



# 2023 Trail Steward Report

## MINNEWASKA STATE PARK PRESERVE MAY - OCTOBER 2023

A PROGRAM OF THE  
New York-New Jersey  
Trail Conference



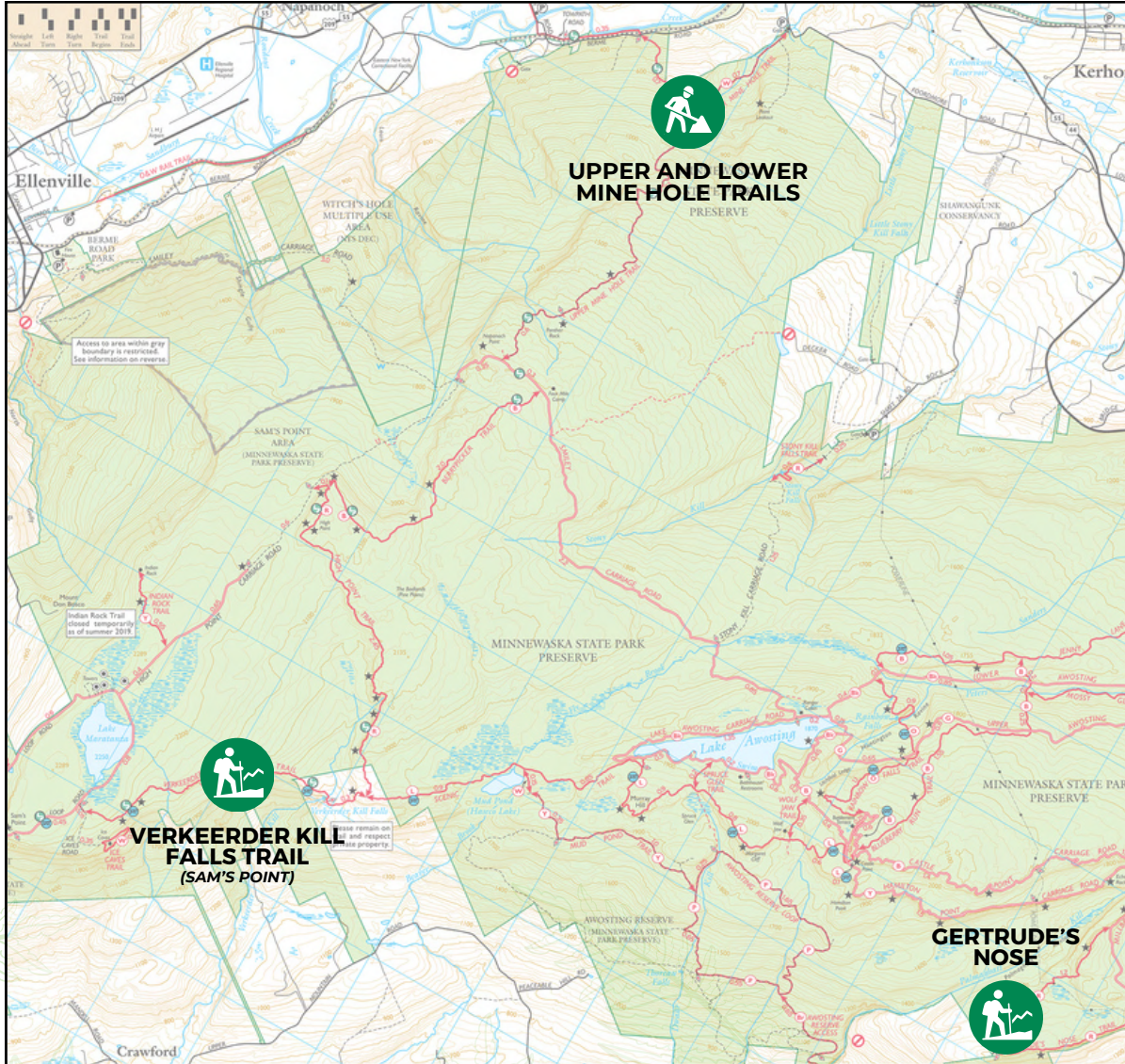
# Minnewaska State Park Preserve

## 2023 Trail Steward Report

Prepared by

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Vanessa Mangual

Trail Steward Program Coordinator  
Trail Steward Crew Leader



The above map represents the locations covered by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Conservation Corps Trail Stewards in Minnewaska State Park Preserve.





# 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 Minnewaska 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 integral to our response to these threats. When used responsibly, trails protect the people who use them and the surrounding environment. 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 Trail Stewards



**Vanessa Mangual**  
Crew Leader



**James Jaster**  
Crew Member



**Colleen Stevens**  
Crew Member



**Matthew Moran**  
Crew Member



**Maddison White**  
Crew Member



**Jay Porcelli**  
Crew Member





# TRAINING

During the beginning of the 2023 Conservation Corps season, the stewards received onsite training at Minnewaska State Park Preserve and Sam's Point from Trail Steward Program Coordinator Myra Romano, Trail Steward Leader Vanessa Mangual, and Rebecca Howe-Parisio, the Sam's Point Educator at New York State Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation. This training focused on familiarizing stewards with the history and geological significance of the trails and surrounding area, collaborative efforts between stewards and park staff, unique features of the fire-adapted ecosystem, talking points and commonly asked questions, and emergency protocols.

## Wilderness First Aid / CPR / AED

In the beginning of June, all stewards earned Wilderness First Aid, CPR, and AED certifications from Mid-Atlantic Outdoor Recreation Education. With these skills, our stewards are better prepared to respond to emergencies in both frontcountry and remote areas.

## Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics

On June 15-16, the stewards came to Welch Education Center to complete their Leave No Trace Level 1 Instructor training. With this certification, they can teach others about Leave No Trace principles and help preserve the beauty of our outdoor spaces.



# Minnewaska State Park Preserve



## STATISTICS

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED

**4,846**

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED

**1,836**

GROUPS OF 4+ COUNTED

**295**

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER  
PARK LOCATIONS

**94**

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS

**10**

DOGS ON LEASH

**238**

DOGS OFF LEASH

**38**

HIKERS WITH DOGS OFF LEASH  
THAT WERE EDUCATED

**30**

LOST HIKERS HELPED

**59**

INJURED HIKERS HELPED

**2**

DAYS WITH RAIN

**11**

Minnewaska State Park Preserve sprawls over 22,275 acres, providing countless activities for outdoor recreation. The park offers beautiful hikes and invigorating bike rides, scenic horseback trails, refreshing swimming spots, and the challenge of rock climbing and bouldering. Beyond the thrill of outdoor adventures, Minnewaska also caters to those seeking serene moments with its breathtaking views and designated day-use areas, providing an ideal setting for picnics and strolls. Given the diverse array of activities and the immense popularity of the stunning viewpoints, many visitors need to prepare for the challenges they might face, highlighting the crucial necessity for Trail Stewards.

Comprehensive training sessions immersed the stewards in the park's historical and unique geological features. They also learned about a rare and endangered trailside plant, the broom crowberry, an evergreen shrub that is mainly limited to coastal habitats, but can be found along the rocky ridges of the Shawangunk Mountains. Despite perceiving these locations as front-country, the Shawangunks pose numerous hazards. The rocky, rugged terrain, adorned with cliffs and crevices, demands respect – reckless jumping or descending without proper experience or gear is discouraged. Popular trails often lack shade, exposing hikers to harsh conditions and rapidly changing weather. Stewards also reminded visitors that camping and fires are prohibited here and emphasized the importance of packing out trash and recycling since no receptacles are provided within the park.

Our collaboration with park staff and rangers was crucial in educating and guiding visitors during bustling weekends and scorching summer days. Data collection was a crucial part of our stewardship, focusing on metrics such as the hikers observed, the number of hikers we were able to educate, and the visitors with dogs, noting leash compliance. Additionally, our data collection extended to instances where alternative hikes were recommended and incidents involving lost or injured hikers whom we were able to assist. Stewards also participated in trail improvement projects during the 2023 season with volunteers and park staff.





Stewards during training with Rebecca Howe-Parisio, Educator at Sam's Point



Stewards walking through the Sam's Point ice caves during their initial training



Stewards traversing the rocky terrain out the Gertrude's Nose during their initial training



# Gertrude's Nose

## Minnewaska State Park Preserve



### STATISTICS

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED

**3,583**

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED

**1,269**

BUSIEST DAY

**Oct 22: 443 hikers**

GROUPS OF 4+ COUNTED

**221**

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER  
PARK LOCATIONS

**58**

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS

**10**

DOGS ON LEASH

**183**

DOGS OFF LEASH

**30**

HIKERS WITH DOGS OFF LEASH  
THAT WERE EDUCATED

**22**

LOST HIKERS HELPED

**39**

INJURED HIKERS HELPED

**0**

DAYS WITH RAIN

**11**

AVG HIGH

**73°**

AVG LOW

**62°**

Gertrude's Nose emerged as one of the busiest stewardship locations, drawing approximately 140 daily visitors. Despite the park's assorted attractions, such as pristine sky lakes and majestic waterfalls, the allure of Gertrude's Nose persists due to its stunning panoramic vistas of the rugged Shawangunk Mountains and its winding trails through dense hardwood forests. During peak times, the parking lot reaches capacity, necessitating the park to redirect incoming visitors. Whether propelled by word of mouth, social media, hiking blogs, or apps, the surge in visitation underscores the pressing need for enhanced education on safe and sustainable hiking practices at this location.

Over 26 days of stewardship, stewards engaged with 1,269 hikers. Frequently asked questions ranged from clarifications about Gertrude's Nose to the quickest routes back to the parking area. Essential topics discussed included hiker preparedness, route familiarity, and the lasting impact of veering off designated trails. Visitors often sought information on park flora and fauna. Notably, the broom crowberry, which grows along siliceous rock at Minnewaska, represents the only non-coastal site worldwide where this plant naturally flourishes. Its discovery in 1881 sparked excitement within the botanical community, continuing to captivate botanists and naturalists annually. Steward outreach efforts enlightened visitors about the rare plant while explaining how off-trail travel may jeopardize the already limited population.

The stewards also led a guided hike out to Millbrook Mountain in October, educating patrons on the vast array of plant and animal life that can be found within the park. They emphasized the importance of respecting wildlife and understanding the potential hazards they may pose. The guided hike also focused on Leave No Trace principles, invasive species awareness, and how to capture memorable moments through photography. Patrons reveled in the experience, eager to embrace the challenge of extending the hike to Gertrude's Nose. Their enthusiasm reflected the enduring spirit of discovery and appreciation for all the beauty Minnewaska State Park Preserve offers.





Patrons of the steward-led guided hike, observing the valley down below through binoculars



Stewards leading a guided hike along the Millbrook Ridge Trail



A copperhead snake spotted by Steward Colleen

# Verkeerder Kill Falls Trail

Sam's Point Area of Minnewaska State Park



## STATISTICS

TOTAL HIKERS COUNTED

**1,263**

HIKERS EDUCATED/ASSISTED

**567**

BUSIEST DAY

**May 27: 285 hikers**

GROUPS OF 4+ COUNTED

**74**

HIKERS DIRECTED TO OTHER  
PARK LOCATIONS

**36**

HIKERS DIRECTED TO TOWNS

**0**

DOGS ON LEASH

**55**

DOGS OFF LEASH

**8**

HIKERS WITH DOGS OFF LEASH  
THAT WERE EDUCATED

**8**

LOST HIKERS HELPED

**20**

INJURED HIKERS HELPED

**2**

DAYS WITH RAIN

**1**

AVG HIGH

**79°**

AVG LOW

**62°**

Nestled within the northern reaches of the Shawangunk Mountains lies a sprawling 5,000-acre preserve – a testament to the beauty and ecological significance of ridgetop dwarf pine barrens. At the southernmost edge of the Shawangunks rests the magnificent cliff known as Sam's Point, offering sweeping vistas spanning from the Hudson Highlands in the southeast to High Point State Park and the Kittatinnies in the southwest. This pristine expanse boasts trails leading to Sam's Point, Verkeerderkill Falls, natural ice caves, High Point, and Indian Rock, unveiling unique natural wonders.

Regrettably, stewardship coverage for this location was limited throughout the 2023 season. However, with occasional assistance from the Hudson Valley Trail Stewards, stewards managed to cover six days. Despite this modest duration, data collection included observations of hikers, impactful interactions, and monitoring canine leash compliance.

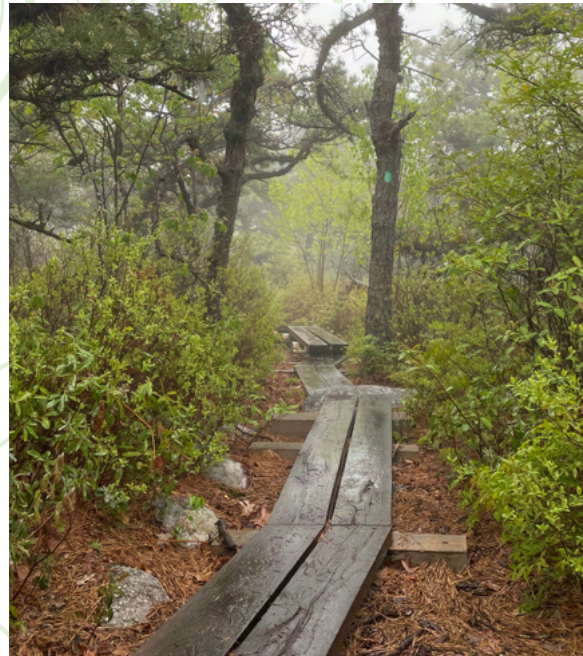
During training sessions, the Sam's Point Educator, Rebecca Howe-Parasio, illuminated the rich history behind Sam's Point and the once-standing hotel atop it. She also unveiled the fascinating glacial striations etched into the rocks, vestiges of ancient ice formations. Stewards also learned about the dwarf pitch pines, a rare and exclusive species within Minnewaska State Park Preserve. These diminutive pines, found solely in the Shawangunk conglomerate outcrops at Sam's Point, epitomize the unique and globally scarce dwarf pine ridges.

Amidst ongoing educational endeavors, stewards emphasized the promotion of sustainable outdoor recreation, particularly highlighting waste management and trail preservation. Stewards encountered and engaged with 1,263 hikers throughout the season, transforming approximately 45% of these encounters into valuable teaching moments. Notably, adherence to Minnewaska leash regulations among hikers with dogs stood at an encouraging 88%. The stewards' commitment to nurturing these pristine natural landscapes grows stronger as they continue to learn and educate, fostering a hopeful future for Sam's Point and its visitors.





A sign at the start of the Verkeerder Kill Falls Trail asks hikers to stay on the designated path



The trail to Verkeerder Kill Falls has sections of bog bridges, which can be slippery in wet weather



Additional stewards who were trained at Sam's Point

# Trail Improvement Projects



## STATISTICS

BLOWDOWN REMOVED  
**10**

CORRIDOR CLEARING  
**.7 miles**

DRAINAGE (FEET)  
**254 ft**

TURNPIKING  
**65 ft**

STONE STEPS  
**11**

INFORMAL TRAIL CLOSURE  
**11**

EDUCATIONAL SIGNS INSTALLED  
**9**

TRAIL REHABILITATION  
**2.5 miles**

Teaming up with Trail Conference Volunteers and park staff, stewards delved into trail maintenance, honing their trail rehabilitation and construction skills. Stewards witnessed the effects of trail deviation by park users and the necessity to brush in social trails. Additionally, they observed the aftermath of the fire control measures implemented after the devastating blaze that swept through Minnewaska in the summer of 2022. Being part of these improvement projects that enhance the hiking experience at Minnewaska State Park Preserve brought the stewards immense joy and hope for the future of this beautiful area.

In early July, with Park Manager Jorge Gomes, stewards carried a metal interpretive sign mount, six 3-foot locust posts, and a 45-pound backpack containing supplies for future signage projects. Upon delivering the supplies, they cleared out 11 distinct social trails from the Gertrude's Nose viewpoint to the eastern trailhead for Gertrude's Nose. Along nine of these paths, they utilized high-visibility cords to suspend educational signage, emphasizing the importance of adhering to designated trails to minimize environmental impact. Unfortunately, good-natured visitors sometimes see the brushed-in paths and think they are helping by "clearing the trail," but the signage reminds visitors that an excellent way to identify a trail is by locating a trail marker.

Stewards faced a significant challenge in the aftermath of the wildfires that ravaged Minnewaska last summer – a bulldozer wreaked havoc on a section of the Mine Hole Trail. Rehabilitation became the mission. This meant targeting the restoration of trampled vegetation, relocating or repairing altered rock features, and resolving drainage issues caused by scattered debris.

Teaming up with seasoned Trail Conference volunteer Andy Garrison, stewards dedicated 20 trail maintenance days to trail improvements in the Mine Hole area of Minnewaska State Park, specifically, a section of the Long Path that had been closed since last year's wildfires. The result was a trail rehabilitation spanning 2.5 miles, marked by transformative upgrades.





# Trail Improvement Projects



During this extensive restoration, stewards upgraded a 40-foot stream crossing using five stepping stones that enhanced traversability and resilience against natural elements. In areas prone to excessive wetness and mud, trail building involved turnpiking – a technique involving collecting and arranging rocks and boulders to create structured drainage beneath the surface. This method, spanning 65 linear feet, enhanced stability and water management. One segment required two 31-foot-long drainage outlets bolstered by stepping stones, while another section utilized a 700-pound boulder to fashion a stone bridge over a persistently wet area.

The stewards also dug 45 feet of drainage ditches to redirect water off the trail. Additionally, a .7-mile trail stretch from Berme Road was rerouted to Foordmore Road, involving vegetation clearing, root removal, and the elimination of 10 obstructive blowdowns.

Blazing the trail was the final flourish before its triumphant reopening in November. Despite limitations from wildfire smoke and incessant rainy days, the stewards tackled this mammoth project with unwavering dedication. It's a point of immense pride for them to have contributed to such a vital endeavor and be able to witness the tangible impact of their teamwork and commitment.







Before and after photos of the Mine Hole Trail rehabilitation



A section of the Mine Hole Trail where the stewards laid stepping stones in a wet section





# Thank you!

Thank you to our partners and volunteers for all of your support. We would not be able to do it without you.

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