



CATSKILLCENTER

Catskill Stewards Program 2019 End of Season Report

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Stewardship and Advocacy Coordinator



Figure 1: Catskill Stewards cleaning up Kaaterskill Falls.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

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Figure 2: The red star icons indicate the Catskill Center's three locations of the Catskill Stewards Program.

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Locations

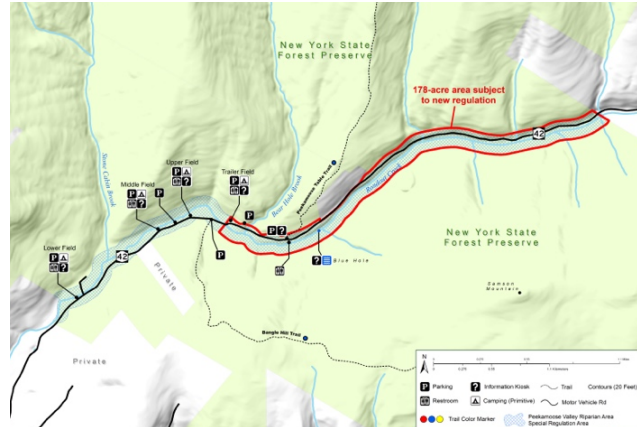
After a successful inaugural season in 2018 at the Peekamoose Blue Hole, the Catskill Center identified two other high-use locations in the Catskills and expanded the program to cover three iconic locations within the Catskill Park in 2019.

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.

Pre-2014, trash and litter were a rarity and easily picked up by local visitors. **Over the past three years 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 including the first day use permit system in New York, as well as the implementation of the Catskill Center's Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program in 2018. The Peekamoose Blue Hole has been the catalyst for the now robust Catskill Stewards Program.



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, Kaaterskill falls is estimated to host well over 100,000 visitors each year. This landmark has been at the center of Catskills tourism since the early 1800's, thus making it the most popular and well visited destinations in the Catskill State Park.

With the expansion of the Catskill Stewards Program in spring 2019, Kaaterskill Falls has been a primary consideration for the stewards' efforts. To date the Catskill Stewards Program has interacted with 39,449 visitors and has removed over 2,000 pounds of litter.

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.



Figure 3: Jenny and Selina point out destinations on the map. Taking a cell phone picture of the trail map is a quick and easy way for most visitors to know where they're going.

Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

A refuge and sanctuary for an untold number of artists, Platte Clove has been the 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 the 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 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.

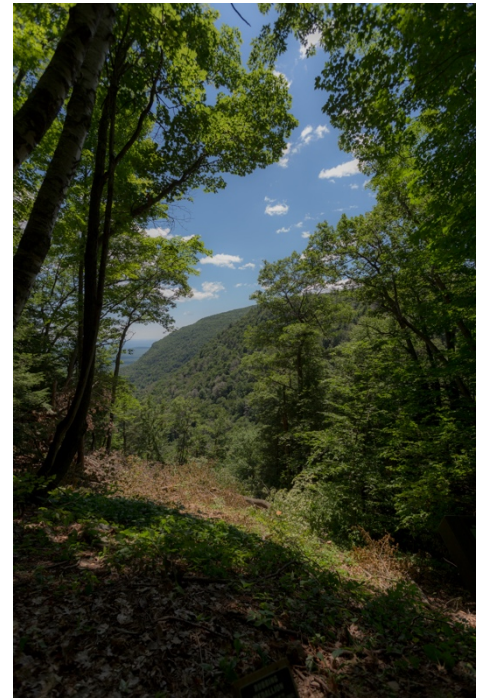


Figure 4: The infamous view east from the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve.

Catskill Stewards are on site to:

- Welcome all to the Catskills
- Provide information, such as where to explore and what to avoid
- Describe impacts that are harmful to each location
- Educate how everyone can help 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 areas and others across the Catskills





Season In Summary

2019 was a big year for the Catskill Stewards Program. The Catskill Center expanded the program to include three locations across the Catskill Park, employing four full-time stewards, one part-time steward, and a program coordinator. This expansion has enabled the stewards to **reach over 50,000 visitors** to the park.

Coordinated efforts between Forest Rangers, volunteers, outside organizations, townships and the Catskill Stewards; kept the three locations within the Catskill Park cleaner, greener, and more welcoming than ever before.

In 2019,

- Visitor engagement reach of over **53,187 people**
- Over **230 bags** of litter collected (~ **4,600 lbs.**)
- Fire rings deconstructed - **25** - sites rehabilitated
- Rock dams deconstructed - **11**
- Rock stacks removed - **302**
- Total days at each location - **158**
- Dogs greeted - **1,326**
- Visitor parking citations avoided - **596** (minimum)



Figure 5: Visitors learn how best to protect Kaaterskill Falls before continuing on their hike.

While each stewarding location has its own specific needs, similar natural resources are common. Water bodies, riparian areas, trail systems, flora, and fauna are consistently in danger of being trampled or harmfully impacted by a growing visitor population. The Catskill Stewards have become such a vital link to the visitation experience. Without their on-site presence, litter increases, rock dams and stacks are built in the streams, and user-created trails begin to wander through pristine forest.

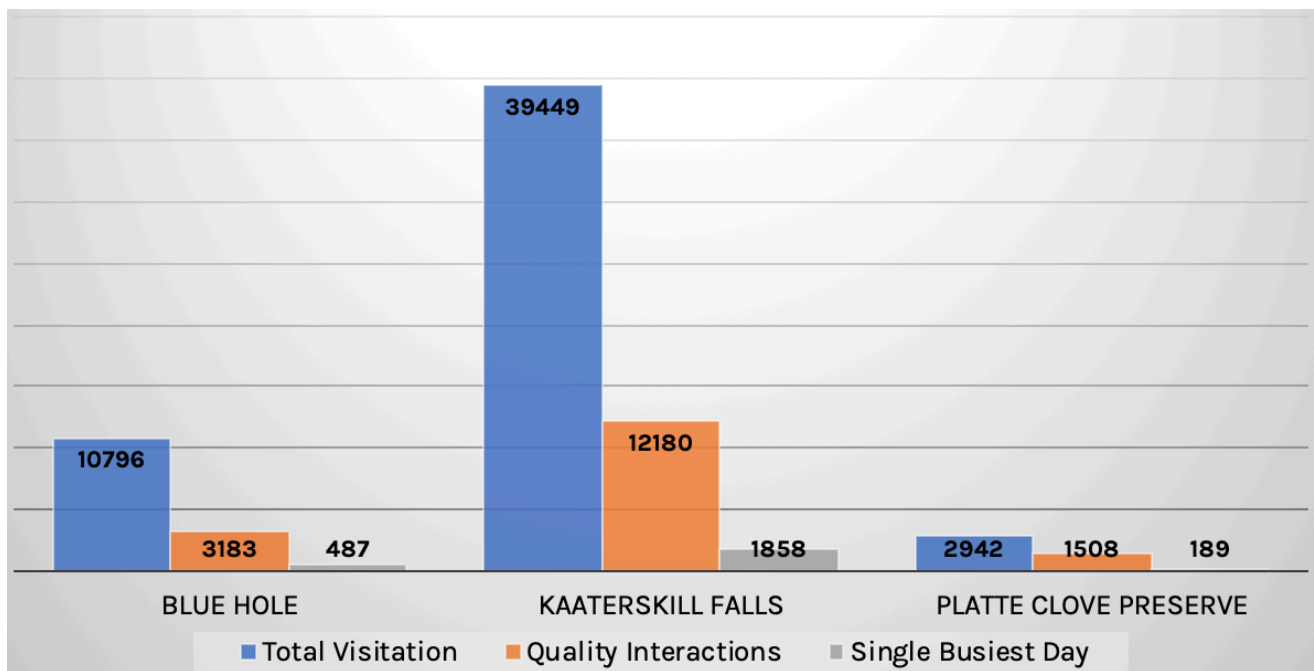
Impacts will continue to threaten public land in the Catskill Park, and it is the duty of all people to be stewards of the land individually, to each do our part to keep these places the natural gems they are. This noble pursuit is an effort to keep our wild lands wild, for future generations to come.

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. Each location presents its own needs, visitor base, and communication techniques. This first graph shows the relationship between each location, including their totals and busiest days.

In addition to the data supplied here, the stewards have gathered basic weather information for each day, as well as additional metric data. If interested in supplementary data, please reach out to Andy Mossey (amossey@catskillcenter.org) with an inquiry, full contact information is found on page 16.

Season Totals per Location

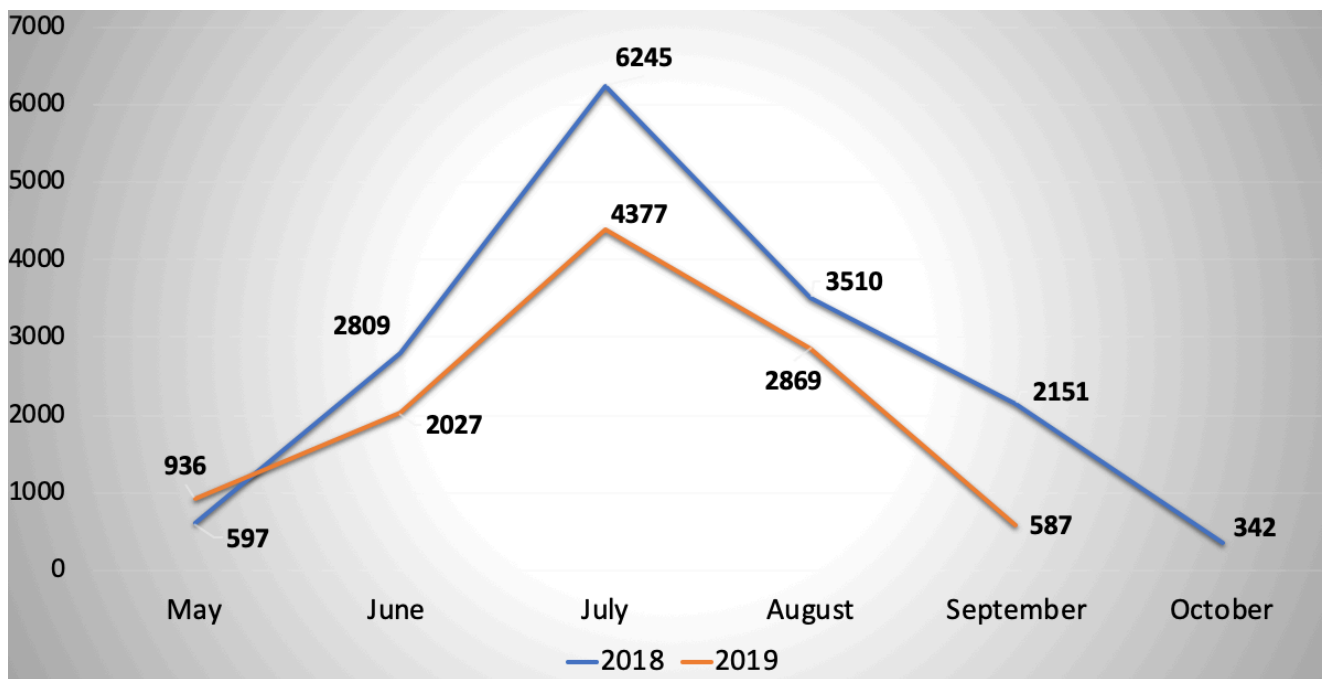


Peekamoose Blue Hole

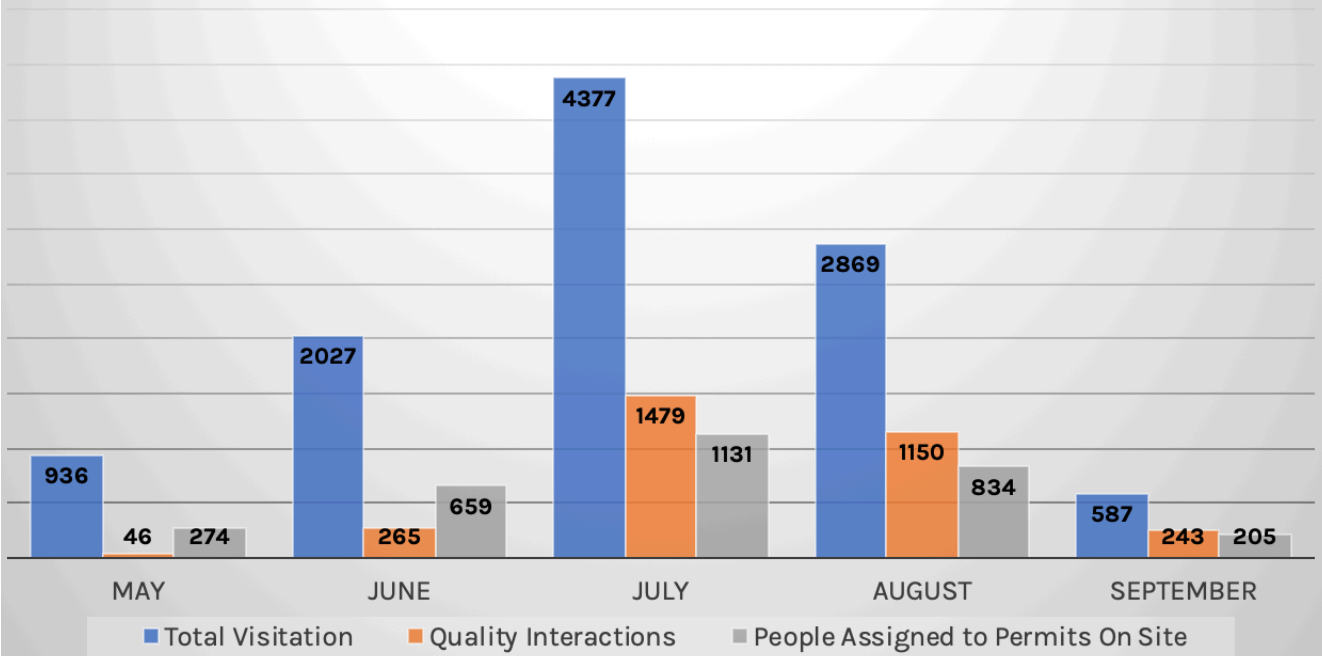
The Blue Hole is the original location for the Catskill Stewards. Combining education with thoughtful regulation, the atmosphere and natural resources of the Blue Hole have improved drastically over the past two years. Stewardship messaging and permit system regulations have thoughtfully evolved since their coordinated start in 2018, now providing a far greater experience for the visitor while preserving the unique landscape.

One primary goal of these management and educational efforts is to encourage visitors to choose another Catskill Park location during high peak-use days at the Blue Hole. This dispersion is designed to spread impact throughout the park, rather than keeping it isolated in the fragile ecosystem that is the Blue Hole. Reflecting on our visitation numbers from 2018, we can now see a shift to fewer visitors in 2019. If this trend continues, then the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Catskill Center will know that these synchronized efforts have paid off.

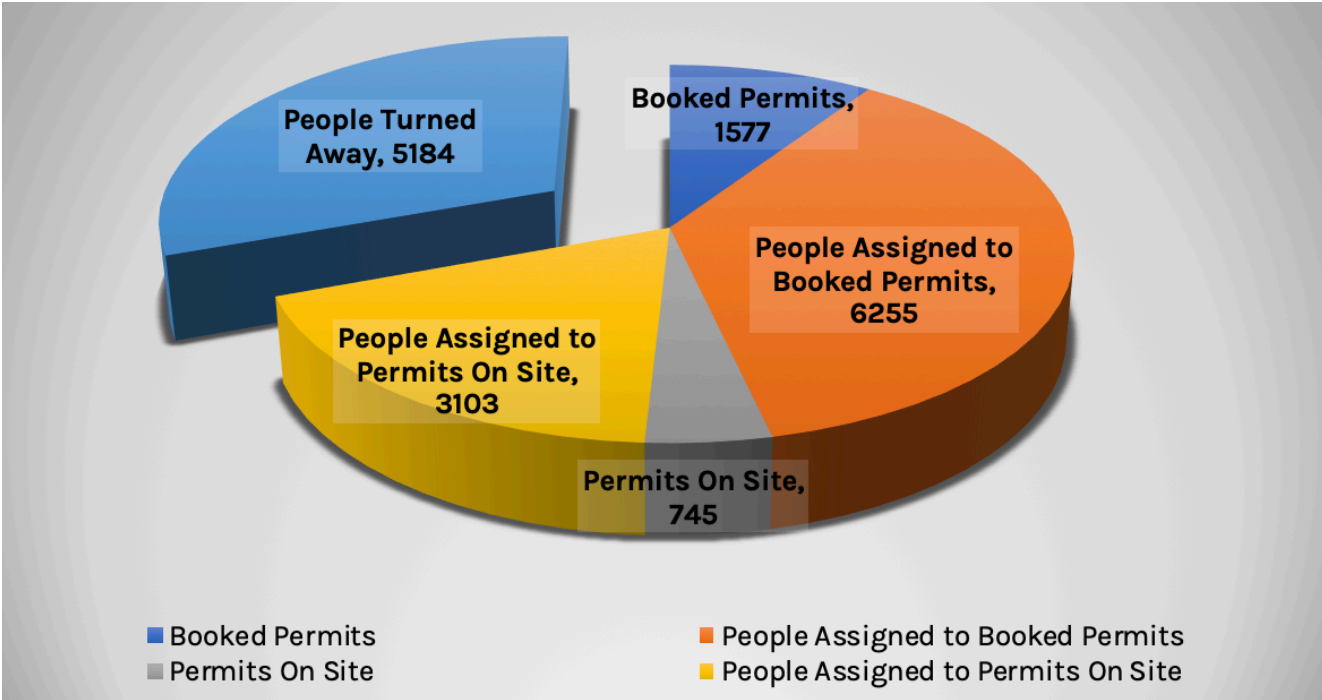
Blue Hole Visitation: 2018 vs. 2019



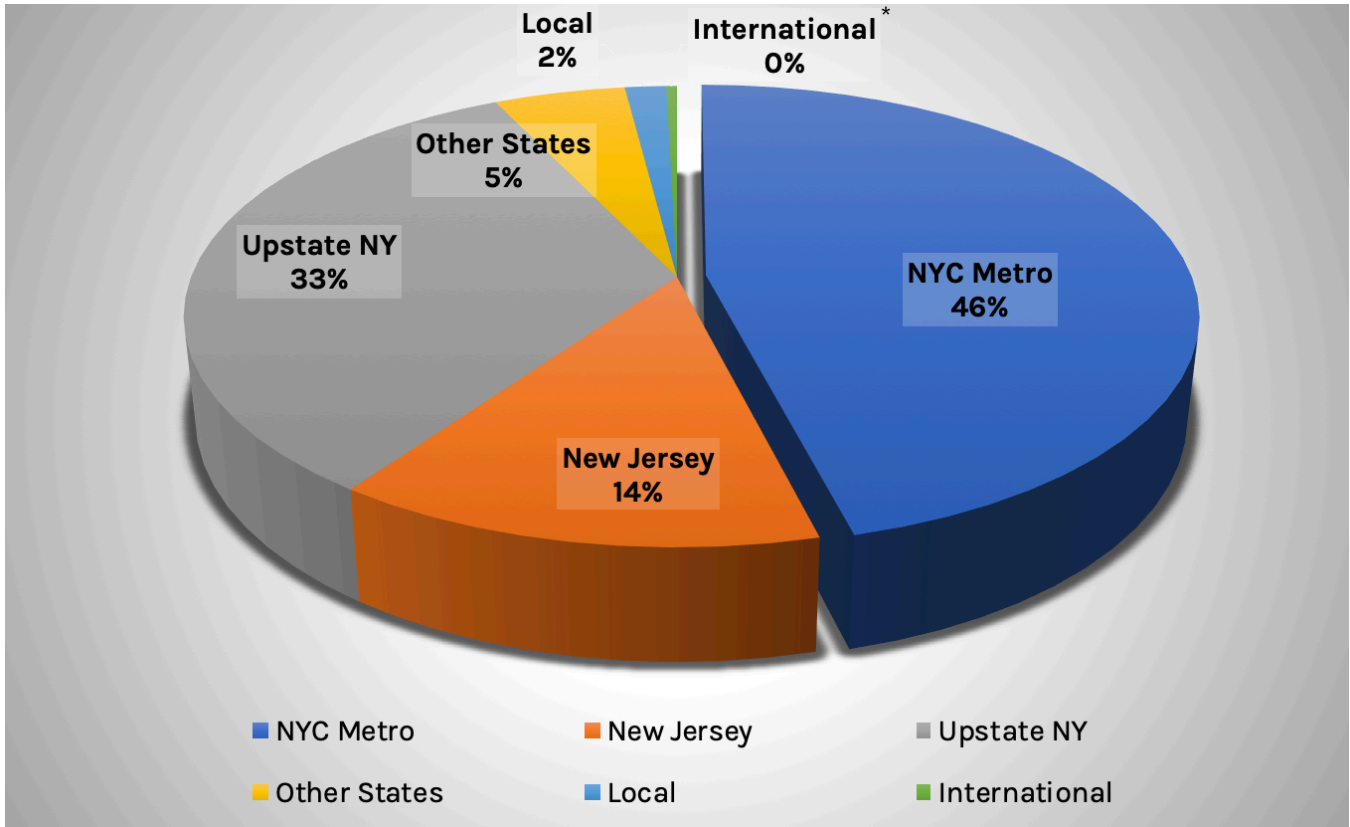
Blue Hole Visitation: Totals



Blue Hole Visitation: Permit Data



Blue Hole Visitation: Demographic Data via Permits



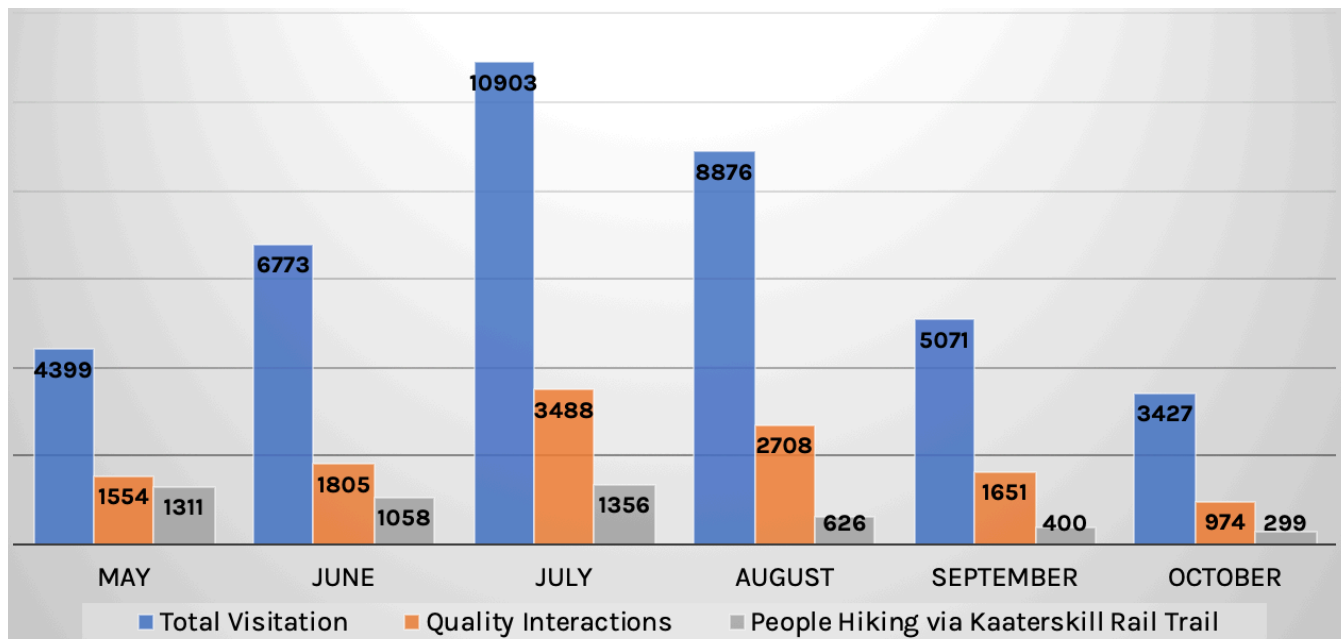
* While the International data represented here reflects that of 0%, anecdotally our stewards have met well over 100 visitors from different countries. Some of these countries include Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, England, France, Spain, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, China, India, among other countries. Typically, these visitors have come during mid-week times. Weekend international visitors have either a U.S. address from a family member, or have used an address from their accommodations.

Kaaterskill Falls at Laurel House Trailhead

Easily the busiest and most popular destination in the Catskill Park, the first season at Kaaterskill Falls blew our expectations out of the water. While there was no way to reach every single visitor as we do at the Blue Hole and Platte Clove, stationing our stewards at the Laurel House Trailhead helped us to capture the attention of a majority of visitors entering Kaaterskill Falls.

Safety, and ecological preservation are the primary concerns for the stewards. We achieve this through quality interactions, signage, and by taking patrols through the area while speaking with visitors while they are on-site.

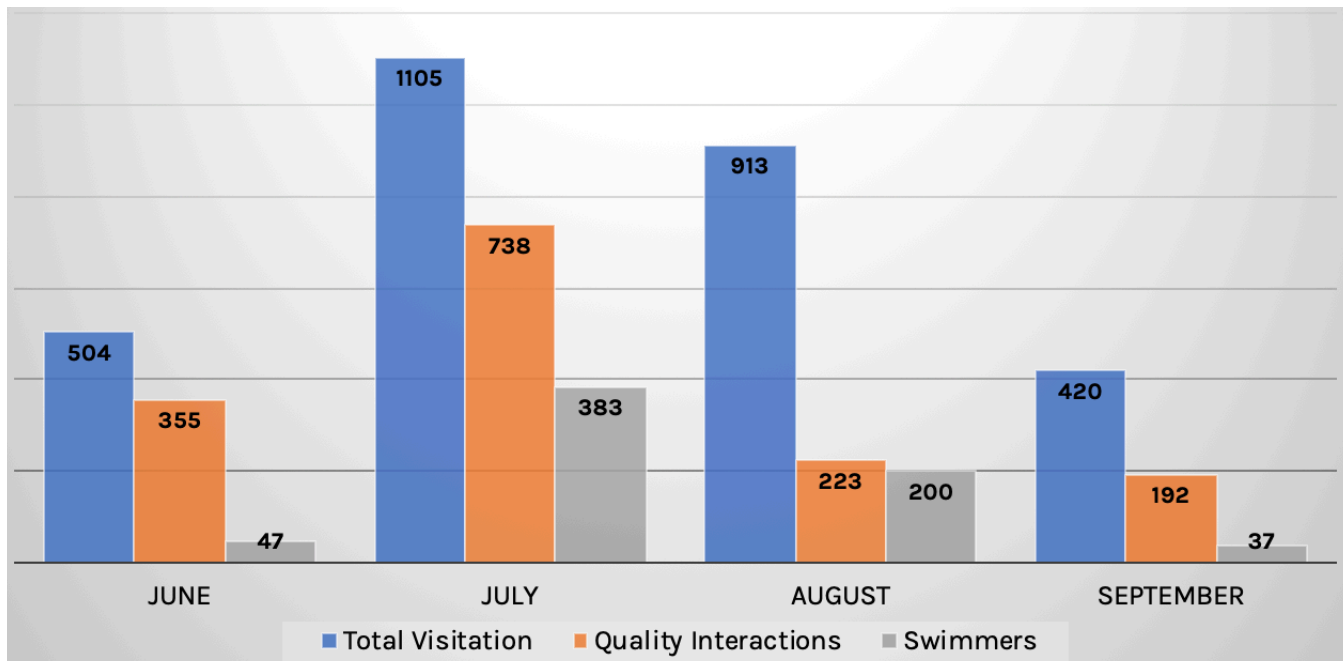
Kaaterskill Falls Visitation



Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

With one part-time steward, the Catskill Center was able to greet visitors and educate them on weekends and holidays. The Platte Clove Preserve is a unique location with a very sensitive and dangerous ecosystem. The preserve is centered around a stream with multiple waterfalls. A crumbly shale shelf surrounding the tops of cliffsides and waterfalls makes for a potentially deadly situation for visitors to the clove. Our steward Peter, did his best to keep the clove clean, he also made sure that people were well prepared to visit the site as safely as possible.

Platte Clove Visitation



Impacts & Special Programming

The Catskill Stewards Program has reduced or rehabbed the following impacts to the natural resource. In addition to the photographs provided, the stewards delivered up-to-date information about invasive species, to the Catskill Center's Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership.

The following photographs illustrate some of the impacts faced at the steward locations as well as special programs offered by the Catskill Stewards.





es and portable generators are allowed only
 ed campsites downstream of the Blue Hole.
 and other audio devices.
 ontainers.
 r the designated camping sites, the
 ose Corridor is open to the public from one-
 r before sunrise.

- Solo está
 generador
 aguas abajo
- No se perm
- No se puede
- Salvo en el ca
 de Peekamoos
 antes del aman

***ASK US ABOUT BLUE HOLE PERMITS!**
 www.reserveamerica.com



Leave No Trace Hot Spot Revisit at the Blue Hole

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is a national not-for-profit, based in Boulder, Colorado. As an organization, their mission is to inspire and educate visitors of the outdoors to recreate responsibly on public lands. In 2017 after being nominated a Hot Spot by the Adirondack Mountain Club, a Subaru/Leave No Trace Traveling Trainer team came to the Blue Hole in an effort to offer fresh ideas to the growing concern of high visitor use, and combat natural resource degradation. This visit became a catalyst for both the current permit system, and Catskill Stewards Program.



In 2018, the Catskill Center nominated the Blue Hole as a Leave No Trace Hot Spot Revisit location. This nomination was quickly reviewed by the Leave No Trace organization and selected as a 2019 Hot Spot Revisit site.

In August of 2019 the Catskill Center and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation partnered with Leave No Trace to assess the current state of affairs at the Blue Hole. Their general findings – current conditions at the Blue Hole in 2019 are far better than originally found in 2017. **“The concerted efforts by both the NYSDEC and the Catskill Center have led to a remarkable decline in over-use and visitor-created impacts.”** – Leave No Trace, Blue Hole Hot Spot Revisit Report

The progress shown at the Blue Hole has only been possible through the power of partnership. Indeed, the Catskill Stewards Program is an example of just how successful partnerships can be when stakeholders rally together for a common cause.

This hard work is not finished however. Visitors to the Catskill Park will forever come in increasing numbers. Because of this reality, partnerships throughout the park, as well as a growing Catskill Stewards Program are the best sustainable option for preserving the Catskill Forest Preserve in the future.



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 two years at the Catskill Center, Andy has worked with partner organizations and agencies to ensure public access to lands across the United States are protected and preserved for future generations. Andy is the Catskill Center's, Stewardship and Advocacy Coordinator.

Selina Guendel - Selina is a Catskill native. Born and raised in Boiceville, she has been visiting the Peekamoose Valley since her teenaged years. She said this about her season as a Peekamoose Blue Hole Steward, "Personally, I felt a great sense of fulfillment once we got into the busy season. The need for stewards in the Peekamoose Valley became so apparent to me and to see my presence and work making a noticeable impact was incredibly fulfilling. I was always proud to explain what I was doing for work at and away from the Blue Hole." Selina was the Head Steward for the 2019 season.



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 this 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."

Eli Rogers - Coming from an IT background, Eli was looking for an opportunity to work outdoors. In college, Eli was a trip leader for the Outing Club at SUNY New Paltz. Taking this passion for the outdoors, and the ability to problem solve, Eli helped to streamline educational programs and document lesson plans. Eli said his season was, "Rewarding, challenging, and surprising. With so many different people visiting the Catskills, being a steward is always interesting."

Patrick Miller - At home in the Catskills, Patrick shares a passion for the outdoors and music, two distinctive pieces of culture which make up this irreplaceable region. As a musician Patrick shares his art for many. As a steward, he shares his knowledge with visitors. Sharing his highlight of the season, Patrick said this, "The highlight from the back half of the season would have to be the community cleanup at the Blue Hole. It was awesome to talk with everyone from different organizations and get their perspectives on the issues here while also listening about how much this area means to them."

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 this summer. Peter said, "I had a great time helping people find trails and directing them to the Platte Kill falls and creek."

Funding

The Catskill Stewards Program is an example of the power of partnership. The gracious support of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Rondout Neversink Stream Program, and REI Co-op made this program possible.

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 first-time grantor to the Catskill Stewards Program for 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 opened their doors to the stewards to host informational displays in their NYC metropolitan stores. This has enabled the stewards to educate visitors of the Catskills before visiting 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

In addition to our major supporters above, the following **community partners** have donated to the Catskill Stewards Program. This level of commitment proves how special the communities and organizations of the Catskills are. We are incredibly grateful for your continued support.

The Bruderhof Community at Platte Clove
Catskill Mountain Club
Catskill 3500 Club
The Hunter Foundation

Partnership & additional data inquiries may be directed to...

[Andy Mossey](#)

Stewardship & Advocacy Coordinator

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CATSKILLCENTER

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