



INFORMATION CENTER VOLUNTEER HOST PROGRAM

Program Location:

The Adirondack Mountain Club's (ADK) High Peaks Information Center (HPIC) is located on ADK's Heart Lake Property. Abutting New York's busiest trailhead, the HPIC serves as a gateway to the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness. On average in July and August we see approximately 30,000 registered hikers at the Heart Lake Property trailheads. The High Peaks Wilderness Area is New York State's largest wilderness area and is home to the 46 high peaks. One can hike in a landscape that varies from a northern hardwood forest to the spruce-fir zone to the arctic tundra. The area is also home to numerous pristine lakes and streams providing scenic waterfalls along major New York State watersheds. Over the last few years visitor numbers have been on an upward trend complicating the integrity of the wilderness experience and the ability to protect its natural resources.

Relevance to High Peaks Wilderness Area:

The Heart Lake Property offers visitors easy access to many of the 46 high peaks (4,000 ft mountains). The HPIC has a 200 car visitor parking area that fills regularly between 6 & 7am most days in July and August. When these parking areas fill, cars park along Adirondack Loj Rd sometimes extending miles down the road. Each year around 35% of these visitors to the High Peaks Wilderness are new to the area. The HPIC staff serves as the primary means of educating these visitors on responsible recreation practices, Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles, and rules and regulations specific to the area. Of the approximately 30,000 registered hikers in 2018 at the Heart Lake Property it is speculated that only a small percentage of them entered the HPIC before entering the backcountry for their hikes.

Several problems specific to the Central High Peaks in recent years include: overuse in sensitive environments (especially the fragile alpine zone), improper disposal of human waste, improper food storage, illegal campfires and unprepared hikers. Many of these issues are preventable with increased public outreach.

While on site Adirondack Mountain Club's (ADK's) Trailhead Stewards will represent ADK in an attempt to reach more of the visitors hiking from the Heart Lake Property. They will be stationed in the HPIC's hiker parking areas performing a variety of functions such as helping to park vehicles, spreading ADK's mission of responsible recreation and stewardship, educating visitors on LNT Principles and regulations specific to the area, suggesting alternative hikes in other locations and encourage more visitors to stop inside the HPIC before they enter the backcountry. ADK Trailhead Stewards will work with HPIC staff from 6:30am-12:30pm (weekdays) and from 6:00am-12:00pm (weekends) in order to reach more visitors before entering backcountry in an attempt to help alleviate some of the problems specific to this area.

Project Summary:

In 2021 ADK plans to use ADK's Trailhead Stewards from Friday to Sunday on weekends in the spring and fall and from Sunday to Sunday during July and August in front of the HPIC to instruct visitors where to park while sharing knowledge with them about ADK. ADK's Trailhead Stewards will provide the public with quality backcountry education in a friendly and welcoming way. Any enforcement activities will be left to NYS DEC personnel on site.

ADK's Trailhead Stewards will receive training specific to the Heart Lake Property and Central High Peaks Wilderness and will wear a uniform identifying them as a representative of ADK. While performing these tasks ADK's Trailhead Stewards will use a hand counter to keep track of the number of visitors they've engaged with. These counts will be used to help establish how many visitors we're reaching through these efforts in order to fine tune the program for the future. Hosts will also be on hand to help with parking lot cleanup. We plan to have one Host present each morning, with potential additional help added on weekends.

Staffing and Management:

The ADK's Trailhead Stewards will be supervised by the Volunteer Coordinator, HPIC Manager and staff. The HPIC Manager will be responsible for greeting the ADK's Trailhead Stewards upon arrival and departure in addition to day to day management of the volunteers.

Specific Planned Outcomes and Deliverables:

We seek to establish a dedicated Trailhead Stewardship Program to realize the following general outcomes:

- Educate public on alternative hiking destinations outside of the High Peaks Wilderness Areas and direct visitors to the High Peaks Information Center
- Provide general public outreach and education on Leave No Trace principles (especially traveling and camping on durable surfaces)
- Educate hikers on the High Peaks rules and regulations
- Educate the public on proper backcountry food storage and disposal of human waste
- Familiarize hikers with the 10 essentials necessary for a safe and fun backcountry experience
- Collect detailed visitor information (count each visitor interacted with)

Specific measurable deliverables that we seek from this program:

- Interact with at least 18,000 visitors at the Heart Lake Program Center
- Assist in weekly parking lot clean ups to promote a litter free backcountry and collect 50lbs of trash
- 30% of hikers will stop in the HPIC before their hike (compare trail register numbers to TrafX data)
- Have 95% coverage for all 100 scheduled days

We anticipate by meeting these deliverables, benefits from this program will include:

- An increase in the proper disposal of human & pet waste
- Reduction in human/black bear interactions
- Greater understanding of safe backcountry travel and responsible recreation practices
- More hikers enter the backcountry with the 10 essentials

- Reduced natural resource impact

Timeline:

Spring & Fall 2021 – Weekend Coverage

July & August 2021 – Weekly Coverage