



CONSERVATION CORPS

# Trail Steward Report

# Breakneck Ridge

May - Oct 2022 —



Parks, Recreation  
and Historic  
Preservation



# Introduction

The Trail Conference is taking a leadership role in coordinating stewardship efforts to keep up with growing threats to natural spaces and outdoor recreation areas. To educate users and help mitigate the negative impacts from increased use, the Trail Conference has partnered with land managers to begin a multi-phased approach in the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve. We believe the most effective way to advance change is through user education, public participation, and sustainable, on-the-ground solutions. Our Trail Steward program is an integral part of our response to these threats. When used responsibly, trails protect both the people who use them and the environment that surrounds them. But without education, trail lands are subject to mistreatment and misuse. Trail Stewards provide outreach and information about park regulations, hiker safety, preparedness, and other best practices. In addition to readying hikers, Trail Stewards help discourage and mitigate the misuse of trails and the surrounding lands through education and public relations work.



# Meet The Crew



**Ryan McClean**  
Crew Member



**Declan Urffer**  
Crew Member



**Tiffany Rolle**  
Crew Leader



**Andrew Katz**  
Crew Member



**Charlene Ramos**  
Crew Member





# Training

During the first month of the 2022 Conservation Corps season, five Trail Stewards received onsite training at Breakneck Ridge from Trail Steward Program Coordinator Myra Romano. Additional training was provided by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, and Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail.

They also received certifications in Wilderness First Aid and Leave No Trace.

## Wilderness First Aid CPR / AED

From June 6-8, the Trail Stewards joined other Conservation Corps members in earning their Wilderness First Aid certifications, enabling them to treat and stabilize ill and injured persons in front-country and backcountry settings.

## Leave No Trace Trainer Course

From June 21-22, the Trail Stewards came to Welch Education Center to earn their Leave No Trace Trainer certifications. The stewards learned the Seven Principles of Leave No Trace and how to best educate the public on outdoor ethics.





# Breakneck Ridge

Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve



## STATISTICS

TOTAL STEWARDING DAYS:

48

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED:

28,765

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED:

17,889

BUSIEST DAY:

October 22

1,863 hikers

BUSIEST HOUR:

10am - 11am

120 hikers on average

HIKERS DIRECTED TO BEACON:

419

HIKERS DIRECTED TO COLD SPRING:

4,628

**MOST COMMON REASONS WHY  
PEOPLE CHOSE NOT TO HIKE  
(AFTER TALKING TO A STEWARD):**

Improper footwear  
Insufficient water

LOST HIKERS HELPED:

148

INJURED HIKERS HELPED:

7

AVG HIGH:

78°

AVG LOW:

57°

The well-known, heavily trafficked Breakneck Ridge hike within the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve was the catalyst for the Trail Conference's Trail Steward program in 2013. This trail and the surrounding park are popular destinations for new and seasoned hikers in the Hudson Valley region. With Metro-North resuming passenger train service to the Breakneck Ridge stop in 2022, the trails have become even more accessible once again. Unfortunately, hikers continue to arrive unprepared for the challenging scramble and exposed terrain: little to no water, shoes that lack adequate tread and support, and no route plan. Luckily for them, the Trail Stewards are here to assist.

Two to three Trail Stewards were assigned to the Breakneck Ridge trailhead each weekend (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday holidays) from Memorial Day weekend through October 22nd. Over 48 days, stewards educated or assisted 17,889 of the 28,765 hikers they counted, a 62% engagement with visitors in 2022 (up from 56% in 2021). Many of these initial interactions focused on educating visitors before their hike. Stewards ensured that hikers were as well-prepared as possible for the terrain and conditions that lay ahead, reminded them of the rules and regulations, and provided them with insight on what to do in case something went awry. Because of their familiarity and expertise of the trails and surrounding areas, stewards could provide personal suggestions for visitors who were unprepared for Breakneck Ridge, looking for a more leisurely and less-challenging hike, or interested in visiting the nearby towns of Beacon and Cold Spring.

# Breakneck Ridge

## Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve



The Trail Stewards also walked the trails, providing directions, assistance, or encouragement to hikers they saw along the way. These excursions allowed the stewards to do litter cleanups along the short, moderate, and long loops - many of which become heavily populated with garbage due to visitors who may expect to find trash cans at viewpoints or trail intersections. By setting a good example and through friendly conversations about how we can all help protect our natural areas, we continue to make it our mission to educate people on the importance of disposing of waste properly.

Another evolution of the Trail Steward messaging in 2022 concentrated on invasive species outreach and education. At Breakneck Ridge, stewards taught visitors at the trailhead and on the trails about invasive species and how they are distinguished from native and non-native non-invasive species. Informational signage at the steward station acted as a conversation starter. Some of the topics covered included risks posed by invasive species, what some of the most common or dangerous ones look like, and how people can get involved in combatting the spread of invasive species. On seven days throughout the season, stewards had an extra ally when members of the Invasives Strike Force or Aquatic Invasives Strike force teamed up with them at Breakneck Ridge. This collaboration allowed for increased knowledge and awareness about the invasive plants in the area, treatment methods and hardships, and how to best communicate these matters to the public.





# Breakneck Ridge

## Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve



By interacting with visitors before they begin their hike, the Trail Stewards help mitigate various hazards to the land, to park staff and first responders, and to the individuals who are hiking (including everything from minor injuries to more extensive rescue operations). Although the presence of stewards cannot diminish these risks entirely, the training provided by the Trail Conference early in the season prepared the stewards with the knowledge and resources to respond appropriately in emergencies. In 2022, the stewards were able to directly assist on six incidents requiring first aid, including: two hikers who passed out on the trail, a physically exhausted hiker who needed assistance hiking down, a hiker with an ankle injury that required a splint, a hiker who fell and sustained cuts to their arms and legs, and a hiker who needed assistance hiking down from the rock scramble after experiencing a panic attack.



Trail Stewards were also able to help 148 lost hikers find their way back to a trail or trailhead. Many people begin their hike with the free map provided at the trailheads. On the back of the map is a phone number that hikers could call as an "emergency line" when they were lost and needed guidance. These phone calls were directed to two designated cell phones kept at the steward station, enabling the stewards to stay in contact with hikers throughout the day. The stewards who received these calls ask hikers to describe their surroundings, calmly guide them back to the trail and explain the best way to complete their hike. Having stewards on the ground who can respond to a call from a lost hiker or immediately assist an injured hiker with basic first-aid while calling for help allows for immediate assistance that is not often seen in the outdoors. Efforts like these can do wonders to help reduce or alleviate emergency situations, but can also help visitors of all skill levels feel more welcome, supported, and equipped to navigate outdoor recreation.





Declan, Andrew, and Ryan at the trailhead



Park staff prepare to escort an injured hiker out



Crowds of hikers gather around the Wilkinson Memorial Trailhead





# Trail Maintenance



When the Trail Stewards weren't stewarding, you could find them working alongside Trail Conference Trail Crews, staff, and volunteers to build and maintain trails across the region. On Fridays over the course of the season, the stewards traveled to various worksites in Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve to assist in tasks such as adding/removing blazes, moving rocks, corridor clearing, covering up social trails, and more. These trail maintenance days in conjunction with their trail stewarding is what helped make the Trail Stewards experience and expertise so multifaceted.





# WILKINSON TRAIL REROUTE

Over the course of the season, the Trail Stewards teamed up with the Taconic Trail Crew to assist them with their reroute of the Wilkinson Memorial Trail near Sugarloaf Mountain. We assisted with closing the original trail, dispersed duff and rock piles, hid the existence of the old trail, replanted some native plants, removed old blazes, and added blazes along the new trail. On October 21, the stewards were fortunate enough to be with the Taconic Trail Crew on the day that the trail officially opened. One very nice moment occurred when we welcomed the first hikers onto the newly opened trail. One of those hikers had never been in the park before, and she expressed excitement at the prospect of being part of the history of the trail.







The Trail Stewards and Taconic Trail Crew



Bench cut section of new trail



The crews taking a well-deserved lunch break in the shade





# NOTCH TRAIL: SPECIAL PROJECT

In September, the Trail Stewards teamed up with the Taconic Trail Crew, Trail Conference staff, and a group of volunteer leaders to tackle a particularly wet and muddy section of the Notch Trail, just east of the Fishkill Ridge Trail. The work for the day consisted of putting in three ditches with waterbars, crossing the trail at places where water was entering the trail. Because of the drought, it took a little bit of detective work to figure out where the wettest sections might be. We also dug a ditch along the edge of one side of the trail to help move water more efficiently off the trail. The teamwork, camaraderie, and fantastic weather made for a productive yet fun day.







Digging a trench to divert water off the trail



Stewards and volunteers digging a trench



Trail Stewards, Trail Crew, Trail Conference staff, and volunteers admiring their hard work





# Thank you!

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Trail Steward Program at Breakneck Ridge is going strong and looking forward to another successful season in 2023. Thank you to our partners and volunteers for all of your support. We would not be able to do it without you.

Please feel free to email Trail Steward Program Coordinator Myra Romano ([mromano@nynjtc.org](mailto:mromano@nynjtc.org)) with any questions or comments on how we can continue to improve the program.