

# Catskill Park Advisory Committee

## Meeting Notes

October 28, 2020 at 10:00am

Meeting held via Zoom

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.

Jeff also thanked so many stakeholders for submitting reports ahead of time. He said that this helps keep the meeting moving forward and ensures that information that groups want to get out, gets out to all CPAC members.

Kathy Nolan mentioned a new group – the Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) and noted that the group should be added to the agenda.

Jeff noted that the new Catskill Rec plan is now available for download on the Catskill Watershed Corporation's website (<https://cwconline.org/catskill-recreation-plan/>). Public comments that were submitted have been included and addressed in the final.

### **Updates:**

**FPAC Update:** Peter Frank apologized for the technical difficulties at FPAC. All felt it was challenging and using Webex was “a challenge at best.” Discussing one possibility as maybe having an FPAC member host a zoom meeting – as the state must use Webex, but a guest could host using zoom. Jeff S. offered assistance.

**NYSDEC Update:** Peter Frank provided updates from Central Office. Discussed at CPAC when first announced via the Governor's 2020 state of the state address, the Catskills region is now convening a group to look at Catskill issues with regard to increased visitation and heavy use (the CAG). Many people were considered for representation on this group, it was then narrowed down to a manageable size. Will be virtual meetings at least to start with. COVID meant delay in getting the group off the ground. Increase in use of state land – safety, traffic, overuse issues is the focus. Includes stakeholders such as municipalities, businesses, tourism professionals, etc. – to address overuse issues throughout the Catskill Park. Goal is to protect resources and visitor experience. Group members will make recommendations to DEC. Will have specific experts “visit” the group, and “ad hoc” members also visit the group, so not necessarily members but others may be asked to lend expertise. 1<sup>st</sup> meeting planned for mid-November.

Maria Bedo (3500 Club) asked how will info be shared from these meetings and Peter Frank said that summaries will be posted on DEC website – likely in a monthly or

bimonthly report. Interim report due in May and will invite public comment at that time. Looking for short term and long term recommendations.

**NYSDEC Region 3 Updates:** Bill Rudge noted that the UMP for Beaverkill campground completed, finalized by commissioner. On website shortly. Lots of day use took place at BK and staff/resource weren't prepared. It's a unique campground as day use area is separate, so harder for DEC staff to interact with public in that area. Proposed staff booth in that area to help educate day users.

Acquisition program: focusing on lands adjacent to Sundown WF. Have several acquisitions (partnered with Open Space Institute) Adams acquisition and Golden Acquisition. These acquisitions will enhance conservation, protection, and opportunity for added public recreation. OSI has great process for starting the dialog with the public. DEC will use amendment to the Sundown WF UMP. Will have public access improvements as part of the amendment.

Tom from OSI added NYS will be making a significant investment in the properties (water protection and forest) as well as public recreation that doesn't impact natural resources. It was noted that there are concerns by neighbors to property are concerned/interested in how these properties will be managed, especially with regard to public access.

Ian Dunn reviewed new connector trail from Denning Rd to Red Hill Fire Tower - 90% done. Operations is working on new PA. for better access to Red Hill FT. Replacing windows in Overlook FT. Ops is replacing steps and landings at BLM.

Trail has been remarked Blue to RED on that portion of the long path - Upper Cherrytown area. Intent is to provide a better visitor experience - less confusing.

Good season with Blue Hole stewards. Finally winding down a little bit. Not as many overfilled PAs this past weekend.

Public Access to Vernoooy Kill State Forest: in Sundown WF UMP there's the reroute of the LP. Plan is to improve access re: better PAs. Added two - Lundy Road and Cutler Road.

UMPS: Public comment period ended for Shandaken Wild Forest - in final stages.

Bluestone amendment "not too far behind" (adds a new property and trails on it)

Great volunteer turnout marking the trail to Ticeteneyck from Peck Road. Short hike - 1.2 miles one way. Thanks to DEP as a partner on that project. Trailhead is located on DEP land and traverses DEP property. Thanks and terrific partnership. Working to ensure PA works well for everyone including local neighbor. Trail leads to a western vista but not quite to the summit.

Same on Red Hill - also on DEP land. Thanks to DEP for that partnership. Thanks to DEP for assisting in providing access to forest preserve. Bill Rudge congratulated Ian

and Tahawus trails for great work - well designed, very sustainable, terrific features. "You will be blown away." Much more accessible parking.

Also super partnership with Town of Denning. Kudos to supervisor Dave Brooks.

Jeff Senterman noted that this is great to hear - nice growth in partnership and improvement in access due to these partnerships. "Keep up the good work."

Within the Bluestone WF, Kevin Smith has ridden the new areas a few times. Trails were specifically designed to be more accessible to wider range of riders: 7 y/o son did the "quick loop" and "it's really working. Kudos. Kevin is also delighted to see a trailhead coming out Myers Road.

Ian stated that work included the straightening out of the entryway on Myers road, redirected it to be fully on state land, and hardened the trail.

#### **NYSDEC Region 4 Update:**

Jeff Rider reported on potential acquisitions for improving access. Larger one near Bearpen. Would significantly improve access. Another one in the Dry Brook Road area. Closed on a couple of small properties - small additions and inholdings.

Overuse and continued use - covid put the exclamation point on this issue but it was already steadily increasing. Combo of virus and weather... "perfect storm" for heavy use

2 Trail counters at Kaaterskill Falls alls - people going to mid pool, people going to viewing platform. The highest month for the counters so far was 26,000 counted in August going into the mid pool (^ 3k per day)

Lots of folks seeking water-based recreation, spillover from Kaaterskill Clove, parking at Mountaintop Historical Society and using rail trail to access falls

Reviewed parking. Numbers are up particularly water-based areas - every trail head including lesser known trail heads and lesser known trails - unbelievably busy. Everywhere.

Pleased to see the advisory group up and running - looking at short term solutions while group gets going. Feels like we need to be ready as its likely to be just as busy next year.

Alicia Sullivan: working on upgrades to bridges on the Mountain turnpike or sleepy hollow horse trail. Upgrading to be better for horses and safer. Current big project.

Trail counters went out - successful. Looking at 3 more in the Kaaterskill Falls area. Molly Smith remains closed, but if reopened then add a counter there, add one at campground access.

Trail crew did some work on rail trail

Colgate UMP - final review and waiting on map updates. Then it will go public.

Hayden UMP picked back up this winter.

Tahawus trail work on Kaaterskill Falls trail - on the rt 23A part of the trail. Awesome work. Added steps -looks good.

Great partnerships - Kaaterskill Falls stewards. Great work. Also AFRs - great work. Lots of volunteers, especially helping with litter. DEC staff did 2x weekly sweeps. Town of Jewett partnership - improved parking with entrance and exit signage and overall safety for that road.

Town of Hunter and DOT for Route 23A - DOT placed a ton of signage. Directional signage, variable messaging boards, MHS parking assistance, porta johns at MHS ... got through it with a lot of help from others.

Jeff Rider says that folks are here to stay, Covid or not. Jeff said that they did do water sampling, never had a hit anywhere near health dept concern. He said that they are working with the Catskill Science Collaborative to do research that includes looking at concentrating use versus dispersal of use. Looking at fragmentation, impact on back country, etc., especially on fauna and flora. Concentrating use may be a better tactic than dispersing use.

Jeff S. reviewed comments that came in via chat. 1) please provide a list of DEC interventions and 2) did you test for pharmaceuticals? Jeff Rider Answer no.

Re: the requested list - all the interventions on high use areas. We could fairly easily provide a list. Jeff S. will distribute when DEC provides.

Peter Frank mentioned that trailheads for 46er peaks were the focused area. In Catskills - more water based and more day use. Waiting at least an hour to get a spot at Laurel House.... As one car went out, let one car in. All North Lake Road was packed in.

Jeff R. reviewed recent trip around the entire region - numbers like he's never seen. No "off season" any more. Numbers don't seem to dip regardless of leaf peeping and weather.

Jeff R. noted that it was a very hostile year - most hostile conditions staff has ever seen. Nasty rude interactions with the public. Jeff S says stewards had the same experiences. He says "we've had the good fortune of being forgotten for many decades" but ... seems like that's changed. Can't get undiscovered.

Kevin Smith asked: three are too many people coming here too quickly for us to educate them adequately. Because of the way social media works, it seems that we need a big public education program that fits hand in glove with I Love NY. Seems that's one of the only ways to get to people before they arrive. By the time they arrive

- it's too late. Through their POV - working do hard to protect stewards and they are the front lines. Interactions and even altercations... the stewards are the best ambassadors and we need to protect them

Heather Bagshawt with Green County - Kevin brings up a great point. Greene County tourism has never promoted Kaaterskill Falls. Done some search marketing. It's been a very different year - even from a tourism perspective. They are developing an educational campaign - difference between a picnic and a hike. Difference between a picnic location and a hike location. Lots of visitors that aren't hikers.

Jeff S - thinking about the same thing. How to reach people before they reach us? For example, littering - campaigns about littering. No such campaigns exist today. Today there are people who were never exposed any of that messaging.

Laura DiBetta: director outdoor recreation, DEC Albany - does work closely with I Love NY. Has been doing much more on LNT and developing proper and consistent messaging. Already talking about 2021 with them - and assures us that the close relationship and collaboration is happening.

#### **NYSDEC Ranger Updates:**

From Greg Tyrrell - increased numbers, parking a problem, issues a lot of tickets especially at Blue Hole. Things are slowing down now - last couple weekends were leaf peeper heavy.

Question for DEC: Trailheads and the possibility of developing a COVID hotspot? Yes, DEC staff says is a concern. Bill Rudge answered - staff stresses masking and distancing.

Rider: people may not want to sign in - suspects they may be underreporting. Lots of folks at trailheads... hotspot is a concern. Some people are very careful but not all.

Jeff S noted that in addition to trailheads, also trailless peak registers... bring your own pens and sanitize

Kathy N suggested using QR codes instead of signing in. Use as a counter and also as a sign in.

It was asked if there as been an increase in rescues. Jeff Rider said that there had been quite a few in region 4 - more water related, but some trail related. Majority of users are not local. Jeff R. said that one Ranger told him: "I've told my wife and kids that I'm going to get COVID. It's just a fact." One young person who had covid, hiked to the mid pool. Passed out and needed to be assisted out. Had been very fit - runner and hiker. Couldn't get back to PA.

Jeff Rider - may thanks all Region 4 Rangers. They have done a great job under very difficult circumstance.

## **NYCDEP Update:**

Tom Davidock echoed what DEC staff has said – trend has been off the charts. Increased numbers – more issues of every type. More calls of every kind. Parking issues, neighbor complaints. Expects it will continue to increase, especially during hunting season. They are trying to manage and accommodate the larger numbers.

Ashokan Rail Trail has been heavily used, numbers are way up. Total numbers shared via screen share. Over 200k in 2020. October 10 was peak day. Use up at every trailhead. Number increased and then remained steady. Prior to COVID, weekends were highest use. Post covid, every day is high. Thanks to Kevin and trail stewards – insane year for visitors and DEP “I don’t think we could have handled it.” Stewards have been absolutely amazing. Big shout out to TC as well. “Great partnership.” Baptism by fire – not anticipating all the issues. But good communication among partners helped.

New trails developed and opened. Ashokan Quarry Trail now open. Shavertown trail had been closed due to risks to dam, lowered water level, then trail was reopened. CMC completed extension of trail – relocated the upper part of the trail to a new vista. Open to public. Michele and her team worked on Huntersfield creek trail. Opened last spring. Thanks to partners. Acknowledged it was a hard year.

Hunting: beginning of season now. Thanks to DEC for tags for DMAP program. Mailed out 400 tags this year – same number as last couple of years. From DEC’s report – fishing and hunting license sales – up around 300% mark.

Recreational boating – season ends this Saturday. Seasonal tags and temp tags – 404 ms 180 temp – total 588 tags for 2020. 622 last year. Not a huge increase in rec boating this year. Fewer people getting tags but increases in boat rentals.

Thanks to DEC again for partnering re: trail heads. Reiterating the great partnership in Region 3 re parking areas.

Barbara Puglisi provided boating numbers. Some vendors felt that COVID safety and sanitizing was an issue so fewer vendors participated. 473 single boats 228 tandem boats. 665 boats rented so far.

Ann Roberti: tags down in rec boating but DEP placed additional rack at Shavertown and she saw heavy use – more people on the water than previous years. Tom clarified more seasonal boats. Also the CMC had an issue with people leaving dog poop baggies at trail heads. Used passive aggressive signage: “other people take their dog poop bags home with them. Won’t you?” She says how sign is worded makes a difference.

Jeff S. offered congrats to everyone involved with Ashokan RT. Reminded group of initial predictions and that the trail has surpassed all expectations.

Kevin – called out 65,000 bicycle visitors. Big number, really important. For so many reasons – more bicycles. Good sign and something to pursue regionally as we move forward.

Tom: the trail counters are permanent fixtures – they count all the people and bikes and time stamp everything then remotely updated to the cloud. Can get almost real time data.

Question re: issues at Ashokan RT in violations. Tom: Not sure there has been an increase. Big issue early on was dog waste – dog waste containers and bags installed and that reduced those issues. Kevin: lots of education going on for trail users, just had one year anniversary. By and large, given intensity of visitorship, pressure on the resource was intense. The number of violations was extremely small proportionately. Stewards do a great job educating folks about the rules. They call DEP police if there's an issue. Resounding success if you look at the big picture. Social media – easy place for folks to make negative comments – not sure social media outrage is proportionate to actual issue.

Maxanne: if there are folks that are seeing things are concerned – call DEP police. Report issues if you see them.

#### **NYSDOT Update:**

Ed Frantz provided a few couple quick updates. He said that in the Adirondacks he's working to create ways to sustain wayfinding signage through a GIS system, and that he is currently working out bugs. When the system is ready, he will create one for the Catskills to maintain our signage. Will create one for the Cats. Getting location specific information to motorists. Will be a future component of the ADK and Catskill viewer.

Transportation working group call sometime before the end of the year – expect the doodle poll

#### **Stakeholder Updates:**

**Hot Spot Working Group:** Kathy and Michele's group – what are high use spots and what management efforts have been implemented. The group has met 3 or 4 times. Working on a spreadsheet after the meeting started. Basically trying to generate a list of spots of interest - hot spots and cold spots. Look at various interventions at each site. Tried to be comprehensive and inclusive. Trying to use this to understand what interventions are possible and what's working at each site. They'd like to continue meeting – doing this project inspired Mountainkeeper to create the webinar on overuse – over 300 people attended that webinar. Solutions are going to have to be both dispersal and concentrating people due to amount of public lands. Lots of overlap from this subcommittee to CAG.

Jeff S noted that this was a possible discussion topic for CAG – how is this info collected and ideas explored best organized and continued.

Peter Frank says there will be a place for this info and info is important.

Jeff S. thanked all on subcommittee for their work.

Cathy Pedler asked if the Catskill Park should go through an assessment with LNT organization as ADKs did? LNT center did an assessment. Nice to have professional look and get their recommendations. Spearheaded by ADK council and ADK – LNT came to the location, met with stakeholders did surveys and analysis, working with DEC DEP and land managers. Cathy noted that the Report has considered by the HPAG. Info is available to and accessible to advisory group. There is a cost. It is “affordable.” Cathy noted that this would be a parallel collaborative effort. Would need buy in from Catskills groups. More participation would make the outcome/final report more robust. Jeff S. expressed desire for input from ADK high peaks group re pros and cons on the LNT report, but said that he was interested in having one done for the Catskills.

Jeff S. thanked everyone for the data collection and presentation.

**CATS:** Heather noted that work on the visitthcatskills.com page has been stopped for now due to budgeting issues. She offered to help colleagues from other counties. CATS is basically defunded at the moment.

**NYNJTC:** Josh mentioned the 100 year anniversary of the Trail Conference and that they are “looking forward to the next 100 years.”

**Woodstock Land Conservancy:** Maxanne noted that WLC has seen an increased use in smaller preserves. Using work with Tahawus at Sloan Gorge to do some trail work.

**Catskill Park Coalition:** Jeff S. noted that the Catskill Park Coalition is getting organized for Catskill Park Day (February 2). Will be a virtual event.

### **New Business:**

Kevin: Ulster County trails report – featuring shared use trails, especially connections – river to ridge etc. 28 pages long, designed to show the many benefits of our shared trail use system. Will be printed and presented to legislature. Also available electronically. Can run through it at an upcoming CPAC meeting.

Michele – thanks for all the reports. Could CWC break out the 500k based on the categories addressed? And region 4 discussions – would relate to the Kaaterskill Clove working group. Would be helpful for DEC and local officials coordinate. Shout out to Pete S on tree flagging for Hunter branch RT and measuring on Hunter trail network and Happy Birthday to Carol O’Beirne.



Happy Birthday Carol and thanks for everyone's work. Next meeting in approx. 3 months.

**Stakeholder Reports Attached.**



## Catskill Center for Conservation and Development

### Catskill Park Advisory Committee Update For October 28, 2020 Meeting

**Catskill Stewards Program:** The Catskill Stewards Program has concluded its busy 2020 season. Even with an uncertain start to the season our three full time stewards and one part time steward worked diligently to ensure the continued protection of the Peekamoose Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls, and Platte Clove Preserve. The observations were astounding, more people, impacts, and trash than the stewards have ever witnessed before; making the value of having the stewards onsite even more clear. The stewards greeted each visitor, rid these areas of litter, rehabilitated illegal campsites, protected stream quality, and educated visitors to encourage self reliance and minimum impact recreation.

#### **The Catskill Stewards Program in numbers**

Total Visitors: 72,859 (27% increase from 2019)

Total Bags of Litter Removed: 351 (34% increase from 2019)

Total Campfires Rehabilitated: 25 (compared to 21 in 2019)

**Catskill Park Coalition:** The Catskill Center and Catskill Mountainkeeper will be calling together the members of the Catskill Park Coalition over the next few weeks. Priorities for the remainder of this fiscal year will be to protect existing environmental funds, including funds specifically for the Catskills such as stewardship funding, the Catskill Science Collaborative EPF line, and the Catskills Visitor Center EPF line. Work for the next fiscal year will be to minimize cuts to environmental funding overall and maximize funding to the Catskills given the expected condition of the State budget. Catskill Park Day will be held virtually on February 2, 2021.

**Catskill Fire Tower Project:** See attached report.

**Catskills Visitor Center:** See attached report.

**Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership:** See attached report.

**Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan:** The Catskill Center seeks a qualified consultant or consulting firm to develop an Internal JEDI strategy for the Catskill Center, provide appropriate training to Catskill Center Board and Staff on JEDI issues, facilitate the establishment of a Catskill Park JEDI stakeholder working group, and in collaboration with these stakeholders, develop a preliminary JEDI strategy for the Catskill Park. Full request for proposals at - <https://catskillcenter.org/jedi-consultant-rfp>

**Final Greater Catskill Region Comprehensive Recreation Plan:** The Catskill Center is pleased that the final version of the Recreation Plan has been completed. We look forward to working with partners across the region in the implementation of the plan. The plan can be downloaded from the CWC <https://cwconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Greater-Catskill-Region-Comprehensive-Recreation-Plan.pdf>.

**Catskills Strategic Planning Advisory Group:** As part of the CAG, the Catskill Center will give voice to the need to protect unique natural resources, for better and more facilities, for appropriate DEC planning and enforcement staffing, increased visitor interpretive services and increased educational programs. Alongside regulation and new facilities, it will be central to offer visitors educational opportunities focusing on responsible outdoor recreation. Effective education will help enable visitors to make safe and smart decisions on the trail, which will protect their experience and the natural resources of the Forest Preserve. It will also be important to ensure that visitors have the tools to enjoy, visit and spend time in the communities of the Catskill Park, to ensure that our economies also benefit from this increasing number of visitors. <https://catskillcenter.org/news/2020/10/26/catskill-center-named-member-of-advisory-group-to-find-ways-to-balance-public-use-with-natural-resource-protection-in-the-catskill-park>

**How To Videos:** The Catskill Center has produced a number of outdoor how-to videos to help visitors to the Park recreate responsibly. The can be found on IGTV (<https://www.instagram.com/catskillcenter/channel/>) and on Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4BcstOpQR9vWCYsJphLABA>).



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## Catskill Park Advisory Committee Update October 28, 2020

### Volunteer Recruitment in the Catskills

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference has revitalized its volunteer trail maintenance and shelter caretaker program in the Catskills.

In 2018 the program was facing a vacancy rate of 63% of its volunteer trail maintainer, shelter caretaker and leadership positions. Recognizing this was not an acceptable performance, we made investments over the past 18-months making the Catskills a priority for our Engagement Team. The organization restructured staff and volunteers, improved backend data quality and processing logistics, and strengthening partnerships.

As a result of these efforts the program is seeing one of the strongest seasons it's had in years - even in the midst of a pandemic that resulted in a shortened season with limited permitted activities.

We are thrilled to report that only **5.4%** of volunteer positions are vacant.

In 2020 58 new volunteers were onboarded, meaning nearly all the trail sections and shelters we're responsible maintaining and reporting their conditions to the DEC have dedicated, on-the-ground volunteers and additionally a third of the Catskills has new, strong leadership.

Specifically:

- Over the last 10 months we have placed 42 new Trail Maintainers who have adopted 48 trail sections.
- In January of 2020, we introduced our new Shelter Chair, Snapper Petta, who has since onboarded 12 new volunteer Shelter Caretakers and vastly improved reporting and communication about the conditions of the shelters.
- Andy Garrison, who in 2019 stepped into the Trail Chair role focused on the Long Path, has been a force of nature helping to recruit and train 4 new Trail supervisors who now oversee a combined 123 miles of trails and provide leadership for over 55 Trail Maintainers. Andy was also responsible for recruiting and onboarding many new Trail Maintainers.
- The 3500 Club has provided tremendous support with recruitment by promoting our volunteer opportunities to their base. Their efforts helped us to recruit 18 of the 42 new Trail Maintainers and one of our new Trail Supervisors, and we have more interests from them in the queue.

In 2021 we plan to focus recruitment efforts on filling the four 4 remaining leadership positions and for the time being, the Volunteer Engagement team will provide support for volunteers that are currently without volunteer leaders.

## **Catskill Trail Steward End of Season Summary**

The start of the 2020 Steward season was delayed due to Covid-19. The program, with new safety protocols, launched in time for the Fourth of July weekend with 2-3 stewards serving each weekend at both Giant Ledge and Slide Mountain.

Stewards received Leave No Trace Trainer Certifications from two Trail Conference LNT Master Educators as well as first aid training.

We observed a drastic increase in visitation to the two primary summits we patrolled from July to mid-October.

An unfortunate side effect of the delayed start of our season coupled with increased use and visitation was the impacts from illegal camping and campfires on Giant Ledge. Much of the regrowth and restoration that had occurred from raising awareness of Forest Preserve regulations and polices from our program over the past three years was negated.

Additionally, 4-10 stewards from our program made 5 maintenance trips with our leaders to trails in the Forest Preserve and along the Shawangunk Ridge

### **Giant Ledge**

- Hikers counted: 8,009
- Illegal campfires 21
- Illegal camping 18

### **Slide**

- Hikers counted: 4600
- Illegal campfires 31
- Illegal camping 21

## **FOBMFT stakeholder report for Next Catskill Park Advisory Committee meeting**

- FOBMFT received our 501c3 tax exempt status from the IRS
- Our charity status has been accepted by PayPal so now FOBMFT can accept PayPal payments at the reduced PayPal service fee
- An inventory of the fire tower components was done by volunteers and Dave Vana on August 25th – the components were judged to be in excellent condition with just a few pieces with pack rust that will have to be dealt with
- We worked with Delaware County Economic Development to apply for a small grant. Decision expected in February
- We continue to hold off on major fundraising efforts due to the pandemic

CPAC Report  
October 28, 2020  
10:00am via Zoom

## **Catskill Fire Tower Project**

Correction to minutes of previous meeting – 7-29-2020 minutes as written stated *Balsam Lake Mountain is opening after COVID related closure*. In fact Balsam Lake, Overlook, Tremper, and Hunter all opened following Covid related closures by NYSDEC. The cabs of Overlook and Balsam Lake remained closed in 2020.

Volunteers - I want to take time to thank all of the volunteers who participated in the Catskill Fire Tower Project this year. While our health care officials and our governor all recommended you avoid mass gatherings and crowds, even in outdoor spaces, the Fire Tower Stewards were right in the middle of huge crowds every day they were out there! Yes, they have been wearing masks and practicing social distancing, but still – they are putting themselves in harm's way with hundreds of visitors in rather small outdoor spaces. Their interactions with visitors, sharing of fire tower history and restoration information, Leave No Trace, hikeSafe principles, NYS Regulations, and more, was greatly needed, particularly in light of all the new outdoor recreationists we saw in 2020. My deepest gratitude to all of them. There were those who made the choice to not steward due to Covid. This choice was certainly understandable and we respect that choice, appreciate them taking the time to consider going out there, and hope they will return next year!

Reports state that all fire tower parking lots were overflowing on weekends and many on weekdays too. As one Forest Ranger put it, everyday is now Saturday. Many visitors were arriving either very early or very late in order to get a parking spot so the trails were busy all day, not just in the middle of the day.

Despite the number of visitors, there was little trash found on the trails, the volunteer stewards helped visitors to understand what Pack it in, Pack it out means and what outdoor bathroom habits should be when no privy or port a johns were available. Visitors were reminded to wear masks and to use hand sanitizer before and after being on the fire towers and to go up the tower in their family group only. Volunteer stewards kept the lines moving and visitors sorted out on a first come, first serve basis to climb the tower. Visitors were happy to follow these guidelines.

## **Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Chapter (FFLA)**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower event was very successful this year with 24 fire towers participating. It was the perfect social distancing event with visitors asked to view the towers from different areas around their community at 9 pm. When the tower light came on, visitors were reminded of the protection these historic structures provided over their community, businesses and homes. The man who designed the event, Doug Hamilton Red Hill Fire Tower Chair said it was likely the most successful event yet with many visitors on the ground flashing lights at the towers. Statewide we had Forest Rangers, Retired Forest Rangers, College Students and Volunteers participating with mostly clear skies everywhere. Many thanks to all the Illuminators!

Several FFLA work projects were able to take place around the state with small groups following Covid 19 protocols. These included assisting with the inventory of fire tower parts for Bramley Mt Fire Tower, replacement of landing boards and steps, painting over graffiti, trail work and safety fence repair, and assistance with new trail building. Several work projects are planned for 2021, and we hope it includes several Catskill projects. In addition to Bramley we hope to see progress at Rock Rift and we are continuing to encourage NYSDEC to restore the Leonard Hill Fire Tower, which would be a fully accessible site and make a great impact on Western Delaware and Schoharie Counties where visitors could potentially climb three fire towers; Bramley, Utsayantha and Leonard Hill. We have volunteers and funds ready to go for this project.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin, Volunteer Coordinator Balsam Lake Mt Fire Tower; Director, NYS Chapter FFLA, [www.nysffla.org](http://www.nysffla.org)



## Catskills Visitor Center Catskill Park Advisory Committee Report

Staff at the CVC continue to assist visitors through a service window at the building.

Volunteers are opening the cab to the Upper Esopus Fire Tower so weekend visitors can enjoy the view of fall foliage. This will continue as long as the weather cooperates.

On-line programs have included nature writing workshops, a virtual camp-out, talks with local authors, and basic outdoor how-to videos.

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

Increased social media presence of the CVC on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).





### 3500 Club Updates:

- NYNJTC report details in greater depth the increasing collaborative stewardship work in the Catskills between the 3500 Club and the TC. Highlights are:
  - As the Club has done for several years, we helped fund 2 summit stewards in the Catskills for education and stewardship purposes.
  - To help fill the many trail maintainer and supervisor vacancies, the Club did a big social media push and the response was very heartening. The TC even has a queue of interested individuals and the trails are close to all being covered.
  - The Club has created a “strike force” team led by two board members, who can pull volunteers together quickly for special projects or trash pickups during heavy use times. Ian Dunn utilized the group when the signage and work to formalize the Ticeteneyck trail was done this fall.
- The Club is working on funding several Porta Johns at trailheads as a test use case to see if they have a positive impact on.
- The Club is having to rework our membership list regarding Doubletop and Graham mountains. These peaks are privately owned by the Gould family who have kindly allowed hikers to climb them since the Club was founded. They were completely closed to all hikers when the COVID crisis started and were only opened to residents in local counties since the COVID travel restrictions were lifted. We have just announced alternatives for members because the mountains will be completely closed during hunting season and we do not know if they will reopen to nonlocal hikers in 2021.
- While many of our Club activities such as our Wilderness First Aid classes, Annual Meeting and upcoming Winter Weekend events were cancelled, we are leading hikes at reduced numbers complete with COVID restrictions. Additionally, our fall maintenance trips did occur.
- CMSAR currently has 15 mission ready members (including an active NYSP officer and as of November 2020, 4 Wilderness EMT (WEMT), 4 Wilderness First Responder (WFR) and 7 Wilderness First Aid (WFA).

**Aid to Localities Projects- Greater Catskill Park Stewardship Final Report**  
**Contract Number: DEC01-C00225GG-3350000**

Senator James L. Seward and Senator George A. Amedore, Jr., were instrumental in obtaining a grant from the enacted 2015-2016 New York State Budget, which included \$500,000 to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation under Aid to Localities for Catskill Master Plan Stewardship and Planning. Numerous partners assisted in the implementation of the grant. Partners included the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development (CCCD) and the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC). CWC was tasked with the administration of all funding as well as all grant reporting obligations. The contract was signed on September 1, 2016 and expired on August 31, 2020.

The Catskill Park and the West of Hudson Catskill Watershed region is a unique combination of land owned by New York State, New York City and private landowners. The funding was used to build on the distinctive character of the forest preserve lands managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the City's watershed lands managed by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to create opportunities by working collaboratively on projects that improve public access to the region's outstanding natural resources. Funding was used for both planning and construction projects.

Planning included the Greater Catskill Region Comprehensive Recreation Plan, which undertook a broad overview of the region to determine the best strategies to join the public lands owned by the DEC and DEP to enhance recreational opportunities. This plan was developed by Alta Planning in cooperation with the CCCD, CWC, DEC and DEP, and can be found at 28 regional libraries and by visiting [www.cwconline.org](http://www.cwconline.org).

In addition, Tahawus Trails LLC was contracted to design a mountain bike trail on newly acquired state land in the Shandaken Wild Forest. This plan has been made part of a revised Shandaken Wild Forest Unit Management Plan.

Several much needed trailhead parking areas were built to help with overcrowding, road congestion, and illegal parking on the roadway, which caused a hazardous condition. In Ulster County, funding was used to purchase materials for DEC to construct a parking lot for the Mead's Meadow - Overlook Mountain trailhead and for kiosk and trail construction. Additionally, materials were purchased for DEC to construct parking lots at the Kanape Brook Trailhead, the Shandaken Wild Forest Sawmill Access, the Red Hill Fire Tower trailhead and Vernooy Kill trailheads.

The Willow trailhead parking lot and kiosk were built on DEP land to access DEC hiking trails, this project was contracted to Delaware Bulldozing Corporation. The Sundown Wild Forest Upper Cherrytown Road parking lot was constructed by Rock Mountain Farms. In Greene County, the Elm Ridge parking lot expansion, kiosk and trail were constructed by

Lefever Excavating Inc. These projects resulted in an additional 142 parking spaces for a total of 189 parking spaces at these locations, please see the chart below:

<b>Trailhead Name</b>	<b>Original Spaces</b>	<b>New Spaces</b>	<b>Total Spaces</b>	<b>Management Unit</b>
Willow -Trailhead Parking and Kiosk	0	6	6	<u>Phoenicia - Mt. Tobias WF</u>
Elm Ridge Parking Lot Expansion, Kiosk and trail construction	30	15	45	<u>Elm Ridge WF</u>
Sundown Wild Forest Upper Cherrytown Road parking lot construction	5	25	30	<u>Sundown WF</u>
Overlook Mountain Trailhead Parking, Kiosk and trail construction	0	30	30	<u>Overlook Mountain WF</u>
Kanape	12	12	24	<u>Sundown WF</u>
Shandaken Wild Forest Sawmill Parking Lot Construction	0	8	8	<u>Shandaken WF</u>
Red Hill Fire Tower Parking Lot	0	10	10	<u>Sundown WF</u>
Vernooy Kill Falls Parking Lot (Cutler)	0	20	20	<u>Vernooy Kill SF</u>
Vernooy Kill Falls Parking Lot (Lundy Road)	0	8	8	<u>Vernooy Kill SF</u>
Vernooy Kill Falls Parking Lot (Rogue Harbor Road)	0	8	8	<u>Vernooy Kill SF</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>189</b>	-

Additionally, funds were used to complete the Wayfinding Signage project to direct visitors and residents to the many recreational assets that can be found in the Catskill region.

# Visitors' Perceptions of Trail Registries in the Catskill Park



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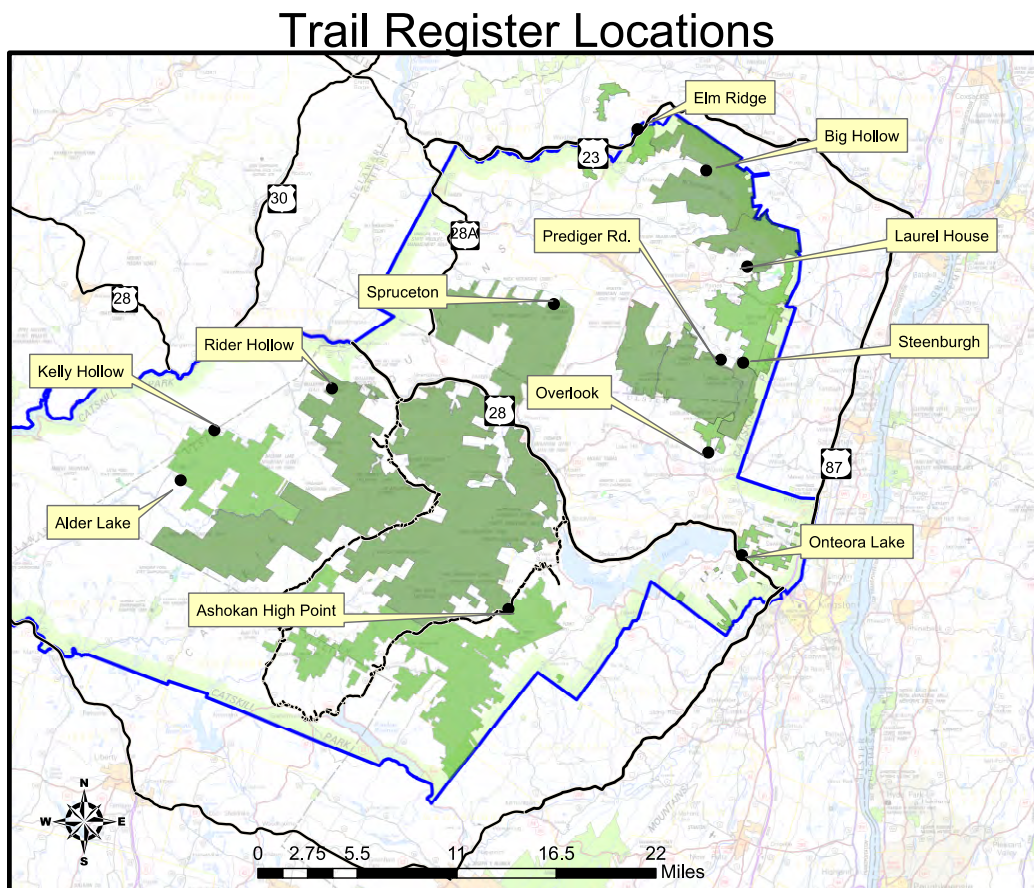
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## Introduction

The Catskill Park is a state park in southern New York that consists of 700,000 acres of forest preserve, wilderness areas, and wild forest (DEC, 2020). The goal of this study is to better understand the factors that encourage visitors to use trail registries in the Catskill Park. To achieve this goal, a visitor survey was conducted at 12 different trailhead locations within the Catskill Park (Figure 1). Six of these locations are in Region 3 of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and six are in Region 4. The objective of this study is to identify if visitors' perceptions concerning risk of trail use and trail difficulty, as well as level of trail experience, influence the percent of registry sign-ins. By understanding visitors' perceptions of trails and previous trail experience, forest managers may be better able to implement management strategies that increase the use of registries by visitors.



**Figure 1.** Trail registry locations sampled within the Catskill Park (map courtesy of Pine Roehrs, NYSDEC).

## Methods

Trailhead locations were selected to include a diversity of visitor experiences. Trailheads were selected by a few employees from Region 3 of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) based on their sense of relative risk of the trail, and so that an equal number of sites in the two regions of the Catskills (regions 3 and 4) were sampled. A diverse representation of wild forest, wilderness, front-country, and backcountry sites were chosen to see how different experiences may influence users to sign the registry. A similar study took place in 2017 (Archer, 2017) and the DEC tried to avoid overlapping the trailheads included in that study with the trailheads included in this study.



The survey was written by the second author with input from the first author, and employees of the NYSDEC and the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. A pilot study of the initial draft questionnaire was completed with the assistance of the NYSDEC and several organizations based in the Catskills (i.e., The Catskill Center, Catskill 3500 Club, Adirondack Mountain Club, Finger Lakes Trail Conference, NY-NJ Trail Conference, Trout Unlimited, and The Catskills Visitor Center). Representatives of these organization completed the survey and provided comments on the questionnaire; revisions were then made to the questionnaire.

The sampling schedule was set up to survey visitors between May 25 and August 20, 2019, at each location a total of six times (three times on a weekend and three times during the week); however, weather conditions prevented sampling on all days for all trailheads. Two different data collection techniques were used on sampling days: a visitor observation data sheet and the visitor questionnaire. The observation data sheet was used from 8 am to 4 pm to observe the number of visitors using the trailhead, number of visitors with packs, number of visitors with appropriate footwear for trail use, and number of visitors who signed the registry between 8 am and 4 pm.

This information allowed the researchers to calculate the sign-in rate (i.e., proportion of visitors signing in) at every location at the end of the day.

The second data collection technique was the visitor survey. Visitors were asked to fill out a 17-question survey upon exiting the trail they had used that day. The survey took approximately seven minutes for each user to complete and was administered via tablet. All data were collected by Qualtrics software, which enabled the researchers to easily collect observational and survey data electronically and upload that data at the end of each day. The survey was anonymous and asked users a series of questions about their trail usage in the past, how often they frequent the area, what activity they were taking part in that day, and whether they decided to sign the trail registry or not and why. It also asked users for their perceived risk of using the trail and for their perceptions of the difficulty of the trail.

Observational and survey data were collected from 8 am to 4 pm daily on sampling days. Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used for analysis. Excel was used to summarize data and calculate percentages. SPSS was used to perform t-tests to find significant differences between visitors who signed the registry and those who did not, and to conduct regression analyses.

## **Results**

### ***Response rate***

The total number of survey respondents was 352. Sixty-two individuals did not wish to respond to the survey, yielding an overall response rate of 85%.

### ***Visitor Demographics***

The average visitor at the sampled trailheads used trails in general six to ten times each year, used the trail they were visiting that day two to three times in the past five years (i.e., since 2015), perceived the difficulty level of the trail they were using that day to be easy, and used the trail they were visiting that day primarily for hiking; the majority (56%) were male (43% were female, and 1% were other or “prefer not to say”; N = 352). The average age of visitors was 45 years old (the range was 18-76; N = 346). Most trailhead users were visiting with two other



people (mainly friends and family). Approximately one-fifth of visitors (21%) who filled out the survey had an income over \$150,000; smaller percentages of visitors had lower levels of income (12% were in the \$125,000 to \$149,000 range; 17% were \$100,000 to \$124,999; 16% were \$75,000 to \$99,999; 18% were \$50,000 to \$74,999; were 13% \$25,000 to \$49,999, and 4% were \$0 to \$24,999; N = 298). Most visitors were from New York State (74%); 10% were from New Jersey and 4% were from Pennsylvania (N = 351). Visitors from Australia, Canada, China, India, Paraguay, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom were also recorded. Of the visitors observed (N = 4,662), 59% had backpacks or daypacks, and 94% had footwear appropriate for trail use (i.e., adequate walking shoes or hiking boots). No significant differences were found between those who signed-in at the registry and those who did not for the demographics of age ( $p = .990$ ), level of education ( $p = .555$ ), or income ( $p = .585$ ).

### ***Registry Sign-in Rates***

Table 1 shows the overall sign-in rates for survey respondents and visitors observed at each trailhead location. Overall, 46% of survey respondents indicated that they signed-in at a registry (N = 352). Observational data were also collected to identify the percentage of trailhead users who signed in either for themselves or for their group as a whole. Observations indicated that 4,662 visitors used the trailheads between 8 AM and 4 PM on survey days. Registry data (collected at 4 PM on each survey day from the registry at the trailhead being sampled) indicate that 1,080 trailhead users (23%) were accounted for in the registries, either by signing-in for themselves or as part of their group. When the data for the Laurel House trailhead are excluded from this analysis (due to the extremely low observed sign-in rate of 7% at this location), the overall sign-in rate for the 11 remaining trailheads is 56%.

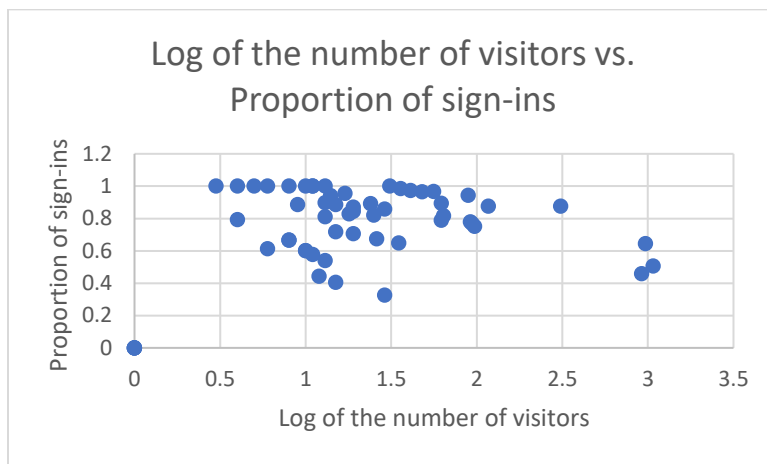
**Table 1.** Percentage of respondents and all visitors at each trailhead who signed in.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of survey respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents who signed-in</b>	<b>Percentage of observed visitors accounted for in registry</b>
Alder Lake	20	50%	46%
Ashokan High Point	15	67%	79%
Big Hollow	18	67%	82%
Elm Ridge	35	40%	38%
Kelly Hollow	9	89%	72%
Laurel House	100	21%	7%
Onteora Lake	29	38%	32%
Overlook	57	53%	54%
Prediger Road	23	65%	82%
Rider Hollow	5	80%	95%
Spruceton	9	67%	57%
Steenburgh	32	69%	76%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>23%</b>

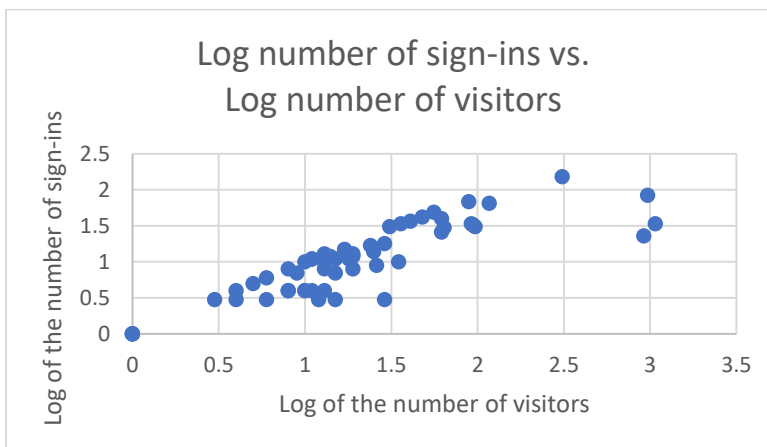
Further analysis reveals a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.363$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $N = 57$ ) between the number of visitors observed daily at each trailhead during the summer of 2019 and the proportion of visitors who signed in at the registry each day. This result indicates that as visitor numbers increase at a trailhead, the *percentage* of visitors signing-in at the registry decreases (Figure 2). Linear regression results indicate that the number of visitors at a trailhead positively influences the overall *number* of sign-ins at the trailhead ( $R^2 = 0.740$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 57$ , Figure 3). In other words, as the overall number of users to a trailhead increases, the *number* of sign-ins increases, but the *percentage* of sign-ins decreases. These results suggest that visitors may perceive trail use as less risky when other visitors are in the area, and, consequently, may sign-in less. In addition, at crowded trailheads, the high numbers of visitors may physically prevent some visitors from signing in.

Estimates of the number of visitors to the trailheads sampled can be calculated by using the regression equation below if the number of visitors signing in to a registry is obtained (a log10 conversion of the variables will be required). Daily registry data should be used for estimates. In order to meet regression assumptions, the log of the number of visitors signing in on sample days was used as the dependent (Y) variable in the regression, and the log of the number of visitors at each trailhead on sample days was used as the independent variable (X). The unstandardized regression equation is:

$$Y_{\text{Log number of visitors signing in}} = 0.159 + 0.661 X_{\text{Log number of visitors}}$$



**Figure 2.** A scatterplot of the *proportion* of visitors signing in at each trailhead (Y) vs. the log of the number of visitors observed at each trailhead on sample days (X; n = 57). Note: In order to “spread out” the data, the log of the number of visitors was used in this figure.



**Figure 3.** A scatterplot of the log of the *number* of visitors signing in at each trailhead (Y) vs. the log of the number of visitors observed at each trailhead (X; n = 57). Note: In order to “spread out” the data, the log of the number of visitors was used in this figure.

### ***Reasons for signing in***

Tables 2 and 3 indicate the reasons why visitors likely decided to sign in or not during their visit. The most common reason indicated for signing in was “signing in is important for my safety and/or the safety of others in my group;” 87% of visitors who signed the registry indicated this as a reason for signing in. The second most indicated reasons were that “it only takes a minute to sign in” and “signing in helps New York State determine where to allocate funding;” 66% of visitors who signed the registry indicated both of these as reasons for signing in.

Visitors who decided to not sign in during their visit (43%) indicated that the main reason for not signing in was “other,” which included responses such as “I didn’t know about the registry” or “I forgot about the registry.” Thirty-three percent of visitors also indicated that they did not sign in because “I was anxious to get started on the trail and didn’t want to take the time to sign in.”

**Table 2.** Percentage of visitors according to why they decided to sign in (n = 163).

<b>Why did you decide to sign in during your visit?</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Signing in is important for my safety and/or the safety of others in my group.	87%
It only takes a minute to sign in.	66%
Signing in helps New York State determine where to allocate funding.	66%
Signs near the registry indicated that I needed to sign in.	30%
Other.	4%

**Table 3.** Percentage of visitors according to why they did not sign in (n = 187).

<b>Why did you decide to not sign in during this visit?</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Other.	43%
I was anxious to get started on the trail and didn’t want to take the time to sign in.	33%
Signing in is not necessary since this is an easy trail.	21%
Signing in is not necessary since I have used this trail before.	11%
Signing in is not important to me and/or is a waste of my time.	10%
Someone else in my group signed in for me.	2%
I don’t want other trail users to see my personal information.	2%
I don’t want the NYS DEC to have my personal information.	1%

When a logistic regression was used to identify which variables affect if a visitor signs-in or not, only one variable was identified as significant: the log of the number of visitors at the trailhead on the day of the respondent's visit ( $p < .001$ ). The regression was able to correctly predict 66% of the time if a respondent signed in or not, based on trailhead visitation.

***Trail use***

Tables 4 and 5 respectively show respondents' trail use per year overall (i.e., both in and out of the Catskill Park) and trail use specifically at the sampled trailheads. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated that they use trails in general 21 or more times annually ( $N = 352$ ). Half (50%) of the respondents indicated that they had used the trail they were hiking that day one time only; 18% indicated that they had used it 2 to 3 times, 9% indicated 4 to 5 times, 7% indicated 6 to 10 times, and 16% indicated 11 or more times ( $N = 352$ ). In addition, users who signed in used trails in general more frequently (on average, 11 to 20 times per year) than those who did not sign in (6 to 10 times per year;  $p = .002$ ). These results reveal that, overall, visitors may be experienced trail users, but only half may be experienced or familiar with trails in the Catskill Park. There was no significant correlation between the proportion of visitors who signed in at a trailhead's registry and the number of times respondents used the trail over the past five years (i.e., since 2015;  $r = .050$ ;  $p = 0.356$ ;  $N = 347$ ).

**Table 4.** Respondents' trail usage per year (i.e., both inside and outside the Catskill Park;  $N = 352$ ).

<b>Total trail usage per year</b>	<b>Total trail usage per year</b>
0 to 1 times per year	6%
2 to 5 times	20%
6 to 10 times	26%
11 to 20 times	19%
21 or more times	29%

**Table 5.** Percentage of respondents surveyed at each trailhead according to number of times they used that trailhead since 2015 (N = 352). Percentages above 20% are in bold.

Location	Number of times respondents used trail				
	1 time only	2 to 3 times	4 to 5 times	6 to 10 times	11 or more
Alder Lake	<b>60%</b>	10%	5%	15%	10%
Ashokan High Pt.	<b>67%</b>	13%	7%	0%	13%
Big Hollow	<b>44%</b>	<b>28%</b>	11%	6%	11%
Elm Ridge	<b>27%</b>	9%	9%	9%	<b>47%</b>
Laurel House	<b>64%</b>	<b>20%</b>	9%	3%	4%
Kelly Hollow	<b>33%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>22%</b>	11%	11%
Onteora Lake	<b>28%</b>	10%	7%	14%	<b>41%</b>
Overlook	<b>46%</b>	<b>21%</b>	7%	5%	<b>21%</b>
Prediger Road	<b>48%</b>	<b>26%</b>	4%	9%	13%
Rider Hollow	<b>60%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>20%</b>	0%	0%
Spruceton	<b>44%</b>	<b>33%</b>	0%	11%	11%
Steenburgh	<b>56%</b>	16%	16%	9%	3%

Table 6 shows visitors’ activities during their visit. The majority of visitors (67%) indicated that they participated in hiking during their visit; 13% indicated that they were doing “other” activities such as “looking for a view,” or looking for a significant feature in the landscape, such as a waterfall.

**Table 6.** Visitors’ activities at the trailheads (N = 352).

Activity	Percentage of Respondents
Day hiking	67%
Other	13%
Mountain biking	7%
Backpacking and camping	5%
Walking my dog	5%
Access for fishing	2%
Trail running	2%
Boating access	<1%

### *Respondents' Perceptions of Risk*

Respondents were asked two questions concerning risk: 1). “How much risk to your personal health and safety do you think is involved in using this trail?” and 2). “How much risk to the health and safety of the other individuals in your group do you think is involved in using this trail?” The average respondent to both questions perceived the risk to be “slight” (N = 352 for both questions). Trailhead areas where users perceived the risk to their personal health and safety to be higher had higher sign-in rates (Table 7; Figure 4). In addition, an important (but not significant;  $p = .099$ ) difference was found between users who signed-in at a registry and those who did not. Specifically, trailhead users who signed-in were more likely to perceive the risk to the health and safety of individuals in their group to be slightly higher than those who did not sign in. This slight difference was not found between those who signed in and those who did not for respondents’ perception of risk to their own personal health and safety. Those who travel in groups (such as families with children) may be more likely to sign in. There was no significant correlation between the proportion of visitors who signed in at a trailhead registry and the respondents’ perceived risk to self ( $r = .050$ ;  $p = .356$ ;  $N = 347$ ), or perceived risk to others in their group ( $r = .033$ ,  $p = .569$ ;  $N = 303$ ).

**Table 7.** Percentage of perceived risk to self at each trailhead location (N = 352). Percentages above 20% are in bold.

Location	Level of perceived risk to self				
	No risk	Slight risk	Moderate risk	High risk	Extensive risk
Alder Lake	<b>65%</b>	<b>35%</b>	0%	0%	0%
Ashokan High Point	<b>47%</b>	<b>40%</b>	13%	0%	0%
Big Hollow	17%	<b>61%</b>	<b>22%</b>	0%	0%
Elm Ridge	15%	<b>47%</b>	<b>35%</b>	0%	3%
Laurel House	<b>25%</b>	<b>60%</b>	15%	0%	0%
Kelly Hollow	<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>	0%	0%	0%
Onteora Lake	<b>42%</b>	<b>48%</b>	10%	0%	0%
Overlook	<b>30%</b>	<b>63%</b>	7%	0%	0%
Prediger Road	13%	<b>52%</b>	<b>30%</b>	3%	0%
Rider Hollow	<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>	0%	0%	0%
Spruceton	<b>22%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>22%</b>	0%	0%
Steenburgh	19%	<b>62%</b>	19%	0%	0%
<b>Average</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>

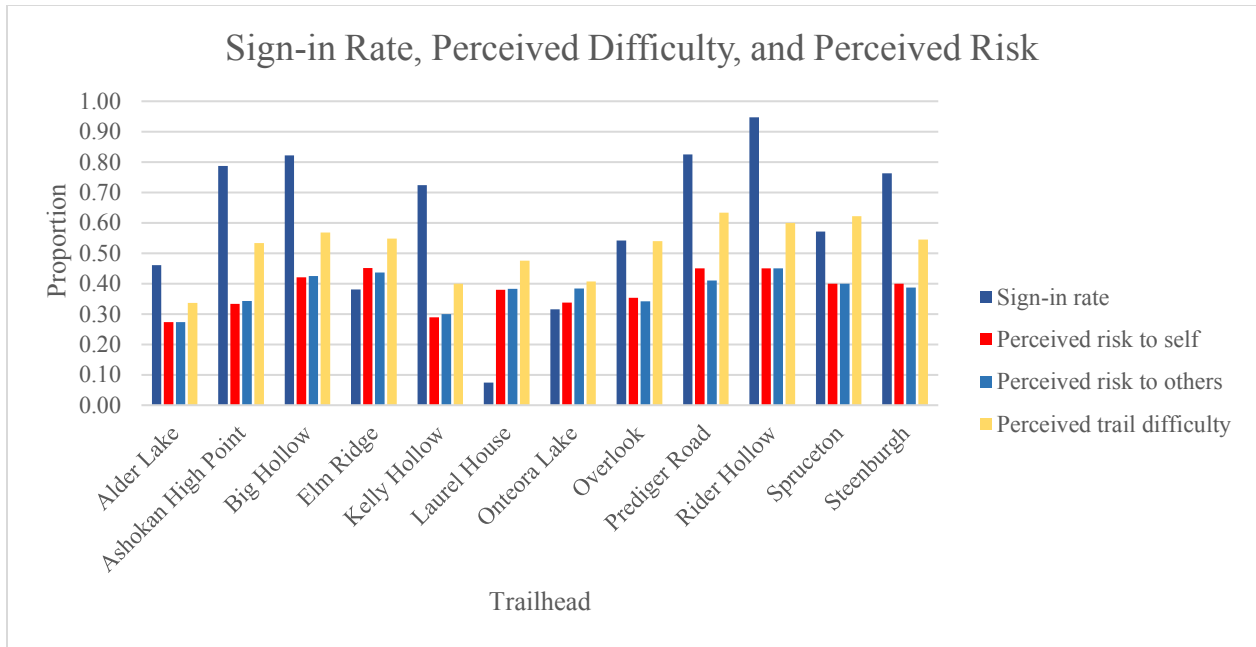
### ***Respondents' Perceptions of Difficulty***

Respondents were asked one question concerning trail difficulty: “How difficult do you perceive this trail to be for hiking?” The average respondent perceived the trail they were hiking that day to be easy to moderately difficult (N = 351; Table 8; Figure 4). A significant difference in perception of trail difficulty ( $p = .032$ ) was identified between those who signed-in at the registry and those who did not. Specifically, those who signed in at the registry perceived the trail’s level of difficulty to be higher than those who did not sign in. Users who perceive a trail to be difficult may be more likely to sign in. A small but significant correlation was found between the proportion of visitors who signed in at each trailhead registry and the respondents’ perceptions of trail difficulty ( $r = .205$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $N = 346$ )

**Table 8.** Average respondents’ level of perceived trail difficulty (N = 351). Data are presented using the following scale: 1 = very easy, 2 = easy, 3 = moderate, 4 = difficult, and 5 = very difficult.

<b>Trailhead Name</b>	<b>Average perceived difficulty</b>
Alder Lake	1.68
Ashokan High Point	2.67
Big Hollow	2.84
Elm Ridge	2.74
Kelly Hollow	2.00
Laurel House	2.38
Onteora Lake	2.04
Overlook	2.70
Prediger Road	3.17
Rider Hollow	3.00
Spruceton	3.11
Steenburgh	2.73





**Figure 4.** Graph of proportion of users who signed in at each trailhead registry (i.e., sign-in rate), and an index of respondent’s perceived level of risk to self, perceived level of risk to others in their group, and perceived level of trail difficulty. Data are presented on a scale of 0 to 1.0, with 1.0 indicating the highest levels.

***Visitors’ Perceptions of Trail Sign-in Stations***

Tables 9 and 10 show the percentage of visitors who indicated their level of agreement with specific statements about trail registries. Most visitors agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, inferring that people do believe that trail registries are beneficial to their health and safety, to the health and safety of friends and family, and to the DEC for estimating trail use and determining funding allocation. In addition, there was a significant difference between those who signed-in at registries and those who did not ( $p < .01$ ) for all statements in Tables 9 and 10. Specifically, on average, those who signed in tended to agree more strongly with each statement than those who did not sign in.

**Table 9.** Percentage of visitors according to their perceptions of using trail sign-in stations in the Catskill Park (N = 344). Percentages above 20% are in bold.

<b>I believe that using trail sign in stations in the Catskill Park...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
... will keep me safe on trails.	3%	5%	16%	<b>44%</b>	<b>32%</b>
... is always important, whether I am familiar with a trail or not.	2%	5%	15%	<b>40%</b>	<b>38%</b>
...Reduces the health and safety risks associated with using a trail.	2%	9%	16%	<b>42%</b>	<b>32%</b>
...is always necessary, no matter the difficulty level of a trail.	2%	8%	<b>21%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>33%</b>
...helps park managers estimate how many people are using the trails.	<1%	2%	7%	<b>37%</b>	<b>53%</b>
...provides the information necessary for search and rescue operations.	1%	<1%	6%	<b>35%</b>	<b>57%</b>
...provides the information necessary for prioritizing trails for maintenance and repair.	1%	1%	11%	<b>39%</b>	<b>47%</b>

**Table 10.** Percentage of visitors according to their perceptions of trail sign-in stations in general in the Catskill Park (N = 345). Percentages above 20% are in bold.

Trail sign-in stations are...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
... an important feature of trails in the Catskill park.	<1%	4%	16%	<b>41%</b>	<b>39%</b>
... a good thing to have at all trailheads in the Catskill Park.	1%	3%	9%	<b>44%</b>	<b>43%</b>
... necessary to have at all trailheads in the Catskill Park.	2%	8%	18%	<b>36%</b>	<b>37%</b>
... Necessary for keeping visitors safe in the Catskill Park.	1%	5%	15%	<b>42%</b>	<b>37%</b>
... necessary for the management of trails in the Catskill Park.	<1%	4%	12%	<b>43%</b>	<b>41%</b>

## Discussion

Trailhead registries provide the DEC with important information that can be used for search and rescue operations, trail use monitoring, and allocating resources for funding and staff time to high use areas. The results of this study have several important implications for management. First, the number of sign-ins does not accurately indicate the actual number of visitors that trails are receiving. According to survey results, the trailheads sampled in the Catskill Park currently have an overall registry sign-in rate of about 46%; the sign-in rate according to observational data was 56% (excluding the Laurel House trailhead with its extremely low sign-in rate). Low registry sign-ins at locations receiving high use could provide the DEC with inaccurate perceptions of the management needs at these sites. For example, road-side parking was observed as an issue at Kaaterskill Falls (Laurel House trailhead), where only 7% of visitors (i.e., 235) were accounted for in the registry on survey days. The parking lot would fill and visitors would start parking along the road where signs clearly stated “no parking”. This illegal parking created problems for emergency and service vehicles trying to access the trailhead. Trail registry information in this case did not nearly account for the actual number of visitors to the trailhead.

Second, low sign-in rates may be related to visitors' activities, perceptions of risk, number of other visitors at the site, and perceptions of trail difficulty. Kaaterskill Falls (Laurel House trailhead) and Onteora Lake are highly frequented areas but had some of the lowest sign-in rates. These low sign-in rates could be due in part to the activities in which visitors are engaged. For example, many of the visitors at Kaaterskill Falls and Onteora Lake go to swim or relax by the water; their perceptions of risk may be lower for these activities than they would be if they were hiking. In addition, both regression and correlation results from this study reveal that having a large number of other people at a trailhead appears to reduce the sign-in rate, possibly because it reduces the perceived risk for some visitors at the site and/or physically prevents visitors from signing in. It is also possible that the low sign-in rates at popular trailhead areas are related to where visitors are coming from and their previous experience with the outdoors. Many of the people visiting Kaaterskill Falls, for example, are from New York City; they may be unaware of how registries are used for search and rescue efforts, and of the risks associated with using trails in general.

Third, the use of sign-in registries varies between trailheads, and appears to be somewhat influenced by the remoteness of the site and the number of visitors. For example, Ashokan High Point, Rider Hollow, and Kelly Hollow were the three least-visited trailheads, but had the highest percentage of sign-in rates of all locations sampled. All three of these locations have small parking lots, where users often see only one to two other vehicles during their visit. Although no visitors at these three locations indicated that they felt the risk to their personal health and safety was above moderate, it is likely that the feeling of solitude and lack of foot traffic at these trailheads influenced people to sign-in. Visitors may be less concerned with signing in when there is a higher number of vehicles in the parking lot and more interaction with other visitors is taking place on the trail or at the trailhead.

## **Conclusion**

Public education and outreach that stresses how using trail registries may be beneficial to visitor health and safety, and site management, and could be useful for increasing sign-ins. Trail registries within the Catskill Park, though used by approximately half of visitors, are not achieving their full potential. Visitors' perceptions of risk to themselves and their group, trail

difficulty, and number of other users at the site, as well as the realization that signing in could help the DEC with management, all affect registry sign-in rates. The main reasons that users do not sign trail registries are simply that they do not know that registries exist and do not understand the importance of signing in. To encourage the use of trail registries, public education and outreach can be focused on educating visitors about the benefits of signing-in at trailhead registries, as well as at other locations within the Catskill Park (e.g., Catskill Center, Catskill Visitor Center, local businesses). It would also be beneficial to have information about the impacts of trail registries on the DEC website so that visitors can see the information before they visit a trailhead. Educating the public on the use of trail registries is the best option for increased registry use in the future, leading to more accurate visitor estimates and management that better accommodates visitor numbers in the Catskill Park.

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# Appendix A. Visitor survey.

## Visitors' Perceptions of Trail Registries in the Catskill Park

### I. Let us know a little about your perceptions of this trail:

1. What is the name of the trailhead where you are completing this survey? Check one box only.
- |   |                                       |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alder Lake         | <input type="checkbox"/> Laurel House | <input type="checkbox"/> Prediger Road |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashokan High Point | <input type="checkbox"/> Kelly Hollow | <input type="checkbox"/> Rider Hollow  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Big Hollow         | <input type="checkbox"/> Onteora Lake | <input type="checkbox"/> Spruceton     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elm Ridge          | <input type="checkbox"/> Overlook     | <input type="checkbox"/> Steenburgh    |
2. How **many times** have you used this trail in the past five years (i.e., since 2015) **including today**? Check one box only.
- 1 time only       2 to 3 times       4 to 5 times       6 to 10 times       11 or more times
3. How **difficult** do you perceive this trail to be for hiking? Check one box only.
- Very easy       Easy       Moderate       Difficult       Very difficult
4. How much **risk to your personal health and safety** do you think is involved in using this trail? Check one box only.
- No risk       Slight risk       Moderate risk       High risk       Extensive risk
5. How much **risk to the health and safety of the other individuals in your group** do you think is involved in using this trail? Check one box only.
- No risk       Slight risk       Moderate risk       High risk       Extensive risk
- I am by myself today
6. What is the **primary reason** that you used this trail today? Check one answer only.
- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day hiking         | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail running           | <input type="checkbox"/> Geocaching            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access for fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Backpacking and camping | <input type="checkbox"/> Boating access        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking my dog     | <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain biking         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |
7. a. Did you sign-in at the trail sign-in station during this visit? **Your candid answer is appreciated, will be kept anonymous, and will not be connected to your identity in any way.**
- Yes (Go to question 7b below.)       No (Go to question 7c below.)
- b. If "yes", why did you decide to sign in during this visit? Check all that apply.
- Signing in is important for my safety and/or the safety of others in my group.
- It only takes a minute to sign in.
- Signs near the registry indicated that I needed to sign in.
- Signing in helps New York State determine where to allocate funding and staff for trail management.
- Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- c. If "no", why did you decide to not sign in during this visit? Check all that apply.
- Someone else in my group signed in for me.
- I was anxious to get started on the trail and didn't want to take the time to sign in.
- The others in my group didn't want to take the time to sign in.
- I don't want other trail users to see my personal information.
- Signing in is not necessary since I have used this trail before.
- Signing in is not necessary since this is an easy trail.
- Signing in is not important to me and/or is a waste of my time.
- I don't want the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to have my personal information.
- Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
8. **How often** do you **use trails** in general for recreational purposes **each year**? Check one answer only.
- 0 to 1 times per year     2 to 5 times       6 to 10 times       11 to 20 times       21 or more times
9. **With whom** are you using this trail today? Check all that apply.
- Friends       Family       Club/Organization       School group       No one else
- Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**[Turn over page for other questions!]**



**II. Let us know a little about your perceptions of trail sign-in stations in general:**

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following **beliefs** regarding trail sign-in stations in the Catskill Park? Please circle the number that corresponds with your answer.

I believe that <b>using</b> trail sign-in stations in the Catskill Park...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
... will keep me <b>safe</b> on trails.	-2	-1	0	1	2
... is <b>always important</b> , whether I am <b>familiar</b> with a trail or not.	-2	-1	0	1	2
... reduces the <b>health and safety risks</b> associated with using a trail.	-2	-1	0	1	2
... is <b>always necessary</b> , no matter the <b>difficulty</b> level of a trail.	-2	-1	0	1	2
... helps park managers <b>estimate</b> how many people are using the trails.	-2	-1	0	1	2
...provides the information necessary for <b>search and rescue</b> operations.	-2	-1	0	1	2
...provides the information necessary for prioritizing trails for <b>maintenance and repair</b> .	-2	-1	0	1	2

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following items regarding **trail sign-in stations in the Catskill Park**? Please circle the number that corresponds with your answer.

Trail sign-in stations are...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...an <b>important</b> feature of trails in the Catskill Park.	-2	-1	0	1	2
...a <b>good</b> thing to have at all trailheads in the Catskill Park.	-2	-1	0	1	2
.... <b>necessary</b> to have at all trailheads in the Catskill Park.	-2	-1	0	1	2
... <b>necessary</b> for keeping visitors <b>safe</b> in the Catskill Park.	-2	-1	0	1	2
... <b>necessary</b> for the management of trails in the Catskill Park.	-2	-1	0	1	2

**III. Let us know a little more about yourself:**

12. How many **people** are in your group today, including yourself? Number: \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your gender? Check one answer only.

Male                       Female                       Transgender                       Other                       Prefer not to say

14. What **year** were you born? Year: \_\_\_\_\_

15. In which country and state/province is your current residence?

Country: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_

16. How many **years of education** have you had? Include up to 12 years for primary school through high school, plus each year of technical and/or college training after.

Years of education: \_\_\_\_\_

17. What is the **total household income per year** for all earners in your household (optional)? Check one answer only.

\$0 - \$24,999                       \$25,000 - \$49,999                       \$50,000 - \$74,999                       \$75,000 - \$99,999

\$100,000 - \$124,999                       \$125,000 - \$149,999                       over \$150,000

**Thank you for helping us with this study!**

## Catskill Science Collaborative CPAC Report 10/26/2020

By Jamie Deppen, [deppenj@caryinstitute.org](mailto:deppenj@caryinstitute.org)

- We are seeking proposals from university faculty with interested students who want to work with natural resource managers to answer natural resource management research questions. See [RFP](#) for more info and research topics.
  
- This year's four Catskill Research Fellows will be presenting on their work from this summer virtually on Friday November 13<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM (bear education for Catskills visitors and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid mapping) and Monday November 21<sup>st</sup> at 12:30 PM -1:30 PM (stream restoration and sediment modeling in the Stony Clove and stream habitat quality measurement methods). I will be sending out more information about this soon. Feel free to email me (address above) if you want to make sure you receive the information.
  
- We held a speaker series on climate change. The talks were recorded:
  - [Implications of climate change for invasive species in the Northeast](#)
  - [Climate change and the future of montane birds in the Northeast](#)
  - [Storms, floods & droughts: Hydrological extremes in the Catskills](#)



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## **Updates 10/28/2020**

The invasive fish Northern Snakehead was caught for the first time on July 31 in the Upper Delaware near Callicoon. DEC is surveying for Snakehead in the Delaware and asking anglers to report all snakehead caught to the regional NYS DEC fisheries office, DEC's Invasive Species Bureau at [isinfo@dec.ny.gov](mailto:isinfo@dec.ny.gov) or through [iMapinvasives](http://iMapinvasives.com). Spotted Lanternfly is now established on Staten Island and sites are being investigated by the State Department of Agriculture and Markets very close to the CRISP boundaries. We are asking people in our area to be extra vigilant for Spotted Lanternfly and to report any sightings to <https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/a08d60f6522043f5bd04229e00acdd63>.

Information is available on our website, [www.catskillinvasives.com](http://www.catskillinvasives.com), including a presentation on spotted lanternfly, northern snakehead, and Asian giant hornets from our last Partners Meeting.

This summer, CRISP, coordinating with the Catskill Center's Catskills Strike Team, had 105 sites under management. We removed 4,000 mile-a-minute stems across 7 sites. Eight sites were surveyed for giant hogweed and 192 hogweed stems were removed. Removals of Early Detection Rapid Response species were performed over 4 acres and are continuing for black jetbead and Japanese angelica tree. The Catskills Strike Team surveyed 822 acres of DEC Campgrounds, and other public sites, and performed control over 15 acres of invasive species. Over 2 acres of restoration plantings were maintained in 2020.

CRISP staff congratulate the Catskill Strike Team members and the CRISP Watershed Stewards for another successful summer of invasive species management in the Catskills!

Quarterly Report to the CPAC – Oct. 28, 2020  
The Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce, Inc.  
Catskill Mountains Scenic Byway  
The Catskill Water Discovery Center

While we are all doing our best to quarantine, wear masks and stay socially distanced we have kept up with promoting our businesses and communities who are working hard on being creative in offering events and activities that are a cornerstone to our tourism economy.

Our businesses have, for the most part, complied with CDC and NYS Covid-19 Guidelines. Restaurants have been incredibly flexible to meet the public's needs. The Federal Cares program was very helpful for employers and employees but challenging to keep up with as rules changed and, in some cases, responded to changing dynamics.

To keep moving forward with community-based activities along the CMSB, we sponsored a Pollinator Garden Initiative that provided seeds and garden signs to each of the 6 municipalities along the byway. This was a successful and fun project that was relatively safe to do while following the Covid-19 Guidelines. A new Pollinator Garden report has been added to the [www.ScenicCatskills.com](http://www.ScenicCatskills.com) website.

The CMSB has created numerous audio tours which tell the traveler about the key interests including Arts & Culture, Outdoor Recreation and most recently released - Sustainability Tour which features a growing number of businesses and organizations who are using Green Technology. Each of these audio tours are featured in another new section on our website. This section also features the Podcast Kaatscast created and produced by Brett Barry of Silver Hollow Audio the creator of all of our audio tours. Remember the Catskill Mountains Scenic Byway is included in the GPS-based TravelStorys APP.

The final push to improve our website provides for three new marketing tools: a calendar of events, a blog and a newsletter that will be both informational to those on our data base and an option to build a visitor list to increase outreach. We have also invested in expanding our outreach through social media collecting a broader audience.

The final work to complete the components of the Smart Growth grant is nearing its end and video footage has been collected during the 1903 Auto Endurance Run.

A brief report on the Water Discovery Center. Our new exhibit has been installed at our new center and office located in the Catskill Watershed Corporation in Arkville. We are gearing up to implement the pathways and interpretive signage at the 33-acre parcel at our location. The Catskill Mountain Club has taken on the job to establish hiking trails in a nearby 206-acre lot across from our office effectively establishing a recreational hub in Arkville. These assets will compliment the offerings of the Catskill Recreation Center where many recreational options are available including a steam-cleaning station for canoes and kayaks.



## **CMC Report - CPAC October 28, 2020**

### **Hiking programs**

We have recently introduced three programs that award patches and certificates of accomplishment. Two are legacy programs that were begun by the Rip van Winkle Hikers, which have sadly disbanded after many years of service to the Catskills hiking community. In honor of the Rips, we are proud to have been asked to assume sponsorship for the Catskills Grid 420 and Catskills 4 Seasons 140 programs. These programs encourage a more complete appreciation of the beauty, features and issues of the Catskill Park.

The CMC has constructed six trails so far and we are working on a seventh with the DEP on Morris Hill in Arkville. To celebrate the success of our trail building program, we are offering a CMC Hiking Trails Challenge patch to those who hike all of the trails. We are proud of our efforts to introduce folks to hiking in less well known and used places in the Catskills while bringing public health and economic benefits to local communities. This patch is available to members and non-members alike, free of charge.

### **CMC Trails**

Use of CMC trails has increased dramatically this year, as it has throughout the Park. Use of our older trails is up about 61% over last year and the new Ashokan Quarry Trail has been particularly busy since it officially opened in July. We have had well over 2500 CMC Trail Guide brochures picked up at trailheads since the new edition was published in early August.

### **Lark in the Park**

The 2020 Lark was a success, albeit a very different one than in the past. With no in-person events, the Lark partnership offered an extensive list of self-guided tours, hikes, paddles and cycling routes. We also offered a menu of online video presentations that were available for viewing at the convenience of users. Many of these features will remain available in the future.

In consideration of the covid health crisis, we did not promote the Lark widely this year, sticking to our own communications platforms exclusively and buying no advertisements.

## **Press**

The CMC have been fortunate to be featured in a number of publications this year. Articles focusing on our trails have appeared in Adirondac Magazine, Upstate Life, The Reporter, Catskill Country and the Oneonta Daily Star. We have taken the opportunity to speak to issues of stewardship, sustainability, safety and added precautions during the time of covid.



## **Catskill Fire Tower Project - Catskill Park Advisory Committee - Fall 2020**

Balsam Lake, Overlook, Mount Tremper, and Hunter reopened their volunteer programs following Covid-

19 safety protocols directed by New York State and by the CDC. The volunteer schedule was modified this year from July 4th weekend through October 12<sup>th</sup> for Columbus Day weekend. Mount Tremper and Hunter's top cabs were opened to visitors from July through October, and Mount Tremper's top cab remains open throughout the fall. The cabs of Overlook, Red Hill, and Balsam Lake stayed closed in 2020 while the staircases stayed open. The Upper Esopus Fire Tower at the Catskills Visitor Center is climbable 7 days a week, and the top cab is open Fridays and Saturdays throughout the fall by a Catskill Center volunteer.

All towers that were open are reporting high visitation in 2020 compared with 2019. Even at Hunter, with the Ski Area chairlift being closed this year, fire tower volunteers report slightly higher visitor numbers. Parking lots were at capacity for the most popular fire towers on weekends and often on weekdays as well. Volunteers at Overlook saw an increase in both legal and illegal roadside parking. Columbus Day weekend at Overlook Mountain was one of the busiest. Charlie, the Overlook volunteer coordinator, can remember recently with an estimated 800 visitors climbing the fire tower on Sunday of that weekend.

Mount Tremper's top cab being open 7 days a week throughout the fire tower season has been successful. Catskill Center staff plan to go up to the fire tower before the winter to help close the top cab before snow and heavy weather.

The Catskill Fire Tower Project will have an annual meeting later in late 2019 or in early 2020 to calculate visitor numbers and to read through volunteer reports from the season.

There are over 100 Catskill Center fire tower volunteers and several volunteer coordinators located throughout the Park who made these openings possible, both for top cab visitation and for interpretation of the Park and the Catskills Region. We want to take time to thank all of the volunteers who participated in the Catskill Fire Tower Project this year! Their interactions with visitors, sharing of fire tower history and restoration information, Leave No Trace, HikeSafe principles, NYS Regulations, and reminding visitors to wear masks came during a time of both new outdoor recreationists and returning ones.

Despite the increased number of visitors, Balsam Lake and Overlook volunteers report that there was only light trash found on the trails, the volunteer stewards helped visitors to understand what Pack it in, Pack it out means and what outdoor bathroom habits should be when no privy or port-a-johns are available. Visitors were reminded to wear masks and to use hand sanitizer before and after being on the fire towers and to go up the tower with their hiking group only. Volunteer stewards kept the lines of visitors orderly to go up the tower staircases.

-Many thanks to Laurie Rankin of Balsam Lake Mountain FT who helped put together this report with Olivia Bernard of the Catskill Center