



CONSERVATION CORPS

Trail Steward Report

BY CHIARA BRADY,
CREW LEADER

Catskill Forest Preserve

May - Oct 2022



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



Introduction

The Trail Conference is taking a leadership role in coordinating stewardship efforts to keep up with growing threats to natural spaces and outdoor recreation areas. To educate users and help mitigate the negative impacts from increased use, the Trail Conference has partnered with land managers to begin a multi-phased approach in the Catskill Forest Preserve. We believe the most effective way to advance change is through user education, public participation, and sustainable, on-the-ground solutions. Our Trail Steward program is an integral part of our response to these threats. When used responsibly, trails protect both the people who use them and the environment that surrounds them. But without education, trail lands are subject to mistreatment and misuse. Trail Stewards provide outreach and information about park regulations, hiker safety, preparedness, and other best practices. In addition to readying hikers, Trail Stewards help discourage and mitigate the misuse of trails and the surrounding lands through education and public relations work.

Funding was provided from the Environmental Protection Fund as administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.



Meet The Crew



Josh Nussenfeld
Crew Member



Brandon Elgun
Crew Member



Chiara Brady
Crew Leader



Liam Stuart
Crew Member



Amanda Clark
Crew Member



Training

Over the first month of the 2022 Conservation Corps season, five Trail Stewards received onsite training at each of the stewarding locations from Trail Steward Program Coordinator Myra Romano. They also received certifications in Wilderness First Aid and Leave No Trace.

New York State DEC Training

On May 26, 3 of the 5 stewards met with leaders from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to learn about the rules and regulations they would be educating park visitors on throughout the season.

Wilderness First Aid / CPR / AED

From June 6-8, the stewards joined other conservation corps crew members in earning their wilderness first aid certifications. The stewards are now ready to prevent and treat ill and injured persons in remote environments.

Leave No Trace Trainer Course

From June 21-22, the stewards came to Welch Education Center to earn their Leave No Trace Trainer certifications. The stewards learned the Seven Principles of Leave No Trace and how to best educate the public on outdoor ethics.



Catskill Forest Preserve



STATISTICS

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED:

14,435

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED:

3,944

BACKPACKERS COUNTED:

1,229

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER
PARK LOCATIONS:

282

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS:

203

ILLEGAL CAMPERS OBSERVED:

20

ILLEGAL CAMPERS CONFRONTED:

19

FIRERINGS/CAMPSITES REMOVED:

62

LOST HIKERS HELPED:

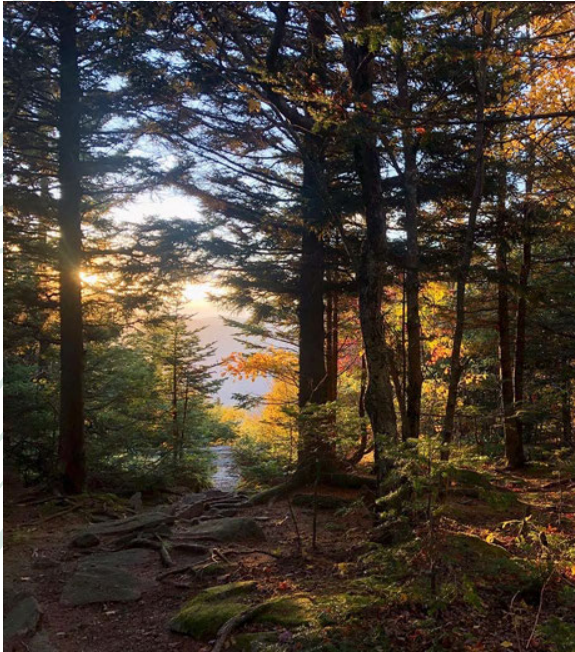
210

INJURED HIKERS HELPED:

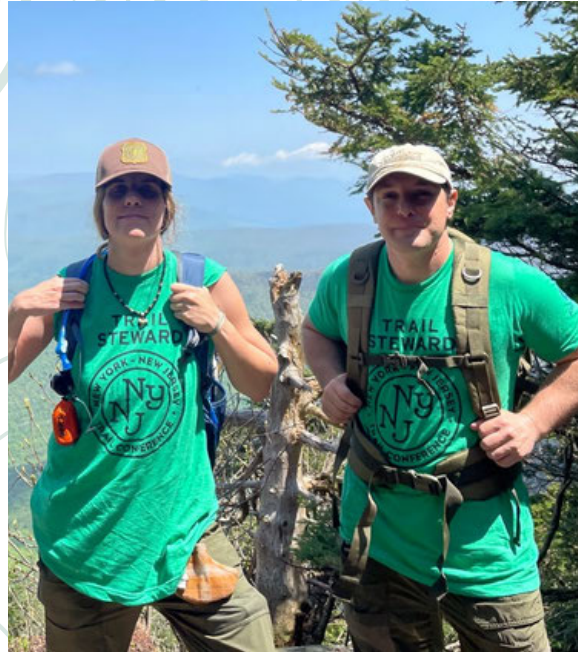
3

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Catskill Trail Steward program, launched in 2015, is an invaluable resource for visitors at popular hiking locations within the Catskill Forest Preserve. Partnering with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and partially funded by the Environmental Protection Fund, the goal of a Trail Steward is to interact with every hiker to ensure that they are safely, responsibly, and appropriately prepared for the hiking or backpacking trip they intend to take. Efforts focus on communicating DEC regulations on camping and campfires, general Leave No Trace principles and wilderness ethics, and protecting the fragile summit ecosystems above 3,500 feet. Stewards attempt to eliminate unofficial social paths, clear illegal fire rings and campsites, and assist DEC with any emergencies that may arise.

In addition to communicating these essential regulations, Catskill Trail Stewards provide information to visitors about current trail conditions, alternate route suggestions based on fitness level and time constraints, local weather forecasts, historical facts, flora/fauna identification, and recommended towns and attractions to visit in the region. In 2022, a team of five Catskill Stewards were stationed at the summits of Slide, Cornell and Wittenberg; Giant Ledge and Panther; North Point; and the Blackhead Range on weekends and holidays, Memorial Day Weekend through October 22nd. Over 22 weekends, we collected various data points to determine how hikers and backpackers utilize these wilderness areas.



Golden hour at Giant Ledge



Chiara and Josh at the Slide Mountain viewpoint



The Trail Stewards on one of their first days of training at the summit of Wittenberg

Burroughs Range

Slide, Cornell, and Wittenberg



STATISTICS

TOTAL STEWARDING DAYS:

48

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED:

4,447

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED:

1,390

BUSIEST DAY:

Aug 6, 198 hikers

BACKPACKERS COUNTED:

523

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER
PARK LOCATIONS:

98

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS:

57

ILLEGAL CAMPERS OBSERVED:

7

ILLEGAL CAMPERS CONFRONTED:

5

FIRERINGS/CAMPSITES REMOVED:

25

LOST HIKERS HELPED:

62

INJURED HIKERS HELPED:

0

AVG HIGH:

78°

AVG LOW:

57°

Hugging the west side of the Ashokan Reservoir in the Slide Mountain Wilderness, the Burroughs Range contains the Catskills highest peak, Slide Mountain (4,190'), as well as two other peaks above 3500 feet, Cornell Mountain (3,860'), and Wittenberg Mountain (3,780'). These were 3 of the Trail Stewards' slocations for the 2022 season.

Over 48 stewarding days in 2022, we counted 4,447 hikers and were able to provide education and assistance to 1,390 of those visitors. Many conversations at this location focused on the topics of local flora and fauna (especially Bicknell's thrush and the first-growth balsam fir forests), the landslide in the early 1800s that gave Slide its name, mileage and difficulty of the surrounding trails, hiker preparedness, weather forecasts, best viewpoints, location and availability of primitive campsites and water sources, and the importance of responsible and sustainable hiking and camping practices.

With some of the most beautiful view points in the region, various challenging traverses, and their close proximity to the Woodland Valley Campground creating a large draw for visitors, the Burroughs Range was the second busiest location for the Trail Stewards in 2022. As such, it is no surprise that the Stewards saw more illegal campers, fire rings, and lost hikers than any other mountain, making the range a great location for the Stewards to put their training to the test.



Josh filling up with fresh spring water on Slide



Liam at the stairs up to Slide Mountain summit



Josh, Chiara, and Amanda descending from the summit of Slide Mountain

Giant Ledge & Panther

Slide Mountain Wilderness



STATISTICS

TOTAL STEWARDING DAYS:

47

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED:

5,562

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED:

1,208

BUSIEST DAY:

Oct 16, 482 hikers

BACKPACKERS COUNTED:

410

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER
PARK LOCATIONS:

111

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS:

81

ILLEGAL CAMPERS OBSERVED:

5

ILLEGAL CAMPERS CONFRONTED:

5

FIRERINGS/CAMPSITES REMOVED:

16

LOST HIKERS HELPED:

68

INJURED HIKERS HELPED:

1

AVG HIGH:

76°

AVG LOW:

54°

Just about 15 miles from the town of Phoenicia, Giant Ledge and Panther mountain make up the second range that the Trail Stewards have roved this season.

Being one of the shorter routes, with the total distance from the trailhead being just under 1.5 miles (3 mile round trip), the hike to Giant Ledge packs a punch. Hikers ascend roughly 1,000 ft in what usually takes about 2 hours. Once at the top, hikers get to look out at the Catskills from 5 distinct view points, or "Giant Ledges" as the name may suggest.

For those who wanted to make their day on the trail even longer, we recommended that they continue along the blue trail for an additional 1.85 miles to reach Panther Mountain, which offers another beautiful vista.

Giant Ledge and Panther Mountain was the busiest location that the Trail Stewards covered in 2022, with a total of 5,562 hikers counted. We were able to provide education or assistance to 1,208 of those hikers.

Many of the challenges the Trail Stewards faced at this location have been based around Leave No Trace, needing to utilize their skills to remove illegal fire rings, educate park-goers on carrying out their trash, and just trying to be a friendly face for those on their way up to ask questions.



Amanda checking in from Giant Ledge



Discs on a tree at the Panther Mountain summit



Brandon relaxing and enjoying the amazing Giant Ledge view

North Point

Windham-Blackhead Range Wilderness



STATISTICS

TOTAL STEWARDING DAYS:

47

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED:

3,075

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED:

998

BUSIEST DAY:

June 25, 180 hikers

BACKPACKERS COUNTED:

212

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER
PARK LOCATIONS:

66

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS:

58

ILLEGAL CAMPERS OBSERVED:

9

ILLEGAL CAMPERS CONFRONTED:

9

FIRERINGS/CAMPSITES REMOVED:

19

LOST HIKERS HELPED:

56

INJURED HIKERS HELPED:

2

AVG HIGH:

74°

AVG LOW:

56°

Situated just beside North-South Lake Campground in Haines Falls, NY, North Point is the summit furthest to the east that the Trail Stewards were stationed at in 2022. With unique views of the valley to the east of the Catskills, hikers may be surprised by the opportunity to look into four different states (New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont) from the various lookout points along the trails.

Because of its proximity to both the campground and Kaaterskill Falls area, North Point saw a lot of traffic from people of all walks of life. When stationed at the mountain, the stewards got the opportunity to educate park-goers from all different backgrounds, and at all different skill levels.

Some of the sites that stewards recommend for hikers to visit while in the North Point area include the North Point summit, Stoppel Point (particularly the plane crash which rests just a few steps further up the trail), Badmans Cave, Newmans Ledge, and Artists Rock.

Some of the challenges at North Point have been stewarding at such a highly trafficked location. Though the North Point summit itself can be a walk in the park, other spots along the trail may see a disproportionate amount of people due to the proximity to the campground and other very popular hiking trails.



Before and after photos of an illegal fire ring found at the viewpoint at North Point



Brandon stewarding at the North Point lookout

Blackhead Range

Blackhead, Black Dome, Thomas Cole



STATISTICS

TOTAL STEWARDING DAYS:

35

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED:

1,351

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED:

348

BUSIEST DAY:

July 31, 134 hikers

BACKPACKERS COUNTED:

84

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER
PARK LOCATIONS:

7

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS:

7

ILLEGAL CAMPERS OBSERVED:

0

ILLEGAL CAMPERS CONFRONTED:

0

FIRERINGS/CAMPSITES REMOVED:

2

LOST HIKERS HELPED:

24

INJURED HIKERS HELPED:

0

AVG HIGH:

79°

AVG LOW:

57°

The northern-most location that the Trail Stewards have roved this season, the Blackhead Range in the Windham-Blackhead Wilderness boasts 3 amazing summit hikes; Blackhead, Black Dome, and Thomas Cole. With all summits hitting the 3,500'+ marker, and Black Dome reaching 3,980' (making it the third highest peak in the Catskills), the range offers a challenging hike for those who choose to take on any combination of these three peaks.

There are many different locations that the Stewards suggested hikers towards throughout the season, including Acra Point, the Batavia Kill lean-to, Lockwood Gap view point, and others to make this 4.4 mile loop into a must for any able hikers. The trail also offers hikers a natural water spring and 2 designated camping areas for anyone looking to spend a night out on the trail.

Though this location was the least visited by hikers this season, it still offered the stewards the ability to test their skills and offer their abilities to those who wander this far north. The various campsites and lean-to in this wilderness range are points of focus for the stewards, making sure that those who visit practice low-impact camping techniques, and are receptive to the Leave No Trace knowledge that the stewards may educate them on.



Before and after photos of cleaning up and making repairs to a fire ring at one of the campsites



Amanda checking in on the Batavia Kill lean-to



Trail Maintenance



On work days when the Trail Stewards weren't roving the Catskill high peaks, you could find them working alongside the many Trail Conference volunteers to build and maintain trails throughout the region. Every Thursday and Friday, the stewards traveled to various trails/worksites to assist in tasks such as making crush, farming dirt, moving rocks, clipping branches, filling in brush, and more. The trail maintenance that the crew participated in, in conjunction with their trail stewarding, is what helped make the Catskill Trail Stewards experience and expertise so multifaceted.



LANE ST.

On the Trail Stewards' first trail maintenance day, and the stewards' first official day as a 5 member crew, they met up with a long-time Trail Conference volunteer, Andy Garrison, at the Lane St. trailhead in Phoenicia.

This day was mostly spent learning the fundamentals of trail building and maintaining, as well as getting used to the full crew that the stewards would work with for the remainder of the season.

The task at hand for the day was to reestablish a pre-existing, eroded trail. The crew made crush, farmed dirt, and left the site at the end of the day with a fresh, safe, revitalized corridor for hikers to enjoy.





Brandon making some crush



Andy Garrison chainsawing blowdown



First picture of the whole crew after maintaining the trail at Lane St.



PLATTE CLOVE PRESERVE

The second trail maintenance location that the Trail Stewards helped out at was Platte Clove. The stewards linked up with Trail Conference volunteer Charles Gadol and other day volunteers on June 30 and July 8 to maintain a preexisting trail.

At various points along the trail, water flow from rain disrupted the tread, so the crew stepped in to create multiple water bars at the areas along the trail that were most in the water's path. The tread was dug up to create drainage, and the drains were reinforced with large, flat rocks.





Digging out a drainage path to redirect water



Digging another drainage path



A water bar in the drainage channel will provide structural support and prevent erosion



HUCKLEBERRY POINT

The Trail Stewards spent 3 days at Huckleberry Point with volunteer leader Matt Smith and other Trail Conference volunteers to maintain a preexisting trail.

These days were spent making crush, farming dirt, and moving rocks to raise and reinforce the already established trail. Drainage passageways were dug between the gaps in the trail to redirect water flow from over the tread to under it.

In addition to reinforcing the trail, areas surrounding were brushed in to prevent erosion from hikers avoiding mud that pooled where the original trail had been. The stewards left their most recent workday at Huckleberry Point with 3 freshly maintained areas of trail, making it a huge success!





One of the rocks retrieved from off the trail



Liam making some crush for the treadway



One of the newly completed drainage systems constructed by the crew



BALDWIN MEMORIAL SHELTER ROOF PROJECT

On August 4th, the crew set off with Trail Conference volunteer Eric Friedman to rebuild the old, tree damaged roof of the Baldwin Memorial Shelter on Mount Tremper. The crew started the day with a half mile bushwhack in the late summer heat, carrying in all the tools and roof boards they would need. Once they arrived at the shelter, the crew removed and bagged the old shingles, removed all of the old roof boards, and started to remove bark from the new rafters and beam.

On the following day, crew members Liam, Josh, and Brandon joined Eric at the shelter once again. They spliced in the broken log which supports the front roof beam and installed a new ridge beam to finish off the two days at the shelter.





Liam nailing in the roof boards with volunteers



Brandon sitting atop the shelter



Josh, Liam, and Brandon attaching the front roof beam to the shelter



WARNER CREEK

On July 1, the Trail Stewards teamed up with a group of campers from YMCA Frost Valley to tackle yet another maintenance project with volunteer Andy Garrison. Crush was made, dirt was farmed, eroded trail was brushed in, and the crew even made some crustacean friends in a nearby creek.

The crew later revisited the same site every Friday going from July-October to construct 4 rock bridges. These bridges would help hikers cross newly dug drainage paths. The crew spent most of these days using rock bars, baskets, and cranks to move enormous rocks from deep into the woods out onto the trail. This was definitely a difficult site, but the end result was incredibly rewarding.





Brandon guiding the rope as Josh cranks it



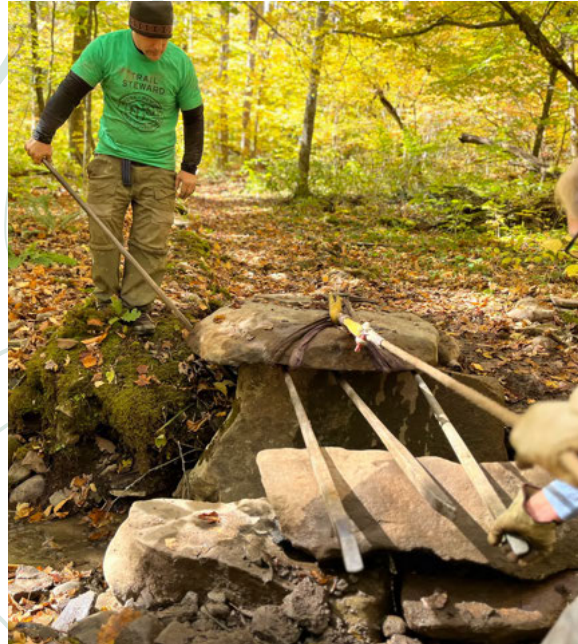
One of the finished bridges



Josh, Brandon, and Andy determining the best route to guide the bridge rock to position it correctly



Amanda digging out drainage



The bridge stone being placed over the two walls



A photo of the largest bridge completed by the crew



Thank you!

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Catskill Trail Steward Program is going strong and looking forward to another successful season in 2023. Thank you to our partners and volunteers for all of your support. We would not be able to do it without you.

Please feel free to email Trail Steward Program Coordinator Myra Romano (mromano@nynjtc.org) with any questions or comments on how we can continue to improve the program and protect the Catskill Forest Preserve.