



CATSKILLCENTER

Catskill Stewards Program 2021 End of Season Report

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Stewardship & Advocacy Coordinator



Catskill Stewards during training week at Kaaterskill Falls

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of a difference you want to make.” – Jane Goodall

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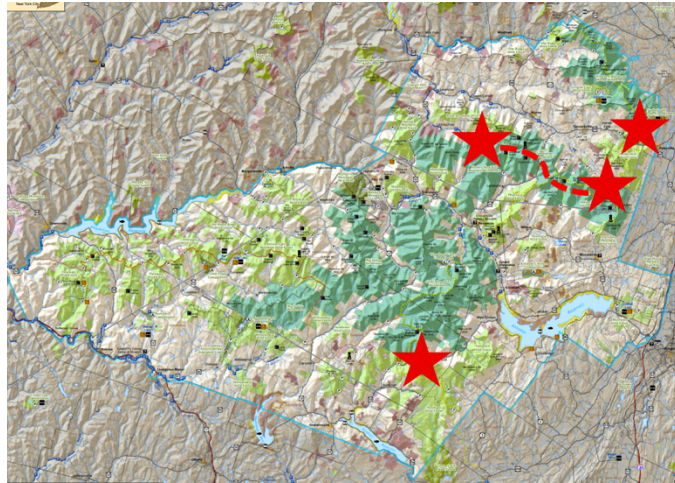
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Locations

The Catskills are known for iconic landscapes, rolling hillsides, and freshwater creeks and streams. Visitors come to the Catskills to experience a life in the trees, seek adventure, and find solace. Over the years the Catskills have become busier and are more popular than ever.

In 2021, the Catskill Stewards Program nearly doubled the number of stewards from the previous year, given the large increase in visitors to high-use areas. Plus, for the first time since the program was launched in 2018, one steward served as a ridge runner along one of the Catskills most challenging hiking routes.



The red stars indicate the primary locations of the Catskill Stewards Program with the dashed line representing the newest location, the Devil's Path

The Catskill Stewards Program covered four locations in 2021, ensuring that visitors received quality education about how to tread in Catskill Park with minimum impact. For another year, stewards worked hard to educate an influx of visitors on Leave No Trace Principles, clean up litter, and coordinate with land managers to complete projects such as trail maintenance to make a meaningful difference on the ground. The Catskill Stewards do this work in an effort to safeguard access to these Catskill Park gems for all people, and for future generations.

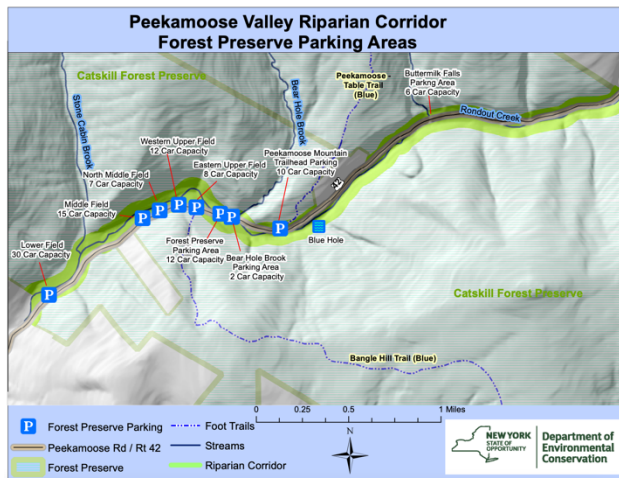
In addition to completing the hard work on the ground, for the first time the Stewards began capturing photo and video each week. These images were used for social media where the Catskill Center could share with our audience, the important work of the program, and also minimum impact techniques for exploration in the Catskills. Some highlights included rare flora, black bear sightings, and important gear for big Catskill hikes.

[Peekamoose Blue Hole](#) | [Kaaterskill Falls](#) | [Devil's Path](#) | [Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve](#)

Peekamoose Blue Hole

New for 2021, the permit system expanded to seven days a week and covered additional locations to include the entire Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor. Popular sites in the corridor include the Blue Hole, Buttermilk Falls, Peekamoose/Table Mountains Trailhead, Bangle Hill Trailhead, Upper Field, Middle Field, and Lower Field. This location expansion is an effort to include all camping in the Peekamoose Valley. Campers receive a permit that is good for the entirety of their stay, at their

specific campsite. With their camping permit, visitors may access the Blue Hole and other trailheads in the corridor. The Blue Hole continues to draw visitors from around the globe.



Permit expansion includes all access to the Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor. Permit season dates: May 15th - September 15th

Lined by shale ledges 3'-5' in height, the Peekamoose Blue Hole is a natural geologic formation and an exquisite frontcountry swimming hole in a remote Catskills location. Cool, 55°F, spring-fed water keeps the “hole” a stunning blue color. Social media fame has exponentially increased recent visitation and the resulting impact has been severe.

Pre-2014, trash and litter were a rarity and easily picked up by local visitors. Since 2015, however, social media, news outlets, and internet guides have boasted about the pristine and picturesque beauty of the Blue Hole, and people have flocked to the narrow corridor.

The Blue Hole’s internet fame has necessitated new resource management strategies and investments including the first day-use permit system in New York beginning in 2018, as well as the creation of the Catskill Center’s Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program (now the Catskill Stewards Program) the same year. The Peekamoose Blue Hole is the flagship location of the Catskill Stewards Program and has enabled a foundation for the program to grow into the operation that it is today.

Kaaterskill Falls

Kaaterskill Falls boasts a 260-foot relief from the top of the falls to the base of the second tier. Admired by locals and tourists alike, Kaaterskill Falls is estimated to host well over 150,000 visitors each year. This landmark has been the epicenter of Catskills tourism since the early 1800s, and is still the most popular and highly visited destination in the Catskill Forest Preserve.



A clean-up at Kaaterskill

With the expansion of the Catskill Stewards Program in the spring of 2019, Kaaterskill Falls has been a primary consideration for the stewards’ efforts. To date, Catskill Stewards have interacted with 230,000 visitors and removed over 6,500 pounds of litter from Kaaterskill Falls and its surrounding trails.

Unlike the Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls has multiple points of entry. However, the most commonly used trailhead is at the Laurel House Parking Area, situated at the top of the falls. Catskill Center Stewards are situated at this trailhead full-time throughout the peak season. Stewards regularly help with area cleanups and rescues as directed by NYSDEC Forest Rangers.

Devil's Path

This is a stretch of 24.2 miles of steep and rugged Catskills Mountains. The Devil's Path shares company with some of the world's most dangerous trails, according to a 2014 *Outside* online article. This trail traverses some of the Catskills tallest peaks, with large climbs and many rock ledges. Without prior hiking and climbing experience, the Devil's Path can be treacherous. This reputation has made the trail (as well as sections of it) very popular among visitors and hikers. Due to this increased activity, the trail has seen increased recreational impacts.



Views from the Devil's Path, photograph taken by Jenny Flavin

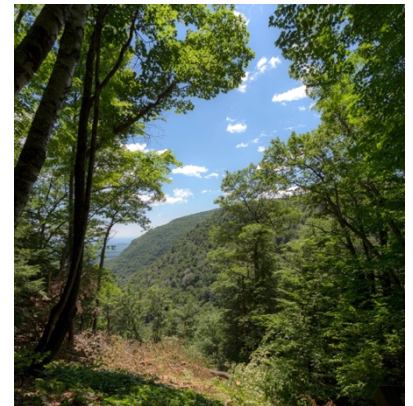
The 'Hike for the Catskills (Center)' benefit hike, driven by Moe Lemire of Hike On Guides, was the catalyst for the Catskill Stewards Program expanding to include the Devil's Path for the 2021 season. Our goal here was simple; provide high quality, minimum impact education to all visitors and hikers of the Devil's Path while out on the trail. This position adopted the title, Ridge Runner as our Steward (Jenny Flavin) was hiking along a different section of the path each day.

Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

A refuge and sanctuary for an untold number of artists, Platte Clove has been an inspiration for Hudson River School painters dating back to the 19th century. Today, Platte Clove hosts a part-time Catskill Steward on weekends (Friday – Sunday) and holidays.

The natural beauty of Platte Clove is undoubtedly a Catskill Park gem. Fresh streams, waterfalls, and access to some of the most iconic hiking trails in the Catskills, Platte Clove is worth the visit. Our on-site steward educates people about the unique ecosystem, hiking trails, and best place to park.

The Catskill Center aims to protect the Platte Clove for future generations. With a steward on site to greet our guests, we have witnessed a decrease in riparian erosion, as well as a reduction to the many social trails which once spiderwebbed the woods.



The iconic view looking east at the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve.

Catskill Stewards are on site to:

- Welcome all to the Catskills
- Provide information, such as where to explore and what to avoid
- Describe harmful impacts and inform people how to avoid contributing to these impacts
- Educate and inspire visitors to reduce their impacts and follow Leave No Trace principles both in the Catskills and in their lives
- Inform people of the most important rules and regulations



Season In Summary

Our biggest season to date, the Catskill Stewards worked hard and interacted with more visitors in 2021 than ever before during a single season. For 2021, the Catskill Center hired eight stewards and provided coverage at four locations. After a very busy 2020 season, the Catskill Stewards Program was eager to help the region cope with the previous years' increased visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic and help to rehabilitate recreation impacts.

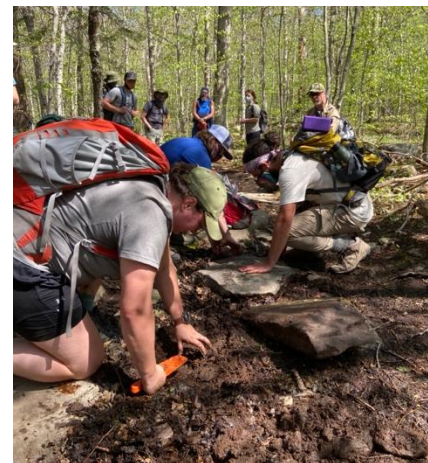
2021 began in May with two weeks of training for the incoming team. This season, we hosted and helped train our friends at Catskill Mountainkeeper who hired two stewards for this season. Each season we commit this amount of time to training to ensure that the stewards are prepared to encounter most scenarios on the trail or at the trailhead. We cover many topics during this time including a Leave No Trace Trainer Course, Authority of the Resource Technique, Wilderness First Aid Course, wilderness preparations, radio protocols, wildlife encounter protocols, trail maintenance, and much more. All of this training helps to ensure that, regardless of the interaction while in the field, our stewards are prepared to provide a meaningful, kind, and welcoming experience for all visitors.

While preparing for the 2021 season, many in the conservation field were wondering if the Forest Preserve would receive the same influx of visitors as we witnessed in 2020. After keeping track of the metrics and speaking with visitors, we experienced a different season than last year in the Catskills. Overall, numbers resumed their slow upward trend, reverting largely back to pre-2020 levels, but we are no longer seeing the overwhelming waves of visitation that came in 2020. This dropoff in visitor numbers in 2021 made for a more effective stewarding season. We were able to provide higher quality and more meaningful interaction because stewards were able to spend more time with visitors.

In 2021:

- Visitor engagement reach of over **84,847 people**
- Over **225 bags** of litter collected (~ **4,500 lbs.**)
- Fire rings deconstructed and sites rehabilitated - **94**
- Rock dams deconstructed - **19**
- Rock stacks removed - **305**
- Total days on site - **201**
- Dogs greeted - **3,045**
- Visitor parking citations avoided - **147** (minimum)

Stewards explain and demonstrate why responsible recreation is important - from the importance of not littering to staying on the trails. While each location has its specific needs, the common thread is natural resource protection, public awareness, and education. Water bodies, riparian areas, trail systems, and flora and fauna are consistently in danger of being negatively impacted from an influx of visitors. When stewards are not on site (such as on their days off), they notice increased litter, rock dams and rock stacks, and user-created trails beginning to wind through pristine forest floors. Without the stewards, the Catskills' forever wild spaces are constantly in danger of being trampled or otherwise damaged because of the increasing number of visitors. Stewards help interpret the Catskill Park, provide information on alternative areas to visit, and offer directions to local businesses, which, in turn, helps the local economy.

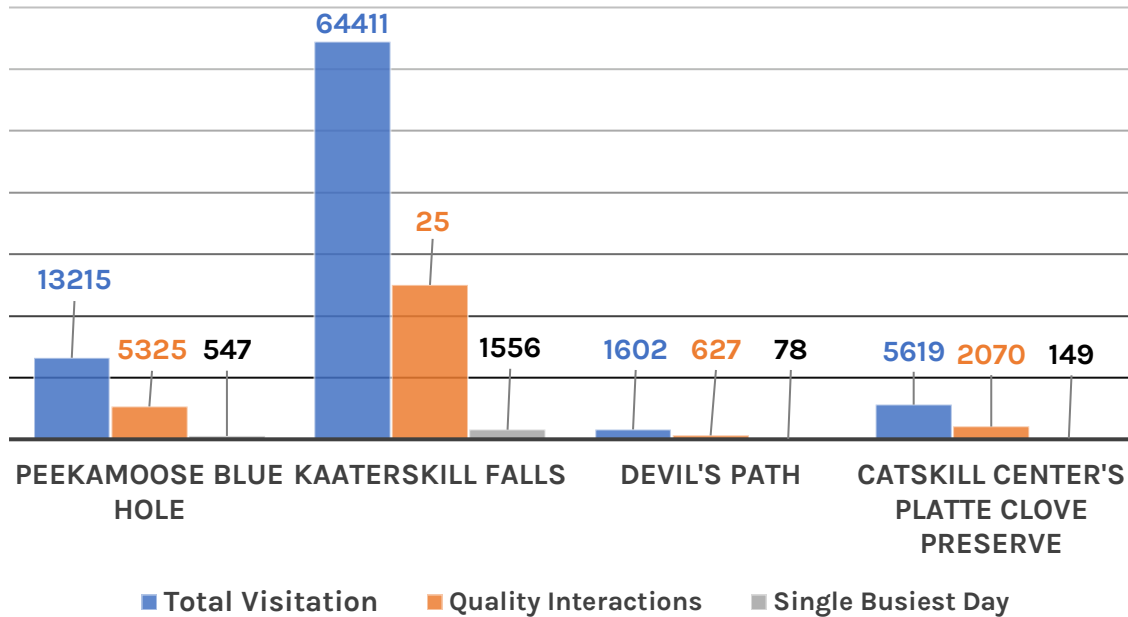


Impromptu trail maintenance during the Leave No Trace Trainer Course

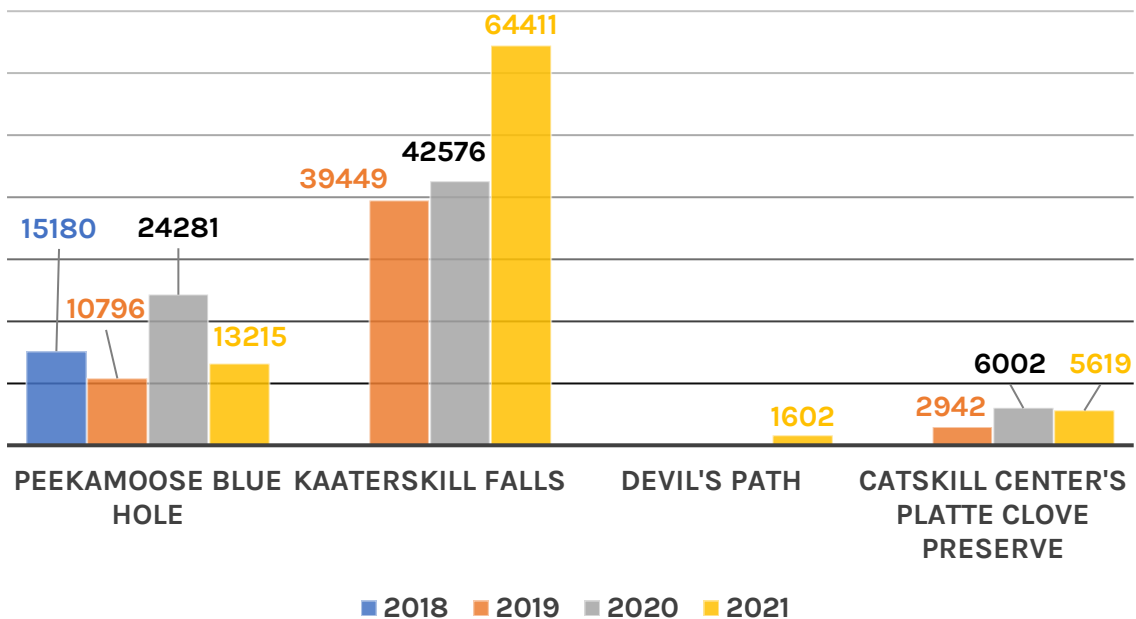
Graph Data

The following graphs are separated by location (Peekamoose Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls, Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve, and Devil's Path) and give the reader insight to the scope of work achieved throughout the 2021 season. Each location presents its own needs, visitor base, and specific communication techniques to meet the needs of specific natural resource considerations. The first two graphs represent the visitation rates of all three locations for the season in summation.

2021 Season Totals (graph 1)



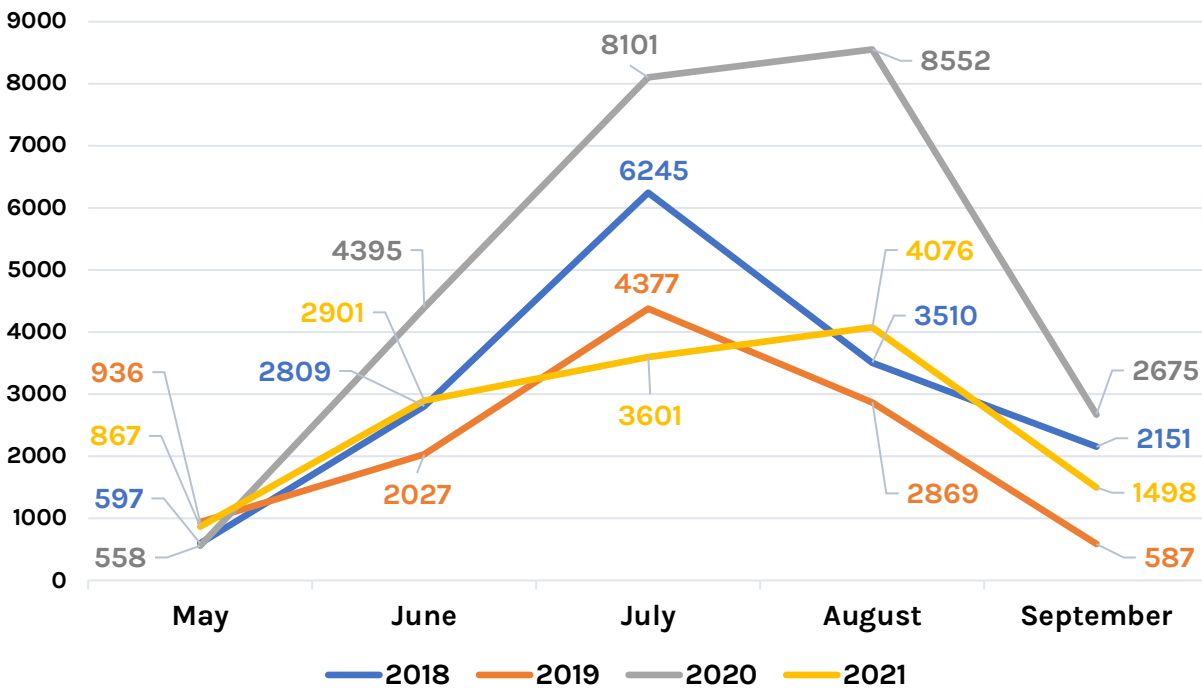
Yearly Totals 2018-2021 (graph 2)



Peekamoose Blue Hole

The Blue Hole is the flagship location of the Catskill Stewards Program. Combining education with thoughtful regulation (i.e. the permit system), the visitor experience and natural resources of the Blue Hole have improved immensely over the years. Stewardship messaging, permit system regulations, and Forest Ranger presence have all thoughtfully evolved since their coordinated start in 2018. The 2021 season included new changes to the permit area (see page 3), required permit days (7 days a week), and increased presence of stewards and rangers.

Peekamoose Blue Hole Monthly Totals 2018-2021 (graph 3)



Definitions of Label Terms:

Total Visitation - The total number of individuals counted on location.

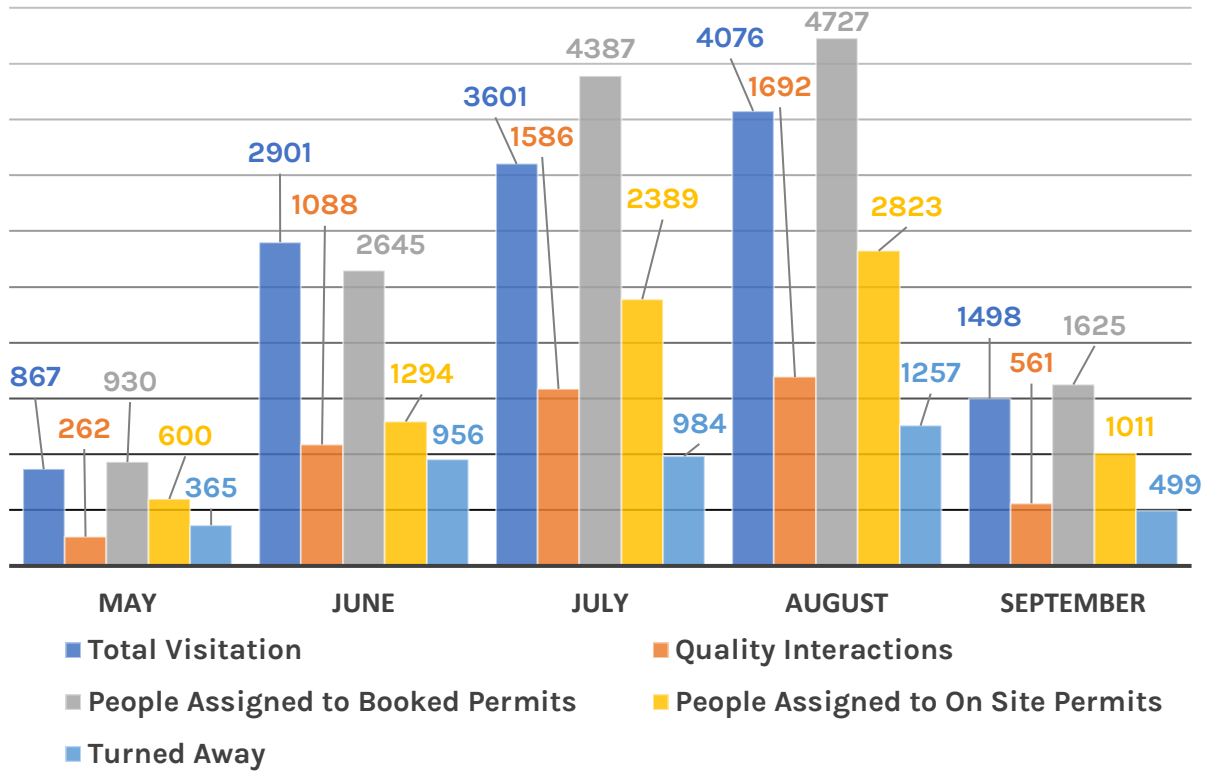
Quality Interactions - Educational touchpoints, these individuals learned specific information about Leave No Trace as well as details about the specific impacts facing a given location.

People Assigned to Booked Permits - Total number of individuals assigned to the booked permits. These individuals may or may not have visited the Blue Hole.

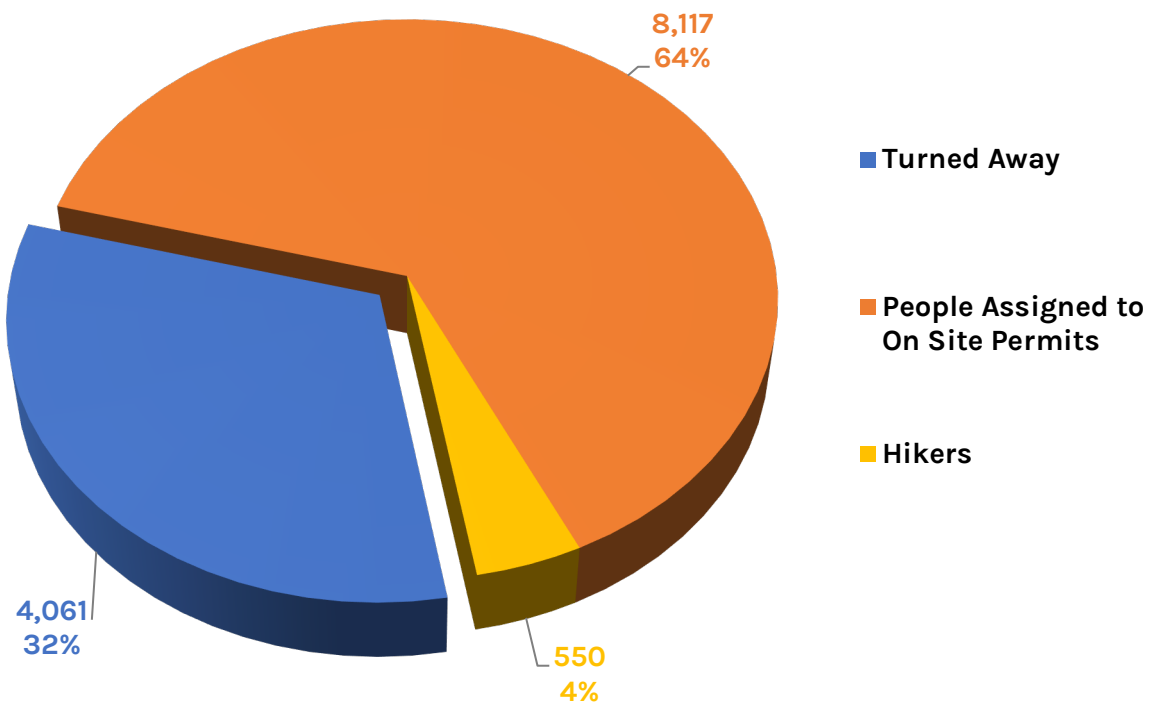
People Assigned to On Site Permits - Total number of individuals assigned to booked permits who actually visited the Blue Hole.

Turned Away - Total number of visitors who visited on a weekend or holiday without a permit. Does not include hikers leaving the riparian corridor.

Peekamoose Blue Hole 2021 Totals (graph 4)



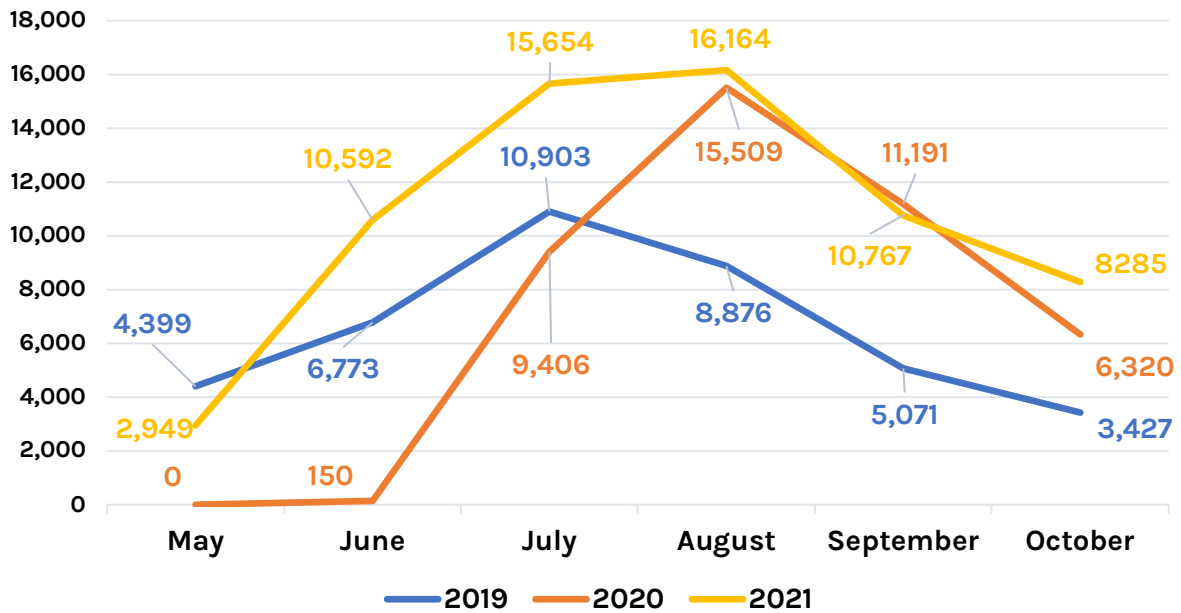
Peekamoose Blue Hole On Site Visitor Breakdown (graph 5)



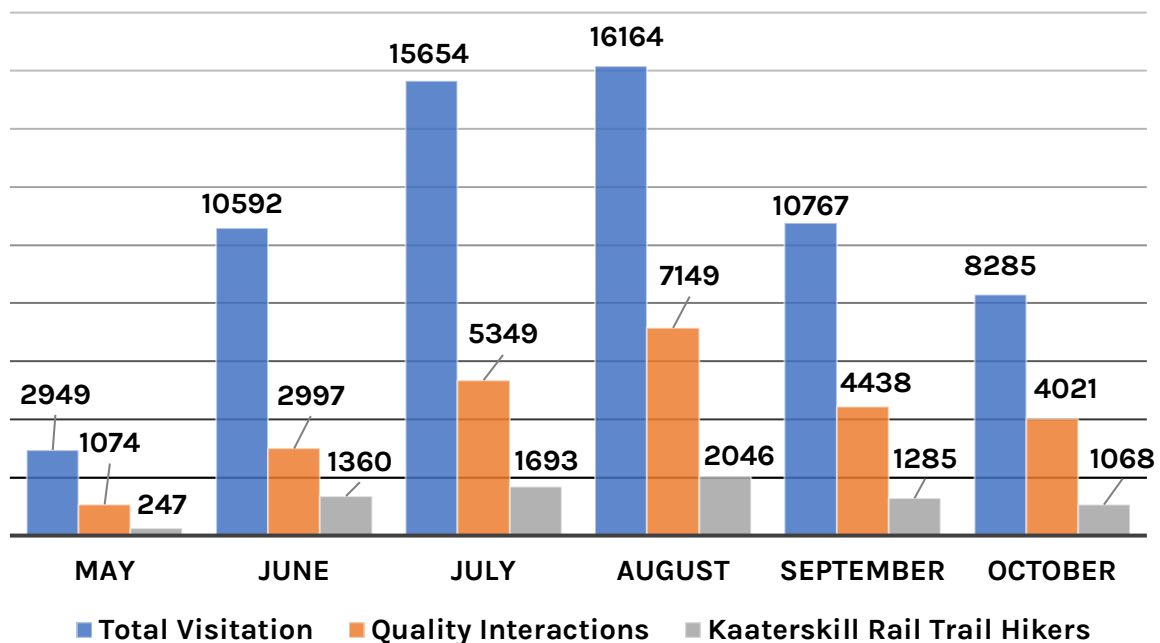
Kaaterskill Falls

This is easily the busiest and most popular destination within the Catskill Forest Preserve. The Catskill Stewards were on site full-time this season and were stationed at the Laurel House Trailhead. Please note that our numbers from 2020 do not directly reflect the actual use of the 2020 season as we had limited staff members on site. The **single busiest day** in 2021 had **1,556** visitors compared to **2,745** visitors in 2020 and **1,858** visitors recorded in 2019. Additionally, stewards removed **50 bags of trash** during the season.

Kaaterskill Falls Monthly Totals 2019-2021 (graph 6)



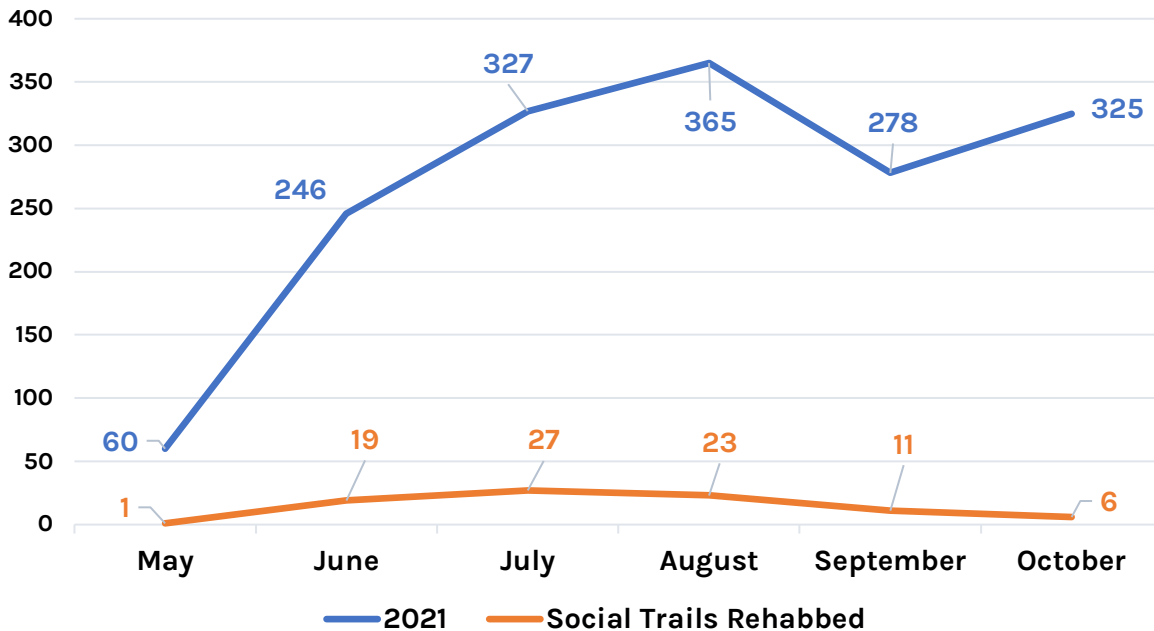
Kaaterskill Falls 2021 Totals (graph 7)



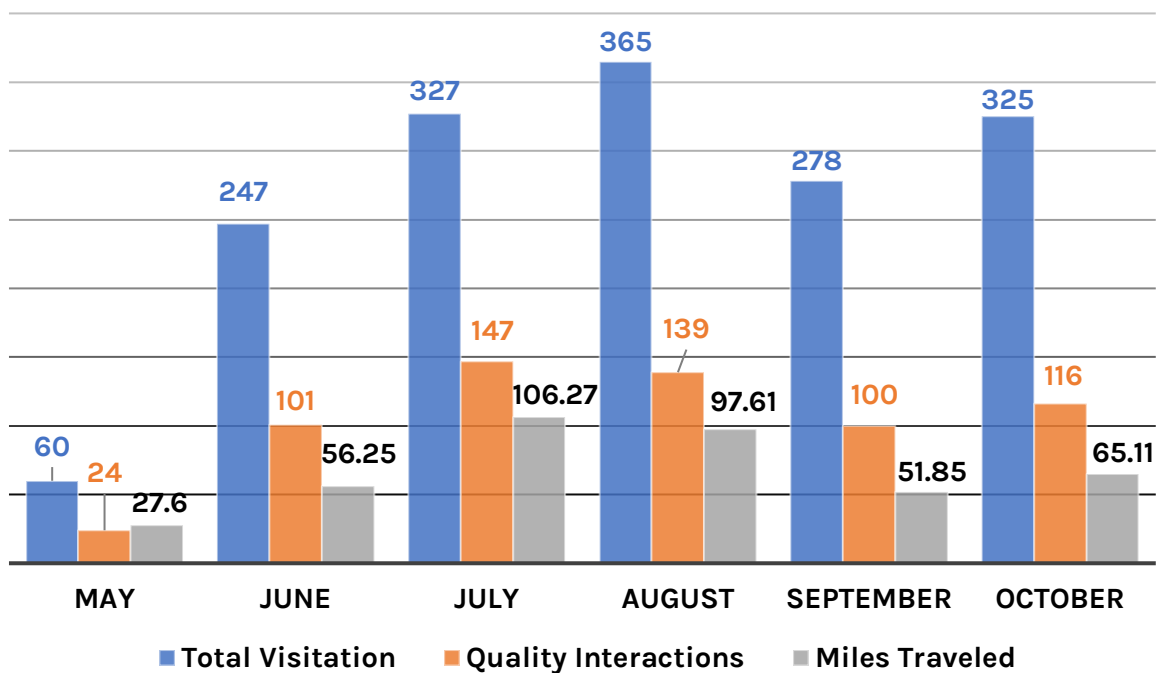
Devil's Path

A new location for the Catskills, our stewarding Ridge Runner (Jenny Flavin) was able to traverse the peaks of the Devil's Path to provide education to trail users. While hiking along the trail, Jenny identified areas of impact including social trails, rock stacks, food waste, tree carvings, and illegal campsites. Once identified, Jenny would rehab the areas, or remove the waste as needed.

Devil's Path Monthly Totals 2019, 2020 (graph 6)



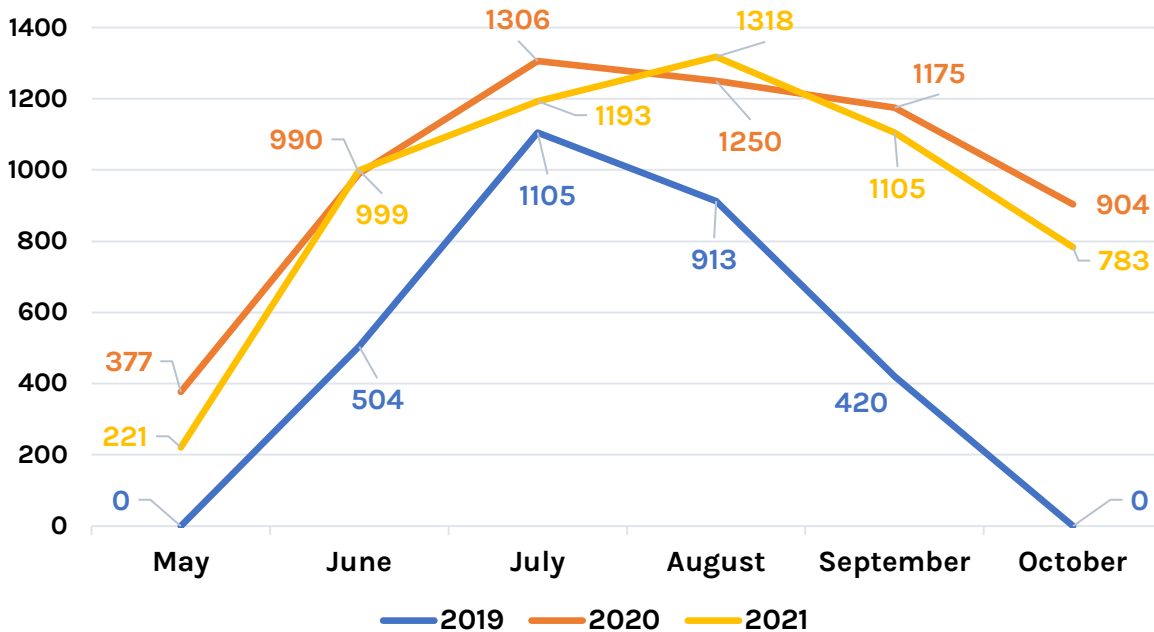
Devil's Path 2021 Totals (graph 7)



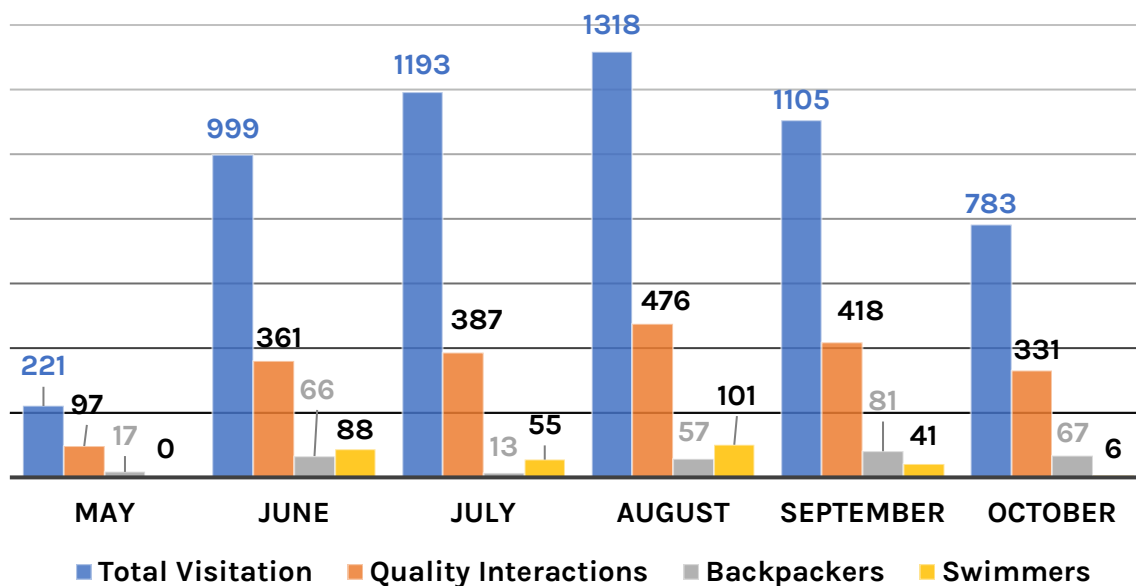
Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

With one part-time steward, the Catskill Center was able to provide outreach and education to visitors on weekends (Friday-Sunday) and holidays. The Preserve is a unique location with a sensitive ecosystem and dangerous geology. The central feature of the Preserve is the Platte Kill which meanders through the preserve cascading over multiple ledges. A crumbly shale shelf surrounding the tops of cliff sides and the waterfalls makes traveling off trail incredibly dangerous and ill-advised. Catskill Stewards did their best to keep the clove clean, while making sure visitors were well prepared for a safe experience.

Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve Monthly Totals 2019-2021 (graph 8)



Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve 2021 Totals (graph 9)



Our Stewards

Andy Mossey - Skiing, camping, backpacking, climbing, and wandering in the woods are the activities that brought Andy outside. Once out there, he discovered a knack and passion for speaking up for public lands. Over the last four years at the Catskill Center, Andy has worked with partner organizations and agencies to ensure Catskill Forest Preserve gems are protected and preserved for future generations. Andy is the Catskill Center's Stewardship & Advocacy Coordinator.

Jenny Flavin - As an avid outdoor enthusiast, Jenny has been playing in the outdoors her entire life. This love for the outdoors inspired her to help protect the place she calls home for her third season. She summarized the benefits of the steward's program by saying, "The most rewarding accomplishment of the steward season would be witnessing the physical shift in the environment when we were physically stationed at a given location. It truly gave me the feeling that what we are trying to do at these locations is working." Jenny was the Ridge Runner for the 2021 season.

Eli Rogers - Born and raised in New York just outside the Catskills, Eli returned in 2021 for his second season as a Catskill Steward. He steadily grew his interest in recreating and protecting the outdoors through hiking over 500 miles of Catskills trails, exploring the many hidden corners of these special mountains. This inspired him to pursue working in the field of environmental stewardship, enabling him to spend more time outside giving back to the land. In his spare time, he enjoys climbing, trail running, long distance hiking, and hanging out with his cat. Eli was the Head Steward this season.



David Hans - David Hans joined the Catskill Stewards Program for his first season in 2021. A resident of Woodstock, NY, David brings a love for the Catskills and the beauty it provides. As an avid hiker, he is currently working on joining the 3500 Club with plans to follow up with the Adirondacks 46 high peaks. David cares deeply for the Catskills and loves sharing this passion with other visitors.

Kyla Watson - Kyla began her first year with the Catskill Stewards Program. She recently earned a BA in Aquatic and Fisheries Science at SUNY ESF (College of Environmental Science and Forestry), which she aims to apply to the study of Atlantic sturgeon in the Hudson River. She grew up in Ulster County where she spent much of her time along the shorelines of the Hudson River and exploring the nearby forests and mountains of the Catskills. She continues to enjoy hiking, camping, SCUBA diving, and keeping reptiles. She wants to contribute to the healing of our natural world and, more importantly, communicate the importance of respecting it.

Chet Cienkowski - Chet was excited to work with the Catskill Center after spending years in an office. The high point of 2020 was taking time off of work to go hiking and camping, so he then looked for opportunities to work outside and share this passion for the outdoors. This marked Chet's first year with the Catskill Stewards Program, and he hopes it will be the start of something great.

Lucas Frank-Holzner - Hailing from the Midwest, Lucas joined the Catskill Stewards Program for the first time in 2021. Lucas brought their love for the outdoors and helping people to the Catskill Stewards Program. While in the Catskills, Lucas took time hiking, camping, and getting to know this unique area. When the season ended, Lucas stood ready to start their next adventure.

Peter Geoghan - Working on weekends and holidays, Peter helped to protect the wild Platte Clove Preserve. As an avid outdoors person, Peter spends his winter in South America searching for remote rivers to fly fish. This same passion for wild spaces encouraged Peter to help protect the Catskills for the past three summers. Peter said, "I had a great time helping people find trails and directing them to the Platte Kill Falls and Creek."

Additional Programming

Every season, the Catskill Stewards Program brings the opportunity to share with others skills, ethics, and passion for the outdoors. This year, the stewards worked with partners and the Catskills Visitor Center to reach out to new groups and complete projects across the Catskill Park.

Trail Maintenance

Our stewards were responsible for the day-to-day care of their locations. As mud puddles formed or trash was left behind, the Catskill Stewards sprang into action to ensure a high quality experience for visitors and to educate them about how to walk muddy trails with the least impact and to carry out what they carried in, all with the intent of “leaving no trace”.



Kiosk Build at the Catskill Center’s Thorn Preserve

Peter and Doug Senterman built in pieces the kiosk for Thorn Preserve. Over the course of three days, the stewards brought in, constructed, installed, and stained the kiosk. This new feature will provide visitors to the Preserve with information and guidance.



Nature Walk and Leave No Trace

After a year in which the pandemic shut down a large part of society, in-person programming in 2021 was a big step towards a more fully functioning season. Our stewards stood alongside Catskills Visitor Center staff to work with youth, teach Leave No Trace principles, and share a deeper connection to the Catskills.



Illegal Campfire and Campsite Rehabilitation

One of the most frequent and significant impacts to the Forest Preserve are illegal campsites and campfires. While on the trail, stewards worked hard to minimize these impacts and rehabilitate campsites.



After restoration: The fire ring has been scattered and ash dispersed of. Leaves, sticks, and duff camouflage the impacted site to promote rehabilitation.



Before restoration: an illegal campsite and fire ring.

Funding

The Catskill Stewards Program is made possible with support from the following partners:

Thank you to the **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**. In addition to DEC grant funding, the agency's Natural Resources staff works closely with the Stewards Program, enabling the stewards to achieve their goals each season through improved signage and resources. DEC staff help assist stewards to keep communication and safety a priority.



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**



Thank you to the **Rondout Neversink Stream Program** — a project of Sullivan County Soil & Water Conservation District in partnership with the Towns of Denning and Neversink funded by NYC Department of Environmental Protection. Their continued support keeps this program running at the Peekamoose Blue

Hole location in the town of Denning.

A major partner of the Catskill Stewards Program since 2019, the **REI Co-op** is dedicated to helping preserve the Catskill Park. Thank you to the REI Co-op and its members for their assistance in growing this program to include Kaaterskill Falls. In addition to monetary support, REI has opened its doors to the stewards in the past to host informational displays in their NYC metropolitan stores. This has enabled the stewards to educate visitors before they even visit the Catskills. #OptOutside



Catskill Center members and donors enable the continued success of this program by ensuring the proper administration of this program. A heartfelt “thank you” to all Catskill Center members. To become a Catskill Center member visit catskillcenter.org/support

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In addition to our major supporters mentioned above, the following **community partners** have donated to the Catskill Stewards Program. We are incredibly grateful for your continued support.

The Bruderhof Community at Platte Clove
Catskill Mountain Club
The Hunter Foundation

Partnership & inquiries may be directed to...

Andy Mossey
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o. 845-586-2611 ext. 118

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