ADIRONDACK DIVERSITY INITIATIVE · PUBLIC COMMENT ALERT

Keep the High Peaks Open to Everyone

The DEC is proposing to restrict access to the Adirondack High Peaks. The science doesn't support it. The equity data opposes it. Your voice matters.

Find the DEC Final Recommendation Document for the High Peaks here- https://dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/forest-preserve/visitor-use-management/adirondack-high-peaks-kaaterskill-clove. Management actions specific to the High Peaks Wilderness and Kaaterskill Clove will be developed and implemented based on the feedback provided and in consultation with local partners. **We need your voice to represent welcoming & belonging in the Adirondacks. ★ Comment deadline: June 1, 2026 to** forestpreserve@dec.ny.gov

The Adirondack Diversity Initiative's Three-Year High Peaks Survey, conducted from 2022 to 2025, gathered firsthand data from hikers and visitors at iconic High Peaks trailheads to better understand who is visiting, why they come, and whether they feel safe and welcome in the Adirondack Forest Preserve. In light of our data, we share the following concerns:

1. Zero ecological evidence supports restrictions. The DEC report never measured plants, soil, or wildlife; it only asked whether hikers felt crowded. Summits with stewards are healthier now than they were 20 years ago.

2. "Solitude" is not a universal value. ADI data shows that Black hikers value pristine environments as much as all hikers, but care far less about solitude. This policy protects one group's preference, not the land. ADI strongly opposes the use of subjective "solitude" metrics to justify visitor caps, permit systems, or access restrictions in the Adirondack High Peaks.

3. Diversity is finally growing, don't reverse it. Latino representation nearly tripled in 2025. Black hikers up 30%. Non-White visitors exceeded 10% for the first time. Access caps would erase this hard-won progress.

4. Permits send the wrong message. Permit systems and access restrictions to natural areas are not neutral policies. For communities with historical experiences of over-policing, surveillance, and exclusion from public spaces, a permit requirement sends a message before a single step is taken on the trail: you must prove you belong here.

5. The Summit Steward Program works. Education, inclusion, and on-the-ground trail management, not fewer people, are what protect the alpine zone. The answer is to expand this program. DEC's own data reports show the following:

- Every summit with regular steward coverage, including Mount Marcy and Algonquin Peak, has shown substantial ecological recovery compared to unmanaged peaks.
- Cascade Mountain, once cited as a worst-case example of hiker damage, has recovered measurably, thanks to on-the-ground education and trail management techniques, including scree walls, cairns, and string fencing.

6. DEC's proposed access restrictions go directly against their own stated commitment. *"The purpose of the NYSDEC Visitor Use Management Pilot Project in the High Peaks Project Area is to promote safe, equitable, and inclusive access to the Forest Preserve, while protecting natural, historical, and scenic resources and the quality and character of visitors' experiences".* (Page 3, High Peaks Project Area Visitor Use Management Pilot Project Final Recommendations Report and Monitoring Plan, February 2025)

TELL THE DEC

✕ **Reject permits and visitor caps for the High Peaks**	✓ **Expand the Summit Steward Program**
✓ **Require ecological studies before any access limits**	✓ **Fix parking through infrastructure, not exclusion**