



CATSKILLCENTER

Catskill Stewards Program 2020 End of Season Report

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Figure 1: Catskill Stewards greeting visitors in the age of the COVID-19 Pandemic

“Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point at which we will say our work is finished.”
– Rachel Carson

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Locations

The term “Hot Spots” have been used to describe outdoor destinations all across the United States. These notable destinations have two main characteristics in common with one another, high rate of visitation coupled with measurable impacts.

The three locations made up of the Catskill Stewards Program were first identified as Hot Spots by key stakeholders including the New York State Department of Conservation, and local not-for-profits. In an effort to reduce the impacts to these three locations in the Catskills, the Catskill Center began the work of the Catskill Stewards Program in 2018. Now, every year stewards work hard to educate an influx of visitors on Leave No Trace Principles, actively cleanup litter, and coordinate with land managers to complete projects 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 to come.

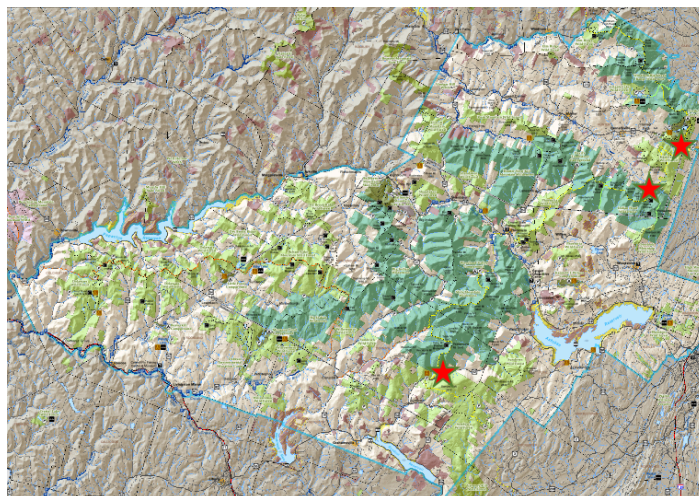


Figure 2: The three red stars mark the primary locations of the Catskill Stewards Program

Peekamoose Blue Hole

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-degree Fahrenheit, 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.

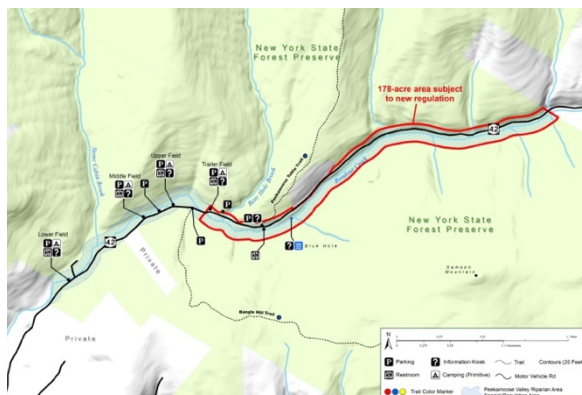


Figure 3: The red outline identifies the boundary for the special regulations and permit system in the Peekamoose Riparian Corridor

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 this place 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) that 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. Loved 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 1800's, thus Kaaterskill Falls is the most popular and highly visited destination in the Catskill Park Forest Preserve.

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 the Catskill Stewards Program has interacted with 82,025 visitors and has removed over 3,000 pounds of litter from Kaaterskill Falls and it's 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. It is at the beginning of the trailhead where the Catskill Center Stewards are situated full-time through the peak season.

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 an annual series of artists-in-residence during summertime weekdays as well as a part-time Catskill Steward on weekends.

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, as well as the best place to park.

The Catskill Center aims to protect the Platte Clove for future generations to come. 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.

Catskill Stewards are on site to:

- Welcome all to the Catskills
- Provide information, such as where to explore and what to avoid
- Describe the impacts that are harming each location
- Educate and inspire visitors to reduce their impacts and follow Leave No Trace
- Inform people of the most important rules and regulations
- Be a resource for any questions people have about these locations as well as others across the Catskills



Figure 4: Looking out from the edge of Kaaterskill Falls

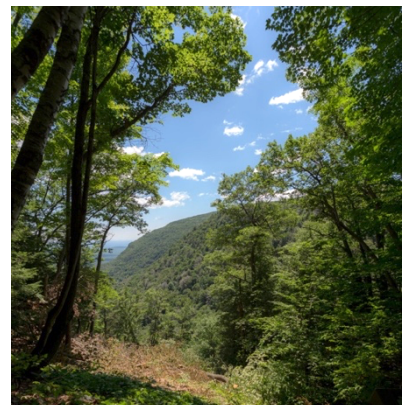


Figure 5: The iconic view looking east at the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve.



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Season In Summary

2020 presented new challenges and obstacles for the Catskill Stewards Program to overcome. With a bumpy start due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all training was completed online over email and in zoom meetings. Additionally, new pandemic minded protocols added to the complexity of this public facing program. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was implicit, but our stewards expanded their caution. Just a few of the protocols included: sanitizing, keeping equipment spotless and disinfected, and staying socially distant. The stewards' ultimate goal is to connect with visitors in an effort to help people feel more comfortable, while they share priceless information about responsible recreation and natural resource protection. 2020 has been a unique moment in time when a Catskill Steward must smile with their eyes and navigate their work with masks on. Fortunately, with thoughtful precautions the stewards were able to keep a responsible distance while still effectively communicating the Catskill Stewards' mission.

We need our visitors in the Catskills. We need each visitor to recreate responsibly and visit thoughtfully. The Catskill Stewards Program gives all people a baseline of information and skills to recreate with. Catskill Stewards encourage people to think about their footsteps, cumulative impacts, and individual choices while spending time in the woods.

The 2020 season has been filled with an array of new challenges, as well as momentous successes. This humbling season helped us to remember that the work of the Catskill Center's Stewards is critical for the health, safety, and experience of our visitors and the continued protection of the Forest Preserve. This season, the Catskills hosted the highest number of visitors to its trails and waters than ever before. For our stewards this meant balancing a welcoming educational environment while simultaneously cleaning up trash, litter, rehabilitating illegal campsites, promoting stream health, amongst other responsibilities in the field. All at a higher frequency and density than ever before in the programs three season history.

In 2020,

- Visitor engagement reach of over **72,859 people**
- Over **351 bags** of litter collected (~ **7,020 lbs.**)
- Fire rings deconstructed - **25** - sites rehabilitated
- Rock dams deconstructed - **22**
- Rock stacks removed - **176**
- Total days on site - **158**
- Dogs greeted - **1,577**
- Visitor parking citations avoided - **361** (minimum)

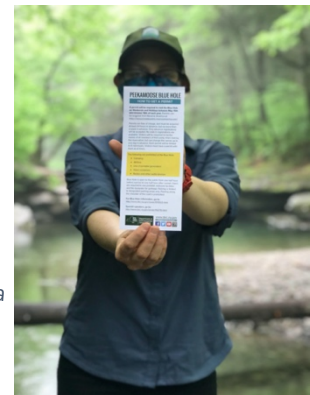


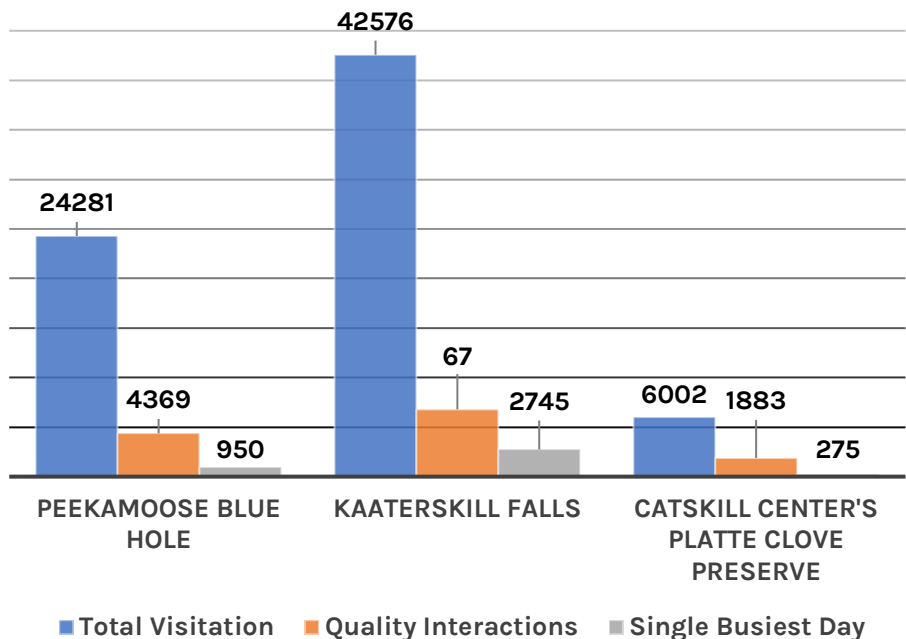
Figure 6:
How to get a
permit for
the Blue
Hole

While each stewarding location has its own specific needs, there is a common theme of natural resources. Water bodies, riparian areas, trail systems, flora, and fauna are consistently in danger of being trampled or harmfully impacted by an influx of visitors. The Catskill Stewards have become a vital link to the visitation experience. Without their on-site presence (such as on their days off), the stewards have witnessed increased litter, rock dams and rock stacks, and user-created trails begin to spiderweb through pristine forest floors. Impacts will continue to threaten the public land in the Catskill Park, and it is the duty of all people to be stewards of the land individually, to each do our part to keep these places the natural gems they are. This noble pursuit is an effort to keep our wild lands wild, for future generations to come. The role of the Catskill Stewards is to lend a hand, and lead all visitors in the direction of making minimum impact decisions while recreating in the park.

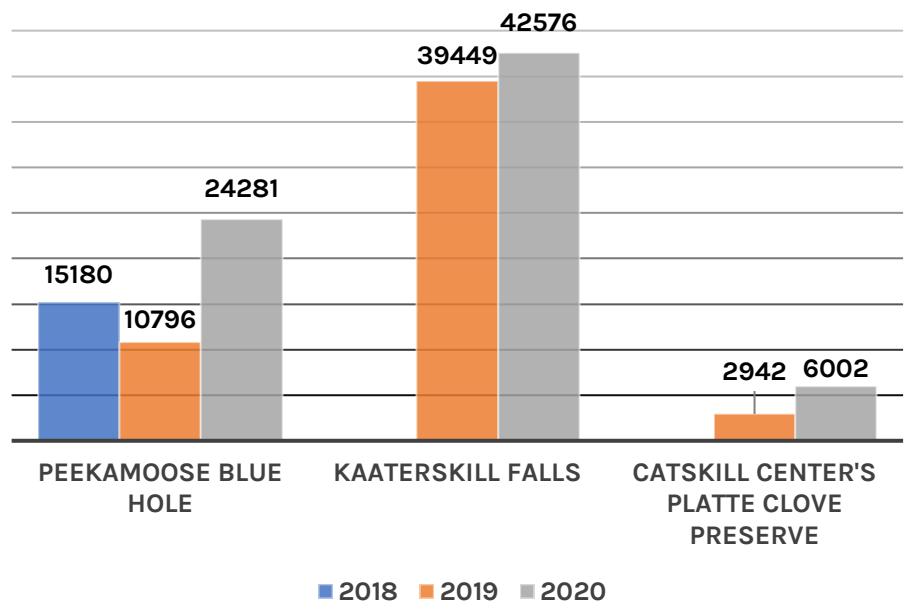
Graph Data

The following graphs are separated by location (Peekamoose Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls, and the Platte Clove Preserve) and give the reader an insight to the scope of work achieved throughout the 2020 season. Each location presents its own needs, visitor base, and specific communication techniques. The first two graphs represent the visitation rates of all three locations for the season in summation.

2020 Season Totals (graph 1)



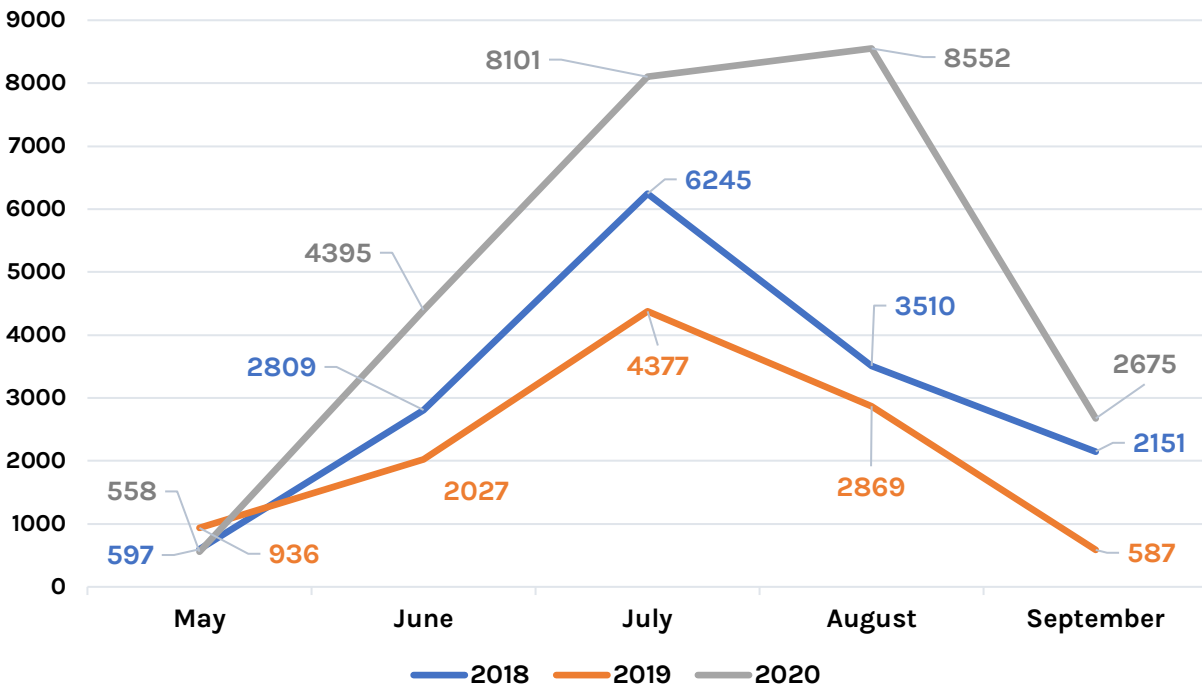
Yearly Totals 2018-2020 (graph 2)



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 2020 season was like no other as the COVID-19 pandemic surged at the start of the steward season, this program and the Blue Hole itself faced new challenges with a greater number of visitors than ever before. Those numbers are reflected in the following graphs.

Peekamoose Blue Hole Monthly Totals 2018-2020 (graph 3)



Definitions of Label Terms:

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

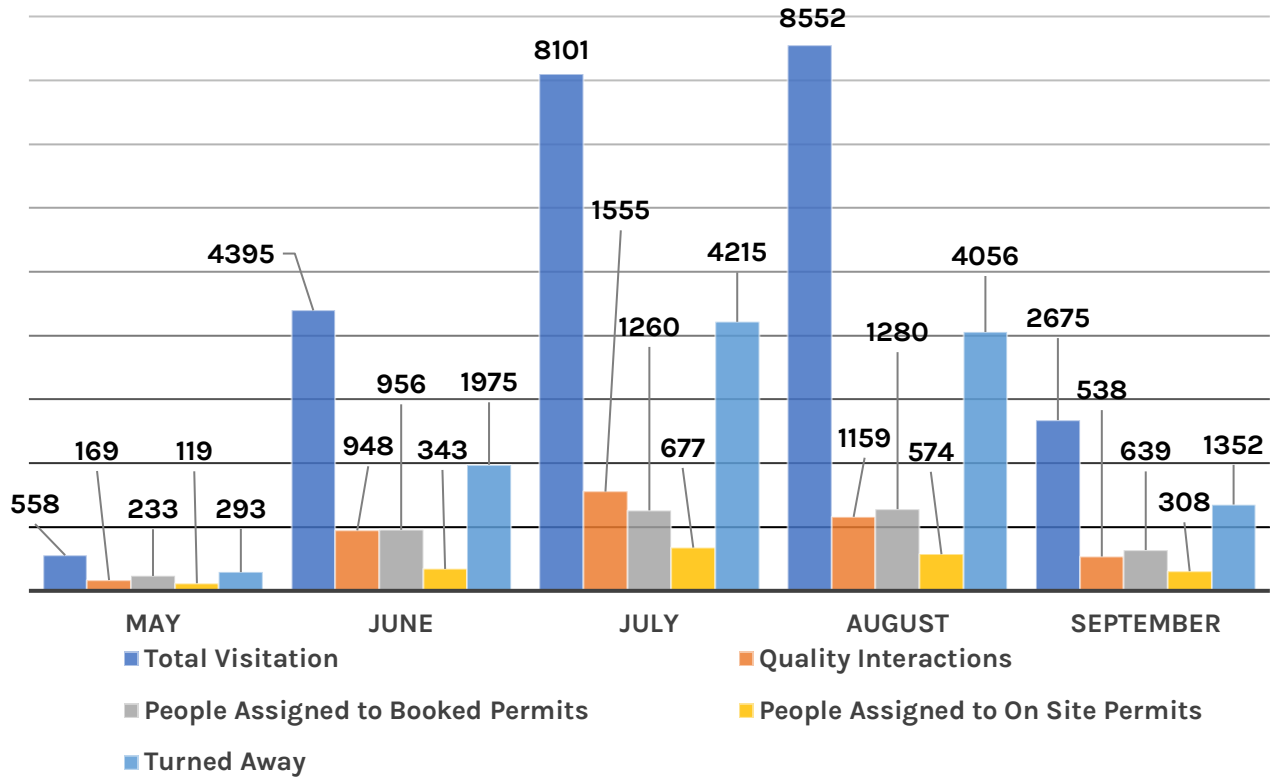
Quality Interactions - Educational touchpoints, these individuals learned specific information about Leave No Trace as well as details about the specific impacts facing a given location.

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.

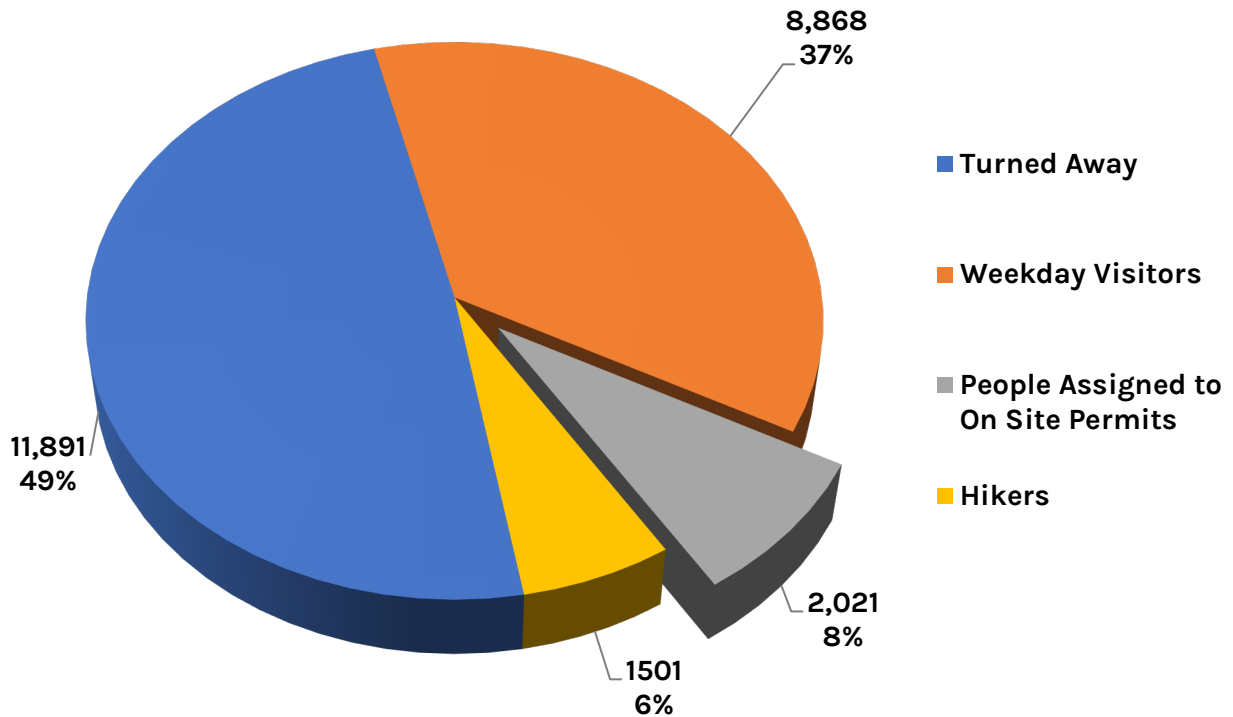
People Assigned to On Site Permits - Total number of individuals assigned to booked permits who actually visited the Blue Hole.

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 2020 Totals (graph 4)



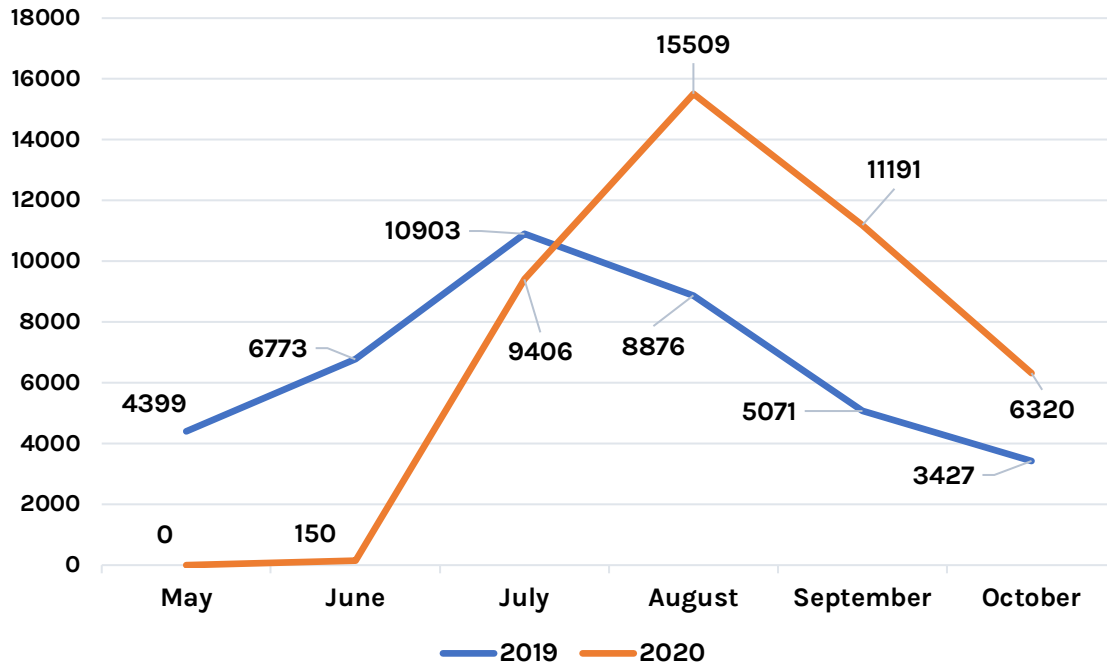
Peekamoose Blue Hole On Site Visitor Breakdown (graph 5)



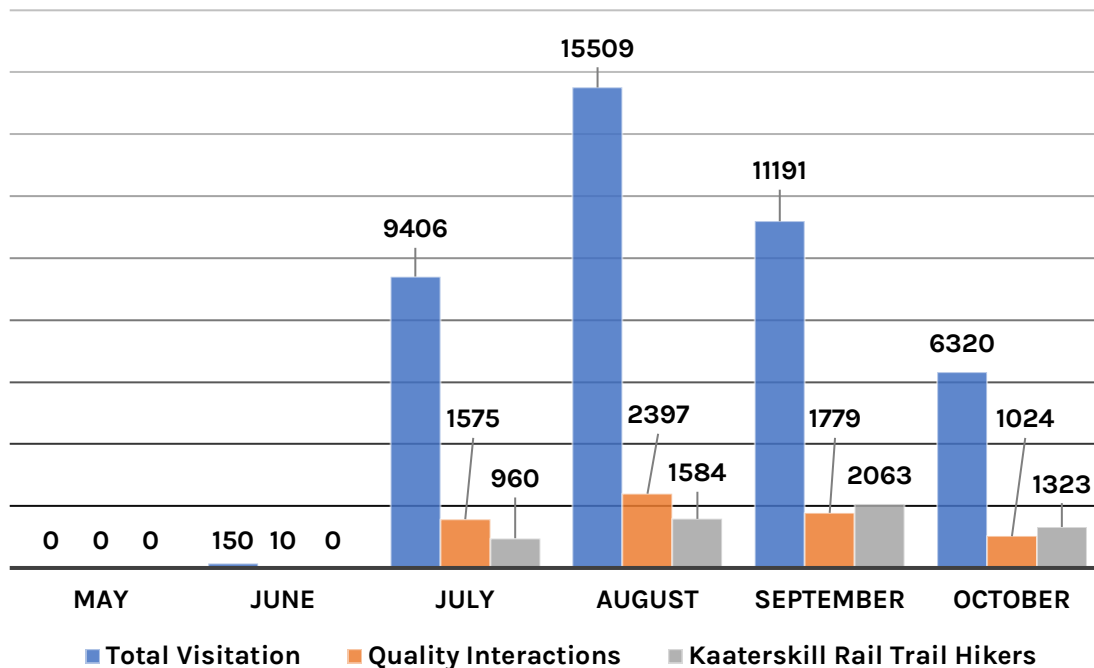
Kaaterskill Falls

Easily the busiest and most popular destination within the Catskill Forest Preserve. This season due to COVID-19 the Catskill Stewards were unable to provide consistent coverage at Kaaterskill Falls until mid-July. Even without two months (May and June) of data the stewards recorded more visitors than our 2019 numbers. The single busiest day in 2020 was 2,745 individuals, compared to the 1,858 visitors recorded in 2019.

Kaaterskill Falls Monthly Totals 2019, 2020 (graph 6)



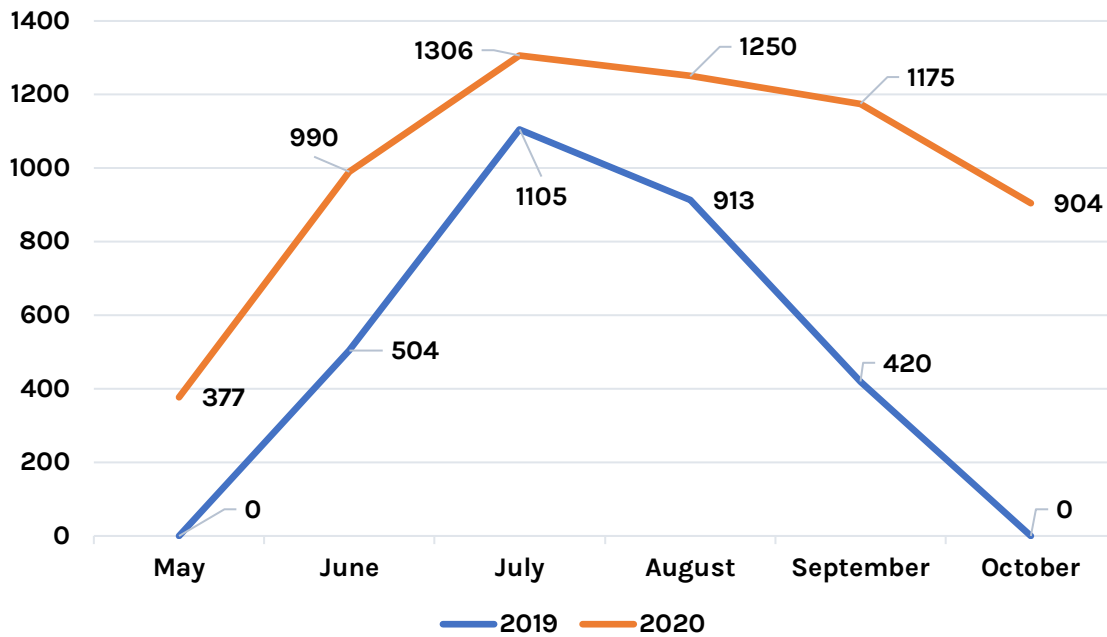
Kaaterskill Falls 2020 Totals (graph 7)



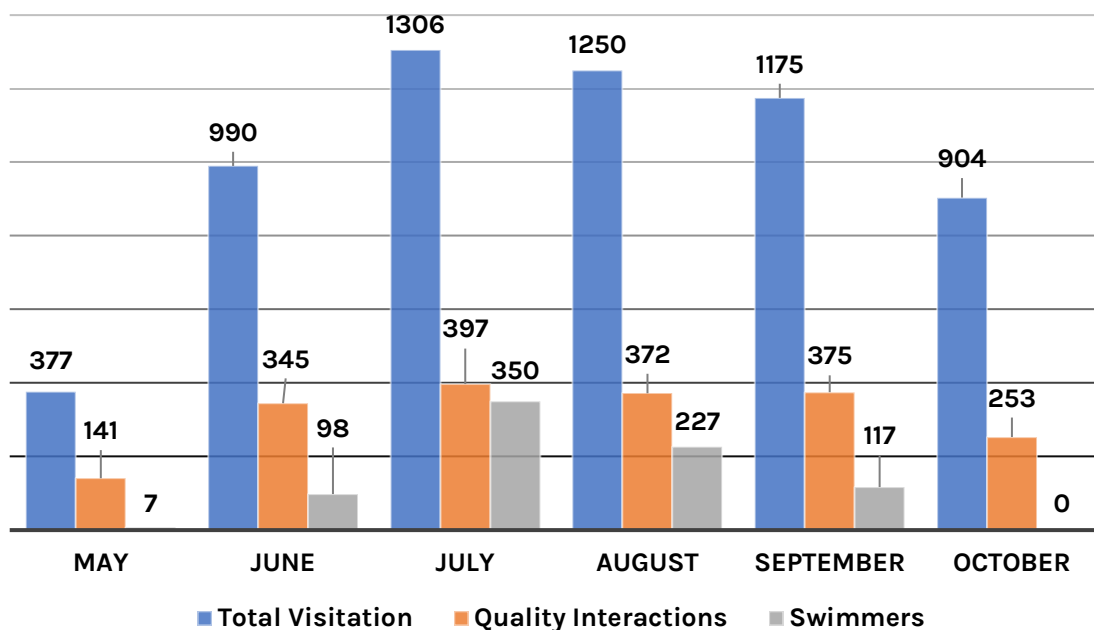
Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

With one part-time steward, the Catskill Center was able to provide outreach and education to visitors on weekends and holidays. The Preserve is a unique location with a sensitive ecosystem and very dangerous geology. The central feature of the Preserve is the Platte Kill which meanders through the property cascading over multiple ledges. A crumbly shale shelf surrounding the tops of cliffsides and the waterfalls makes traveling off trail incredibly dangerous and not advised. Catskill Steward, Peter did his 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, 2020 (graph 8)



Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve 2020 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 without a voice. Over the last three 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 and 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 a second season. She summarized the benefits of the steward's program by saying this, "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. By this I mean, on days that we were on site, we were able to see a physical decrease in litter being left behind and hearing people's attitudes changing. It truly gave me the feeling that what we are trying to do at these locations is working." Jenny was the Head Steward for the 2020 season.

Peter Geoghan - Working on weekends and holidays, Peter helped to protect the wild Platte Clove Preserve. As an avid outdoorsman 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 two summers. Peter said, "I had a great time helping people find trails and directing them to the Platte Kill falls and creek."

Maddison Prescott - Hailing from Maine, Maddison brought great energy and experience to the Catskill Stewards team. Growing up in the outdoors gave her a deep appreciation for the natural world. After working indoors for too long, Maddison took her passion for the outdoors and became a Catskill Steward. She said this about her season, "Even with the thousands and thousands of people coming through, it was great to witness the connections and change in behavior. Also the appreciation that visitors and locals have for the steward's and our work was awesome to be a part of."

Anna Shubel - Anna knows that outdoor education is the direction for her career. While most of her work has been with youth, she was excited to take those skills and bring it to the visitors of the Catskills this season. Anna brought great energy to the team. She said this about her favorite interactions with visitors, "It was very cool to see visitors who were there to solely pick up trash and help the areas themselves. Those conversations and interactions with people who wanted to help, really stand out to me."



Figure 7: Anna and Jenny dismantle a visitor built rock dam in the Rondout Creek



Figure 8: Jenny, Anna, and Maddison say, boo trash!

Funding

The Catskill Stewards Program is an example of the power of partnership. With the gracious support of the following partners, this program was made possible during an unprecedented 2020 season.

Thank you to the **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation** and their continued working partnership. In addition to grant funding; this program works closely with the Natural Resources staff, which enables the stewards to achieve their goal each season through improved signage, and resources. All while helping to keep communication and safety a priority for the stewards.



**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 their doors to the stewards in the past to host informational displays in their NYC metropolitan stores. This has enabled the stewards to educate visitors of the Catskills before they even visit the park itself.
#OptOutside



Catskill Center members 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 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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