



**CATSKILLCENTER**

## **Catskill Stewards Program 2021 End of Season Report**

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*Figure 1: Catskill Stewards during training week at Kaaterskill Falls*

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of a difference you want to make.” — Jane Goodall

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## Locations

The Catskills are known for iconic landscapes and freshwater creeks and streams. Visitors come to the Catskills to experience a life in the trees, seek adventure, and find solace. Over the years the Catskills have become busier and are more popular than ever.

In 2021 the Catskill Stewards Program expanded to reach more people as efficiently as possible. Now covering four locations, we are able to ensure that visitors are receiving quality, minimum impact education on the ground, while on site. Now, every year stewards work hard to educate an influx of visitors on Leave No Trace Principles, actively cleanup litter, and coordinate with land managers to complete projects to make a meaningful difference on the ground. The Catskill Stewards do this work in an effort to safeguard access to these Catskill Park gems for all people, and for future generations to come.

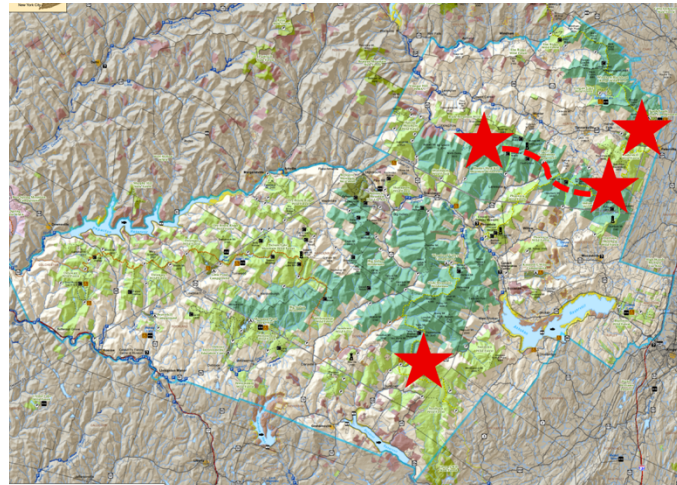


Figure 2: The red stars indicate the primary locations of the Catskill Stewards Program with the dashed line representing the newest location, the Devil's Path

## Peekamoose Blue Hole | Kaaterskill Falls | Devil's Path | Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

### Peekamoose Blue Hole

New for 2021 the permit system has expanded to seven days a week as well as expanding location coverage to include the entire Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor. Popular sites in the corridor include the Blue Hole, Buttermilk Falls, Peekamoose/Table Mountains Trailhead, Bangle Hill Trailhead, Upper Field, Middle Field, and Lower Field. This location expansion is in an effort to include all camping in the Peekamoose Valley. Campers receive a permit that is good for the entirety of their stay, at their specific campsite. With their camping permit, visitors may access the Blue Hole and other trailheads in the corridor. The Blue Hole continues to draw visitors from around the globe.

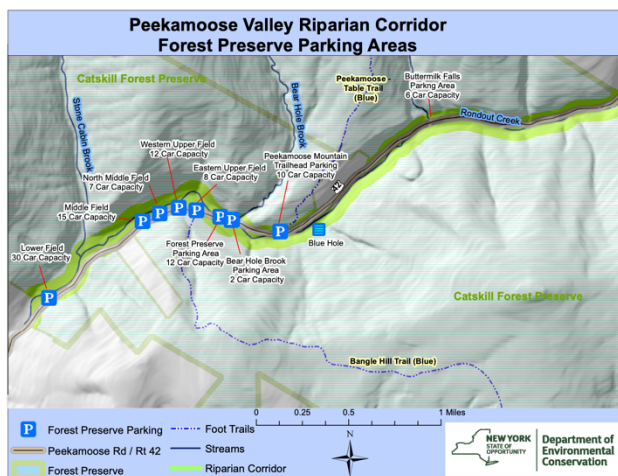


Figure 3: Permit expansion includes all access to the Peekamoose Valley Riparian Corridor. Permit season dates: May 15th - September 15th

Lined by shale ledges 3-5' in height, the Peekamoose Blue Hole is a natural geologic formation and an exquisite frontcountry swimming hole in a remote Catskills location. Cool, 55-degree Fahrenheit, spring-fed water keeps the 'hole' a stunning blue color. Social media fame has exponentially increased recent

visitation and the resulting impact has been severe.

Pre-2014, trash and litter were a rarity and easily picked up by local visitors. Since 2015 however, social media, news outlets, and internet guides have boasted about the pristine and picturesque beauty of this place and people have flocked to the narrow corridor.

The Blue Hole's internet fame has necessitated new resource management strategies and investments including the first day use permit system in New York beginning in 2018, as well as the creation of the Catskill Center's Peekamoose Blue Hole Stewardship Program (now the Catskill Stewards Program) that same year. The Peekamoose Blue Hole is the flagship location of the Catskill Stewards Program and has enabled a foundation for the program to grow into the operation that it is today.

### **Kaaterskill Falls**

Kaaterskill Falls boasts a 260-foot relief from the top of the falls to the base of the second tier. Loved by locals and tourists alike, Kaaterskill falls is estimated to host well over 150,000 visitors each year. This landmark has been the epicenter of Catskills tourism since the early 1800's, thus Kaaterskill Falls is the most popular and highly visited destination in the Catskill Park Forest Preserve.



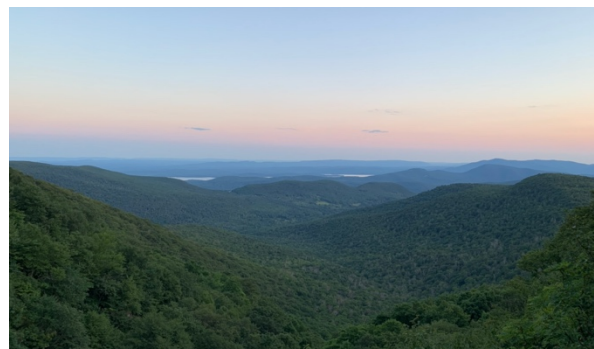
*Figure 4: A clean-up at Kaaterskill*

With the expansion of the Catskill Stewards Program in the spring of 2019, Kaaterskill Falls has been a primary consideration for the stewards' efforts. To date the Catskill Stewards Program has interacted with 230,000 visitors and has removed over 6,500 pounds of litter from Kaaterskill Falls and its surrounding trails.

Unlike the Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls has multiple points of entry. However, the most commonly used trailhead is at the Laurel House Parking Area, situated at the top of the falls. It is at the beginning of the trailhead where the Catskill Center Stewards are situated full-time through the peak season. Stewards regularly help with area clean-ups and rescues as directed by NYSDEC Forest Rangers.

### **Devil's Path**

24.2 miles of steep and rugged Catskills Mountains. The Devil's Path shares company with some of the world's most dangerous trails according to a 2014 Outside Online article. This trail traverses some of the Catskills tallest peaks, with large climbs and many rock ledges. Without prior hiking and climbing experience the Devil's Path can be treacherous. This reputation has made the trail (as well as sections of it) very popular among visitors and hikers. Due to this increased activity the trail has had increased recreational impacts.



*Figure 5: Views from the Devil's Path, photograph taken by Jenny Flavin*

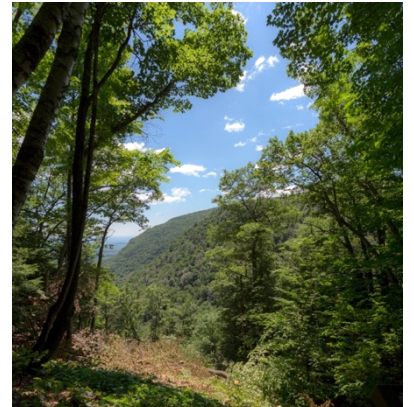
The 'Hike for the Catskills (Center)' benefit hike driven by Moe Lemire of Hike On Guides was the catalyst for the Catskill Stewards Program expanding to include the Devil's Path for this season. Our goal here was simple; provide high quality, minimum impact education to all visitors and hikers of the Devil's Path while out on the trail. This position adopted the title, Ridge Runner as our Steward (Jenny Flavin) was hiking along a different section of the path each day.

### **Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve**

A refuge and sanctuary for an untold number of artists, Platte Clove has been an inspiration for Hudson River School painters dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, Platte Clove hosts a part-time Catskill Steward on weekends (Friday – Sunday) and holidays.

The natural beauty of Platte Clove is undoubtedly a Catskill Park gem. Fresh streams, waterfalls, and access to some of the most iconic hiking trails in the Catskills, Platte Clove is worth the visit. Our on-site steward educates people about the unique ecosystem, hiking trails, as well as the best place to park.

The Catskill Center aims to protect the Platte Clove for future generations to come. With a steward on site to greet our guests, we have witnessed a decrease in riparian erosion, as well as a reduction to the many social trails which once spiderwebbed the woods.



*Figure 6: The iconic view looking east at the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve.*

### **Catskill Stewards are on site to:**

- Welcome all to the Catskills
- Provide information, such as where to explore and what to avoid
- Describe the impacts that are harming each location and inform people how to avoid contributing to these impacts
- Educate and inspire visitors to reduce their impacts and follow Leave No Trace both in the Catskills and in life
- Inform people of the most important rules and regulations
- Be a resource for any questions people have about these locations as well as others across the Catskills



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## Season In Summary

Our biggest season to date, the Catskill Stewards worked hard and interacted with more visitors this year than ever before during a single season. This year the Catskill Center hired eight stewards and provided coverage at four locations. After a very busy 2020 season the Catskill Stewards Program was eager to help the region cope with the previous years' increased visitation and help to rehabilitate impacts caused by recreation.

The season began in May with two weeks of training for the incoming team, this season we hosted and helped train our friends at Catskill Mountainkeeper who hired two stewards for this season. Each season we commit this much time to training to ensure that the stewards are prepared to encounter most scenarios on the trail or at the trailhead. We cover many topics during this time including a Leave No Trace Trainer Course, Authority of the Resource Technique, Wilderness First Aid Course, wilderness preparations, radio protocols, wildlife encounter protocols, trail maintenance, and much more. All of this training helps to ensure that regardless of the interaction while in the field our stewards are prepared to provide an meaningful, kind, and energetic experience for all visitors.

While making preparations for the season many in the conservation field were wondering if the Forest Preserve would receive the same influx of visitors as we witnessed in 2020. After keeping track of the metrics and speaking with visitors, we have had a much different season than last year in the Catskills. Overall, numbers resumed their slow upward trend, reverting largely back to pre-2020 levels but we are no longer seeing the overwhelming waves of visitation that came with 2020. This made for a much more effective stewarding season. We were able to provide higher quality and more meaningful interaction due to being able to spend more time with individuals.

### In 2021,

- Visitor engagement reach of over **84,847 people**
- Over **225 bags** of litter collected (~ **4,500 lbs.**)
- Fire rings deconstructed - **94** - sites rehabilitated
- Rock dams deconstructed - **19**
- Rock stacks removed - **305**
- Total days on site - **201**
- Dogs greeted - **3,045**
- Visitor parking citations avoided - **147** (minimum)



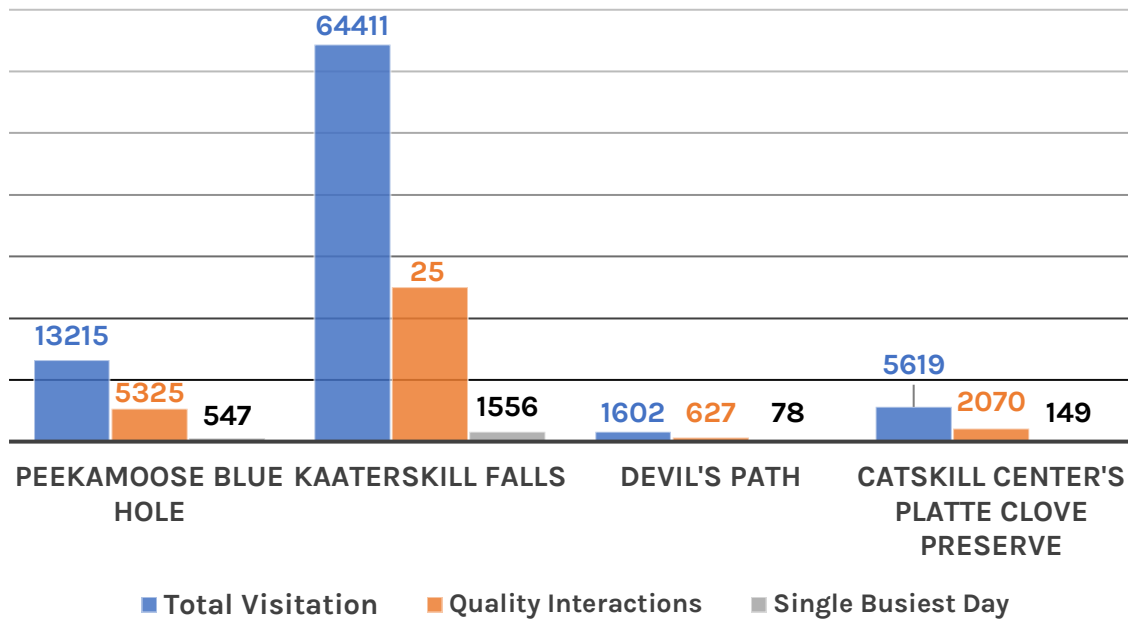
*Figure 7: Impromptu trail maintenance during the Leave No Trace Trainer Course*

While each stewarding location has its own specific needs, there is a common theme of natural resources. Water bodies, riparian areas, trail systems, flora, and fauna are consistently in danger of being trampled or harmfully impacted by an influx of visitors. The Catskill Stewards have become a vital link for the visitation experience. Without their on-site presence (such as on their days off), the stewards have witnessed increased litter, rock dams and rock stacks, and user-created trails begin to spiderweb through pristine forest floors. Impacts will continue to threaten the public land in the Catskill Park, and it is the duty of all people to be stewards of the land individually, to each do our part to keep these places the natural gems they are. This noble pursuit is an effort to keep our wild lands wild, for future generations to come. The role of the Catskill Stewards is to lend a hand, and lead all visitors in the direction of making minimum impact decisions while recreating in the park.

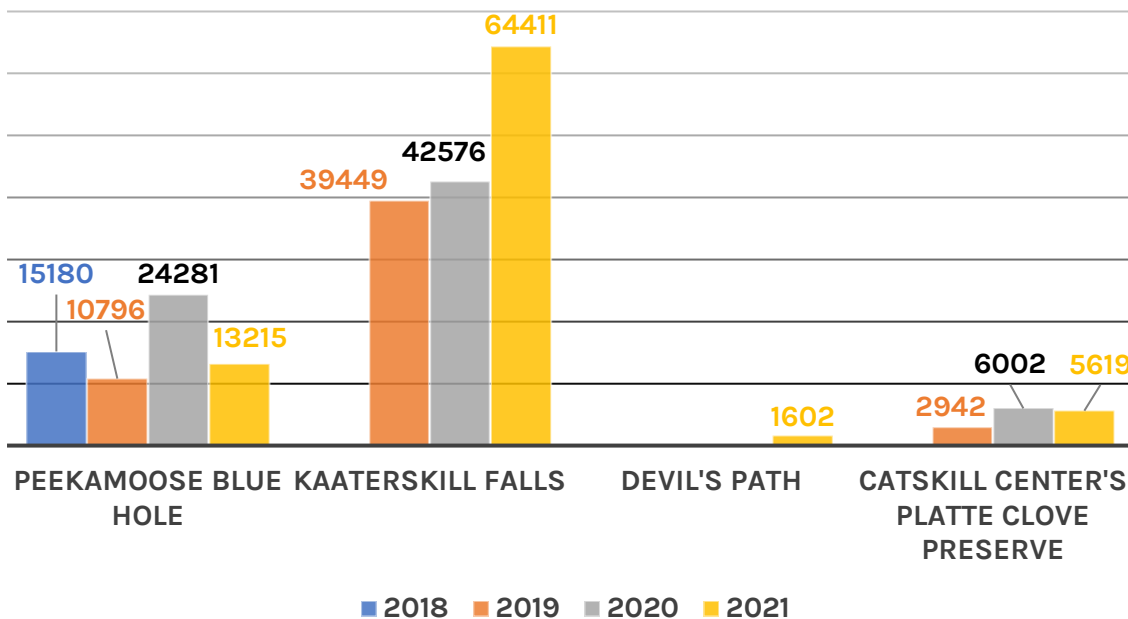
## Graph Data

The following graphs are separated by location (Peekamoose Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls, and the Platte Clove Preserve) and give the reader an insight to the scope of work achieved throughout the 2020 season. Each location presents its own needs, visitor base, and specific communication techniques. The first two graphs represent the visitation rates of all three locations for the season in summation.

2021 Season Totals (graph 1)



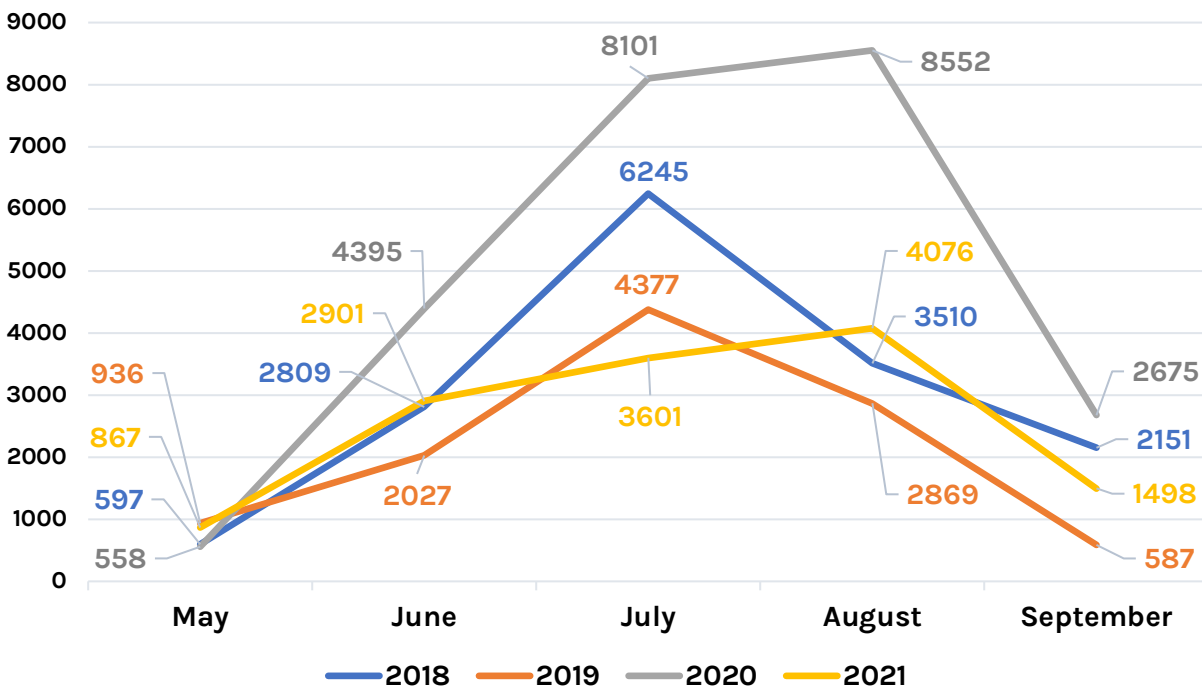
Yearly Totals 2018-2021 (graph 2)



## Peekamoose Blue Hole

The Blue Hole is the flagship location of the Catskill Stewards Program. Combining education with thoughtful regulation (i.e. the permit system), the visitor experience and natural resources of the Blue Hole have improved immensely over the years. Stewardship messaging, permit system regulations, and Forest Ranger presence have all thoughtfully evolved since their coordinated start in 2018. The 2021 season included new changes to the permit area (see page 3), required permit days (7 days a week), and increased presence of stewards and rangers.

Peekamoose Blue Hole Monthly Totals 2018-2021 (graph 3)



### Definitions of Label Terms:

Total Visitation - The total number of individuals counted on location.

Quality Interactions - Educational touchpoints, these individuals learned specific information about Leave No Trace as well as details about the specific impacts facing a given location.

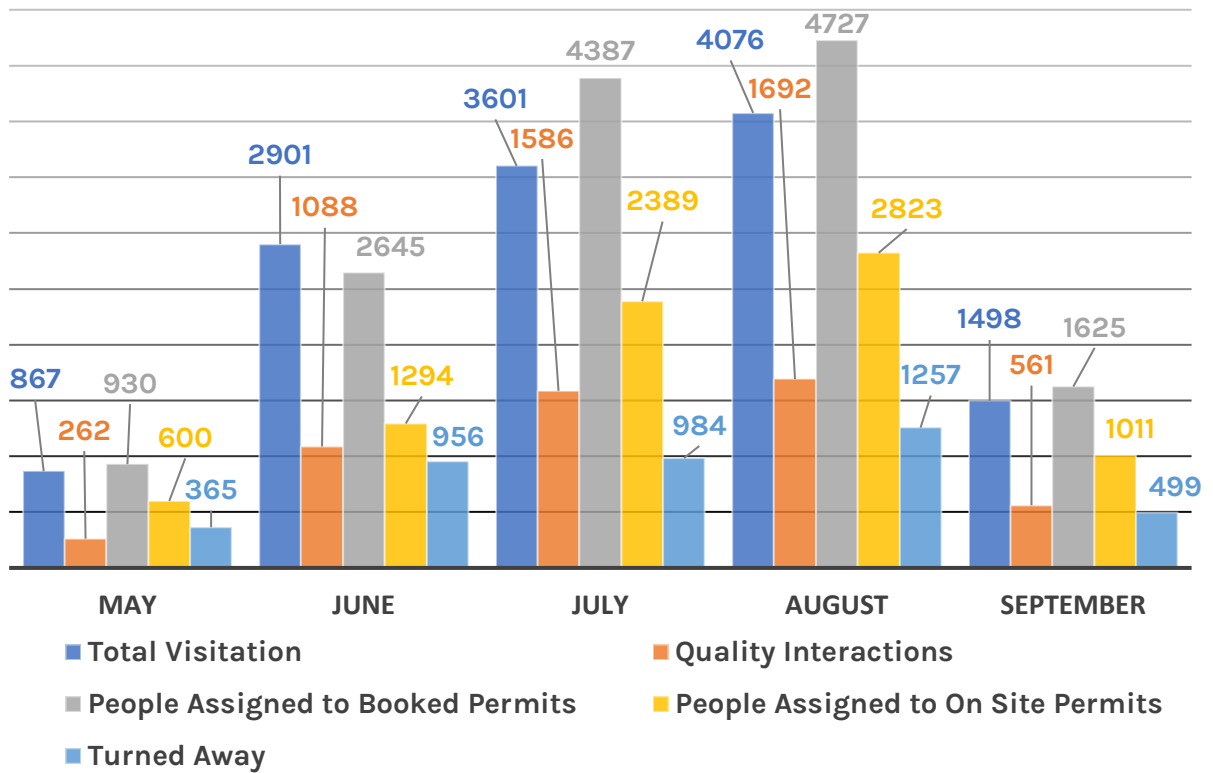
People Assigned to Booked Permits - Total number of individuals assigned to the booked permits. These individuals may or may not have visited the Blue Hole.

People Assigned to On Site Permits - Total number of individuals assigned to booked permits who actually visited the Blue Hole.

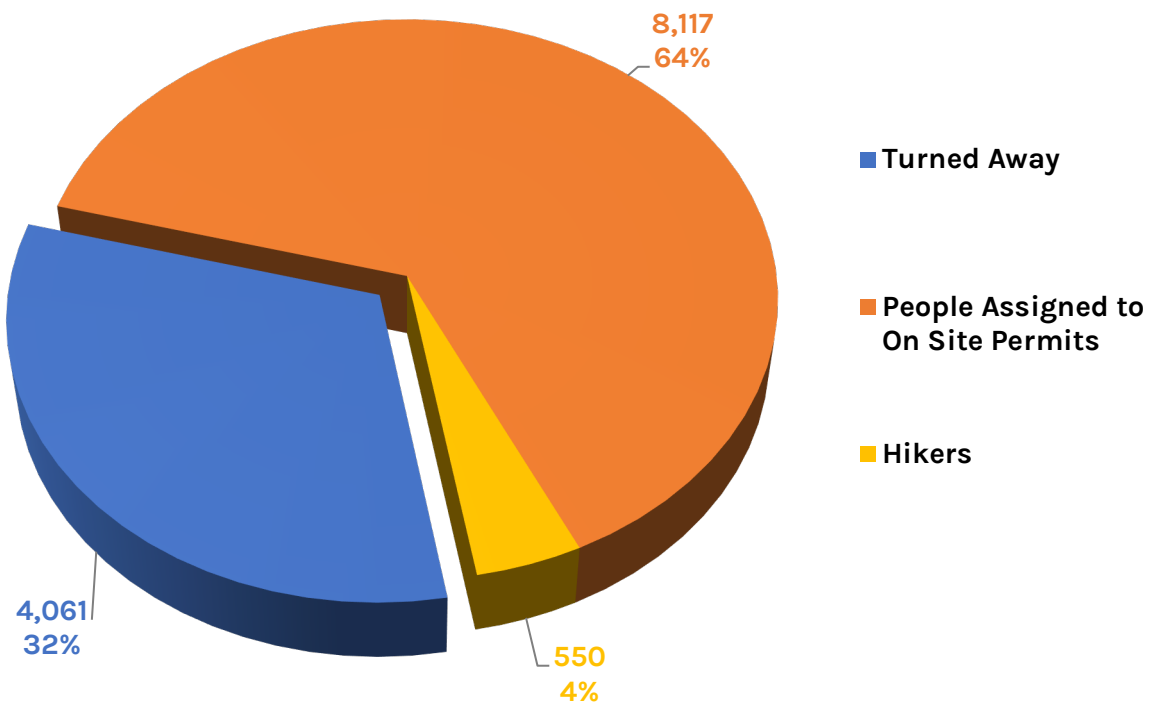
Turned Away - Total number of visitors who visited on a weekend or holiday without a permit. Does not include hikers leaving the riparian corridor.



Peekamoose Blue Hole 2021 Totals (graph 4)



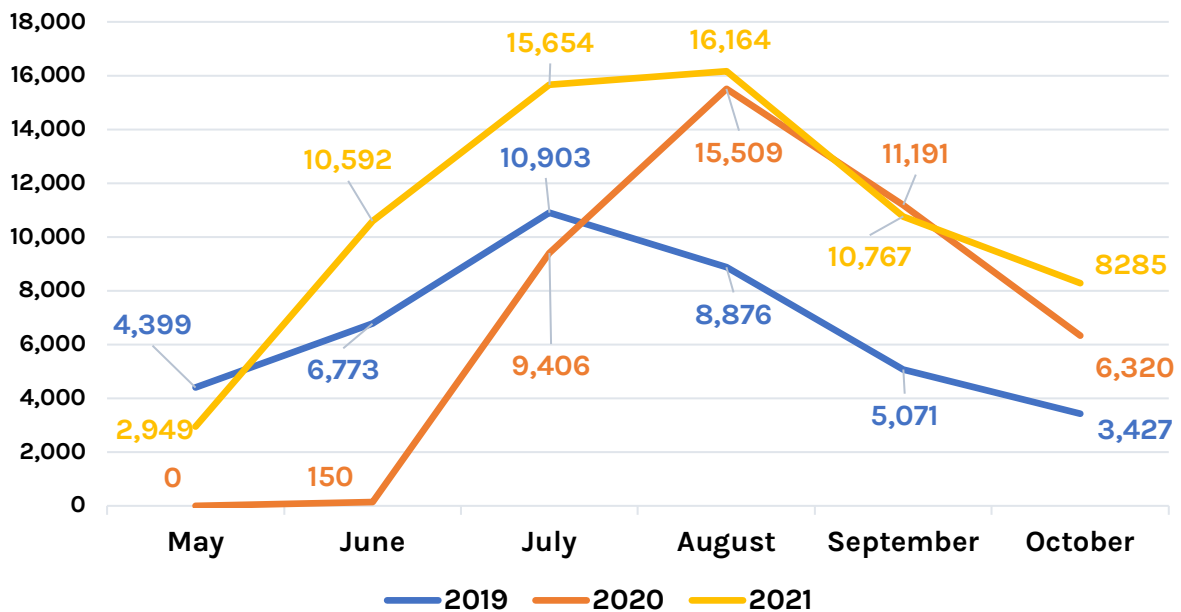
Peekamoose Blue Hole On Site Visitor Breakdown (graph 5)



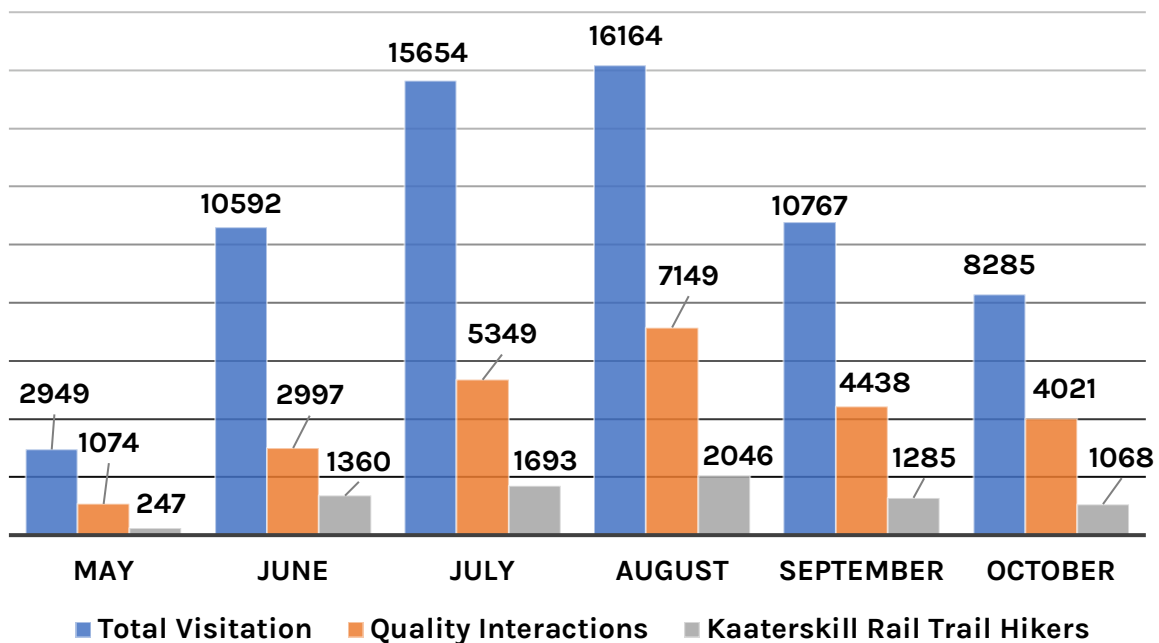
## Kaaterskill Falls

Easily the busiest and most popular destination within the Catskill Forest Preserve. The Catskill Stewards were on site full-time this season and were stationed at the Laurel House Trailhead. Our numbers from 2020 do not directly reflect the actual use of 2020 as we had limited staff members on site. The **single busiest day** in 2021 had **1,556** visitors compared to **2,745** visitors in 2020 and **1,858** visitors recorded in 2019. Additionally, stewards removed **50 bags of trash** during the season.

**Kaaterskill Falls Monthly Totals 2019-2021 (graph 6)**



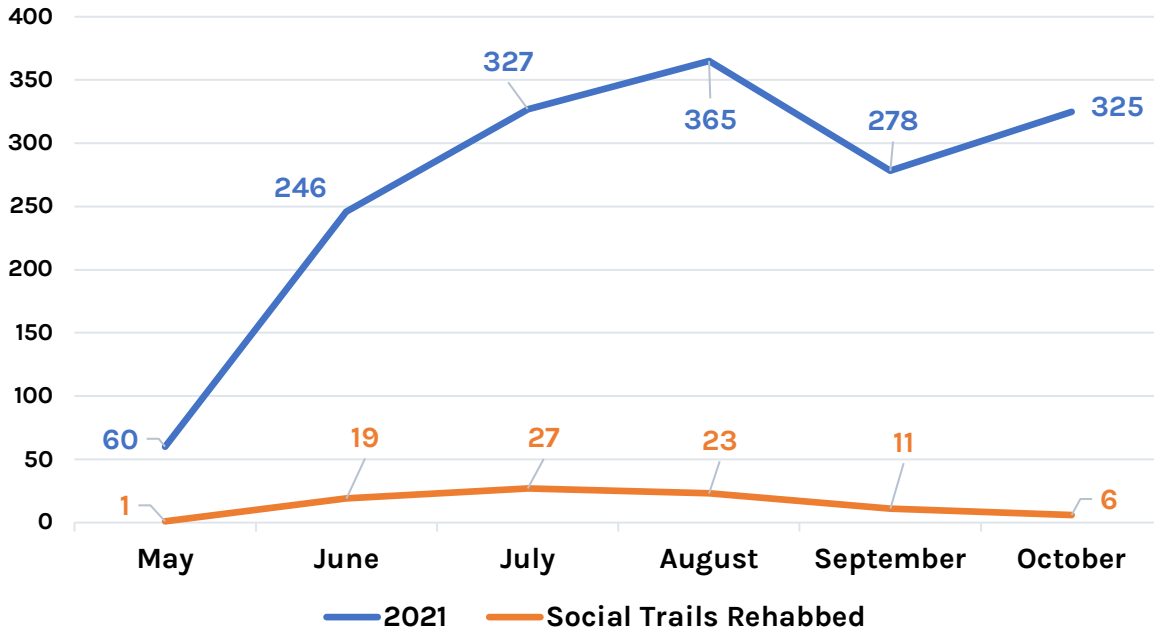
**Kaaterskill Falls 2021 Totals (graph 7)**



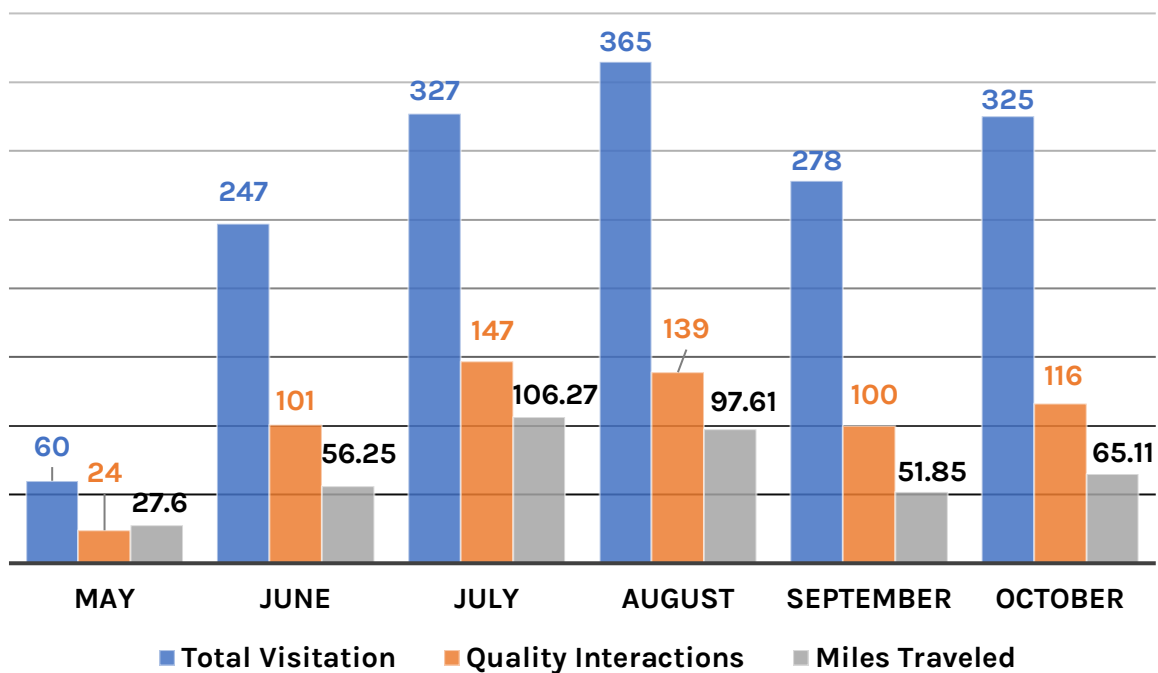
## Devil's Path

New for this year, our stewarding Ridge Runner (Jenny Flavin) was able to traverse the peaks of the Devil's Path to provide education to trail users. While hiking along the trail, Jenny identified areas of impact including social trails, rock stacks, leftover food waste, tree carvings, and illegal campsites. Once identified, Jenny would rehab the areas, or remove the waste as needed.

Devil's Path Monthly Totals 2019, 2020 (graph 6)



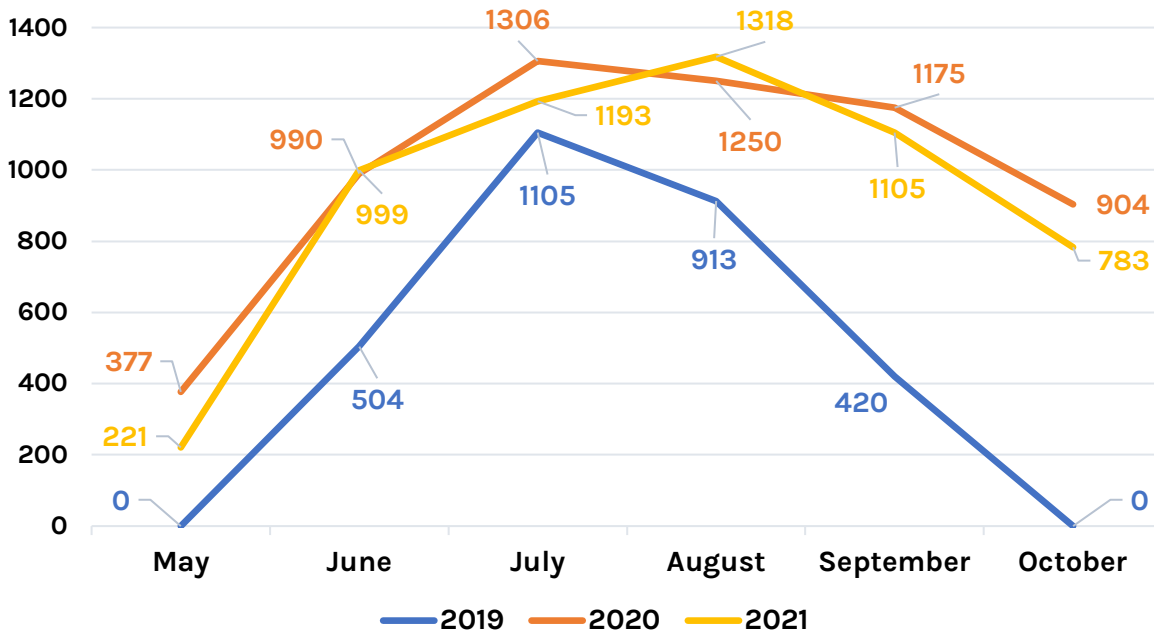
Devil's Path 2021 Totals (graph 7)



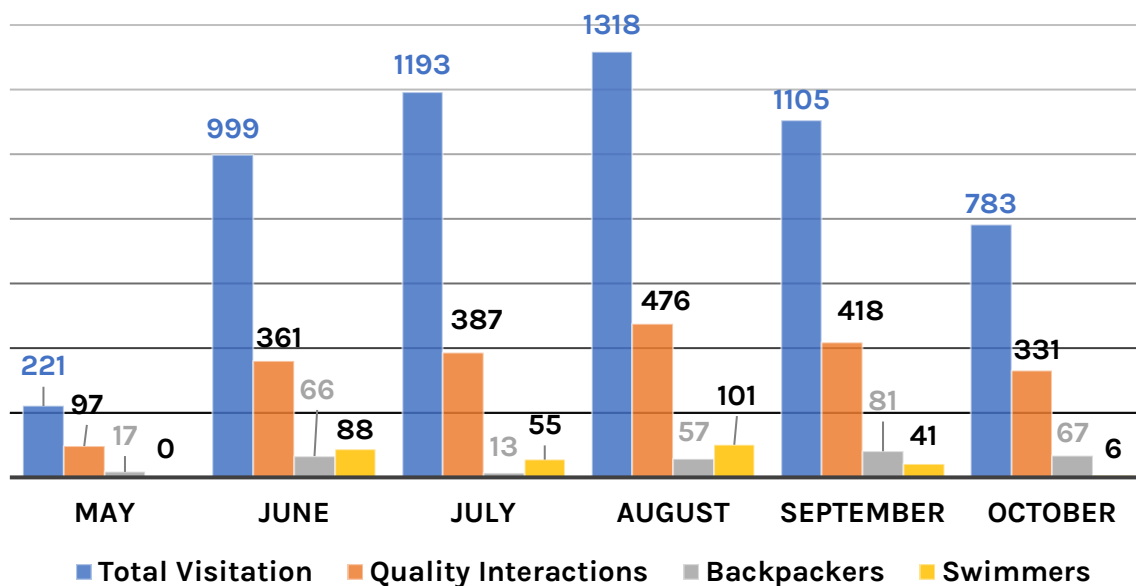
## Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve

With one part-time steward, the Catskill Center was able to provide outreach and education to visitors on weekends (Friday-Sunday) and holidays. The Preserve is a unique location with a sensitive ecosystem and very dangerous geology. The central feature of the Preserve is the Platte Kill which meanders through the preserve cascading over multiple ledges. A crumbly shale shelf surrounding the tops of cliffsides and the waterfalls makes traveling off trail incredibly dangerous and not advised. Catskill Stewards did their best to keep the clove clean, while making sure visitors were well prepared for a safe experience.

Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve Monthly Totals 2019-2021 (graph 8)



Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve 2021 Totals (graph 9)



## Our Stewards

**Andy Mossey** - Skiing, camping, backpacking, climbing, and wandering in the woods are the activities that brought Andy outside. Once out there, he discovered a knack and passion for speaking up for public lands without a voice. Over the last four years at the Catskill Center, Andy has worked with partner organizations and agencies to ensure Catskill Forest Preserve gems are protected and preserved for future generations. Andy is the Catskill Center's, Stewardship and Advocacy Coordinator.

**Jenny Flavin** - As an avid outdoor enthusiast, Jenny has been playing in the outdoors her entire life. This love for the outdoors inspired her to help protect the place she calls home for a third season. She summarized the benefits of the steward's program by saying this, "The most rewarding accomplishment of the steward season would be witnessing the physical shift in the environment when we were physically stationed at a given location. It truly gave me the feeling that what we are trying to do at these locations is working." Jenny was the Ridge Runner for the 2021 season.

**Eli Rogers** - Born and raised in New York just outside the Catskills, Eli returned for his second season as a Catskill Steward. He steadily grew his interest in recreating and protecting the outdoors through hiking over 500 miles of Catskills trails, exploring the many hidden corners of these special mountains. This inspired him to pursue working in the field of environmental stewardship, enabling him to spend more time outside giving back to the land. In his spare time he enjoys climbing, trail running, long distance hiking, and hanging out with his cat. Eli was the Head Steward this season.



**David Hans** - David Hans joined the Catskill Stewards Program for his first season this year. A resident of Woodstock, NY, David brings a love for the Catskills and the beauty it provides. As an avid hiker, he is currently working on joining the 3500 Club with plans to follow up with the Adirondacks 46 high peaks. David deeply cares for the Catskills and loves sharing this passion with other visitors.

**Kyla Watson** - Kyla is beginning her first year with the Catskill Stewards Program. She recently earned a BA in Aquatic and Fisheries Science at SUNY ESF which she aims to apply to the study of Atlantic Sturgeon in the Hudson River. She grew up in Ulster County where she spent much of her time along the shorelines of the Hudson River and exploring the nearby forests and mountains of the Catskills. She continues to enjoy hiking, camping, SCUBA diving, and keeping reptiles. She wants to contribute to the healing of our natural world, but more importantly to communicate the importance of respecting it.

**Chet Cienkowski** - Chet is excited to work with the Catskill Center after spending years in an office. The high point of his year in 2020 was taking time off of work to go hiking and camping so he looked for opportunities to work outside and share this passion for the outdoors. This is Chet's first year with the Catskill Stewards Program and hopes it will be the start of something great.

**Lucas Frank-Holzner** - Hailing from the mid-west Lucas is joining the Catskill Stewards Program for the first time in 2021. A love for the outdoors and helping people have Lucas excited to start the season. While in the Catskills, Lucas took time hiking, camping, and getting to know this unique area. As the season winds down Lucas is ready to start the next adventure.

**Peter Geohan** - Working on weekends and holidays, Peter helped to protect the wild Platte Clove Preserve. As an avid outdoorsperson Peter spends his winter in South America searching for remote rivers to fly fish. This same passion for wild spaces, encouraged Peter to help protect the Catskills for the past two summers. Peter said, "I had a great time helping people find trails and directing them to the Platte Kill falls and creek."

## Additional Programming

Every season of the Catskill Stewards Program brings with it the opportunity to share with others skills, ethics, and passion for the outdoors. This year the stewards worked with partners, and the Catskills Visitor Center to reach out to new groups and complete projects across the Catskill Park.

### Trail Maintenance

Our stewarding locations all came under the day-to-day care of the stewards this season. As mud puddles formed or trash was left behind the Catskill Stewards were there to ensure a high quality experience for visitors.



### Kiosk Build at the Catskill Center's Thorn Preserve

Peter and Doug Senterman built in pieces the kiosk for Thorn Preserve. Over the course of three days the stewards constructed, installed, and stained the kiosk. This new feature will provide visitors to the preserve with information and guidance.



## Nature Walk and Leave No Trace

In-person programming was a big step towards a fully functioning season. Our stewards worked alongside Catskills Visitor Center staff to work with youth, teach Leave No Trace, and share a deeper connection to the Catskills.



## Illegal Campfire and Campsite Rehabilitation

One of the most frequent and significant impacts to the Forest Preserve are illegal campsites and campfires. While on the trail stewards worked hard to minimize these impacts and rehabilitate campsites.



## Funding

The Catskill Stewards Program is an example of the power of partnership. With the gracious support of the following partners, this program was made possible.

Thank you to the **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation** and their continued working partnership. In addition to grant funding; this program works closely with the Natural Resources staff, which enables the stewards to achieve their goal each season through improved signage, and resources. All while helping to keep communication and safety a priority for the stewards.



**Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation**



Thank you to the **Rondout Neversink Stream Program**; a project of Sullivan County Soil & Water Conservation District in partnership with the Towns of Denning and Neversink funded by NYC Department of Environmental Protection. Their continued support keeps this program running at the Peekamoose Blue Hole location in the town of Denning.

A major partner of the Catskill Stewards Program since 2019, the **REI Co-op** is dedicated to helping preserve the Catskill Park. Thank you to the REI Co-op and its members for their assistance in growing this program to include Kaaterskill Falls. In addition to monetary support, REI has opened their doors to the stewards in the past to host informational displays in their NYC metropolitan stores. This has enabled the stewards to educate visitors of the Catskills before they even visit the park itself. #OptOutside



**Catskill Center** members and donors enable the continued success of this program by ensuring the proper administration of this program. A heartfelt, “thank you” to all Catskill Center members. To become a Catskill Center member visit [catskillcenter.org/support](http://catskillcenter.org/support)

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In addition to our major supporters above, the following **community partners** have donated to the Catskill Stewards Program. We are incredibly grateful for your continued support.

**The Bruderhof Community at Platte Clove**  
**Catskill Mountain Club**  
**The Hunter Foundation**

Partnership & inquiries may be directed to...

Andy Mossey  
Stewardship & Advocacy Coordinator  
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