

Catskill Strategic Advisory Group

INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

Presented to NYSDEC Commissioner Basil Seggos

January 2022

Dear Commissioner Basil Seggos:

The Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) appreciates the opportunity to provide this interim report on balancing the increasing recreational use of the Catskill Park (Park) with the protection of our natural resources, while ensuring the experience of using the Park is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive. This interim report captures components of a larger, long-term strategic framework forthcoming next year.

Visitor use in the Catskill Park, as measured by trail register data, increased at a steady 9 percent over the last decade and spiked during the Covid pandemic in 2020. The spike during Covid exacerbated an already existing capacity issue for the Park and community infrastructure and facilities. Increasing use also reflects greater diversity of our visitors. These are both positive developments, but inevitably put pressure on many parts of the cherished natural resources in the Park, including, but not limited to, trailheads and trails, lakes and streams, other recreational facilities, and local communities. Public use continues to increase in the Park, in all four seasons and every day of the week, not just on weekends and holidays. This higher and growing volume of use, similar to trends nationwide, should be anticipated to continue for years to come.

Access to public recreation, including trails, campgrounds, parking, water resources, and associated recreation facilities, is vital to the State's recovery during and after the pandemic, and should receive increased financial investment. The CAG maintains that protecting the natural resources and the wild forest character of the Catskills region is essential to the economic well-being of the region's communities, and of the entire State. There are many benefits that are both economic and health-related; for instance, the region protects and provides 90 percent of New York City's drinking water supply, along with large portions of the water supply for Westchester, Putnam, Orange, and Ulster counties in the Hudson Valley. In the future, the Catskills will also be a key area of connectivity for wildlife, critical in a time of climate change.

The CAG recognizes the importance of continued public engagement in its deliberations and long-term planning for the Catskill Park. Meeting summaries have been posted on the DEC website. The CAG also conducted a broad-reaching public survey in March 2021, with 3,797 responses received – among the highest total DEC has received for such a survey. The extensive public comments helped focus the CAG's attention on the challenges and opportunities that mattered most to visitors and residents of the Catskill Park.

Additional public input is critical, as the CAG presents these interim recommendations and develops the long-term strategic framework. This final strategic framework will only be successful with robust public engagement that includes voices from the Park, its surrounding regions, and the many visitors who recreate in the Park.

It will take commitment, resources, and the support of partners – including CAG members and other stakeholders - to manage this revered region. The CAG believes the following recommendations begin to lay a foundation for future management of public recreation in the Catskill Park. Moreover, we feel it is imperative that funding be allocated to ensue these ideas and recommendations get implemented.

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Need for a Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group

The Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) was established by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos in October 2020 (Appendix B). This was done in response to former Governor Cuomo's request to initiate strategic planning among key local stakeholders to address critical issues associated with increasing public use of the Catskill Park.

The Catskill Park is approximately 700,000 acres in size, with sections spanning parts of the four "Forest Preserve counties" of Delaware, Greene, Sullivan, and Ulster. The Park is comprised of about 40 percent State Forest Preserve lands and 10 percent New York City water supply lands, with the other 50 percent mostly in private lands. The Forest Preserve was first defined by law in 1885 and was further protected through an amendment to the state constitution (now Article XIV) in 1894. The Catskill Park was created by law in 1904 as a way to highlight the Forest Preserve's most wild and mountainous areas and to focus New York State's land acquisition efforts in the Catskill region.

The CAG is comprised of local government officials, private business owners, tourism entities, conservation and other relevant non-profits, scientists, and natural resource planners, many of them residents of the Catskills region (Appendix A). It was charged to work collaboratively with New York State agencies and advise DEC by developing action and policy recommendations to inform future planning and management of public use in the Park. Although the CAG's mission, charge and goals were mandated by DEC, the group also adopted a vision statement to guide its work (Appendix C).

The CAG has been meeting mostly remotely due to the COVID-19 crisis. Its members have met approximately every three weeks since November 19, 2020. Summaries of CAG meetings are available at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/122227.html>.

Recreation opportunities in the Catskill Park have remained open since the onset of the COVID pandemic, consistent with the Catskill's rich history as a haven for healing and well-being. Increasing public use before and during the pandemic underscores the importance of the Catskill Park to people's mental and physical health.

The surge in visitation across the Park has brought new challenges and opportunities - both of which underscore the need for additional investments to educate and accommodate visitors, connect them with local businesses, and protect our wild and scenic areas. The CAG is sensitive to the heightened need for management of visitor impacts. Our work in the Catskills region, corroborated through more than a dozen interviews with staff from other very popular parks across the United States, has reached an important conclusion: more intensive use must be met with more intensive management, and more intensive management can only happen through increased funding and investment that meets the scope and scale of our regional challenges.

As the region's population and the users of the Catskill Park become more diverse (including people of different ethnicities, race, gender, age, disability, languages spoken, social status, religion, national origin, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, familial status, military status), the CAG believes that applying an equity lens in all management decisions is essential to the success of

promoting responsible recreation and lasting protection of the Park's cherished resources. Through successful collaboration of stakeholders, agencies, and communities in the Catskills, the Park is well-positioned to become a model for other natural areas that strive to be accessible and welcoming to all.

Purpose of this Interim Report

- Recommend immediate actions to be undertaken along the Route 23a corridor of the Catskill Park in the vicinity of Kaaterskill Clove,
- Outline Parkwide management recommendations and strategies for which DEC, DOT, and partners can begin planning,
- Provide a progress report to DEC, Catskill stakeholders, and the public, and share a summary of management actions already put in place in 2021 (Appendix D) and the results of the public survey (Appendix E) and,
- Invite additional public feedback to be incorporated in the final strategic framework, planned for completion in 2022.

Immediate Actions Recommended Along the Route 23a Corridor in the Vicinity of Kaaterskill Clove

The Route 23a corridor, especially as it passes through Kaaterskill Clove (Clove), receives particularly high visitor use in the Catskill Park. Concerns regarding public safety and the protection of recreational, scenic, natural, and historic resources along this route warrant immediate actions, consistent with the Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan. The Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway is the first state designated scenic byway in the Catskill Park.

The Route 23a corridor is the section of Route 23a that travels through Kaaterskill Clove between the Hamlet of Palenville (Town of Catskill) and the Village of Tannersville (Town of Hunter) in Greene County. The area of concern extends beyond the roadway itself and includes attractions located on Forest Preserve lands in the Clove, including a number of popular swimming destinations in Kaaterskill Creek and Kaaterskill Falls, as well as the Mountain Top Historical Society, which hosts the western trailhead of the Kaaterskill Rail Trail and has become a popular hiking and parking destination. The area of concern also includes North Lake Road from Route 23a to the DEC North-South Lake State Campground, along with the trailheads (Schutt Road and Laurel House Road) that provide access to the Kaaterskill Falls area.

The Kaaterskill Clove Working Group, a set of local stakeholders who have been working for several years on solutions for the Route 23a corridor, was integrated into the CAG's planning process. The group identified the following recommendations in response to increasing visitor use along this corridor:

1. Improve overall communications to the public about public safety, rules and regulations, and the status of recreational facilities, specifically:
 - a. Establish a social media working group to facilitate real-time communications and standard social media messaging about the Clove, including the status of traffic/parking in and around the Clove.
 - b. Collect and disseminate real-time information about the status of traffic and parking in the Clove, which should include installation of technology to track the number of cars in parking lots. This aims to reach people with practical information before they leave home or while they are traveling, so they can see whether parking is available at the Clove or they should seek a different destination.
 - c. Improve information delivery to visitors when they arrive:
 - i. Install visual message boards, with a drive towards permanent VMS boards that are harmonious with the Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway.
 - ii. Investigate informational, low-wattage AM radio station broadcasting.
 - iii. Coordinate with NYS Thruway/NYS Police on messaging on Thruway visual message boards.
 - iv. Develop a common website for the Clove in partnership with the Great Northern Catskills of Greene County, the Destination Management

Organization and Tourism Promotion Agency for Greene County designated by the Greene County Legislature.

- v. Improve signage, including wayfinding and interpretive signs.
 - vi. Generate a common map to be used at all information points.
 - vii. Promote town parking.
2. Finish necessary planning to establish a shuttle for Kaaterskill Clove, building off existing plans developed by towns and Greene County. This pilot system can later be expanded Parkwide as needed. Necessary work includes:
- a. Complete a full traffic study for the Clove area to determine an optimal shuttle plan with full costs and benefits:
 - i. Identify long-term viable shuttle routes; shuttle stops, and necessary improvements to create those shuttle stops.
 - ii. Create a parking plan for the Clove area.
 - iii. Apply for funding under Federal Highway Administration, State Consolidated Funding Application, or other funding sources to improve safety in the Clove.
 - b. Study long-term parking needs surrounding the Clove.
 - c. Explore reclassifying portions of the Wild Forest areas to Intensive Use to facilitate shuttle implementation, pedestrian access, visitor management, etc.
3. Provide additional Forest Ranger staffing for the Clove area to better respond to the increasing number of users present in the area.

Parkwide Management Strategies and Recommendations

Most CAG recommendations require additional staffing and funding to be implemented. This would likely call for additional funding and/or staffing for DEC and thus require consideration in the New York State Budget. Additional costs and funding may be borne by partners who run associated programs and activities.

It is imperative that DEC and its partners begin allocating resources now for the following Parkwide recommendations to be implemented beginning in 2022. Coordinated efforts across agencies such as DEC, DOT, and New York City DEP, as well as other partners, are equally essential for the success of these recommendations.

The CAG identified five overarching areas where recommendations are warranted. Specific action items for their implementation will be included in the CAG's final strategic framework:

1. *Establish a Catskill Park Coordinator position to collaborate among entities and streamline Parkwide efforts.*
2. *Educate all users of the Catskill Park about responsible recreation, protecting natural and historic resources, and Leave No Trace principles.*
3. *Coordinate consistent messaging and communication for the Park (social media, real-time digital infrastructure, a tourism campaign, etc.).*
4. *Implement Parkwide traffic and parking management strategies.*
5. *Incorporate diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice (DEIJ) principles in recreational, educational, and operational frameworks and the economic benefits provided in the Catskill Park.*

1. Establish a Catskill Park Coordinator position to collaborate among entities and streamline Parkwide efforts.

A Catskill Park Coordinator, in some form, has been called for since the 1999 Catskill Forest Preserve Public Access Plan. It has become apparent through the CAG planning process that this role is critical to coordinated management at Park scale. The Park stretches across a multitude of agency regions, police and highway jurisdictions, counties, towns, villages, nonprofit organizations, and stakeholder areas. Because of this complex network of responsibilities and interests, the Park requires a coordinator to ensure implementation of plans, develop consensus, oversee common resources, and tackle challenges that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

The Coordinator's responsibility will be to provide oversight and guidance on the management of the Catskill Park as a single, unified entity. Initiatives and opportunities that would benefit from greater coordination include:

- Overseeing the collection and sharing of visitor use data.
- Developing consensus and coordinate Park management decisions between agencies and stakeholders based on available data.
- Cohesively managing all stewardship and educational outreach programs.
- Being empowered by DEC to ensure that all programs follow the same guidelines and incorporate the same messaging.
- Implementing DEC's visitor use management framework, outlined in DEC Visitor Use Management Workbook, presented to the Adirondack Park Agency in May 2021.
- Ensuring that Catskill Park managers have appropriate resources and access to data critical to evidence-based management.
 - Ensure that data is collected in a systematic manner across time and space, and that the data are available to managers and the public.
 - Target science and data collection on management problems and knowledge gaps where data are needed to address those problems.
 - Anticipate changes in environmental drivers and public use, and ensure data are collected to provide preventative actions before problems arise.

Note: Prior to the release of this Interim Report, NYSDEC announced the creation of a Catskill Park Coordinator position (see Appendix F). The CAG welcomes this announcement and is pleased to see that the Agency aligned this position with the CAG's preliminary recommendations.

The CAG urges NYSDEC to establish dedicated funding to sustain this position into the future and to incorporate it into its permanent staffing structure. These steps would safeguard this position from possible changes in future DEC priorities.

2. Educate all users of the Catskill Park about responsible recreation, protecting natural and historic resources, and Leave No Trace principles.

Many organizations and platforms provide a variety of information about the Catskill Park to visitors and residents. There is no question that useful and engaging information is an effective way to improve user behavior, address natural resource impacts, and reduce impacts to local communities.

However, coordinating all information and delivering it across multiple platforms, while also strengthening the ability of existing resources, such as the Catskills Visitor Center (CVC), to reach and educate people is a tremendous challenge identified by the CAG. It is also apparent that education is essential not only in the Park, but beyond its boundaries, so practical information will reach visitors before they leave home.

Suggestions by the CAG to improve educational efforts include:

- Create a social media working group dedicated to Parkwide educational efforts. Facilitate synergy in the messages put out by agencies, communities, and organizations to reach the largest audience possible.
- Craft and deliver/broadcast consistent Leave No Trace, Love Our NY Lands, and other educational messaging for all users – visitors and locals alike - about natural and historic resource protection.
- Strengthen the delivery of information about the Catskills Visitor Center and the County Tourism Visitor Centers across all platforms, and identify satellite locations for the CVC. The CVC provides parking, education, professional on-site staff, fire tower access, trails, bathrooms, and resources, such as maps and take-away information. The County Tourism Visitor Centers provide professional on-site staff to assist visitors with accommodations, recreation, and experiential travel information, including directional maps and supporting materials for tourism businesses.
- Catalog and harmonize existing rules, regulations, and educational messages in the Park.
- Create a Catskill-specific cohesive education campaign around responsible recreation:
 - Create a Parkwide educational plan.
 - Establish a slogan for the region. The slogan must be tailored to everyone who comes to the Catskills region.
 - Recognize both front-country and back-country use in messaging.Acknowledge that people enjoy hiking (“People are ‘Rugged like Mountains’”) and also enjoy or seek healing (“People are Tender like Wildflowers”).
- Promote fire towers as alternative destinations that provide recreational and educational opportunities. The trails leading to the fire towers are often old roads

that are already hardened, so impacts to surrounding natural resource are limited, there are staff and/or volunteers to greet the public at fire towers, and the structures are already on the mountain tops.

- Determine major historic education opportunities in the four counties of the Park. Work with state and county tourism entities and local historical societies to plan onsite events and curate exhibits at the Greene County Historical Society and the Mountain Top Historical Society, securing private and public funding. Such events would help to alleviate pressures on areas of increasing use by offering alternative destinations. These events would also help to support local businesses and provide opportunities to educate everyone about the special qualities of the Park. For example, the 200th Anniversary of the Catskill Mountain House (2023-2024) is such an educational opportunity.
 - Consider publishing a printable web-based guide that provides facility accessibility information, as well as methods non-profits may use to disseminate pertinent trail information to people with disabilities, with organized content kept current by using visitor feedback.
 - Provide maps at trailheads specifically for previewing the degree of accessibility along the length of the trail, so that those who arrive may view in advance what obstacles they may encounter on any trail, and be empowered to make their own decisions as to whether or not to go forward. These maps could also be posted online for advance viewing.
 - Train education professionals and volunteers who engage with the public to share consistent messaging about recreation in the Catskill Park, principles of Leave No Trace, and how to protect natural and historic resources in the Park.
3. Coordinate consistent messaging and communication for the Park (social media, real-time digital infrastructure, tourism campaigns, etc.).

The Catskill Park is promoted and cared for by a vast array of stakeholders. Coordinated communication across multiple platforms to welcome and educate visitors and residents will improve everyone's experience in the Park and help protect the unique natural and historic resources as stakeholders tackle growing recreational use in the Catskill Park.

- Create a Catskill-specific cohesive marketing campaign around responsible recreation.
- Establish a social media working group to identify, coordinate, and amplify messages that provide important information for residents and visitors. This type of coordinated effort would reach a substantially larger audience than any one group on its own. Messages developed by the social media working group should also be included on the websites of key tourism, nonprofit, and other groups that promote and protect the Park.
- Set up a mechanism to share messaging and create buy-in.

- Carry out marketing research to develop tactics to implement the education and marketing campaign. Establish a data collection mechanism to establish baselines.
- Coordinate tourism and marketing efforts to highlight sites and areas that are less well known.

4. Implement Parkwide traffic and parking management strategies.

Visitor hot spots in the Catskill Park cannot be managed in isolation, as visitors are free to move throughout the Park. Traffic and parking in the Park, while seemingly vast, are best managed as a single, Parkwide system to be effective. Pilot programs can be established in discrete areas to test ideas and methods of implementation, but always with an eye on how those pilot programs could be incorporated into a larger, Parkwide system.

- Prioritize recreation and parking area hotspots, in coordination with DEC's Region 3 and 4 managers, to address those most in need of attention and solutions, e.g. overcrowding, parking, and other traffic and safety issues
 - Explore a pilot reservation system for parking in hotspots that are most overwhelmed by increased use and potentially dangerous street side parking. This would be separate from the effort at Kaaterskill Clove, but its trial and implementation would be informed by the traffic studies, shuttle system, and other solutions that should be fast-tracked for implementation in the Clove.
- Fine-tune the list of trail heads, parking area capacities, and corresponding roadway parking capacities throughout the Park and beyond, including non-DEC parking areas. Solicit input of DOT staff in the four Catskill counties on issues of parking and traffic in their region.
- Use these tools to encourage use of a broader diversity of trails, reducing pressure on these hotspots.
- Broaden the use of technology: install additional trail counters throughout the Park and conduct a pilot test on smart-camera technology that can tell visitors before they arrive whether parking areas are open, getting full, or completely full.
- Collect and use real-time data about visitors, residents, traffic patterns, trailhead use, parking areas, pedestrian patterns, etc. to actively manage areas that have the potential to be impacted, or are already impacted, from increasing use.
- Communicate traffic management decisions or activities in real-time to the public.

5. Incorporate diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice (DEIJ) principles in recreational, educational, and operational frameworks and the economic benefits provided in the Catskill Park.

Diversity – The collective of differences and similarities of individual and organizational characteristics, values, beliefs, behaviors, experiences, and backgrounds, including perspectives from different sex, race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability,

gender identity or expression, marital status, familial status, military status, and any other classes protected by law.

Equity – Fair treatment and equal opportunity provided free from conscious and unconscious bias.

Inclusion – The process that values and cultivates a welcoming and safe environment, including or involving people from a range of backgrounds and beliefs.

Justice – The practice that provides access to resources and opportunities, and results in all people being treated in a way that is fair, equal, and balanced for everyone.

Inclusion is what we do. Equity is how we do it. Diversity and Justice are the outcomes.

5/a. Promote and embrace the benefits of DEIJ to achieve a more welcoming and inclusive Park.

Creating safe and equitable access to public lands and recreational opportunities has been identified across the United States as a critical component of improving recreational experiences, quality of life, and a strong economy supported by tourism.

Due to the successful collaboration of stakeholders, agencies, and communities in the Catskills, the Catskill Park is well-positioned to become a model that incorporates DEIJ in plans, practices, and policies. This is especially true because many of the Park's visitors come from the most ethnically and culturally diverse metropolitan areas in the country. It is important that everyone visiting, living, or working in the Catskills enjoys the benefits derived from DEIJ initiatives. It is equally important to implement strategies that strengthen DEIJ priorities for the Park.

- **Immediate Action:**

- Analysis of diverse visitation will include studying the economic benefits, drawn from the report produced by the Catskill Center and Catskill Mountainkeeper.
- Highlight the benefits of diversity and embrace diversity by creating a safe and welcoming environment throughout the Park.
- Align with Open Spaces for All work that is continuing to evolve and develop across the state. Open Spaces for All is a collaboration between the Open Space Institute and the New York Outdoor Recreation Coalition, with support from Potrero Group, with the goal “to identify innovative policies, programs, initiatives, and partnerships to support and engage a growing and increasingly diverse constituency of park users.” (<https://news.hamlethub.com/somers/life/6408-open-space-for-all-access-inclusion-in-new-york-state-outdoor-recreation>).
- Encourage DEC to work with partners and obtain their input on DEIJ issues in the Park. For example, consider establishing or support the creation of a Catskill Park Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Working Group that is representative of diverse user groups and community members.

- **Long-term change:**

- Establish programs that connect Park users from diverse communities to the Park. This should initially focus on communities within and directly surrounding the Park, and then expand to cities farther away once a pilot is tested and learnings are implemented.
- Highlight and promote the benefits of diverse visitors and ensure that everyone feels welcomed and safe in the Park. Identify projects or programs that support the connection between diverse visitors and community benefit.

5/b. Implement DEIJ within agencies and in their public-facing efforts.

The recreational needs and preferences of visitors and local communities have been changing ever since the Catskill Park was established, and are expected to evolve through the decades and future generations, especially as visitors to the Park and residents in the Catskills region become more diverse.

The following recommendations aim to make the Park more welcoming and inclusive by eliminating bias in all its forms.

- **Immediate Action:**

- Ensure public-facing Park resources are as inclusive as possible, e.g., visitor centers, information delivery points, advertising, publications, etc. Special attention should be paid to language and words used and how people are portrayed.
- Renew dedication to inclusivity by providing and updating facilities to meet accessible standards for people with disabilities.
- Ensure that DEC promotes diversity among its staff. Ensure that all staff are trained in DEIJ and encourage partners to do the same.

- **Long Term Change:**

- Conduct a review of existing management strategies at areas with increasing use, and implement modifications that simultaneously protect natural resources and recognize that use patterns have changed over time. Visitors to the Park and local communities have diverse views regarding what constitutes an enriching outdoor experience. Those conducting the review should consider the full range of suitable uses, without giving undue favor to historical uses or excluding the current/actual activities that are happening on these lands.
- Currently implemented and future strategies should consider equity by removing barriers to access (financial and otherwise) to the extent possible and by providing reservation guidance, regulations, and other information in multiple languages across all platforms. Significant effort should be put into providing ADA-compliant facilities where possible.

- By applying an equity lens in all management decisions, the Park can become a model for other natural areas that strive to be accessible to all.

Appendix A: List of Preparers

CAG members:

Melissa Abramson, Local Brand Engagement and Impact, REI

Ramsay Adams, Founder and Executive Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper

Patrick Barnes, Region 1 Director, New York State Department of Transportation

Adam Bosch, Director of Public Affairs, New York City Department of Environmental Protection

David Brooks, Town of Denning Supervisor

Dr. Joshua R. Ginsberg, Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies and Catskill Science Collaborative

David Kukle, Town of Hunter Councilman and Director of Food and Beverage at Hunter Mountain Ski Bowl, Inc.

Warren Hart, Deputy County Administrator, Greene County Economic Development, Tourism & Planning

Joshua Howard, Executive Director, New York - New Jersey Trail Conference

Adrienne Larys, President, Mountain Top Historical Society, Inc.

Lisa Lyons, Owner, Morgan Outdoors, Livingston Manor

Gilles Malkine, Architectural Modification Consultant, Resource Center for Accessible Living

Cathy Pedler, Director of Advocacy, Adirondack Mountain Club and Michael Barrett, Executive Director, ADK

Jeff Senterman, Executive Director, Catskill Center for Conservation and Development

Matthew Shook, Director of Development and Special Projects, Palisades Interstate Park Commission

Markly Wilson, Director of International Marketing, New York State Division of Tourism - I LOVE NY, and Ross Levi, Executive Director/Vice President, New York State Division of Tourism - I LOVE NY

Michelle Yost, Watershed Assistance Program Manager, Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District

Note: Melodie Mendez, listed in the press release, no longer participates in the CAG

Additional contributors:

Wendell George, Board member, Catskill Mountain Club

Maria Bedo-Calhoun, President, Catskill 3500 Club

Reed Sholtes, Region 1 staff, New York State Department of Transportation

Meeting facilitators (September – December, 2021):

CATSKILL STRATEGIC PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP

Appendix A -- List of Preparers

January 2022

Dr. Mamie Parker, Success Coach and Commissioner, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

Cheryl Amrani, Wildlife Biologist, USFWS (retired), and Conflict Resolution specialist.

DEC facilitators and participants:

Alicia Sullivan, Forester, Region 4

Anthony Luisi, Regional Director, Region 4

Bill Rudge, Natural Resource Supervisor, Region 3

Ian Dunn, Forester, Region 3

Jeff Rider, Assistant Division Director, Division of Lands and Forests

Josh Clague, Adirondack Park Coordinator

Katharine Petronis, Deputy Commissioner of Natural Resources

Kelly Turturro, Regional Director, Region 3

Laura DiBetta, Director of Outdoor Recreation

McCrea Burnham, Catskill Park Coordinator

Mikaela Hameline, Agency Training and Development Specialist

Peter Frank, Bureau Chief, Bureau of Forest Preserve Management

Peter Innes, former Assistant Division Director, Division of Lands and Forests

Sara Hart, Natural Resources Planner, Bureau of Forest Preserve Management

Appendix B: NYSDEC Press Release About Establishing the CAG

For Immediate Release: 10/21/2020

DEC ANNOUNCES STRATEGIC PLANNING INITIATIVE TO SUSTAINABLY MANAGE CATSKILL PARK RESOURCES

*New Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group will Develop Framework to Help
Balance Public Use Needs in Catskills*

*New Advisory Group Builds on Governor Cuomo's Commitment to Protect High-Traffic
Public Lands for Future Generations*

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos today announced the creation of a new strategic planning initiative to promote the sustainable management of public use in the Catskill Park, consistent with Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's proposal in his State of the State earlier this year. The organizations, entities, agencies, and elected officials participating in the Advisory Group will collaboratively provide recommendations to achieve actionable management solutions to help address the critical issues associated with the increased public use of the Catskill Park and protect the Park's resources for future generations.

"DEC and our local partners are thrilled to see more New Yorkers getting outside and exploring the Catskill Forest Preserve, but we must ensure that the uptick in visitors does not negatively impact the region's natural resources or quality of life," **Commissioner Seggos said.** "Governor Cuomo has helped assemble a team of talented and committed people who will work together cooperatively to provide real strategic solutions that support the Catskills' local economies, protect the environment, and provide a safe, quality recreational experience for the Park's visitors and residents."

The Governor's [2020 State of the State \(PDF\)](#) (leaves DEC's website) proposals recognized the need to preserve the Adirondack and Catskill forest preserves for future generations and directed the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to develop a framework to balance public use needs. Similar to the Adirondack High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group launched in 2019, DEC will facilitate the Catskills Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG), which is comprised of stakeholders with expertise in local government, recreation, natural resource protection, business, tourism, and other priority areas. DEC and partners continue to fulfill other elements of the State of the State proposal, including deploying sustainable trail crews to make trails more durable to increased use; analyzing and developing new visitor flow solutions to better manage traffic and hikers; and initiating education programs to promote stewardship practices that minimize the impact to natural resources and ensure positive recreational experiences for future generations.

New York State identified six goals for managing public use in the Catskill Park Region: ensure public safety in communities, along roadways, at trailheads, and in interior areas; address impacts and public safety in areas experiencing significant and unsustainable public use; protect natural resources and recreation infrastructure; provide a quality recreation experience for visitors and users of all backgrounds; support local economic vitality; and ensure that science/fact-driven decisions are made with the use of best available data.

The CAG, led by DEC's Division of Lands and Forests Bureau Chief Peter Frank, will create a framework of policy recommendations to achieve the initiative's goals, incorporate, expand, and/or modify recommendations to date to identify priorities, determine whether additional data is needed to inform the group, and identify actions for implementation. In addition, to preserve these singular natural resources for future generations, New York will develop a framework to balance public use needs. The group includes:

- **Melissa Abramson**, Local Brand Engagement and Impact, Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI)
- **Ramsay Adams**, Founder and Executive Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper
- **Patrick Barnes**, Region 1 Director, New York State Department of Transportation
- **Adam Bosch**, Director of Public Affairs, New York City Department of Environmental Protection
- **David Brooks**, Supervisor, Town of Denning
- **Dr. Joshua R. Ginsberg**, Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, Catskill Science Collaborative
- **David Kukle**, Councilman, Town of Hunter, and Director of Food and Beverage at Hunter Mountain Ski Bowl, Inc.
- **Warren Hart**, Deputy County Administrator, Greene County Economic Development, Tourism & Planning
- **Joshua Howard**, Executive Director, New York - New Jersey Trail Conference
- **Adrienne Larys**, President, Mountain Top Historical Society, Inc.
- **Ross Levi**, Executive Director / Vice President, and **Markly Wilson**, Director of International Marketing, New York State Division of Tourism - I LOVE NY
- **Lisa Lyons**, Owner, Morgan Outdoors, Livingston Manor
- **Gilles Malkine**, Architectural Modification Consultant, Resource Center for Accessible Living
- **Melodie Mendez**, Outings Leader, NYC Latino Outdoors
- **Cathy Pedler**, Director of Advocacy, and **Michael Barrett**, Executive Director, Adirondack Mountain Club
- **Jeff Senterman**, Executive Director, Catskill Center
- **Matthew Shook**, Director of Development and Special Projects, Palisades Interstate Park Commission
- **Michelle Yost**, Watershed Assistance Program Manager, Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District

The CAG will develop recommendations that address recreational use and capacity issues of the Catskill Forest Preserve, with a particular focus on those places experiencing high and increasing use demand, including the Route 23A corridor. To help reduce congestion, DEC is already [highlighting alternative hikes](#) and activities elsewhere in the State and [promoting sustainable use with partners](#) through Leave No Trace principles to help visitors understand their role in protecting the resource. The CAG will meet this fall and provide opportunities for broader public input. The group will be charged with finalizing and submitting a strategic planning framework to DEC Commissioner

Seggos by the end of 2021. Upon completion of the framework, DEC will release a draft Strategic Plan for Managing Public Use in the Catskill Park Region for public review and comment.

Governor Cuomo's commitment to protect public lands and improve recreational opportunities for visitors includes Adventure NY, Parks 2020, Outdoors Day, First Time Camper, Hike with Us-Catskills, and the Catskills Fire Tower Five Challenge. As a result, visits to the Catskills are on the rise. Trails in the Catskills have seen a 60 percent increase in use between 2007 and 2017. Overall, tourism in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks are up 22 percent since 2011.

Appendix C: CAG’s Mission, Vision, Charge, and Goals

MISSION

The Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) is comprised of stakeholders with expertise in local government, recreation, natural resource protection, business, tourism, and other priority areas. The CAG has been formed to develop recommendations that address recreational use and capacity issues of the Catskill Park, with a particular focus on those places experiencing high and increasing use demand, including the Route 23a corridor. The recommendations will be actionable management solutions that protect the aesthetics and natural areas of the Park, while promoting positive visitor experiences and public safety and enhancing the quality of life for the Park’s residents.

VISION

Background. The Catskill Park is a scenic mosaic of forests, streams, and lakes interwoven with small hamlets, villages, and towns. The Park has a long history of welcoming visitors to enjoy its scenic beauty, heritage, and outdoor recreation opportunities. In the past several years, and especially during COVID-19, visitation to the Catskill Park increased significantly and has presented unprecedented challenges to the Park’s ecosystems, residents, managers, businesses, and visitors alike. The Catskill Strategic Advisory Group was formed to update and build upon the body of work done by its predecessors and develop a strategic framework to manage the Park for the next ten years.

Vision. The Catskill Park will strive to be welcoming, accessible, and inclusive, offering a year-round sense of place for all who reside or work here, or visit its historic communities and legendary mountains, streams, and lakes. Through collaboration, investment, and education, the Park’s managers and stakeholders will increase the stature of the Catskill Park—honor its vibrant culture, protect its biodiversity, offer first-rate recreational opportunities, and always advance the economic vitality of its communities. The Park will be a source of pride for visitors and residents alike, and it will inspire everyone to embrace a culture of stewardship and to pass down a love of nature and untrammelled places to future generations.

To this end, the Park’s residents, visitors, and organizations will collaboratively:

- Strive for maximum accessibility for all, without obstacles, no matter their gender, race, ethnicity, age, economic background, or disability.
- Balance the use of resources to ensure that residents have an outstanding quality of life, local businesses thrive and enjoy growth, and tourism benefits the local and regional economy.
- Care for the Park’s wild and native flora and fauna, and firmly protect its sensitive or rare natural resources.
- Ensure public safety within communities, along roadways, and at trailheads.
- Provide a quality recreational experience.

CHARGE

The CAG is charged by the Commissioner of DEC to develop short- and long-term recommendations. These recommendations will:

- Incorporate, expand, and/or modify recommendations made to date to address recreational use and capacity issues of the Catskill Park by building upon existing initiatives where possible,
- Be based on information currently available and address whether additional data is needed to inform recommendations,
- Identify priorities, and
- Inform future planning and management actions that will make the Catskill Park a model of exemplary wildland management.

GOALS

The CAG recommendations will achieve the following six goals:

1. Ensure public safety within the communities, along roadways, at trailheads, and in interior areas where recreation is occurring.
2. Address impacts and public safety of areas where significant, unsustainable public use is occurring.
3. Protect natural resources and recreation infrastructure.
4. Provide a quality recreation experience for visitors and users of all backgrounds.
5. Support local economic vitality; and
6. Ensure that science/factual driven decisions are made with the use of best available data.

Appendix D: Management Actions in Place for 2021 Implementation

The following DEC management actions, with the support of local partners, are already in place and being implemented to address issues stemming from increased use in the Catskill Park. The CAG would also like to recognize and thank the hard work and contributions of other organizations, too numerous to list here, whose efforts help to improve the experience of everyone recreating in the Park.

- Working with partners, DEC expanded several seasonal Catskill Stewards Programs. The stewards educate visitors about appropriate recreation in the Forest Preserve and emphasize Leave No Trace principles and ways to protect our natural resources:
 - 7 days/week coverage at the Blue Hole and Kaaterskill Falls and 3 days/week coverage at the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve. This was accomplished by expanding a contract with the Catskill Center, which is funded by DEC, the Catskill Center, the Rondout Neversink Stream Program, the REI Foundation, Greene County Tourism, the Platte Clove Community, and the Catskill Mountain Club.
 - 5 days/week ridge runner coverage for the summer season on backcountry trails with increased use throughout the Park, funded in part from the Aid to Localities budget line for 2021, as well as significant contributions from other public, private, and non-government organizations. The ridge runner also provides recommendations for alternate backcountry destinations throughout the Catskill Park.
 - Added stewards to areas with increasing use in the Park's southwest, to include Beaverkill day-use area, Big Pond, and Crystal Lake, via a contract with Catskill Mountainkeeper funded through the Aid to Localities budget line.
 - Added a seasonal fire tower steward 5 days/week who supplements volunteer stewards at Hunter Mountain and Red Hill Fire Towers, via a grant to the Catskill Center.
 - Continued a Summit Stewards Program via a contract with the NY-NJ Trail Conference (with funding from the EPF and partners, including the Catskill 3500 Club and the Trail Conference) to include areas with increasing use in the Slide Mountain Wilderness and the Windham-Blackhead Range Wilderness.
- DEC implemented a volunteer "Adopt-A-Trailhead" program to educate visitors at popular trailheads. Initial agreement has been consummated with the Catskill 3500 Club at Slide Mountain and Woodland Valley (Region 3). The State is currently working on an agreement for a volunteer to take care of the Devils Path trailhead located on Prediger Road (Region 4).
- DEC hired 5 Assistant Forest Rangers to assist Forest Ranger staff in many areas throughout the Catskill Park including two at Kaaterskill Falls, one covering Greene County and the Devil's Path, one stationed at Alder Lake, and one working in areas with increasing use in the Slide Mountain Wilderness.

- DEC expanded the permit system for the Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor to require permits 7 days/week, May 15 - September 15, for both day use and primitive camping.
- DEC installed additional trail and vehicle counters in several areas with increasing use to gain a sense of actual visitor use numbers, which can be compared to voluntary trail register entry numbers.
- DEC implemented a "NYSDEC Alerts" Twitter program to provide real-time information about site capacity at some trailheads with increasing use.
- Outreach efforts were expanded via DEC's recently launched 'Love Our NY Lands' campaign to improve public safety and encourage visitors to State-owned and managed lands to practice responsible recreation.
- DEC worked with NYS DOT and the towns of Hunter and Catskill to address visitor use issues along the State Route 23a corridor. In addition to improving signage, DOT is planning a speed study for the corridor this year, which will aid in planning for future management opportunities in the corridor.
- DEC worked with NYS DOT and the Town of Denning to address visitor use issues along County Route 42 (Peekamoose Road), clearly defining appropriate parking locations.
- DEC significantly increased the number of sanitary facilities in many locations with increasing use to accommodate anticipated growth in visitation, based on 2020 experiences.
- DEC operations staff spent significant time this spring clearing trails and improving trailheads throughout the Catskill Park. Volunteer Stewardship Agreements with user groups have contributed to improved trail conditions as well.
- DEC and the Mountain Top Historical Society in Haines Falls partnered again this year to allow public parking at Mountain Top so visitors can access their desired Kaaterskill Clove destinations and Kaaterskill Falls via the Kaaterskill Rail Trail.
- The Catskill Center continued visitor services at The Catskills Visitor Center (CVC), expanding seasonal staffing to provide additional interpretive services at the Center and the Upper Esopus Fire Tower, on site, via funding from the EPF and the Catskill Center. Located in the heart of the Park on the Route 28 corridor, the CVC is the primary source for information and educational opportunities, and the Catskill Center is in the process of a major redesign of interior interpretive displays in the CVC, which will fully re-open to the public in September 2021.

Appendix E: Overview and Results of the Public Survey Conducted by the CAG

Overview

The CAG conducted a broad-reaching public survey between Feb. 26 – March 19, 2021, to better understand public perceptions of the primary strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the Catskill Park, and to inform this interim report.

A total of 3,797 responses were received, one of the highest levels ever for DEC. The particularly high volume of responses shows that people feel a connection to the Catskills region, and they are deeply interested in sharing their opinions.

DEC made the survey available in both English and Spanish. The survey was promoted across DEC communication channels and shared and distributed by many members of the CAG and other organizations. In support of the following summary, detailed charts may be found in Appendix C.

The survey was divided into three sections:

1. Respondent's experience with the Catskill Park.
2. Thoughts on challenges, opportunities, and solutions.
3. Demographic questions.

Experience with the Catskill Park

Most respondents visit the Park for recreation, or are full-time or part-time residents. The favorite activities respondents participate in when visiting or recreating in the Park are:

1. Hiking (85.37%)
2. Leaf peeping/scenic drives (46.27%)
3. Camping (41.46%)
4. Wildlife watching/birdwatching (39.66%)
5. Visiting historic attractions (39.31%)
6. Farmers markets (37.88%)

Other popular activities are snowshoeing, other agritourism/food-related activities, fishing, and nature study. Popular write-in activities were climbing (rock/ice) and horseback riding.

Participants were asked where they typically go when visiting or recreating in the Catskill Park. The most common response was "all over the region." The most popular specific locations were Hunter/Tannersville; the 3500 peaks/high peaks; Phoenicia; North-South Lake; and Windham. The response "hiking" was also provided frequently.

The top two selections for ways people get their information about the Catskills region were DEC's digital communication channels and word of mouth/friends/family. Digital communications overall were the primary means to obtain information. Social media is

likely even more significant if we consider that word of mouth nowadays happens largely through social media. Write-in responses often cited physical maps as sources of information.

Thoughts on Challenges, Opportunities, and Solutions

More than 60 percent of respondents indicated they experienced barriers to visiting outdoor recreation areas in the Park. The three most frequently mentioned barriers were:

- Crowding, overcrowding, congestion, too many people.
- Not enough parking and too many cars.
- Seeing trash and litter, or other issues related to Leave No Trace.

Also noted were insufficient cell phone service; rude, inconsiderate, and disrespectful behavior; and a need for more enforcement, tickets, fines, and police.

The following are the top five priorities respondents think are most important for land managers and caretakers to address:

1. Impacts to natural resources (63.57%)
2. Decreasing litter (50.64%)
3. Overcrowding (46.71%)
4. Parking (39.83%)
5. Expanding education and outreach around sustainable outdoor recreation (35.44%)

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide their suggestions for ways to improve their experience recreating in the Catskills region. A high number of respondents indicated they feel no improvements are needed. Of those who did provide suggestions, the most frequently mentioned suggestions were (See Appendix C for more detail):

1. Parking improvements (e.g., more and improved parking, shuttles from parking areas, better parking at trailheads).
2. Location-specific suggestions (e.g., extend the Ashokan Rail Trail, an off-road walking path for Rt 23A, increase the number of Rangers at Kaaterskill Falls, connect the Elm Ridge trail system to the Village of Windham).
3. Enforcement (e.g., littering, illegal parking, property maintenance codes, dogs on leash).
4. Cell service (e.g., more coverage is needed for safety, Shandaken and Rt 28).
5. Education (e.g., Leave No Trace and Recreate Responsibly messaging).
6. Limiting use at areas where use is increasing or during peak times (e.g., use of permits to reduce the number of people on trails).

7. Address litter (e.g., organize cleanups, educational campaigns, public trash containers).
8. Forest Rangers (e.g., more Forest Rangers, Assistant Forest Rangers, and patrols are needed).

A final, open-ended question enabled respondents to provide additional feedback. Several themes emerged from these comments, the following being the top responses:

- Need for increased public education and information, including on responsible recreation/outdoor ethics and available services and amenities.
- Need for better protection of natural resources, including habitat, watersheds, and keeping lands Forever Wild.
- Concerns about the Catskill Park being too crowded and some of the possible contributors, such as social media and list chasing (i.e., bagging peaks over 3500' or crossing things off lists of places to see or things to do).
- Positive comments on the Catskill Park and its beauty.
- Comments related to the local economy and local communities, such as attracting residents and jobs, better connecting communities to recreation opportunities, and improving the quality of life for residents.
- Infrastructure and visitor management needs, including roadways, Kaaterskill Clove needs, parking, safe pedestrian access from parking to trailheads, welcome signage, stormwater management, and the modernization of infrastructure.
- Comments related to the need for more Rangers and other staff at DEC, as well as increased funding for the Park.
- Comments supporting the enforcement of existing regulations.
- Sense that there is an “us versus them” mentality and general negative perception of visitors by residents.

Demographics

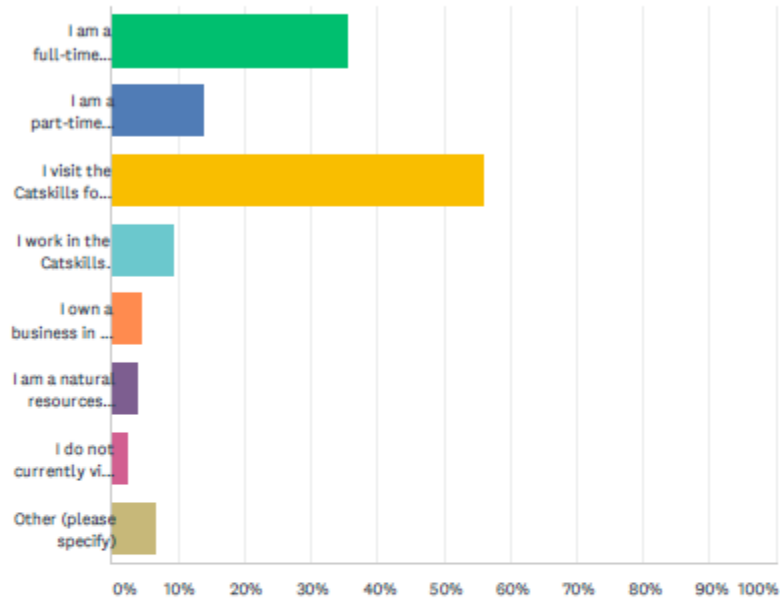
See below for a summary of demographic data collected from the survey.

Results of Public Survey Conducted by CAG

Note: Due to the nature of the survey questions being both open-ended and closed, charts vary based on whether they were able to be generated by SurveyMonkey or were completed by CAG subcommittee members and DEC staff.

Q1 What is your primary connection to the Catskills? Check all that apply.

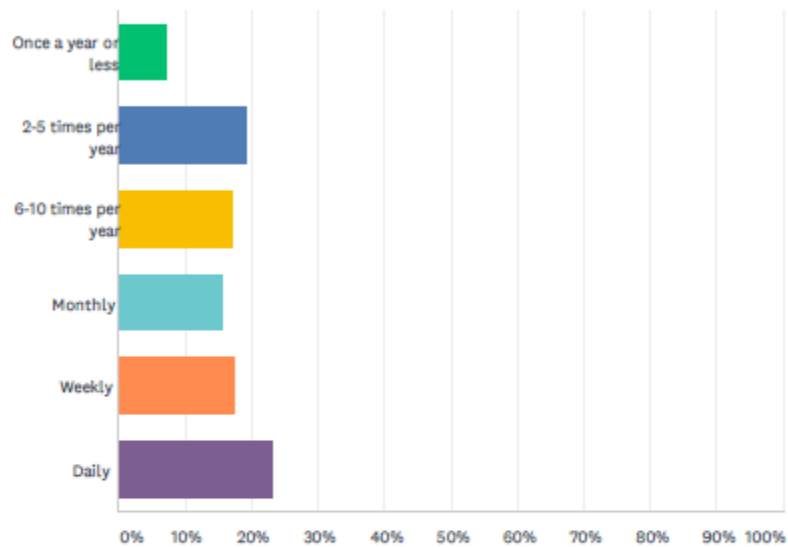
Answered: 3,780 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I am a full-time resident.	35.32%	1,335
I am a part-time resident.	13.84%	523
I visit the Catskills for recreation/leisure.	56.16%	2,123
I work in the Catskills.	9.23%	349
I own a business in the Catskills.	4.44%	168
I am a natural resources volunteer in the Catskills (e.g., trails, fire tower, etc.).	3.73%	141
I do not currently visit the Catskills, but care about them.	2.57%	97
Other (please specify)	6.72%	254
Total Respondents: 3,780		

Q2 How often do you visit the Catskills or recreate in the region?

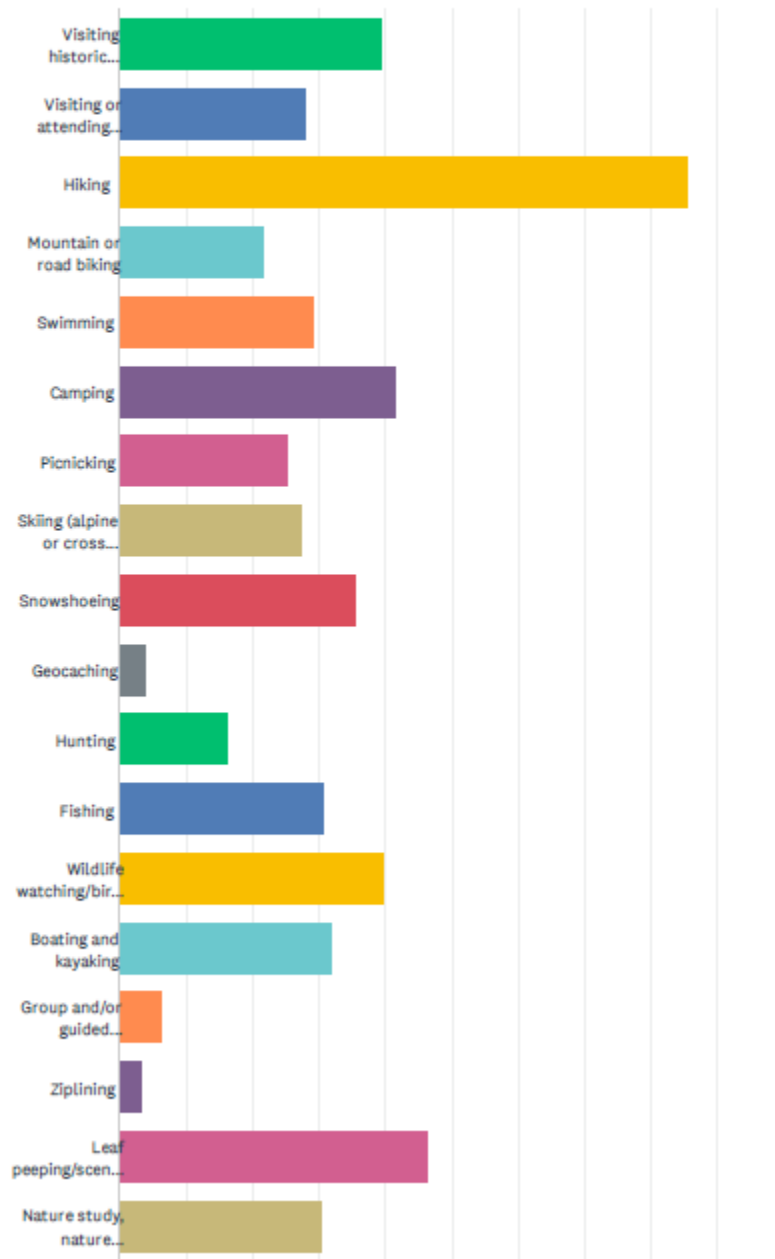
Answered: 3,747 Skipped: 37



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Once a year or less	7.31%	274
2-5 times per year	19.35%	725
6-10 times per year	17.11%	641
Monthly	15.64%	586
Weekly	17.43%	653
Daily	23.17%	868
TOTAL		3,747

Q3 What are some of your favorite activities to do in the Catskills? Check all that apply.

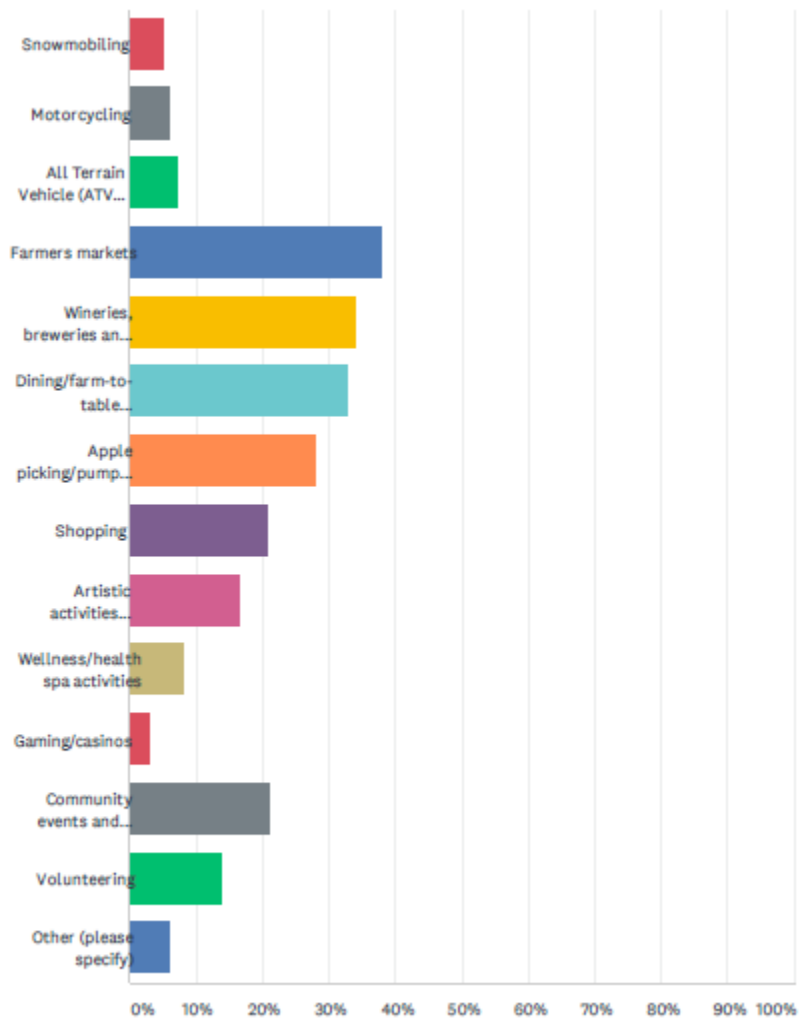
Answered: 3,780 Skipped: 4



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CATSKILL STRATEGIC PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP

**Appendix E – Overview of Public Survey and Results of Public Survey Conducted by the CAG
January 2022**



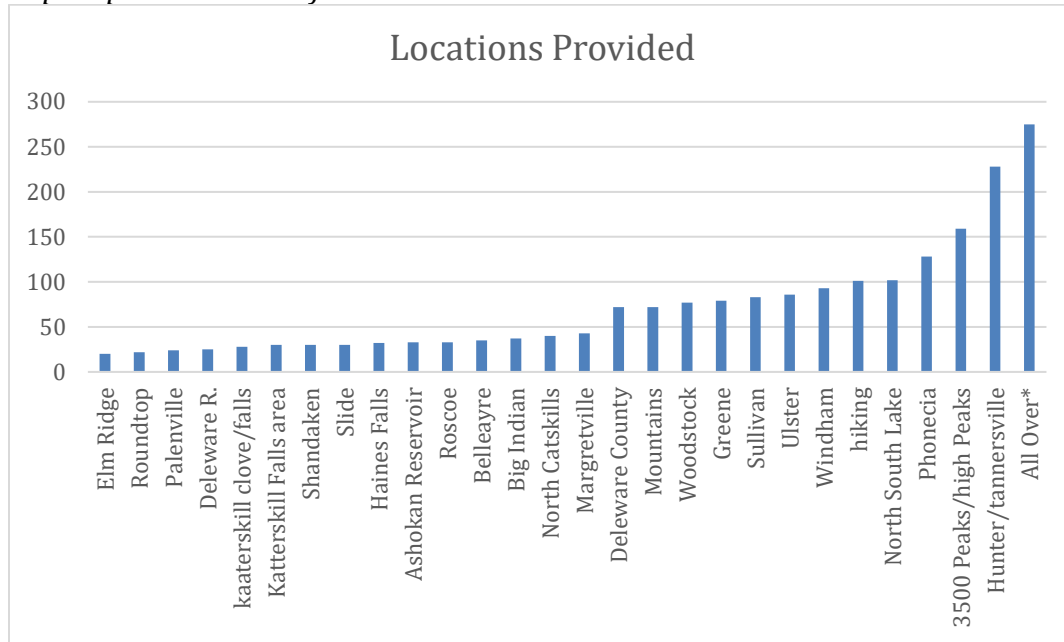
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Visiting historic attractions	39.31%	1,486
Visiting or attending cultural attractions (museums, theaters, musical performances)	27.80%	1,051
Hiking	85.37%	3,227
Mountain or road biking	21.48%	812
Swimming	29.39%	1,111
Camping	41.46%	1,567
Picnicking	25.11%	949
Skiing (alpine or cross country)	27.49%	1,039
Snowshoeing	35.32%	1,335
Geocaching	3.78%	143
Hunting	16.35%	618
Fishing	30.85%	1,166
Wildlife watching/birdwatching	39.66%	1,499
Boating and kayaking	31.80%	1,202
Group and/or guided recreational activities	6.35%	240
Ziplining	3.07%	116
Leaf peeping/scenic drives	46.27%	1,749
Nature study, nature photography or other related	30.42%	1,150
Snowmobiling	5.05%	191
Motorcycling	6.01%	227
All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) riding	7.17%	271
Farmers markets	37.88%	1,432
Wineries, breweries and distilleries	34.05%	1,287
Dining/farm-to-table experiences	32.65%	1,234
Apple picking/pumpkin picking/agri-tourism	28.04%	1,060
Shopping	20.71%	783
Artistic activities (drawing, painting, photography, etc.)	16.61%	628
Wellness/health spa activities	7.86%	297
Gaming/casinos	3.02%	114
Community events and activities	21.19%	801
Volunteering	13.70%	518
Other (please specify)	6.16%	233

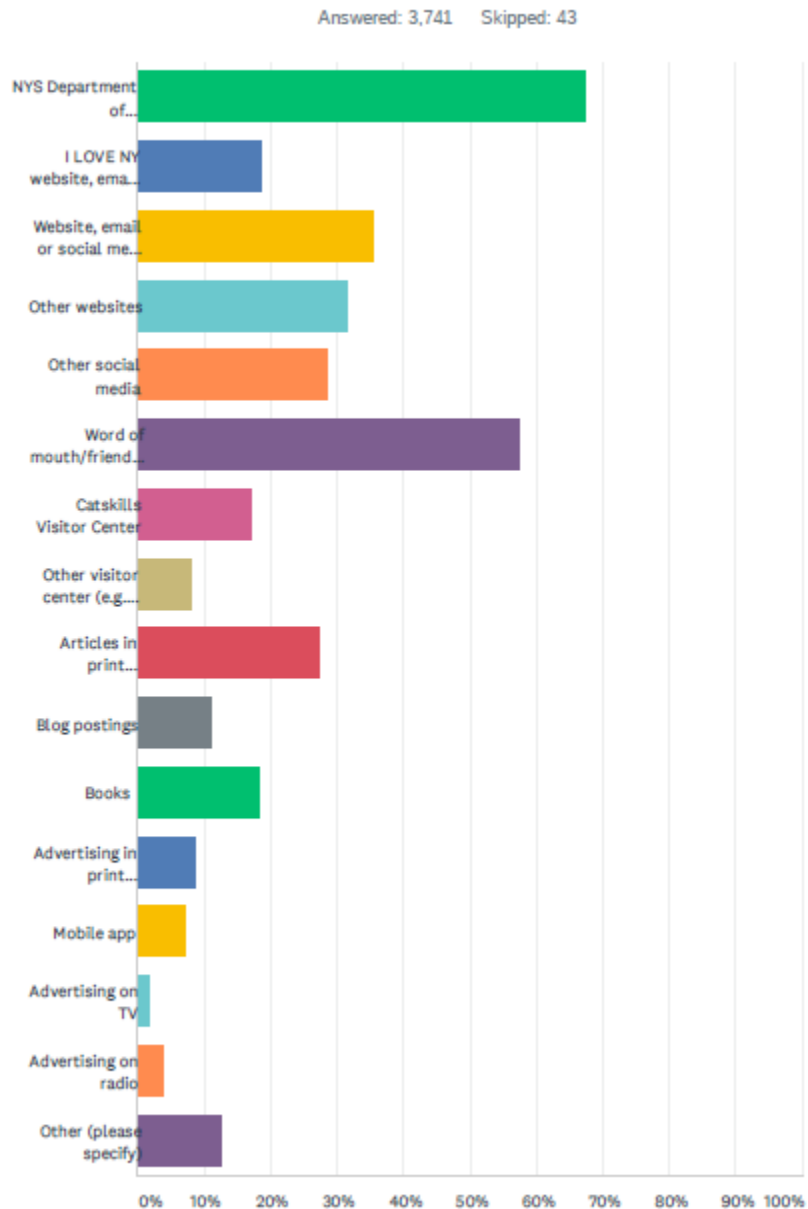
Q4 Where do you typically go when visiting the Catskills or recreate in the region?

Top responses were as follows:



*All Over/Anywhere/Catskills/Catskill Park/DEC lands and trails/different places/entire region/everywhere

Q5 Where do you get information on the Catskills? Check all that apply.



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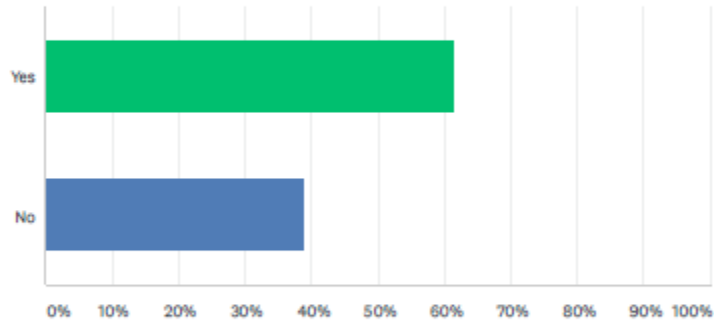
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) website, email or social media	67.44%	2,523
I LOVE NY website, email or social media	18.71%	700
Website, email or social media or another destination marketing organization	35.42%	1,325
Other websites	31.68%	1,185
Other social media	28.66%	1,072
Word of mouth/friends/family	57.26%	2,142
Catskills Visitor Center	17.21%	644
Other visitor center (e.g., New York State Welcome Center, Mountain Top Historical Society)	8.18%	306
Articles in print publications	27.40%	1,025
Blog postings	11.01%	412
Books	18.20%	681
Advertising in print publications	8.85%	331
Mobile app	7.16%	268
Advertising on TV	1.66%	62
Advertising on radio	3.85%	144
Other (please specify)	12.51%	468
Total Respondents: 3,741		

Q6 What do you enjoy or appreciate most about the Catskills? List up to three things.

Natural Beauty	32.25%
Outdoor recreation	24.32%
Open Space	14.22%
Natural Features	8.44%
Peacefulness	4.89%
Close to Home	3.40%
Clean	2.67%
Accessibility	1.84%
Wildlife	1.75%
Cultural Activities	1.71%
Less Crowded	1.46%
Forest Health	1.43%
Weather/Seasons	0.98%
History	0.57%

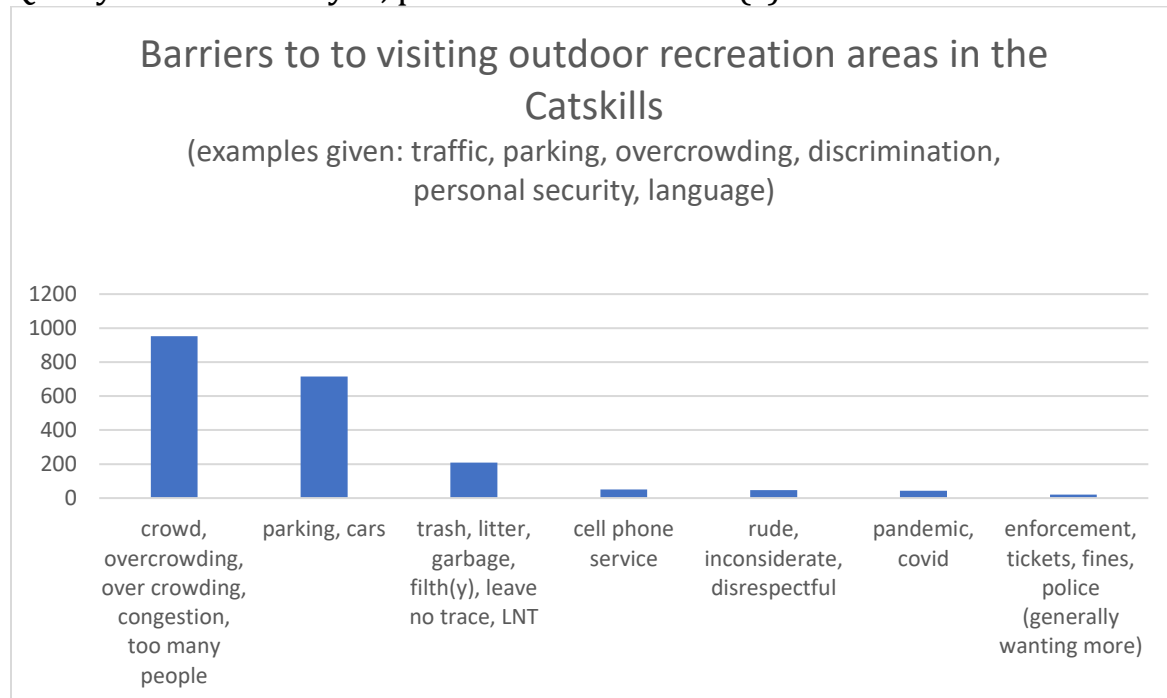
Q7 Have you experienced barriers to visiting outdoor recreation areas in the Catskills (for example, traffic, parking, overcrowding, discrimination, personal security, language)?

Answered: 3,240 Skipped: 544



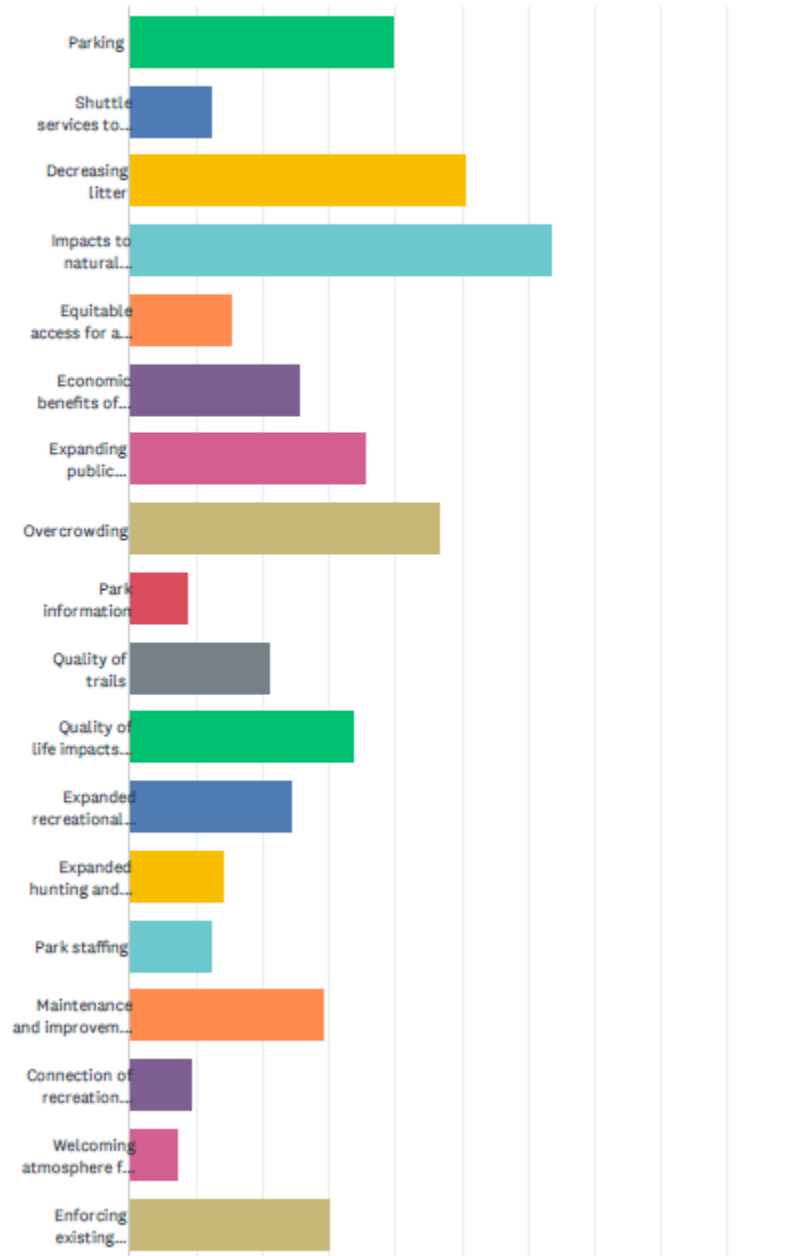
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	61.23%	1,984
No	38.77%	1,256
TOTAL		3,240

Q8 If you answered yes, please list the barrier(s).



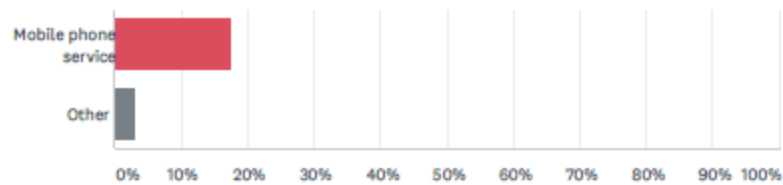
Q9 What are the top five priorities you think are most important for land managers and caretakers to address? Please choose only five.

Answered: 3,256 Skipped: 528



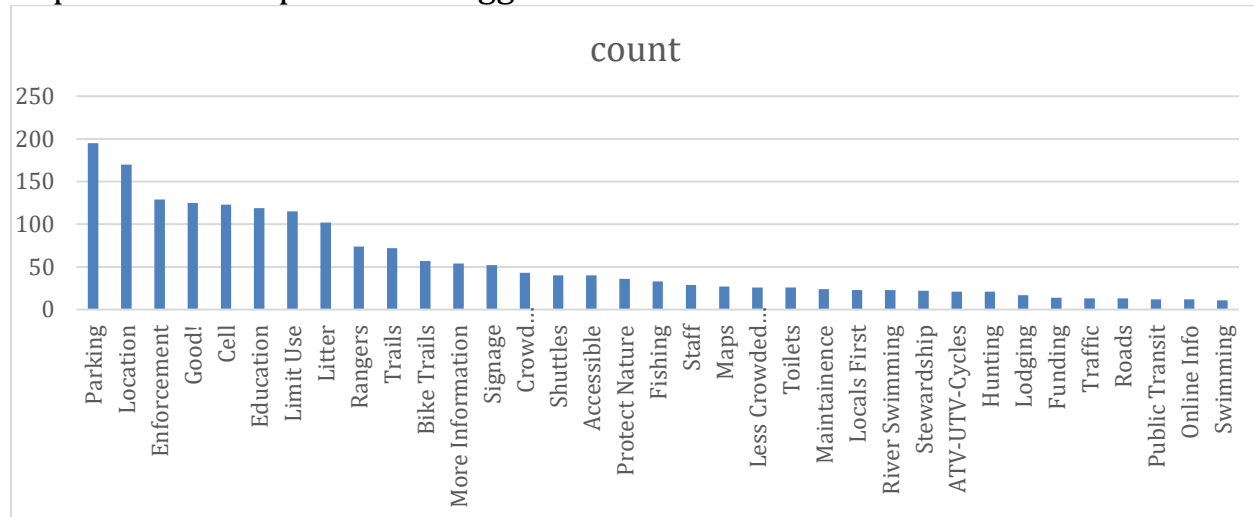
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
	39.83% 1,297
Parking	
Shuttle services to trailheads	12.25% 399
Decreasing litter	50.64% 1,649
Impacts to natural resources	63.57% 2,070
Equitable access for all visitors (e.g., easy access to trail and parking information; welcoming diversity; information in different languages)	15.29% 498
Economic benefits of tourism for local communities (e.g., restaurants, shops, etc.)	25.58% 833
Expanding public education and outreach around responsible outdoor recreation	35.44% 1,154
Overcrowding	46.71% 1,521
Park information	8.78% 286
Quality of trails	20.82% 678
Quality of life impacts to local communities (e.g., traffic, congestion, litter)	33.78% 1,100
Expanded recreational opportunities (e.g., more hiking or biking trails, picnic areas, wildlife viewing areas, etc.)	24.29% 791
Expanded hunting and fishing opportunities	14.28% 465
Park staffing	12.44% 405
Maintenance and improvement of park infrastructure (trails, campgrounds, visitor center, fishing access, parking areas, etc.)	29.12% 948
Connection of recreation infrastructure to community main streets	9.28% 302
Welcoming atmosphere for visitors	7.40% 241
Enforcing existing regulations	30.04% 978
Mobile phone service	17.32% 564
Other	2.95% 96
Total Respondents: 3,256	

Q10 Are there ways in which your experience in the Catskills could be improved? List up to three suggestions.

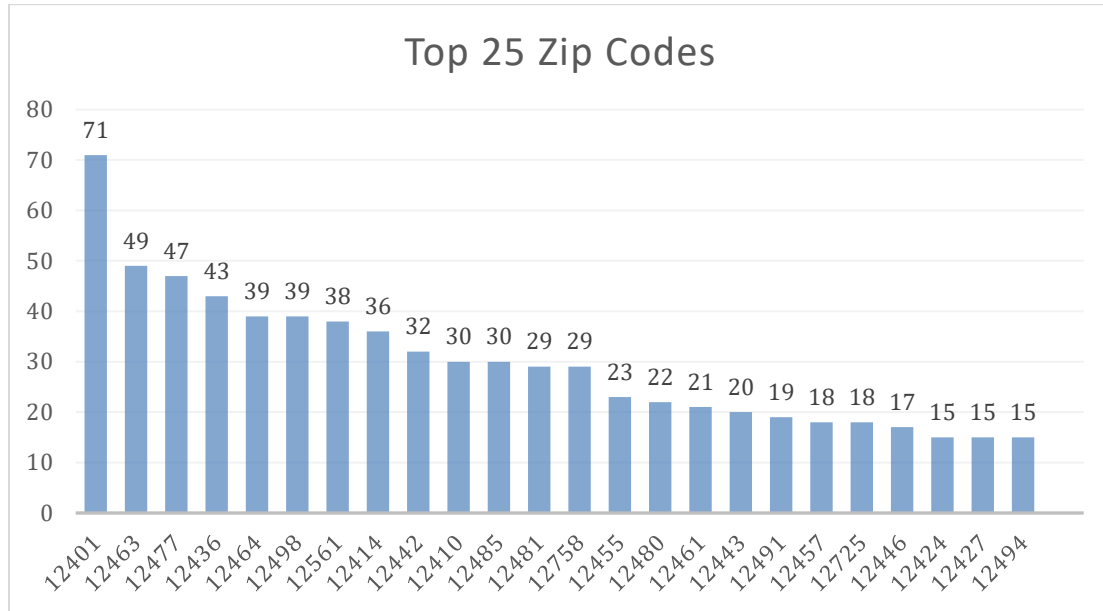


Q11 Please use this space to provide any additional feedback you have about the strengths, challenges, opportunities or desires for the future of the Catskills region.

The summary of responses to this question can be found in the beginning of this Appendix, under 'Overview of responses.'

Q12 What is your zip code?

2887 respondents provided zip codes. There were more than 990 unique zip codes. Below are the top 25 zip codes provided.



Zip code	City	Percentage
12401	Kingston	1.836%
12463	Palenville	1.267%
12477	Saugerties	1.215%
12436	Haines Falls	1.112%
12464	Phoenicia	1.008%
12498	Woodstock	1.008%
12561	New Paltz	0.982%
12414	Catskill	0.931%
12442	Hunter	0.827%
12410	Big Indian	0.776%
12485	Tannersville	0.776%
12481	Shokan	0.750%
12758	Livingston Manner	0.750%
12455	Margaretville	0.595%
12480	Shandaken	0.569%
12461	Olivebridge	0.543%
12443	Hurley	0.517%
12491	West Hurley	0.491%
12457	Mount Tremper	0.465%

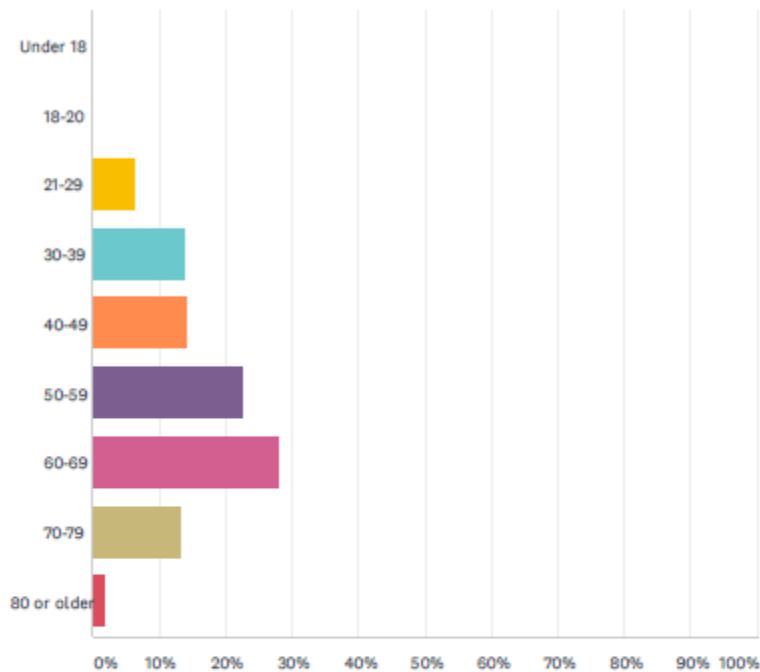
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12725	Claryville	0.465%
12446	Kerhonkson	0.440%
12424	East Jewett	0.388%
12427	Elka Park	0.388%
12494	West Shokan	0.388%

Q13 What is your age range?

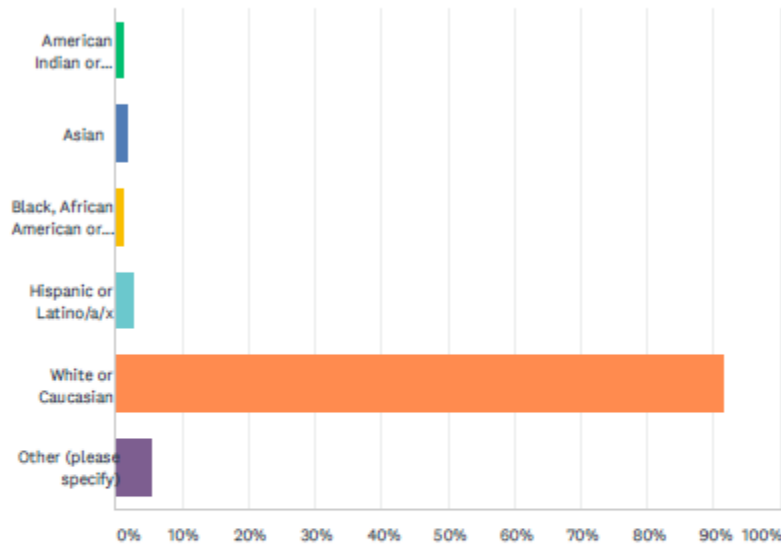
Answered: 2,953 Skipped: 831



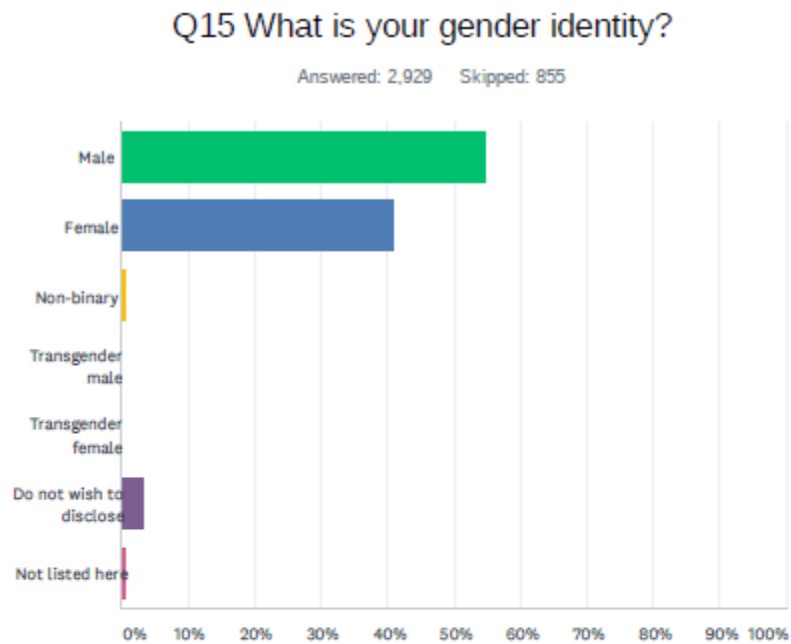
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.14%	4
18-20	0.20%	6
21-29	6.26%	185
30-39	13.82%	408
40-49	13.92%	411
50-59	22.62%	668
60-69	27.90%	824
70-79	13.24%	391
80 or older	1.90%	56
TOTAL		2,953

Q14 How would you describe yourself? Check all that apply.

Answered: 2,885 Skipped: 899



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.18%	34
Asian	1.84%	53
Black, African American or African Heritage	1.07%	31
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	2.77%	80
White or Caucasian	91.33%	2,635
Other (please specify)	5.44%	157
Total Respondents: 2,885		



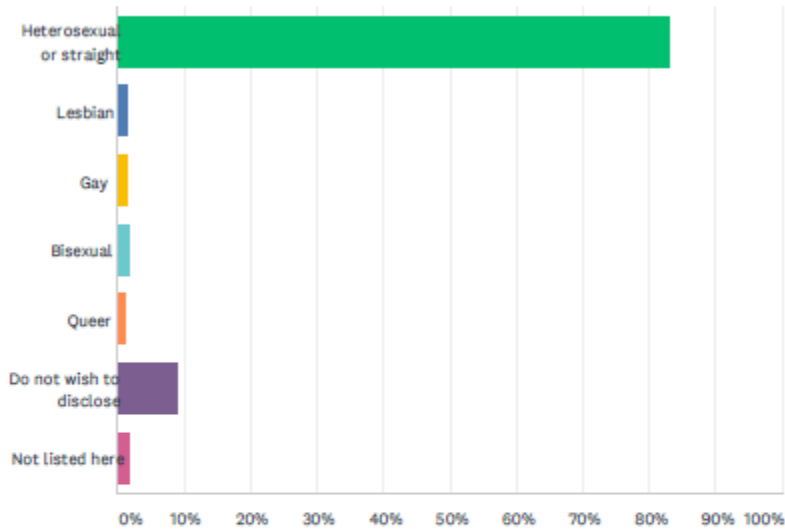
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	54.83%	1,606
Female	40.76%	1,194
Non-binary	0.41%	12
Transgender male	0.03%	1
Transgender female	0.14%	4
Do not wish to disclose	3.21%	94
Not listed here	0.61%	18
TOTAL		2,929

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Q16 Do you consider yourself to be:

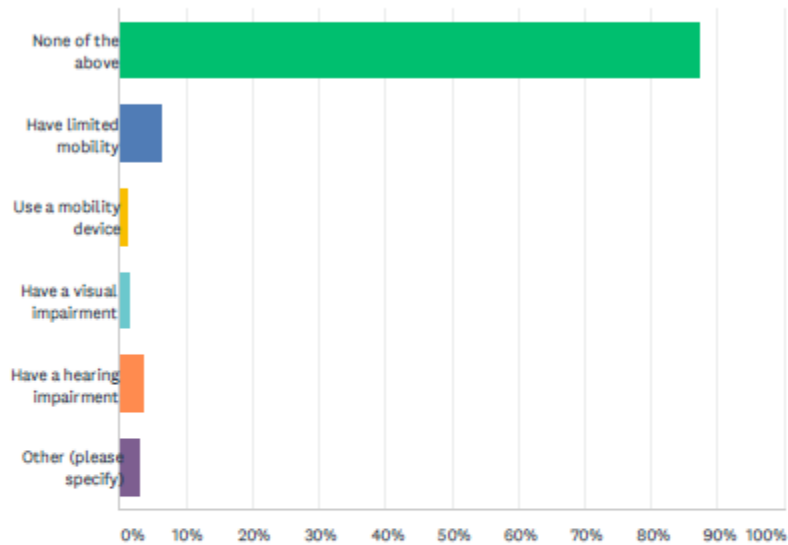
Answered: 2,886 Skipped: 898



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Heterosexual or straight	82.95%	2,394
Lesbian	1.42%	41
Gay	1.42%	41
Bisexual	1.94%	56
Queer	1.25%	36
Do not wish to disclose	9.08%	262
Not listed here	1.94%	56
TOTAL		2,886

Q17 Do any of the following apply to your recreational abilities?

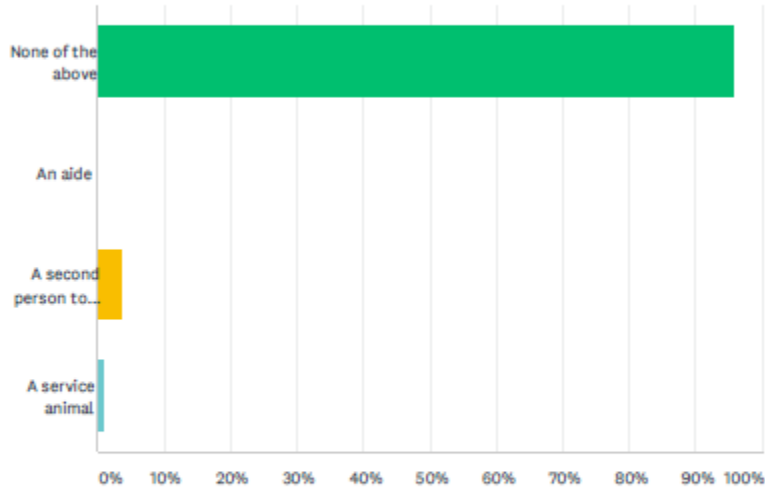
Answered: 2,923 Skipped: 861



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	87.31%	2,552
Have limited mobility	6.26%	183
Use a mobility device	1.09%	32
Have a visual impairment	1.40%	41
Have a hearing impairment	3.49%	102
Other (please specify)	2.91%	85
Total Respondents: 2,923		

Q18 When visiting outdoor recreation areas, do you require any of the following?

Answered: 2,949 Skipped: 835



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	95.83%	2,826
An aide	0.27%	8
A second person to accompany you	3.49%	103
A service animal	0.78%	23
Total Respondents: 2,949		

Appendix F: NYSDEC Press Release About Establishing the Catskill Park Coordinator Position

For Release: Monday, November 29, 2021

DEC Announces First-Ever Adirondack and Catskill Parks 'Coordinators' to Promote Sustainable Use Planning and Implementation for Forest Preserves

New DEC Coordinators for Adirondack and Catskill Parks to Work with Forest Preserve Communities and Other Stakeholders to Help Protect Natural Resources and Public Safety

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos today announced the creation of new coordinator positions to help lead DEC's ongoing and collaborative efforts to promote sustainable use of public lands in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves. Proposed by the High Peaks Strategic Advisory Group (HPAG) and aligned with Catskills Advisory Group (CAG) discussions to date, these new DEC staff positions will help coordinate efforts proposed and undertaken with the multiple communities and regions that comprise the Adirondack and Catskill Parks to better guide efforts to address the unique problems caused by the uptick in visitors to the two Forest Preserves. Both longtime staffers from DEC's Division of Lands and Forests, McCrea Burnham will serve as the Catskill Coordinator and Josh Clague will serve as the Adirondack Coordinator. In these new coordinator roles, the two will be instrumental in helping to implement the recommendations of each advisory group and advancing actions to address increased visitation in each region.

"As more New Yorkers discover the beauty of the Adirondacks and Catskills, DEC continues to build upon our ongoing efforts to protect these unique natural resources by working with our partners to address the increase in visitation we've seen over the last year and the last decade," **Commissioner Seggos said.** "As our new Forest Preserve coordinators, Josh Clague and McCrea Burnham bring decades of experience collaborating with local stakeholders to help address the environmental, economic, and public safety challenges affecting Forest Preserve communities. I am excited to see their work get underway."

Josh Clague, Adirondacks Coordinator, said, "Since joining DEC's Forest Preserve Management program 14 years ago, I've gained a deep appreciation for the Adirondack Park and all it has to offer those who live, work, and visit there. I'm honored to have this opportunity to serve the Adirondacks in this new capacity, and to work with our partners in finding balanced solutions to the challenges that lie ahead."

McCrea Burnham, Catskills Coordinator, said, "Having grown up in the Catskills, this is an exciting opportunity for me. The Catskills and the natural resources of New York helped to create the person I am today, and I look forward to working with our partners to shape the future of the Catskills together."

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of public lands to New Yorkers as visitors flocked in high numbers to State Parks and lands in search of respite outdoors. However, even before this latest rise in use, the last several years have seen significantly increased visitation to destinations in both the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, spurred in

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part by social media and an increased appreciation of the outdoors. DEC and local partners recognized the need to preserve the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves for future generations and to develop a framework to balance public use needs. DEC launched HPAG in 2019, and CAG in 2020. Each of the advisory groups is comprised of stakeholders with expertise in local government, recreation, natural resource protection, business, tourism, and other priority areas.

The coordinator position fulfills a recommendation included in the final HPAG report issued earlier this year and is aligned with CAG discussions, as this group works to finalize its own interim report of recommendations. The coordinators will help organize the implementation of management plans, develop consensus, oversee common resources, coordinate shared challenges that cross jurisdictional boundaries, and help incorporate diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice into educational efforts and operational frameworks. In these roles, Burnham and Clague will enhance coordination among relevant state agencies, local governments, businesses, marketing, environmental, and other non-government organizations. This will ensure focused attention on construction and maintenance of recreation infrastructure, providing safe situations for users while minimizing impacts to the environment, and fostering partnerships to help implement stewardship responsibilities.

The naming of the coordinators expands upon efforts already underway to ensure the protection of natural resources and public safety, particularly in the Route 23 corridor of the Catskills and the Route 73 corridor of the Adirondack High Peaks. Working with local governments, agency partners including the Department of Transportation, New York State Police, and other stakeholders, measures have included: variable electronic message boards and additional signage; the pilot parking reservation system at the Adirondack Mountain Reserve; updated regulations for the Peekamoose Blue Hole; bolstered social media outreach and education through the Love Our New York Lands campaign; the new Route 73 hiker shuttle; and increased law enforcement presence and parking enforcement, among other steps consistent with recommendations in HPAG's final report (PDF) on promoting sustainable recreation in the Adirondack Park.