

DEC Announces Plans to Promote Sustainable Tourism in the Adirondack Park

As we all know popular destinations in the Adirondack Park, particularly in the High Peaks area, are attracting unprecedented numbers of users. Parking lots that once only filled up on holidays are now packed with cars nearly every weekend. This increase in the number of visitors to the mountains is causing safety issues at some of the high-use trailheads as well as stressing the park's natural resources. To address these issues the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recently announced a multi-year, comprehensive effort to promote sustainable tourism.

To improve public safety and reduce impacts to natural resources in the area, DEC held four focus group meetings this past winter to generate ideas and information to support recommendations, particularly to address overuse challenges in the High Peaks region and the Route 73 corridor between Exit 30 of the Northway and Lake Placid. The meetings were held in partnership with the towns of Keene and North Elba and involved a wide range of stakeholders. With input from DEC land managers, the meetings helped the agency identify specific strategies and actions to be taken in 2018 and 2019.

You may have already seen the first phase of actions, which began along the Route 73 corridor just prior to the July 4th holiday. A number of portable bathrooms were installed, parking spots were striped in parking areas such as the Giant and Cascade trailheads, and kiosks with information on alternate hiking opportunities in under-utilized areas of the park were added.

Some of the DEC's actions may impact your next visit to the High Peaks, so please read the following details carefully so you will be aware of the changes and can modify your plans accordingly. Please keep in mind that the DEC is implementing these changes for the safety of those visiting the Adirondacks and for the protection of the natural environment to insure that visitors will be able to enjoy the special beauty of this area for generations to come.

Initial DEC actions include:

- Striping parking spots in designated parking lots;
- Increasing the number of portable bathrooms along the corridor;
- Installing kiosks along the corridor that provide information on nearby, under-utilized alternate hiking opportunities;
- Installing electronic variable messaging boards along the corridor directing hikers to the kiosks:
 - King Phillips Spring Pull-off (Northway Exit 30)
 - Marcy Field in Keene
 - Olympic Regional Development Authority's (ORDA) Mt. VanHoevenberg Olympic Sports Complex
- Installing displays which provide information on nearby underutilized alternate hiking opportunities at two other locations:
 - Northbound High Peaks Rest Area
 - Lake Placid Visitor Information Center

By the end of July, roadside parking will be prohibited in areas around parking spots and along the roadside in certain areas adjacent to roadside parking lots when necessary to improve line of sight for drivers.

In addition, this summer DEC will launch a social media campaign to highlight experiences outside of the Adirondack High Peaks with information on safety, sustainable outdoor recreation (Leave No Trace), and trip planning tips.

Additional strategies will build on continuing DEC efforts to promote sustainable recreation, including the highly successful pilot relocation of the trailheads for Cascade, Porter and Pitchoff (West) Mountains during Columbus Day weekend in 2017:

- Pending approval of the High Peaks Wilderness Complex Amendment, DEC will construct a new, sustainably designed trail up Mt. VanHoevenberg from the new trailhead in time to open Columbus Day weekend 2018.
- In anticipation of Columbus Day weekend, DEC is working with partners to develop a plan to pilot a shuttle bus at the Mt. VanHoevenberg Olympic Sports Complex.
- Pending approval of the High Peaks Wilderness Complex Amendment, DEC will permanently move the Cascade Mountain Trailhead to ORDA's Olympic Sports Complex and construct a new, sustainably designed trail up Cascade Mountain from the new trailhead, which is expected to be open in 2019.
- A traffic study will be initiated to assess traffic patterns and usage of major travel corridors.
- This summer, new volunteer Campground Ambassadors will distribute messages that encourage proper planning, preparation, and practices which facilitate safe, enjoyable, and low-impact outdoor recreation.
- DEC is also working with partners to expand the presence of trailhead stewards; develop additional digital technology to assist the public in trip planning; and facilitate a voluntary dispersal of the recreating public by highlighting alternative recreation opportunities.