

ROUTE 73 TRAILHEAD STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM 2026 END-OF-SEASON REPORT

We're happy to announce the completion of the third year of the Route 73 Trailhead Stewardship Program!

The program's mission is to foster an outdoor ethic in every trailhead visitor, and provide the skills and knowledge needed to protect New York State's wild lands and waters for the benefit of all. Five trailhead stewards were hired for the season and were stationed at trailheads from Thursday to Monday. Their season began on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend in May and ended in October on Indigenous Peoples' Day. Locations include trailheads for Giant (Roaring Brook Falls and the Ridge Trail), the Garden, Rooster Comb, and Cascade Mountain (on Thursday and Mondays when the 46er Trailhead Stewards are not there). Stewards also visited busy rock-climbing destinations like the Beer Walls and Chapel Pond. Trailhead stewards educated 19,016 hikers, backpackers, and rock climbers and were stationed at those trailheads 333 times this year.

PERSONNEL

There was a total of five trailhead stewards during the summer and three of those stewards stayed on into the fall. The team of Brigitte Bell, E Bentley, Ellen Conlon, Elijah Doyle, and Audrey Willette was an incredible crew to have this summer! This crew came in with a diverse set of skills and different types of education experience through their previous work experiences which helped everyone learn new tips and tricks form each other while at the trailheads. From dealing with some buggy days, rainy weeks, and early, dark mornings in the fall, the trailhead stewards were always had a friendly and smiling face at the trailheads ready to share their knowledge with recreators. Thank you to all of the Rt. 73 Trailhead Stewards this season! If you are interested in being a trailhead steward next summer, please reach out via my information at the end of this report.

EDUCATION: USAGE

The Garden parking lot filled on Saturdays from July-October usually before the stewards arrived at 5 am. In September and October, Saturdays typically filled on that Friday evening and remained filled throughout the night. The Roaring Brook parking lot filled between 8–11 a.m., with it commonly filling around 10 am on the weekends. The Ridge trailhead is difficult to estimate when it was full because of roadside parking, but stewards marked it down as filling three times with an average time of 11 a.m. It had an average of 64 cars when it was marked as full.



Trailheads	Contacts	% of Contacts	Days*	AVG Person/TH/Day
Roaring Brook	2,723	14%	52	52
Roaring Brook Falls	0	0.00%	0	0
Beer Walls	56	0.29%	15	4
Ridge	4,478	24%	76	59
Chapel Pond	42	0.22%	12	4
Garden AM	5,711	30%	77	74
Garden PM	2,603	14%	39	67
Garden (Total)	*8,314*	*44%*	*116*	72
Rooster Comb	827	4%	30	28
Cascade	2,576	14%	32	81
Total	**19,016**	**100%**	**333**	**57**
Total Adjusted	**18,918**	**100%**	**306**	**62**

*Days equates to number of times a steward was at a trailhead.
Green= increase, red= decrease, black= stayed the same from last year.



Trailhead stewards educated visitors and were at the trailhead only slightly less than last year. This year, the trailheads where stewards educated the most hikers were once again the Garden, Ridge, Roaring Brook, and Cascade trailheads (44%, 24%, 14%, and 14%, respectively). Cascade continues to be an impactful site even though our trailhead stewards are only there on Thursdays and Mondays when the 46er trailhead stewards are not there. The total adjusted line does not include the Beer Walls or Chapel Pond as the stewards do not spend a full day there and have much smaller numbers of interactions than their full-day locations. These locations provide some significant outliers in the data if included with the full-day locations.

	2025			2026		
Month	**Contacts**	**Days***	**AVG Person / TH / Day**	**Contacts**	**Days***	**AVG Person / TH / Day**
June	2,450	47	37	3,370	62	54
July	4,904	80	61	6,295	98	64
August	6,839	94	72	5,371	83	65
September	3,379	71	53	2,873	50	57
October	2,304	28	82	963	12	80
Total	20,385	324	63	18,873	305	62

The chart above shows our monthly contact numbers for the program. Like the previous chart, these contact numbers and averages do not include data from the Beer Walls or Chapel Pond since stewards did not dedicate full days at those trailheads. This will give us a slightly lower number of total contacts per month, but a higher average and one that is more representative of the trailheads we spend full days at.

Like last year, the busiest days in the High Peaks were the first two weekends in October. These weekends were challenging for us with staffing. In the first weekend of October, we educated 203 recreators at the Ridge Trail on October 3rd. At the Garden, our steward had a much lower number of contacts (80), though many more people than that moved through the trailhead. Because the Garden was full Friday night leading into a busy fall Saturday, most people needed to take the shuttle. Our steward reported people waiting a long time at Marcy field for the shuttle due to high demand, so when hikers got to the Garden, they did not want to stop and talk with a steward. Indigenous People's Day weekend also saw some interesting usage as we only educated 239 hikers at the Garden on Friday the 9th through Sunday the 11th. This could have been from the Garden shuttle not running that day, so it cut down on the number of people walking up from Keene Valley. Again, the lot was full Friday night. The Garden remains a priority location for educators and all parties that play a part in education there (ADK, DEC, and The Town of Keene) are important to recreators heading into the Johns Brook Valley of the High Peaks Wilderness.



TRAILHEAD STEWARDS' KEY TAKEAWAYS

Trailhead stewards complete end-of-season reports to summarize their field season. Here are some key takeaways paraphrased from those reports:

- Stewards felt that the Roaring Brook trailhead was an ineffective educational spot this year. Hikers continued to be confused regarding the reservation system at the Adirondack Mountain Reserve (AMR) and used the Roaring Brook trailhead as overflow parking. Since the permit is for a parking spot, folks would park at Roaring Brook, pile into one car, and then park at AMR which left less space at the Roaring Brook trailhead. The stewards did encounter a lot of groups that stayed at the campsites at Roaring Brook Falls for the night but only talked to them while they were packing up at the trailhead since the overnight groups usually arrived later in the evening when stewards are not present.
- The stewards sometimes felt awkward at the Rooster Comb trailhead. Many people using this lot on the weekends are overflow parking from the Garden, with some recreators heading up the trail towards the Great Range. This trailhead is also very popular for locals to walk around the pond. The stewards did enjoy getting to know locals from seeing them many times, but felt their education was not the most effective at this trailhead. Oftentimes stewards felt like they reverted to a parking attendant trying to manage how efficiently people parked in the lot on busy weekends.
- DEC staffed an educator at the Garden trailhead in the fall due to parking lot conflicts that previously occurred. The Town of Keene Front Country Stewards and our trailhead stewards appreciated the support. It's important to note that trailhead stewards are there only as an educational presence and not law enforcement.
- Chapel Pond is a difficult location to educate since people are mainly stopping there to use the bathrooms, swim, or rock climb. Those activities don't lend themself to the most opportune time to give an educational message. Stewards headed back to some of the walls behind Chapel Pond to provide education to climbers and had great intereactions, especially with camp groups and guided parties.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review season with DEC and make programmatic decisions based off of data.
- Figure out a solution for bear can rentals near the Garden parking lot when The Mountaineer is closed.
- Consider adjusting hours based off of location, day of the week, visitation numbers, and hours of daylight. Stewards recommended this expecially for the fall season.
- Add additional gear sizes and invest in hats and other cold weather gear. Look into gear sponsorship. Replace pop-up tents and tables that have become damaged and invest in a light source for stewards.
- Continue to work with DEC and the Town of Keene on successful coverage at the Garden.
- Add to the educational materials stewards have for tabling.
- Continue to add additional metrics to document whether the program is being successful.

PARTNERS, DONORS, & SPONSORS

This program is contracted by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Funding is provided through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) as administered by DEC. DEC also provided uniform shirts again this year. Thank you to DEC staff for providing administrative, training, and logistical support.

Thank you to L.L.Bean for donating gear to the program. L.L.Bean provided rain jackets, puffy jackets, and zip-off pants, and gloves to trailhead stewards, as well as providing additional gear to ADK's trip leaders which included HPIC and education staff, trails volunteer crew leaders, summit stewards, volunteer trailhead stewards, and professional trail crew.

THANK YOU

The Route 73 Trailhead Stewardship Program would not be possible without the support and funding of several various organizations and individuals. We'd like to thank the following organizations:

- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- Town of Keene Front Country Stewards
- Adirondack Climbers Coalition
- L.L.Bean

And individuals:

Joe Pete Wilson, Tate Connor, Rob Daley, Nate Jeffery, Andrew Lewis, Jenna Curcio, Charlie Foutch, Nicole Duchene, Allison Rooney, Hanna Praczkajlo, Osita Ezumah, Assistant Forest Rangers, Alicia Bodmer and the entire Ray Brook Dispatch team, Jill Trunko, Will Roth (ACC), David Fadden (SNICC), Tamara Jolly (ADI), Lucienne Nicholson (ADI), Martha Swan (JBL!), Anna Forsman (JBL!), and ADK staff who assisted with training.

This is a new beginning in stewardship along the Route 73 corridor! Thank you for all of your support. Please feel free to reach out via phone (518-523-3480 x 129) or email with any questions or comments on how we can continue to improve the program and better protect the Forest Preserve. Thank you.

Most sincerely,
Liam Ebner
Stewardship Manager
liam@adk.org