

CPAC Meeting 6/24/2021

Welcome from Jeff Senterman

Jeff suggested that introductions be handled in the chat function, and introduced Wendell George of the Catskill Mountain Club as Wendell was not using Zoom.

FPAC update:

Last meeting was a special meeting with DEC and APA addressing draft guidance document regarding managing visitor use in the ADK park. At some point a shortened version may be available.

Bill Rudge says in the Catskills they aren't really involved us in the process. Focus of the document is regions 5 and 6. The document was created jointly with APA and DEC. Regions 3 and 4 will examine the documents findings and apply them logically to the Catskills.

CAG

Bill Rudge: the group continues to meet regularly. Developed an interim plan. Some specific proposals and some themes for final report that will be submitted to the commissioner. Group was charged with addressing overuse in the Catskills. Report will be released later this summer. "Pretty far along." DEC has already begun implementation of some of the recommendations.

Jeff Senterman: summaries of meeting notes are available on DEC website. Catskill Strategic Advisory meeting notes is what to look for. Process has been almost completely virtual thus far. Looking forward to meeting in person in the future and making even more progress.

DEC Region 3 updates:

Recent court of appeals decision re:snowmobiles in ADK – the department had completed UMPs that proposed community connector snow mobile trails in the ADKs, and there was some resistance. Litigation resulted. Prior court decision ruled in favor of DEC. Has been appealed – highest state court confirmed that project exceeded what's allowed in the constitution. Grading and grooming in addition, also considered by court. DEC still digesting the court's decision.

Due to the loss in court, DEC attorneys are developing guidance for future projects. Trails in question were not constitutional. Issues were tree cutting and trail building activities. Refers back to the McDonald case (1932 Olympics). Specifically stated class 2 snowmobile trails are not allowed.

Bill Rudge: in the Catskills, while there will be an impact, it won't be as significant here. Our snowmobile system isn't like that in the ADKs. We don't have class 2 trails in the Catskills. The limited number of snowmobile trails in the Cats are in compliance.

Frank Parks: central office is doing a study for a shuttle system. It was proposed prior to covid – feasibility study for a shuttle bus system. Postponed due to pandemic but now contracting the feasibility study out.

There 's been some interest in creating another FPAC special meeting to discuss tree cutting (re: the court decision). Special meeting format to focus on one topic in depth was seen as a good format.

DEC staff is still trying to get approval to utilize overuse funding which has been allocated but not released. No approval to access that funding yet. Funding staff is staying on it and working diligently.

Bill provided some history/background about pandemic impact on outdoor recreation. expanding the permit system in Peekamoose valley. This year expanded that system to require permits every day. Also included the entire corridor and the entire camping area. Permits are now required for the entire area. Includes fishing or hiking – all users must get a day use permit. Has been advertised.

Ian: any use of the corridor requires a permit. \$10 fee. So far has been going well, but expecting it to get busier now. Reserving a campsite is a big difference. Blue Hole stewards are there.

Re: steward program – adopt a trailhead program began in May. Making use of local 3500 club members to provide LNT and other hiking info.

SCA interns have started work.

Mountainkeeper also started a steward program in Sullivan county.

Catskill Center has stewards at Blue Hole and Platte Clove.

Ian sees a decrease in parking lot and trail usage compared to last year so far.

Ian answered Joe Liuni's questions about permit specifics.

Bill added: we are charging a fee this year. That's a first. It just covers the administrative cost. Decided to charge the fee because many obtained permit and then didn't use it when it was free. That created an average of about 50% usage. That was seen as a problem because a lot of folks that wanted access were turned away despite capacity. That was the driving force behind implementing a fee. Has been successful – now 85% of permit obtainers show up.

Progress on Sundown Wild Forest UMP. Plan for this year was to reroute Long Path – 10 mile reroute that moves trail off the road. Plan is to go forward with Tahawus this year with this reroute.

Shandakan Wild Forest - looking to create 3 miles of mtn bike trails from Lost Cove trailhead – phase 1 of 2 implementation. Phase 2 next year – connectivity to Belleayre intensive use area. Also using Tahawus trail crew. Needs to get final approvals in light of tree cutting litigation.

Bill: all stewardship programs would not have been possible without stakeholders – CCCD and Mountainkeeper and 3500 Club and NYNJTC. All partners were thanked.

Maria Bedo asked about leantos for region 3:

Ian: We have them and they're in pieces at the visitor center. Awaiting flight approval. State police flies them in. Waiting and hoping for a flight. Two leanto kits created by the Bruderhof – pre built and broken down, flown in and reassembled. Table Mtn and Terrace. Both need replacement. 3500 Club donated some materials. Partnerships with NYSP, Bruderhof, DEC and 3500 Club.

Pine: Big Indian UMP is her focus. Will be classifying 635 acres – remnant of the acquisition. 3 trailless peaks – South DT, Big Indian and Fir. Close to having a draft ready for internal review. CP42 Indian Nation consultation. Hx of Native American use of these lands, so trying to engage tribal nations earlier in the process. Looking at the name of the unit as well, and seeking tribal participation.

Kathy Nolan: commending DEC and Pine for reaching out to tribal nations. How is this outreach happening? Who does it? What's the formal and/or informal mechanism?

Pine: formal process, gov to gov. Communication via snail mail, and a specific protocol is followed. Protocol is designed to be sensitive and respectful.

Bill: Pine has done a great job illustrating the process and with the UMP update. Bill has worked with the tribal nations and has found it productive. Good suggestions in the past and Bill thinks this will be productive.

Region 4

Alicia: I love my park day events were held at N/S Lake and Colgate lake. Cleaned out fire rings, restacked rocks, cleaned up litter. Good turnout. 12 volunteers at Colgate.

Tons of steward programs. Going well so far. CC at Kfalls, Mountainkeeper at Big Pond, Ridge Runner, and Hunter Mtn steward. (I MISSED ONE)

Met with Ben Lawson to improve LNT messaging and getting to the needed audience.

7 weeks with Tahawus at Kaaterskill on Kfalls connector trail. Finished a staircase, replaced a timber wall, and repaired some damage.

DEC trail crews have been busy – chainsaw window they were out and did all trails in wilderness areas.

Working on kiosks and signage, replacing dilapidated kiosks. Mink Hollow south, Roaring Kill, Mountain Turnpike, Big Pond and Campbell Mountain. May do more. Also received a new panel for the Russell Brook kiosk.

More trail counters at Kaaterskill – 5 infrared and 2 vehicle. Total from July 2020 to June 2021 147,000 at midpool, viewing platform number 104,000 – so for the month of June numbers were up from last year. Seems less overwhelming than last year.

South diamond notch bridge was damaged - hoping to replace this summer

Repairs to devils acre lean to roof

Hoping for flight for devil's kitchen lean to replacement

Coordinating with fire tower volunteers to replace and move Hunter fire tower privy

Delaware County – trying to work a lot of work done in Delco. Looking to relocate the Pelnor Hollow trail. It's been consumed by rubus.

Ben Lawson of LNT - told Frank Parks that what he has seen in the Catskills is really impressive. Kudos. Great work. Compliment from someone who has national experience.

Kathy Nolan reiterated – we get too close to it so we are constantly putting out fires and miss how much positive impact we are having. She said “putting out the fires means nothing is getting burned down”

Jeff noted that Cathy Pedler of ADK teamed up with Catskill Center and Mountainkeeper to bring Ben Lawson to the Catskills. Report will be produced and shared.

Kathy mentioned the survey that was disseminated. He received 67% of the surveys back. This is notable – a 15% response rate is considered good.

Jeff also mentioned how important it is that folks who are involved are all connected to the Catskills. We are all really invested, personally invested.

Bill Rudge:

Statewide program – communications started a pilot program: NY alerts. Real time info on high use areas. When we have staff available at a site that can report whether or not capacity has been reached at that site – communication with DEC staff results in a tweet, announcing it. Eg high use parking area could be retweeted when full. Doing this at Blue Hole and Kfalls. Heavily reliant on stewards from the Catskillcenter and working out well so far.

Jeff suggested all stake holders follow DEC and retweet those tweets.

Wendell: question for Alicia. Thanks for Pelnor Hollow. What about access from southern end? “Something we’re working on.” No changes but we’re trying.

Lisa Lyons: happy Pelnor is getting worked on

Michelle Yost: Long Path issue of underuse north of Ashland

Possible to include city land in the alert system?

DEP:

Paul Lenz to retire. Tom thanked him for mentorship and incredible work. Wish him the best.

Due to Covid, the DEP continues to operate on reduced scale, with no events planned. Stuff has been put on hold. Just trying to keep rec sites open, maintaining access. No delays in opening rec boating season. Opened on May 1. 268 tags issued this year. Rental numbers will likely tell a bigger story re that program.

Ashokan rail trail – 72,000 estimated visitors. Down from last year. Down about 30% but still receiving a lot of use. Just not covid highs.

Trail developments – thanks to all partners Wendell George (CMC) and Michelle Yost. Moving slower due to reduced staff capacity, but thanks for your patience.

Looking to get new deer management permits in for coming year.

Joe Liuni – thanks Paul. Special thanks to open Yankeetown area for hunting.

DOT – report available for review

Member updates:

Thanks for reports submitted ahead of time. Please do so.

Kathy: thanks everyone for work on the pumped energy storage proposal. Great to see so many interveners and so much coalition building

Proposal in town of Kingston for development site is surrounded by 3000 acres including 2 ponds. Concern and being addressed by WLC and Mountainkeeper on their websites...

Jeff reiterated the power of working together

CPC info is in Catskill Center report – 2021 was a good year for the Catskills. New state senator Hinchey has been really helpful and a great advocate for the Cats in Albany.

CRISP submitting a proposal for the next 5 year contract for CRISP. Link in report – looking for people to survey for spotted lanternfly. Need volunteers. Has been spotted in Port Jervis so need is great.

Mountain Clove Scenic Byways – smart growth grant funding ran out but hoping with some stop gap funding that they will have combined plan to DOT, addressing comments from DOT

Science Collaborative: 3 research fellows doing work now, this summer. Details in report. Also have a couple of interns, working on finding more data for data portal, and building a bibliography, including scientific journal literature and other reports etc. to add to the bibliography. Want to make the bib available online, accessing the documents. Making it easier for researchers to obtain docs for background research.

Visitor Center – reopening in September, open to the public inside from then on

Ann Roberti: thanks to Paul. The Bramley Mountain Fire tower project was featured in a podcast. Laurie Rankin and Brett Barry – nice job. Check it out.

Michelle – Hunter Area Trails – making headway re; temporary easement re landowner.

Kaaterskill Clove working group has been absorbed into the CAG. Continues to meet almost monthly, bringing clove stakeholders together with police and rangers, a lot of sharing information with CAG.

Trout Unlimited: this summer hoping 3rd year of sampling for eastern brook trout. So far have located genetically unique populations. Really important. Big deal. Brook trout are an indicator species and the only native species here. Esopus now being managed as a wild fishery – focus on habitat management and wild trout management as opposed to sticking. Fishing is very popular, many businesses and guides have popped up. 3 trout un chapters in the central Catskills. Continue to be active with Ashokan watershed - mentioned xmas 2020 flooding and damage sustained.

Jeff asked: stay virtual or return to in person meetings? Combining in person with online is challenging – none of the in person sites accommodate virtual participation easily. Jeff will poll members.

Kathy marked the passing of Sherrett Chase. Decades of advocacy and generosity. Remarkable, irreplaceable man and he is deeply missed. Helen replied – thank you. “I’ll miss him.”