

2026 MID-SEASON SUMMIT STEWARD REPORT



One of the rebuilt cairns on Wright, standing tall

GREETINGS, EVERYONE!

We are now mid-way through the 37th field season of the Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewardship Program. Summit Stewards are out on the summits educating hikers, monitoring alpine plant recovery, and keeping up with trail maintenance above treeline. We've had rain, wind, snow, hail, and a Fourth of July heat wave, but our crew is staying strong.

This is my first season working full time as the Summit Steward Coordinator, after spending three seasons out on the summits as a Steward and Botany Field Technician. Liam Ebner is still with the Adirondack Mountain Club as the Stewardship Manager, overseeing the Hurricane Fire Tower Stewardship Program, the Route 73 Trailhead Stewardship Program, and assisting with various alpine zone projects throughout the season. We've hired five full-time summit stewards this year, all first-timers, and they've been doing an incredible job protecting New York's rarest ecosystem.

I want to thank our awesome team of stewards, our passionate volunteers, and you, our supporters, who continue to make alpine stewardship possible.



Stewards practice the rock walk on the summit of Algonquin

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS, SPONSORS, AND PARTNERS!

The Adirondack 46ers have supported the stewards for years and continue to fund the work that we do. ADK was awarded a grant to cover one summit steward position for this year. The Adirondack 46ers also provide key financial support for ADK's Professional Trail Crew.

A huge shoutout to our friends at The Mountaineer for their continued support. Summit stewards have received La Sportiva boots, Darn Tough socks, Rab Dryflo Solar shirts, as well as discounts on gear at The Mountaineer. These companies ensure that the stewards have the best equipment and outdoor clothing available. We can't thank them enough for everything they do to make sure the stewards are prepared for everything the alpine has to throw at them.

Thank you to L.L. Bean for donating hiking pants, shirts, and puffy jackets to the Summit Stewardship Program! L.L. Bean has continued to support ADK and the Summit Stewardship Program through gear donations, allowing our program to provide high-quality equipment to each steward.

With sincere thanks to all of our donors, and especially our recurring endowment supporters, sponsors, and High Peaks-level donors whose generosity sustains this program:

- #507 Fund for the Summit Stewardship Program
- Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy
- Helen and Ritter Shumway Foundation
- Nine Pin Cider
- Norton G. Miller Memorial Fund
- Will Cummer Gear Fund

Thanks also to our program partner, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), for administrative, logistical, and financial support. Funding through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) is administered by DEC. A big thanks goes to Hannah Prackajlo, Osita Ezumah, Allison Rooney, Nate Jeffery, Jill Trunko, and Tate Connor for their continued guidance.



Stewards outfitted in new La Sportiva boots on the summit of Algonquin



A steward in a brand new puffy generously donated by L.L. Bean



2026 Crew: Left to Right—Josiah Willink, Joshua Frament, Rachael Dickerson, Eva Jo Nielsen, Katie Leton (Summit Steward Coordinator), Callie Garnet

PERSONNEL AND SCHEDULING

The 2026 crew is comprised entirely of new members, and they have been doing an incredible job educating folks out on the peaks so far. Their enthusiasm is contagious and we're lucky to have such an awesome crew out on the summits for the season.

Rachael Dickerson—Rachael is new to the Summit Stewardship Program, but not to the Adirondacks, having worked previously as a trip leader for the La Vida Center for Outdoor Education and Leadership. She graduated from Gordon College this May with degrees in Biology and Data Science. She previously worked as an Assistant Forest Ranger down in the Catskills and is bringing her interpretive expertise up to the summits. In her free time, Rachael enjoys playing the harmonica, hanging out with her cats, and working on craft projects.

Joshua Frament—Josh comes to the Summit Stewardship Program with a passion for hiking and backcountry adventures and is already well on his way to completing his 46. He is a rising sophomore studying Wildlife and Fisheries Biology at the University of Vermont. When not in the mountains or in class, he works part-time at Outdoor Gear Exchange, helping recreators find the best gear to suit their needs. Josh loves all things outside, from skiing to fishing to trail running, and is a great resource for anybody looking to push themselves in the outdoors.

Callie Garnet—Originally from Acton, Massachusetts, Callie is a rising senior at St. Lawrence University studying Environmental Science and Psychology. At school, Callie is a member of the sustainable living house, where she and her housemates worked together to organize a multiday folk festival at the end of the year. Callie has previously worked at a farmers' market and is extremely passionate about sustainable food systems and cooking with locally sourced ingredients.

Eva Jo Nielsen—Eva Jo is also a rising senior at St. Lawrence University and is originally from Rochester, New York. She is studying Environmental Studies with a minor in Outdoor Leadership. She's no stranger to living in the woods, having previously completed the Adirondack Semester offered by St. Lawrence. Eva Jo is excited to develop her fern identification skills on the summits this summer and to share the skills she's learnt while working as an outdoor guide at school.

Josiah Willink—This is Josiah's first summer with the Adirondack Mountain Club and first summer working in the Adirondacks. He is originally from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is currently a student at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, where he studies English Education and Art. Josiah is an enthusiastic birder, bass player, snowboarder, and hacky-sacker, and is always happy to have more people to sack with.

Kayla White—Kayla is ADK's Stewardship Director. It's her twelfth year with the Summit Stewardship Program and her fourteenth year at ADK. Kayla oversees the full-time staff in charge of the Route 73 Trailhead Stewards, Summit Stewards, and ADK's volunteer and Professional Trail Crews.

Liam Ebner—Liam is ADK's Stewardship Manager. It is their sixth year with the Summit Stewardship Program and with ADK. This year, Liam will be overseeing ADK's newest stewardship program, the Route 73 Trailhead Stewardship Program, and continuing to oversee the Hurricane Fire Tower Stewardship Program. He will also continue to be heavily involved in all things alpine, from collecting new specimens for the teaching herbarium to analyzing photopoint data and collaborating with researchers from other organizations.

Katie Leton—I'm ADK's Summit Steward Coordinator. This is my fourth year with the Summit Stewardship Program, but my first year overseeing the program. When I'm not in the field I can be found rock climbing, swimming, or curling up with a good book.

VOLUNTEER STEWARDS

Our volunteers are an incredible group of dedicated stewards, many of whom have been with the program for multiple years. Without their help, there is no way we would be able to fully staff the peaks or accomplish essential trail maintenance and research projects. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer summit steward for next year, please reach out to me and follow this [link](#) for more information about volunteering with ADK.



ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

- Mary Lamb—14th year
- Jack Coleman—13th year volunteer, 2 years staff
- Ryan Nerp—7th year volunteer, 4 years staff
- Drew Benware—7th year
- Klarisse Torriente—6th year
- Matt Szopa—6th year
- Angela Ranzini—5th year
- Tyler Lucero—5th year
- Tony Goodwin—5th year
- Caitlin Glynn—4th year
- Caitlin Porter—4th year
- Mark Epstein—4th year
- Kristen Peek—3rd year
- David Palat—3rd year
- Peyton Reigel—3rd year, Hurricane
- Kim Brown—6th year, SSP & Hurricane
- Bob Hunter—6th year with ADK, Friends of Hurricane Mountain
- John Loughlin—5th year Hurricane, 2nd year SSP
- Pamela Gothner—Friends of Hurricane Mountain
- Peter Slocum—Friends of Hurricane Mountain
- Mary Jean Bland—Friends of Hurricane Mountain

TRAINING

The stewards arrived on Friday, May 22, and we kicked things off with introductions, orientation, equipment distribution, and a property tour. I went into the field along several of our volunteers for Memorial Day weekend while the new stewards started with two days of Wilderness First Aid.



Practicing fern ID on the Algonquin botany hike

Monday, May 25, we did a training hike up Hurricane Mountain and went over special considerations for fire tower stewardship. We went over the history of the fire tower, some natural and cultural history of the Adirondacks, and gave the stewards a chance to educate hikers on the summit. We also checked out some rare plants and spent a few hours working to rebuild one of the summit cairns.

Tuesday, May 26, we went over radio protocol, park regulations, and did some more interpretive communication training at ADK's Education Yurts. High Peaks Wilderness Land Manager Tate Connor gave a presentation on the High Peaks Unit Management Plan and all the changes to come. Forest Ranger Allison Rooney went over radio protocol and personal safety training. Kayla, Liam, and I went over interpretive communication and the Authority of the Resource Technique. We did some role-playing so that everyone could get comfortable using these interpretive strategies when talking with hikers. We finished with a presentation on alpine ecology.



Learning the art of cairn construction on Hurricane

Wednesday, June 27, we spent the day on Cascade repairing cairns and completing other trail maintenance tasks in the alpine zone. Cascade is an important mountain for us to be on since there are a lot of first-time visitors to the High Peaks that come up it. We hope to introduce these hikers to the rock walk and help prepare them for the next time they arrive at an alpine summit in the region.

Saturday, May 30 and Sunday, May 31 was our first weekend of team stewarding on Marcy and Algonquin. Team stewarding is a crucial part of the training process because it allows new stewards to practice speaking with hikers and receive constructive feedback on their interactions. There was snow and ice up on the summits on Saturday from a late season storm, but still plenty of hikers out on the trails.

Monday, June 1 and Tuesday, June 2, the stewards participated in the Leave No Trace Level 1 Instructor Course. The stewards went in-depth learning the seven principles of Leave No Trace, as well as education practices for teaching them. Thank you to ADK staff members Josh, Lorelei, Kayla, and Virginia for teaching this course!

Wednesday, June 3, everyone participated in ADK's All-Staff Training Day. Liam gave a short presentation for the staff on alpine ecology, the Summit Stewardship Program, and the rest of ADK's stewardship programs. Kayla, Cathy Pedler, and staff members from the DEC and the APA spoke with everyone on the role that each organization plays in protecting our public lands.

Saturday, June 6 and Sunday, June 7 were once again spent team stewarding on Marcy and Algonquin. This second weekend allowed more opportunities for practice interacting with the public and learning from each other. The weekend was rainy and cold, so we did not see too many people, but the stewards definitely got a feel for the harsh alpine conditions that the plants deal with all year long.

Monday, June 8, we drove up Whiteface for a botany training day led by Julia Goren of the Adirondack Rail Trail Association. While on Whiteface, stewards got an in-depth view of the alpine community. We got a chance to look at the population of globally rare Boott's rattlesnake-root thriving on the summit, and reviewed key graminoids found in the alpine zone. In the afternoon, we drove over to The Mountaineer to pick up new boots!



Algonquin Botany Day with Tim Howard

Tuesday, June 9, we did a second botany training hike up Algonquin Peak, led by Tim Howard, the Director of Science at New York Natural Heritage Program. We made many stops along the trail, paying particular attention to the changes in forest ecology that occur as we increase in elevation. The stewards also got some practice identifying alpine plants and learned a few bird calls.

Wednesday, June 10, we started off the day at John Brown Farm, beginning with a tour of the Dreaming of Timbuctoo exhibit given by Anna Forsman and Martha Swan of John Brown Lives!. After getting a chance to explore the property, the stewards sat down for a presentation on inclusion in the outdoors by Tamara Jolly and Lucienne Nicholson of the Adirondack Diversity Initiative. In the afternoon, Summit Stewards and Route 73 Trailhead Stewards drove to the Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center to explore the cultural center and listen to a presentation given by Dave Kanietakeron Fadden on Haudenosaunee culture and history. We were also joined this day by the Poke-O-Moonshine Fire Tower Steward!

Thank you to everyone that participated in and put the training together: Tom Manitta, Daria Stacy, Josh Ellis, Lorelei Meidenbaur, Virginia Ruhland-Mauhs, Tim Howard, Julia Goren, Anna Forsman, Martha Swann, Tamara Jolly, Lucienne Nicholson, Dave Kanietakeron Fadden, Tate Connor, and Allison Rooney.

WEATHER AND USAGE

We started off the season with beautiful weather over Victoria Day Weekend. Clear skies and temperatures in the 50s meant that we had a good number of hikers out on the summits. We had a snowy winter this year, and there was still a section of the monorail intact at higher elevations, necessitating the use of microspikes in order to maintain proper traction along the trail. Memorial Day Weekend was a bit cooler, rainy, and cloudy, with only a few patches of rotting snow still left on the trail. The trails were quite muddy, typical shoulder season conditions, which makes the alpine plants particularly vulnerable to trampling as hikers try to skirt around patches of snow and mud in search of better traction.



Stewards hiking up Marcy for their first weekend of team stewarding

A late season storm brought fresh snow at high elevations on Marcy and Algonquin, and we were surprised to find the trail covered in inches of snow and slush while making our way up to the summit for the first weekend of team stewarding. The weather stayed cool and rainy throughout early June. The snow bowl lasted until mid-June, and thanks to an especially cold and snowy winter we noticed that some of the plant species were blooming a bit later than usual, but for the most part were exhibiting typical alpine phenology. Lapland rosebay began to bloom on the last weekend of May, followed by Diapensia and Bearberry Willow, all of whom are our expected early season bloomers.

We saw an increase in visitor usage this May as compared to last year, although this is probably due to the bad weather we received last year over Victoria Day and Memorial Day weekends. Still, our average daily contacts over May were almost double the number of contacts that we had in May of last year.

June, on the other hand, was a bit slower than last year, with some cold and rainy weekends keeping traffic down in the High Peaks. There were only a few days in June when a steward talked to more than 100 hikers in a day. This June, we only had three 100+ hiker days over the course of the month, and two of those days were on Cascade. July started off strong with a heat wave going into July 4, and it will be interesting to see what visitor usage looks like as temperatures continue to rise and the trails start to dry out. Our numbers were slightly down last year as compared to the year before, and this year will provide some insight into whether that trend is continuing.

The chart below highlights these usage summaries. The average represents the average number of people contacted per day.

<u>May 2025</u> (weekends only)				<u>May 2026</u> (weekends only)			
Mountain	# People	# Days	Average	Mountain	# People	# Days	Average
Algonquin	157	5	31	Algonquin	342	5	68
Marcy	58	4	19	Marcy	306	6	51
Wright	0	0	0	Wright	68	1	68
Cascade	421	5	84	Cascade	657	5	131
Total	636	14	45	Total	1373	17	81
<u>June 2025</u>				<u>June 2026</u>			
Mountain	# People	# Days	Average	Mountain	# People	# Days	Average
Algonquin	896	21	43	Algonquin	672	17	40
Marcy	999	20	50	Marcy	944	18	52
Wright	332	12	28	Wright	314	14	22
Cascade	1136	12	95	Cascade	505	6	84
Total	3363	65	52	Total	2535	55	46

BOTANY AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

This is the 19th year that we will be participating in the Appalachian Mountain Club’s (AMC) Mountain Watch phenology monitoring program. Mountain Watch monitors the phenology of four species found on Adirondack High Peaks Summits: Diapensia, Bigelow’s Sedge, Bog Bilberry, and Labrador Tea. All four species are monitored at standardized monitoring sites in accordance with the National Phenology Network (NPN). AMC uses this data to observe and analyze long term trends in the timing of blooming phases of alpine species, which can indicate effects due to climate change in the alpine communities across the northeast. In addition to Mountain Watch, AMC also created the community science based Northeast Alpine Flower Watch project. Hikers can take pictures of alpine plants and upload them to iNaturalist to get more data on their flowering and fruiting phenophases. A single picture of some flowering plants can help monitor broader trends across the summits. Feel free to download iNaturalist and contribute to this project by uploading your own photos!

Liam made it up Saddleback Mountain in June to complete sampling for Mountain Bird Watch. Mountain Bird Watch is administered by the [Vermont Center for Ecostudies](#) (VCE) and monitors high-elevation breeding bird populations. This study is important to understand how these higher elevation bird species populations are changing over time, especially with climate change. Sites for this project range from the Catskills up to Maine. VCE might be looking for new route adopters for the 2027 season! Check out their website to see how you can get involved.

We are also continuing our collection efforts for our Alpine Teaching Herbarium. Teaching herbaria are a type of herbarium that has the main goal of education. With an alpine-focused teaching herbarium, summit stewards and botany field technicians in the future will have a readily accessible and accurate reference library to aid in learning alpine plant identification. We'll continue collecting specimens this summer from the High Peaks, then will shift efforts to our Heart Lake Program Center. After field work is completed, this collection will be available online for reference.

Liam also traveled over to Vermont in June to work with the Green Mountain Club (GMC) and help train their staff in photopoint monitoring. GMC also tracks vegetation changes over time on Mount Mansfield, Vermont's highest summit, using a photopoint monitoring method very similar to what we use. ADK is always happy to help other organizations with training, especially in photopoint monitoring. In the past three years, ADK has assisted in photopoint monitoring for three other organizations.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Thanks to a highly motivated crew and dedicated volunteer coverage, we've been able to get a good amount of trail work done. We have completed trail maintenance on Marcy, Algonquin, Wright, Iroquois, Cascade, Hurricane, and Colden.

	Scree Wall in feet	Brushing in feet	Rock Packing in square feet	Cairn Rocks removed	Cairn repair
Marcy	18	35			
Algonquin	200			3	
Wright	40				
Iroquois	10	60		15	
Hurricane					1
Cascade	305	15			1
Colden	10	70	4		

Totals as of July 1st

Scree Wall (feet)	Brushing (Feet)	Cairn Rocks Removed	Cairns Repaired
583	180	18	2

OUTREACH

Summit stewards encounter many different organized groups on the summits, whether they be summer camps, college outing clubs, boy scout troops, sports teams, or anything else. For groups that bring trips into the High Peaks often, we offer free Leave No Trace Awareness Workshops and presentations on alpine ecology to better prepare their trip leaders for visits to the alpine zone in the summer. This year, Liam and I gave a presentation on the Summit Stewardship Program, the alpine zone, and Leave No Trace to the La Vida Center for Outdoor Education and Leadership.

This is the sixth year we've been educating on Hurricane Mountain regarding fire tower stewardship. This program has been an amazing outreach opportunity. Hurricane Mountain has been recommended by the DEC as an alternative hike to the High Peaks. Hurricane is family-friendly and is a part of the Lake Placid 9er and ADK Fire Tower Challenge. While up there, we educate about the cultural history of fire towers, help prepare hikers by teaching them Leave No Trace outdoor skills and ethics, as well as natural and Forest Preserve history. For some hikers, Hurricane can be a stepping stone to the High Peaks, and we're there to educate them accordingly. Please let me or Liam know if you are interested in becoming a fire tower volunteer next year! Follow this link to learn more about the [volunteer fire tower steward program](#), or email Liam at liam@adk.org.

CONCLUSION

The Summit Stewardship Program is still going strong. Thank you all so much for your support. Without you, our partners, donors, and volunteers, none of our work would be possible. Feel free to reach out via phone (518-523-3441 x 117) or email with any questions or comments on how we can continue to improve the program and protect our fragile alpine ecosystem. Thank you!

Sincerely yours,

Katie Leton
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and

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