



VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY

Catskill Mountains Trailless Peaks

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Public surveys used to define desired conditions
- Education and outreach to promote responsible recreation and sustainable use

FACTS

35 Peaks

over 3,500 feet

Unique

montane bird species

SUMMARY

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is developing a Visitor Use Management Plan for the trailless peaks in the Catskill Mountains in New York. The peaks above 3,500 feet, previously without formal trails, are experiencing impacts to natural resources caused by the proliferation and expansion of user-created, informal trails. This project aims to enhance data collection and develop educational outreach opportunities that seek to better understand visitor use through projects including administration and analysis of a visitor experience survey; developing training materials for volunteers and stewards that incorporate Leave No Trace TM messaging; educating visitors on recreational impacts to vulnerable species and habitats on Catskill Mountain summits; and recommendations for improving messaging throughout the formerly trailless peak study area.

MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

In 2023, DEC granted an educational contract to the New York - New Jersey Trail Conference to promote sustainable recreation. A visitor experience survey was administered in the fall of 2023 and will inform a draft Visitor Use Management Plan that will present recommendations for addressing the natural resource impacts occurring on the formerly trailless peaks. Field research, funded by the education award, will support ongoing monitoring of montane bird species that breed in the unique spruce fir habitat of this region. From the data DEC will create a plan for making these 'zones' less vulnerable. According to DEC, solutions could include the formation of formal trails that are designed for extended use that will prevent the use of informal trails and the degradation of natural resources.

MORE INFORMATION

- [ADK & Catskills VUM Web Page](#)
- [Effects of Informal Trail Use on Natural Communities in the Catskill Park](#)