

BUCK MOUNTAIN TRAILHEAD STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM 2026 END-OF-SEASON REPORT

MAY 24–OCTOBER 18 (SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS)

16 stewards
43 stewarding days
306.25 volunteer hours

2852 hiker contacts (10% increase over 2025)

HOURLY TRAFFIC COUNT:

8:30–9:30: 904
9:30–10:30: 769
10:30–11:30: 786
11:30–12:30: 684

Stewart's Ledge: 475, average 11 per shift.

The parking lot filled on 17 days.



SUMMARY

The Buck Mountain Trailhead Stewardship Program, now in its fifth year, continues to grow. The May, September, and October season extension continues to be proven successful.

2026 hiker education contacts increased by 10% over 2025.

Weather played a key role. Volunteer stewards encountered May–June rain, July wildfire smoke, July–August excessive heat, September-October glorious hiking weather.

Stewarts Ledge destination is extremely popular. Local dog walkers and rock climbers have frequented this route for years, now via ubiquitous hiking apps, those looking for a less rigorous hike are finding “The Ledge”. More importantly, our trailhead stewards continually encounter unsuspecting folks visiting from away seeking to hike Buck Mountain only to learn from us the route, 6.6 mi RT, 2,000 ft up, is beyond their ability.

We always say, “I have a great hike for you.” We describe the route to “The Ledge” (1.4 mi RT, 295 ft up), offer directions and off they go, only to return expressing their gratitude. We made their day. However, some folks express reluctance to venture toward an unsigned and unmarked route. This is understandable.

Thank you to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for adding an additional portable toilet this year for a total of two. This has made a significant difference meeting the demand. Leave No Trace Principle #3: Dispose of waste properly. The more that goes into the toilet, the less goes into the backcountry.

The trail register kiosk condition was closely monitored and observed by our stewards. The trail register was always in good condition although hikers continue to be challenged determining the front and the back - where to scribe their entries. Poison ivy around the kiosk was less problematic this year with the posting of warning signs for those sensitive to the perils of the plant.

The parking lot filled 40% of the stewarding days. Whereas stewards do not manage parking, drivers were courteous and respectful self-managing limited parking capacity.

SUMMARY CONTINUED

The Lake George area is and has always been a popular tourist destination. Our stewards encounter folks visiting mostly from the northeast United States, but also from all over the country and some visiting from other countries.

A preponderance of visitors are from urban metro areas of Boston, Philadelphia, and especially New York City and nearby New Jersey. During our hiker contact window of opportunity, usually only a few minutes, we message resource protection and preparedness.

Anecdotally we have found during our encounters:

- Most have never met a trailhead or summit steward previously.
- A self-description of a “hiker” has tremendous variation.
- Every stewarding shift, at the behest of our stewards, minimally equipped hikers return to their cars to gather a flashlight (#1 Forest Ranger callout), an extra bottle of water and sometimes having none, a bottle of water.

The significance of these observations is that stewarding is a process. The majority of our hiker education contacts are a first experience.

As volunteer and professional stewarding becomes more ubiquitous, hiker-steward contacts more frequent, learning will build upon prior learning.

We lessen a steep learning curve by helping folks be better prepared, be safe, have a more enjoyable experience, and most importantly learn how to protect our public wildlands.

We are preparing them for their next hike.

Hikers expressed gratitude for our stewarding presence with the highest degree of appreciation.



THANK YOU, TRAILHEAD STEWARDS!



Thank you to the sixteen 2026 Buck-Pilot Knob trailhead stewards! You made it happen. 2852 hikers heard your preparation and stewardship message! Your time and efforts are greatly appreciated. You make a difference.

By fostering appreciation for the southern Adirondacks and helping hikers safely explore new places, you put into action ADK's mission to promote responsible outdoor recreation and build a statewide constituency of land stewardship advocates. We are appreciative of the opportunity provided by the Adirondack Mountain Club. Great job everyone!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A HUGE thank you to the ADK Glens Falls-Saratoga Chapter for its continued steadfast financial support. Proceeds from the chapter's annual presentation of the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour support our mission without which this project would not be possible.

Thank you to Kayla White, Adirondack Mountain Club Stewardship Director; training, administration, paperwork, and attending to steward reported observations.

Thank you to Zach Lawrence, Adirondack Mountain Club Interpretive Manager; training and being an accessible staff asset ready to support our mission by all means.

Thank you to David Lynch, Adirondack Mountain Club Digital Marketing Coordinator; promoting and elevating the marketing and messaging profile of our program.

Thank you to Kate Kuklinski, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Land Manager, for being a superb collaborator always ready to help us in any way possible.

Thank you to NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Forest Ranger Ashly Carabetta for participating in our training session updating us on Lake George Wild Forest details of her patrol area.

Thank you to the Chief Paris and the Pilot Knob Volunteer Fire Department for supporting and allowing us to stage our supply shed at the station and provide parking for our stewards.

Thank you to Phil Bernier for his leadership, weekly steward coordination emails, commitment and dedication to the project. All the best to Phil as he takes over the project lead next year.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Schneider, ADK Glens Falls-Saratoga Chapter
November 2026

