



CATSKILLCENTER

## Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program End of Season Report - 2018

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Stewardship and Advocacy Coordinator



*Figure 1: Stewards, Selina and Andy on-site at the Blue Hole*

*“We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the earth as its other creatures do.”  
— Barbara Ward*

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## The Location

Lined by shale ledges 3-5' in height, the Peekamoose Blue Hole is a wild 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. Recent fame has exponentially increased visitation and the resulting impact has been severe.

Summer weekends, anywhere from 600-2000 people visit the Peekamoose Corridor and the three-quarter acre footprint of the Blue Hole has been impacted with soil erosion, trampled vegetation, litter, food waste, human waste, pet waste, loud music, social trails, and wildlife impacts (bears).

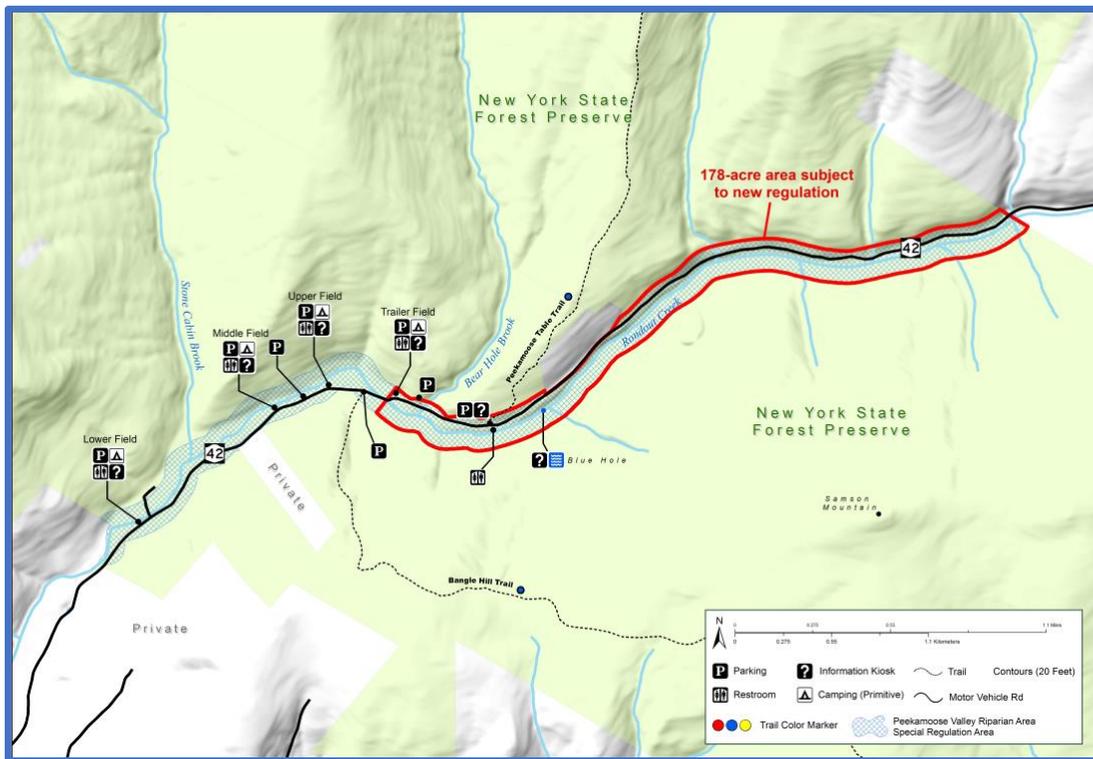


Figure 2: Map of the Peekamoose Valley Riparian Area. Photo courtesy of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

The Peekamoose Blue Hole wasn't always this way. 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 as well as the implementation of the Catskill Center's Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program.

## The Season In Summary

The Blue Hole draws visitors from all corners of the world and the 2018 summer season was one for the record books. With greater crowds than ever previously recorded, 2018 also brought new programs to protect the area. Via coordinated efforts between forest rangers, a fresh permit system, and the Catskill Center's Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewards; the tranquil swimming hole is on its way to a brighter future occupied with sustainable recreation.

The inaugural season for the Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program began May 15<sup>th</sup> and ended October 15<sup>th</sup>. The stewards work, resulted in over **15,000 points of contact** with visitors in the sensitive riparian area of the Peekamoose Valley.



Figure 3: A typical summer day at the Blue Hole

A cleaner riparian area that's free of campfire rings, shards of glass, and with protected trailside vegetation have been the goals of the stewards' educational program. Since the launch of the program, stewards have collected over 180 bags of litter, deconstructed and rehabbed 18 campfire rings, maintained over 3 miles of trail, and disguised herd paths around the Blue Hole proper. The result is very encouraging; stewards have witnessed a trend in far less litter being left behind at the Blue Hole than at the beginning of the season, a marked improvement over years past. This development is due primarily to the consistent education of daily visitors, and stewards removing litter from the site each morning.

- Total visitation: 15,180
- Visitation on weekends: 10,329
- Visitation on weekdays: 4,851
- People w/o permits (turned away): 6,127
- People with permits: 1,657
- Bags of litter collected: 180 (~ 2,700 lbs.)
- Fire rings rehabbed: 18
- Rock dams rehabbed: 13
- Rock stacks deconstructed: 92
- Total steward days: 106



Figure 4: Rare, sensitive plants such as this Jack-in-The-Pulpit line the trails at the Blue Hole

Even with such promising news, the stewardship work is never ending. Visitors continue to come in ever increasing numbers, and bring with them the reminder that everyone needs the tools and skills necessary to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. When stewards and rangers are not present, litter increases, and rock dams and rock stacks are built in the stream.

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.

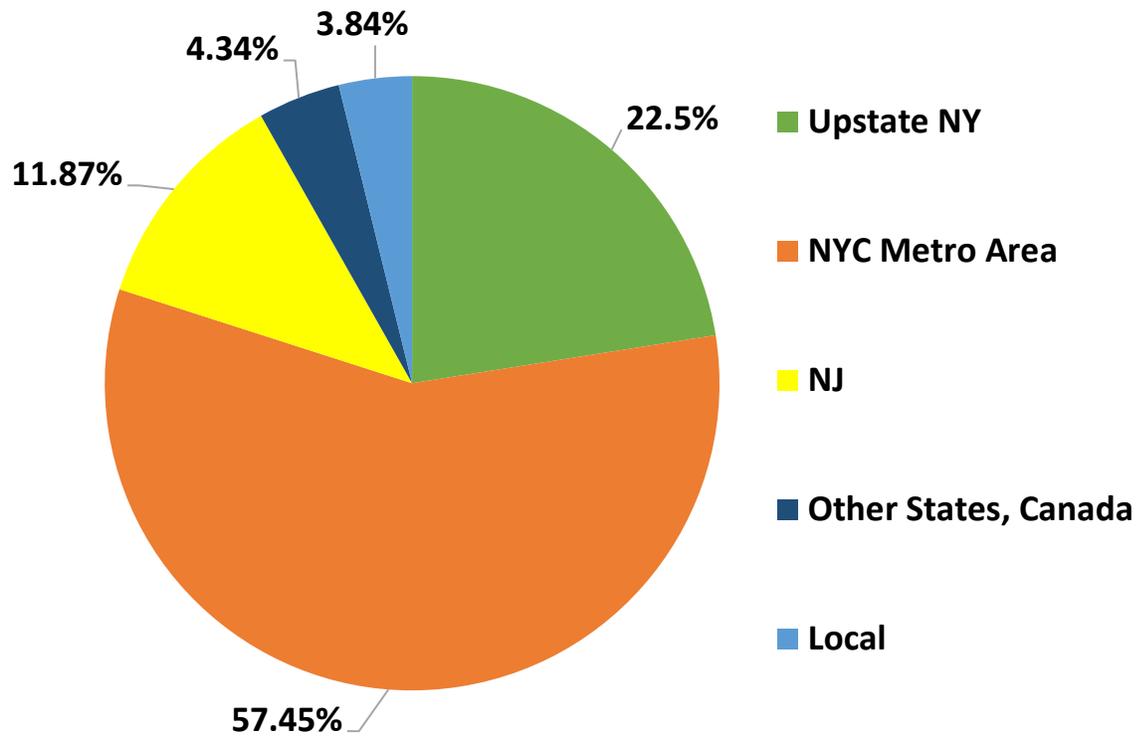


*Figure 5: The namesake, crystalline waters*



*Figure 6: Monday, August 6<sup>th</sup>2018. Total Visitation, 270*

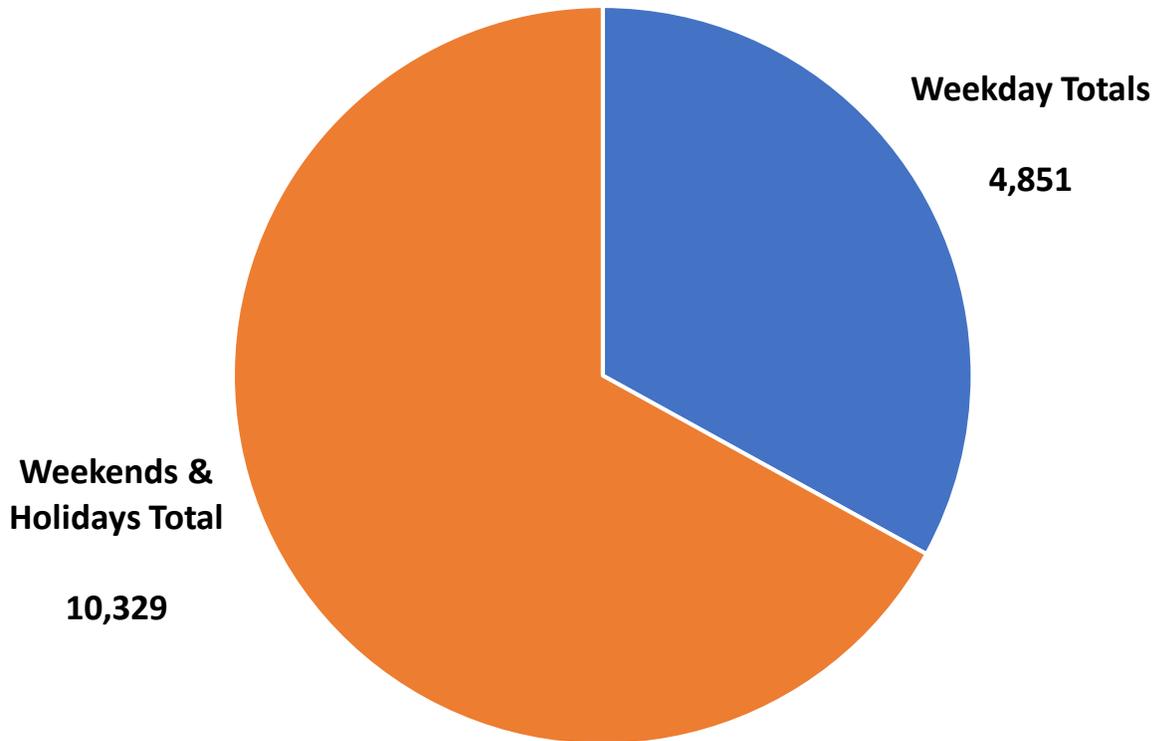
## Blue Hole Demographics via Permits



Data gathered via ReserveAmerica.com’s permit module, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation was enabled to gather permit holder’s home zip code. This helps us at the Catskill Center to further engage with these visitors, and adjust our language, communication techniques, and generally relate to the visitor more effectively.

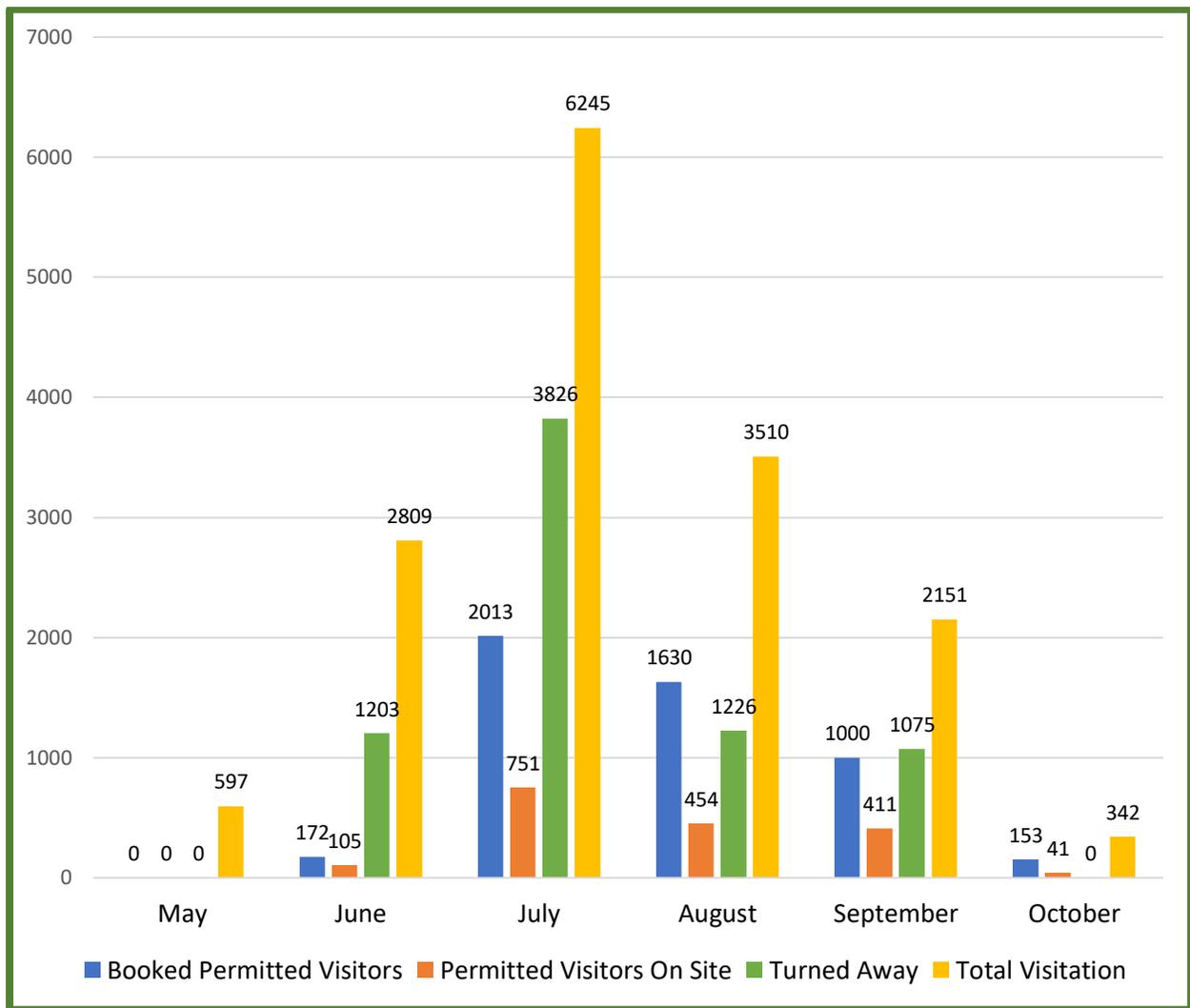
From these zip codes, the Catskill Center has been able to use location specific Facebook ads to offer these communities information about responsible Catskill recreation, permit information, and issues surrounding the Blue Hole.

June 30th - October 15th, 2018  
Total Visitation: **15,180**



Visitation numbers were gathered by the stewards via clicker counters. The “Total Visitation” is a reflection of how many individuals entered the Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor, whether or not they held a permit for entry.

Simple tools and numbers such as these gained here help us to project further trends throughout the coming years and prep us for big weekends and shoulder days for next year. See a breakdown of numbers on the following page.



The following definitions will help to make more sense of the terms used.

- Booked Permitted Visitors – Total number of people registered under the permit system. This number includes the permit holder and guests.
- Permitted Visitors On Site – Permit holders allowed in to the Blue Hole proper.
- Turned Away – refers to the individuals turned away due to the permit process. These people were not registered under the permit system.
- Total Visitation – refers to the number of individuals physically in the Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor, including those at the Blue Hole proper, people turned away, and hikers interested in visiting the Rondout Creek.

Using this information we can more accurately and intelligently advocate for streamlined permit regulations and processes, an improved stewardship presence, and steward training for best visitor engagement practices.

## The Impacts

The Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program has reduced or rehabbed the following impacts to the natural resource. In addition to the photo's provided, the Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewards provided up-to-date information about invasive species spread to the Catskill Center's, Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership.

### 1. Trash and Litter



Figure 7: Glass found on a Monday morning



Figure 8: Early season trash left at the Lower Field



Figure 9: Prior to the stewards' education campaign, how to use a bear proof dumpster

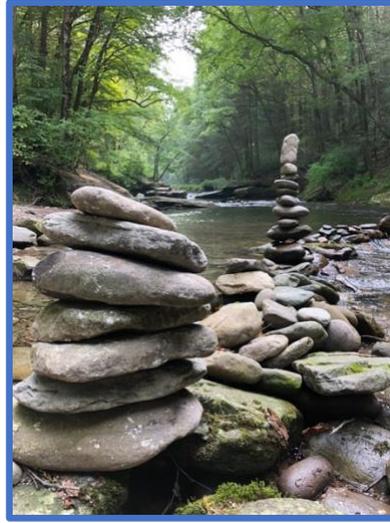


Figure 10: Bears getting into improperly disposed of waste

## 2. Rock Stacks & Visitor Built Cobble Dams



*Figure 11: Before the rehab of a dam*



*Figure 12: Rock stacks, while rehabbing commonly found, stone larvae, and may fly larvae*



*Figure 13: Rock stacks in October*



*Figure 14: One of the largest rock dams found, this dam raised the upstream level by 3.5"*

### 3. Crowd Management and Visitor Engagement



Figure 15: The education starts before visitors enter



Figure 16: A busy but ideal day at the Blue Hole, proper education, different user groups, and the protection of the resource



Figure 17: On this busy Monday, Stewards interacted and offered to aid visitors with trash collection, gave information about the water quality, and encourage people to stick to durable surfaces such as rock

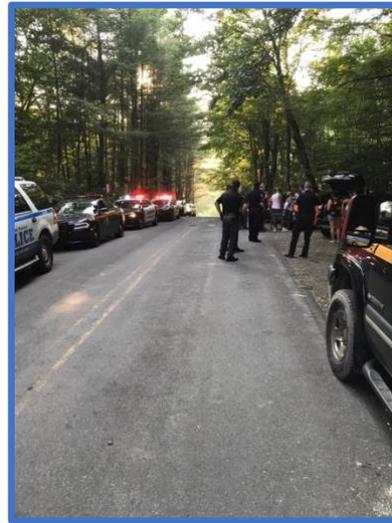


Figure 18: A reduction in citations was observed in 2018

## The Stewards

**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 first 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.”



**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 four years, 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.



*Figure 19: Photo: Brian PJ Cronin of the Highlands Current Publication*

## Funding

The Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program is an example of the power of partnership. The gracious support of the Rondout Neversink Stream Program and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation made this program possible.

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 grant provided much of the funding used for staffing, equipment, and training costs.



Thank you to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and their continued working partnership. The financial support, and utilization of the Forest Rangers enabled the stewards to achieve their goal this season while helping to keep communication and safety a priority.

