

Catskill Park Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

October 30, 2020

MTC Conference Room, 61 Academy Street, Margaretville, NY

The CPAC meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m.

Jeff Senterman provided welcomes and introductions, housekeeping information, a reminder to remain afterwards to be in a group photo, and passed around the sign in sheet for the role call.

Presentations:

Research fellows' studies conducted this past summer in the Catskills were presented.

Andy Mossey of the CCCD presented a summary of the Catskill Center's Catskill Steward program. Summary and additional information available.

FPAC updates:

The first update was Adirondack focused: there was some discussion regarding the recent court case on tree clearing. Peter Frank reviewed the court case regarding tree clearing for snowmobile trails. There was a split decision upon appeal. Trails were ruled as constitutional they are not roads but trails, however, the State lost on the tree cutting decision. Part of the issue had to do with how trees were measured. Total number of trees vary dramatically depending upon measurement and the ruling included all trees (including seedlings). This is a wrench in the works for all construction projects. In order to undertake a project, counting of trees is now happening. The state is appealing the split decision. The appeal is to be heard next spring.

Neil Woodworth weighed in regarding legal specifics. Neil's perspective is that under the current ruling as it stands trail construction and trail maintenance is profoundly impacted. A question was asked if the limits were annual. Limits are per acre, not over any time period.

Jeff Senterman pointed out that the ruling is of a greater scope than the initial situation. Neil reminded us that in the seminal case (the McDonald case) that tree cutting for trails was permissible.

Landbank Amendment: working on discrepancies regarding the Constitution versus the language in the legislation. They're working on the formal process. Pete Senterman asked about the land bank, which has never been re-upped. Neil pointed out when users make use of the land bank, land is paid for. Money goes to Future Forest Preserve acquisition. Jeff Senterman pointed out landbank use replaces Constitutional Amendments making the process much easier.

Update on e-bikes: legislation did not go forward currently. No e-bikes are allowed on trails or roads as they are considered motor vehicles and no motor vehicles are allowed on trails. Mohonk will allow e-bikes on their Carriage roads, per Kevin Smith. Ashokan rail trail also will allow e-bikes.

Region 3 Updates:

After 18 years, Sundown Wild Forest and Vernooy Kill Wild Forest UMP has been approved.

Pine Roehrs reported the plan unified four separate acquisitions, including the Lundy estate and Vernooy kill. It includes trails, parking areas, including snowmobile trails, mountain biking trails, a large PA near the Blue Hole, a safe trail from that parking area to the Blue Hole, a 10 Mi Long Path reroute, and more! Available online.

Ian Dunn reported Bluestone Jockey Hill trail updates, including some reroutes and increased access and opportunities for mountain biking, beginners through experts. Increased signage. The collaboration there was with Fats in the Cats, Tahawus trails, and the Woodstock Land Conservancy.

The significant expansion of the parking lot at Upper Cherrytown Road has been completed. That was funded by Aid to Localities Grant. Thank you to the CWC.

Region Four Updates:

Jeff Rider introduced Alicia Sullivan, and thanked Vicki Cross for filling in during Bryan's absence. Thanks to Pine Roehrs and Vicki Cross for their work on Mount Hayden and Colgate Lake UMPs. Thanks to Ian Dunn for helping out with Tahawus trails and other tasks during the gap in land manager staffing.

Jeff Rider presented on the trail work on Twin and the issues on the Devil's Path. Jeff reviewed the trail work on Twin. He noted the safety issues and the history of the area. He reminded all that the department has the authority and the responsibility to deal with the impact to the resource. Options considered including

- doing nothing
- sustainable reroute
- stone steps
- different types of ladders
- steel rungs

Tahawus Trails suggested the steel rungs. Jeff provided a review of the language in the master plan. Natural materials are to be used unless less obtrusive materials than the natural ones are available. The reroute that was considered was ruled out as it was felt that most hikers would not use it. Thus there would be two scars on a landscape. Wooden and Silo type ladders were considered. The solution they were seeking was a minimum maintenance solution.

To date, the DEC received some positive and some negative responses to the rungs. Jeff showed the group images of the vandalism. He reported that it was the office of general counsel that insisted the trail be closed. Jeff noted that social media spread of misinformation and grandstanding had been unhelpful.

At this point that the nubs remaining had been ground flat. The trail closure details were reviewed. The next steps under consideration include removing the remaining rungs and grinding down the steel, installing a temporary ladder, considering another reroute, and reinstalling rungs. Jeff stated that the Department's goal is to get the trail open as quickly as possible.

Jeff Senterman responded that the DEC has their process and that the process was not preferential to anyone. He also noted that there was an expensive investment in the rungs and reiterated that vandalism is a crime.

Catskill 3500 Club president mentioned that club members felt both positive and negative about the rungs. She mentioned that the rungs being new provoked a reaction and that some of the reaction received was due to the lack of transparency. She made a request for more information and more communication.

DEP updates

Thanks to volunteers for trash cleanup.

Recreational boating season was extended this year. Boat tag numbers are down again this year. That is a continuing trend. Rentals are increasing.

Trails: Ashokan Gorge Trail's new parking area is finished. The new trail will open soon. Ashokan rail trail is open to a huge success with impressive usage. Only one trailhead is open so far. Volunteer stewards are used to manage parking area issues. Trail counters are in place and report bikes and direction of traffic. Data is uploaded to the cloud. Ian Dunn requested more details about these trail counters. Peter Frank noted that trail counters are coming to Kaaterskill Falls.

DOT Update:

Transportation working group is joining forces with the scenic byways.

Bike routes discussed: only one bike route currently in the Catskill park. The guidelines were discussed local government day presentations were reviewed including the shuttle service. Multiple solutions rather than one single approach was recommended. Thank you to the CWC for putting together local government day. Carol O'Byrne reiterated the role of local government. Lori Rankin mentioned education occurring on these shuttles as there is a captive audience.

Fire Tower project update:

20 Towers participated in Labor Day weekend fire tower lighting. Signaling between two fires Towers occurred.

The new tower at the Catskill interpretive Center was mentioned. An agreement signed for the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower. The BLM Centennial was well attended. Thank you to Rangers for their assistance. Laurie Rankin reviewed the Fire Tower Challenge and mentioned parking issues, increased visitation, and that volunteer stewards were heroic. She expressed concern that the Fire Towers will close due to wear and tear. DEC staff responded to her concerns. Numbers are up across the board. Weather also is a real factor in hiker numbers. The concerns raised by Laurie were also discussed in a meeting with DEC and the tone of social media changed after the meeting.

CMC and CLIP updates:

The group is seeking to form a Friends of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower Group. Ashokan Gorge Trail signage was discussed membership is up to you about 470. The CMC also mentioned the popularity of hikes in the western Catskills with their members.

Catskill Lark in the Park had 49 scheduled events. The kickoff occurred at the CIC with the new Fire Tower. A wide variety of the events were scheduled, including events in all four counties of the park. Advertisement that was run engaged with 3,000 people. The CLIP webpage reached 27,000. They also used road signs. Jeff thanked the CMC for their work on CLIP and Bill Rudge mentioned the first day hikes coming up.

Catskill Mountainkeeper:

The 2012 valuation study update has been completed. Mountainkeeper is in process of working with other partners to interpret the results.

Catskill Park Coalition:

initial phases of identifying priorities are underway. Catskill Park day is to 2/4/20

Wayfinding signage:

Peter Manning is done, but the project itself is never done! 350 sign assemblies were delivered to a hundred and two different destinations.

CRISP:

There is money available for projects: 12/15 deadline for 2020 funding.

3 management sessions were held.

A grant was obtained to hire Strike team members.

144 Acres were surveyed for giant hogweed.

CRISP is working on for early detection species collaboration with SUNY Oneonta at boat launches removing an invasive species.

Catskills Science Collaborative:

seeking ideas for science outreach

Catskill 3500 Club:

Updated the group regarding the Table lean-to efforts, ongoing work to create a carpooling to trailheads guide, and an online database to determine what trails are available (working with the New York-New Jersey Trail conference). The search-and-rescue team affiliated with the Catskill 3500 Club, Catskill Mountain SAR has completed its probation year and is now a full-fledged FEDSAR team.

Catskills Visitor Center:

Visitor numbers are higher this year than last year. The fire tower on site is fully staffed on weekends. The Catskill Mountain kids program is going well: Varied programs, very well received.

HATC:

Working on continued expansion of trails to Hunter

NYSOGA:

Will Soter and David DiCerbo attended and expressed the desire to join CPAC and offer their expertise.

New York-New Jersey Trail conference:

Andy reported the plan is to clean up trails, then assign them. Seeking trail supervisors.

Woodstock Land Conservancy:

Maxanne Resnick with the Woodstock Land Conservancy reported on the rail trail. 60 volunteer stewards and so far 5800 visitors, as of yesterday. Bluestone Wild Forest recent acquisition - WLC is working with Tahawus trails and DEC. Also working collaboratively with other groups to monitor the concrete plant Construction Dumping issues at that site were raised.

New Business:

Before adjourning, Jeff took a moment to address Neil's retirement. This was his last CPAC meeting. Neil stated that he was impressed with the contributions of all. It was wonderful thing to witness and be part of. He expressed thanks.