



Source: Hazel Ozturk via Unsplash

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY

High Peaks Wilderness

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Collaborative, interagency resource protection
- Funding to study visitor patterns
- Field monitoring of natural resources

FACTS

275k+ acres of Wilderness; second largest east of the Mississippi

42 of the 46 Adirondack High Peaks

MORE INFORMATION

- [DEC VUM Information](#)
- [High Peaks VUM Project Website](#)

SUMMARY

For the last ten years, visitation to the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Park Forest Preserve has been on an upward trend, culminating in 2020 with a record-setting year in many locations. The compounding effects of parking shortages, unsafe conditions along busy state highways, crowded trails, summits and other points of interest, impacts to water quality, and physical degradation of trails and other facilities has led the NY State DEC to begin conducting this VUM planning process. This has prompted the need for field monitoring and the identification of visitor use management strategies throughout the High Peaks Wilderness. The VUM planning process is focusing on the experiential, social, and public safety elements of visitor use management and visitor capacities to promote sustainable visitor use.

MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

The NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is actively addressing the challenges posed by the increased popularity of recreation in the High Peaks. In response to the surge in popularity, the DEC allocated funds in 2023 to study visitor patterns, addressing concerns such as the absence of proper trail systems in the Adirondacks. A comprehensive visitor use management plan is slated for completion in 2024 and will emphasize data-driven management strategies that enhance visitor safety and experience. Contracted through 2024 with Otak Inc. the DEC plans to introduce management strategies in the spring of 2024 emphasizing the importance of public input through a comment period ending in the fall of 2024. The DEC is committed to a balanced approach, seeking collaboration with 32 groups, organizations, and agencies to secure state funding for resource protection. This collective effort underscores the shared responsibility to preserve these natural treasures for current and future generations.