

Catskill Park Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

November 9, 2022 at 1:00pm

Meeting held via Zoom

The Chair (Jeff Senterman) welcomed all present and thanked everyone for taking part virtually. He went over a few housekeeping and technical details for the zoom meeting and urged everyone to introduce themselves through the chat function.

FPAC Updates: Jeff noted that there had not been a meeting of the FPAC since our last CPAC meeting.

CAG Updates: McCrea reported that the Final Report from the CAG was soon to be released to the public. [It was subsequently released](#) by DEC.

NYSDEC Central Office Updates: McCrea reported that a new Lands and Forest Division Director will soon be in place. He noted that Jeff Rider, the Acting Division Director will return to Region 3 as the Natural Resources Supervisor. Other updates included:

- Passage of environmental bond act
- Neversink regs package published in the ENB
- RFP for Front Country Stewards being put out soon.
- Visitor Use Management (VUM) contract is almost finalized and work will begin in the Kaaterskill Clove area. The Town of Hunter noted that the VUM should take into account the N/S Lake Campground.
- VUM for trailless peaks being developed.
- New work plan policies are being rolled out.
- The CERM conference was very successful.
- DEC is reviewing regulations to determine legality of slacklining, which was recently observed in Platte Clove.

NYSDEC Region 3 Updates: Work continues on the Peekamoose Riparian Area UMP Amendment and work is ongoing with the Rondout Neversink Stream Management Program to restore riparian areas impacted by high use along the Neversink River. Additional updates included:

- Tahawus Trails working to maintain accessible trails.
- DEC working on the Deer Shanty Bridge

- Volunteer work by the Trail Conference and 3500 Club at lean-tos and privies has been great. Overall the year has seen some great volunteer efforts across the Park.
- Old growth hemlock stands in the Big Indian Wilderness were added to the Old Growth Network as part of the CERM conference.

Pine provided an overview of the Trailless Peaks webinar that was hosted by ADK, Catskill Mountainkeeper, and the Catskill Center with assistance from DEC. She also noted that she is looking to organize a volunteer bird survey for the trailless peaks.

NYSDEC Region 4 Updates: Alicia noted that a bridge had been repaired near Colgate Lake, trail work continued at Kaaterskill Falls, Trail 6 at Elm Ridge was relocated to address erosion, and the Devil's Kitchen bridge was replaced.

NYSDEC Forest Ranger Updates: No representative was present.

NYCDEP Updates: No representative was present.

NYSDOT Updates: Shared report that is attached to these notes and noted that a travel corridor report is being prepared for the Catskills and Adirondacks. DOT also noted that there has been a look happening with regards to wildlife passage work and landscape permeability. There is funding available and opportunities for research and collaboration.

Catskill Mountain Club: CMC noted that the Delhi Trails are closed due to an ongoing logging operation. The Shavertown Trail Trailhead is moving closer to the parking lot to reduce the amount of roadwalk for hikers. The 2022 Catskills Lark in the Park offered a full calendar of events and was well attended.

Catskill Mountain Scenic Byway: The CMSB is updating the Corridor Management Plan to include the Towns of Hurley and Roxbury. The process is ongoing.

Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway: The MCSB is submitting the CMP to include the Towns of Jewett and Lexinbton to the byway.

Catskill Mountainkeeper: The Shandaken Rail Trail project is moving forward between Big Indian and Highmount.

Catskill 3500 Club: The club thanks DEC for the work on the trailless peaks.

Friends of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower: The group noted that they are working with the Town of Delhi, which is delaying progress on the installation of the fire tower.

Forest Preserve Coalition: Advocacy work is ongoing with outreach being done to the Governor's office and legislature about the importance of Forest Preserve funding. See attached letter.

Hunter Area Trails Coalition: New bridge has been installed on the soon to be open section of trail. Efforts are ongoing to make the trail more accessible.



Catskill Center for Conservation and Development

Catskill Park Advisory Committee Update For November 9, 2022 Meeting

Catskill Stewards Program: The Catskill Stewards Program has had a busy 2022 season with more than 25,000 quality visitor interactions. Full time stewards and Ridgerunner work closely with DEC at Peekamoose Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls, Platte Clove Preserve, and the Devil's Path. The Catskill Center has [produced a video highlighting the work of the Catskill Stewards](#).

The 2022 Catskill Stewards season included:

- Interactions with 25,290 visitors
- Removal of 85 bags of garbage
- Disassembled 11 illegal fire rings
- Broke apart 86 rock stacks
- Took apart 16 rock damns.
- The Catskill Stewards have provided directions on and off the trail to over 616 visitors and hikers on the Devil's Path
- The Fire Tower Steward divided their time between Hunter, Overlook, Upper Esopus, and Mt. Tremper fire towers. They talked to over 535 visitors.

Catskill Park Coalition: Work has begun for the next budget year, with the first coalition meeting held at the the end of August. The coalition expects to begin advocacy work after Election Day.

Catskills Great Outdoor Expo: The Outdoor Expo returned this year at the Catskills Visitor Center! Despite a two year hiatus because of COVID and the new location, turnout for both vendors and visitors was very good.

Trailless Peaks Comment Letter: The Catskill Center [submitted a comment letter to the NYSDEC](#) regarding efforts to manage increasing use and natural resource degradation on trailless peaks.

catskillcenter.org | catskillsvisitorcenter.org | 845-586-2611 cccd@catskillcenter.org



Catskills Visitor Center Catskill Park Advisory Committee Report

The fall leaf season is just about over and the Catskills Visitor Center staff assisted 2993 visitors during September and October. We are looking ahead to creating a small temporary history exhibit about people of color in the Catskills and the Green Book. Now that the new inside exhibit has been open for a busy season, staff plans to tweak a few spots in the CVC to increase flow and provide more information for visitors.

Catskill Park Trail Information and Conditions are posted weekly at:
<https://catskillsvisitorcenter.org/hiking-and-camping/trail-conditions/>



November 9, 2022 CPAC Update

With the ongoing DEC trailless peaks study and the recent webinar on the situation in the Catskills, the 3500 Club has made the below statement on the issue.

Statement on the Condition and Future of the Trailless Peaks October 26, 2022

As the founding membership-based hiking organization in the Catskill high peaks, the Catskill 3500 Club strongly believes that hiking should be a sustainable activity with minimal environmental impact. Since its foundation in 1962, the Club has encouraged hikers to go off trail, using navigational skills to safely reach summits over 3,500 feet that are not connected to a trail system. This challenge has provided a great sense of accomplishment and enrichment for countless hikers. For hikers who are learning, we have offered guidance and education by sharing navigational and wilderness preparedness skills and promoting the ethos of 'Leave No Trace.'

For many years, the impact of off-trail hiking was minimal. There were simply not that many hikers who wanted to venture off trail, and those who did were encouraged to do so by finding their own way—not by following predetermined routes. Consequently, foot traffic in sensitive areas was infrequent and dispersed and left little discernible impact on the forest floor.

In recent years, far more hikers than ever before have climbed the high peaks, including the trailless peaks. With the arrival of smartphones featuring sophisticated GPS navigational services, hikers are now considerably more confident venturing off trail. Many hikers follow existing digital tracks to ensure they stay on their route. These changes have had a noticeable impact. The Club acknowledges that our challenge of summiting the high peaks has encouraged new off-trail hikers and contributed to the degradation of sensitive habitat. In 2003, the Club Board voted down a proposal to start sponsoring the four seasons and grid challenges, because we felt that these challenges would increase the level of use on all the peaks, particularly the trailless peaks. In 2012, responding to the formation of informal trails known as 'herd paths,' the Club formed a Wilderness Stewardship Committee to discuss concerns about this development. In 2021, recognizing the substantial pandemic-induced increase in Catskills hiking, we formed a Trailless Peak Committee to engage with the DEC. Also in 2021, when the landowners of Graham and Doubletop mountains stopped granting permission for hikers to access them, the Club recognized the impact that hikers were having and chose not to add another trailless peak to the challenge. We understand that a return to the old mentality of minimal traffic and dispersed route finding is not realistic. And we believe that trail infrastructure must be enhanced and hikers must modify their behavior in order to stop the degradation of these summits.

The Club recognizes the ecological significance and sensitivity of the boreal habitat found on many of the higher elevation peaks and ridges in the Catskill Park, including most of the trailless summits. This ecosystem is dominated by balsam fir, red spruce, mountain ash and birches, and is home to bird species with declining populations such as the Bicknell's thrush and the blackpoll

warbler. Hermit thrushes, whose distinctive song has enchanted countless forest passersby, are known to build their nests under the cover of small shrubs and conifers. They are especially vulnerable when they are raising their hatchlings. The soil layer in these places tends to be thin and easily disturbed, making it harder for plants to grow back after being trampled. The Club believes that hiking routes through these ecosystems must be concentrated and sustainably implemented in order to protect the plants and animals that live here.

We have offered to maintain agreed upon herd paths on each of the trailless peaks, to contain and channel the impact to one path instead of many. The DEC, however, is not in a position to decide on this until its recommendations are publicly announced. The DEC will make its decision soon, and we look forward to working with them to bring remedy and relief to the mountain forests, recognizing that it may take years to implement a permanent and sustainable solution. In the meantime, here is our guidance to hikers to address the problem:

Trailless Peaks: Whenever a herd path is present from the approach you are taking to a summit, the Club encourages you to use the most-evident herd path at all times. Hikers should try to hike in a line and remain on the herd path. All Club-led hikes will be following this guideline. The purpose of this is to limit impact to one already existing path and to let the other parts of the forest recover. In the coming weeks, we plan to publish the most evident herd path GPS tracks for each trailless peak, based on the DEC data, to encourage their use. The 2022 edition of the NY-NJ Trail Conference Catskill Maps shows evident herd paths to follow for Kaaterskill High Peak and Vly.

The Club discourages hikers (and their dogs) from wandering off trails and herd paths in the fragile boreal ecosystem when the ground is not frozen. We support dogs being on leash when in the high elevation boreal habitat during spring. This will protect the many species of ground nesting birds and other ground-nesting animals and their offspring that live there.

We are working on additional recommendations. We welcome suggestions for additional ways the Club can make a positive impact to mitigate the damage that comes with increased use of our state lands. Help us find more ways to concentrate use to certain areas, so that the other parts of the forest can remain viable habitats for the organisms that live there. Please email president@catskill-3500-club.org with comments or suggestions.



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
CPAC Meeting Report
November 9, 2022**

9th Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers: The event was held on Saturday, September 3rd with 34 fire towers participating statewide. Community feedback was abundant and positive with young children hiking to the towers during the day and then finding a location where they could see the light come on in the evening. Persons who were no longer able to climb to the towers, also found locations where they could see the lights come on. The Illuminators were treated to a great sunset and mostly clear skies state wide. All 5 Catskill Fire Towers participated in the event along with Page Pond and Utsayantha Fire Towers. Photographs of the event can be found on our website: <http://nysffla.org/light2022.html>

Happy 25th Birthday to the Catskill Fire Tower Project! The Catskill Fire Tower Project was begun in 1997, a first of its kind in the state. Volunteers and benefactors came together to restore the 5 fire towers within the Catskill Park, raising funds and providing volunteers to assist with the work. Once reopened, the towers were manned by volunteer stewards on weekends and holidays from Memorial Day to Columbus Day. The stewards provide valuable information about the history of the towers and educational information about the surrounding forest, recreational opportunities, regulations, the best place to find pizza, a map and more! Thousands of visitors have interacted with hundreds of volunteer stewards in the ensuing 25 years. Today, volunteers continue to greet visitors at 4 of the Catskill Fire Towers. The program is perhaps the single most successful and long standing volunteer program in the Catskills. The NYS Chapter provided each volunteer with a thank you letter and a copy of the October newsletter, featuring the program. Included in the letter was a special thank you gift from NYSDEC Forester George Profous who has been with the program from its inception and continues to support it today.

Current Projects: Bramley, Rock Rift, and Leonard Hill projects each continue to work toward overcoming some challenges. We are hopeful that all three projects will move forward in 2023 and we look forward to assisting and supporting them.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin, Director
NYS Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
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Volunteer Activities

In addition to routine maintenance across the Catskills Forest Preserve, New York - New Jersey Trail Conference volunteers have completed the following projects this season with support from staff and NYSDEC:

General Volunteer:

- Volunteer Leader, Andy Garrison, in coordination with DEC Region 3 through a Temporary Revocable Permit (TRP) has cleared 50 blowdowns in the Slide Mountain Wilderness Area. The low number of blowdowns compared to previous years is the result of three years of repetitive clearing efforts. Andy will be continuing these efforts under the guidelines of the TRP between November 7-15th on the Long Path in the Slide Mountain Wilderness Area and on the Mongaup-Hardenburgh Trail in the Big Indian Wilderness Area, with other locations within Wilderness Areas that are yet to be determined.
- Volunteer Leader, Andy Garrison, led the Conservation Corps Catskills Trail Stewards on multiple work trips on the Warner Creek Trail where they improved several hundred feet of previously wet trail, installed steppingstones at multiple locations, and built a small rock culvert over a stream that the trail crosses.

Catskills Lean-to Crew:

- Volunteer Crew Leader, Eric Friedman, led three work trips with support from the Catskills 3500 Club to the Bouton Memorial Lean-to on Table Mountain to rebuild/stain the privy, install oakum with sapling cover between logs of the shelter, stain the shelter, and make general site improvements.
- The crew will be working mid-November at the Devil's Acre Lean-to to stain the privy, complete stonework at the base of the lean-to to reduce mud, and install oakum with sapling cover between logs of the shelter.

Catskills Trail Crew:

- Volunteer Crew Leader, Matt Smith, led the crew to repair mudholes on the Long Path at the base of Indian Head over the span of several weeks and multiple work trips.
- Throughout the 2022 season the crew did over 1,000 hours of work during 30 days on 8 different projects with over 30 different individual volunteers.
- Looking ahead to 2023:
 - o Continue work on the Long Path at the base of Indian Head
 - o Improvements to the Huckleberry Ridge Trail, Mary's Glen Trail, Geiger Point along the Devil's Path, Pecoy Notch Trail, and the Slide Mountain Trail

Blowdown Brigade:

- The crew will continue to be active over the Winter/Spring seasons.

Please direct any interest in volunteering with the initiatives listed above to volunteer@nynjtc.org.