



SPRING 2024

TRAILWALKER

BUILDING, MAINTAINING, AND PROTECTING MORE THAN
2,000 MILES OF PUBLIC TRAILS & LANDS

Sniffing Out Threats to Our Wild Spaces

How our Conservation Dogs
are using their noses
to save our public lands

A Look at Our Impact on Parks,
Community, and More in 2023

Rebuilding Trails Continues Long
After Last Summer's Storms

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for Work in the Community



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we highlighted in the last issue of *Trail Walker*, the escalating severe weather our region is experiencing is causing substantial damage to the trails and lands we cherish. These destructive storms have added significantly to the already overtaxed workload of our primary responders – our incredible volunteer trail crews.

Just as our Conservation Dogs Program is on the forefront of innovation, protecting natural habitats – as you'll read about in this issue – our focus this year is on finding creative solutions to build and repair the trails under our care.

One of our key initiatives is the revamped Trail U program, providing volunteers a fun opportunity to learn the essential skills needed to safely and sustainably repair trail damage caused by extreme weather. For over 100 years, our volunteers have been the Trail Conference's first response to repair and restore trails, and Trail U aims to continue providing our crews with skilled and passionate volunteers. If you are ready to help, I encourage you to sign up and get involved this spring!

We are also looking at ways to recruit individuals who are passionate about our mission and want to serve in our Conservation Corps. While, in past years, our Corps trail crews have built some incredible trails under the guidance of our professional trail builders, recruiting qualified new members every year is always a challenge. The ideal applicant is willing to make a 900-hour service commitment (approximately 6 months), is ready to get dirty, and is physically fit. All ages are welcome, no prior experience is necessary, and we offer hous-



JOSHUA HOWARD
Executive Director

ing at the scenic Welch Trail Education Center on Lower Twin Lake in Harri-man State Park.

To meet the growing demands of a changing world, we are in the preliminary stages of exploring the feasibility of fielding a professional trail crew, similar to successful models implemented

by our partners. Year after year, we train and deploy multiple Conservation Corps trail crews, so we have a built-in pipeline for skilled and passionate trail builders. The next step is researching and understanding the necessary investment in the infrastructure, tools, and program design to support a crew of this nature.

As the frequency and ferocity of storms continue to rise, the public, as well as our agency partners, rely on the Trail Conference to keep trails open and safe for everyone to enjoy. Our priority has always been the trails we steward, and we will remain committed to innovation and finding solutions as climate change impacts our beloved lands. We're gearing up to utilize all these approaches to repair and protect our trails, but we need your help to succeed. Please consider helping us recruit new Corps members, signing up for Trail U, and supporting us with a monetary donation. Together, we can ensure the health and safety of our trail lands for generations to come.

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TRAIL WALKER

VOLUME LII, No. 1 SPRING 2024

PREVIOUS TRAIL WALKER: FALL 2023 EDITION

MISSION STATEMENT

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a volunteer-powered organization that builds, maintains, and protects public trails. Together with our partners, we strive to ensure that the trails and natural areas we share are sustainable and accessible for all to enjoy for generations to come.

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a volunteer powered, non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization.

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Cover photo by Krystl Sabins: Trail Conference Conservation Dog Program Coordinator Arden Blumenthal and Conservation Dog Lettie survey for invasive species.

PLEASE RECYCLE TRAIL WALKER

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

Trail Walker is a biannual magazine published by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, 600 Ramapo Valley Road, Mahwah, NJ 07430. The editor and managing editor is Ashley Nester, at the same address. The annual subscription price is \$15; contact person is Ashley Nester; telephone number is 201-512-9348. The tax status of the organization has not changed during the preceding 12 months. As of the filing date of March 9, 2023, the average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months was 7,500; the actual number of copies of the single issue published nearest to the filing date was 7,500. The paper has a total paid and/or requested circulation of 4,454 (average) and 4,454 (actual, most recent issue). The free distribution for the 12 months preceding the filing date was 1,549 (average) and 1,549 (actual, most recent issue). The total average distribution was 7,036; the actual distribution of the single issue published nearest to the filing date was 7,036. This information is reported on U. S. Postal Service Form 3526 and here as required by 39 USC 3685.

Cynthia Germana

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS ASSOCIATE

With an extensive career in banking and hospitality, Cynthia brings a wealth of experience to our team. She is eager to explore trails alongside her new colleagues while also pursuing an accounting degree. Beyond her professional pursuits, Cynthia treasures time spent with her husband and four children. All of us in the Trail Conference community extend a warm welcome to Cynthia as she begins this exciting chapter!



Alan Davidson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alan, Executive Director of the Kenya Scholar Access Program, assists low-income students from Kenya in pursuing higher education opportunities. He also serves as the Board Chair of the Shamiri Institute, an organization developing accessible mental health interventions for young people globally and is a Trustee at the Education for All Children Trust in Kenya. Additionally, he advises several education-related NGOs on the African continent. Alan is also a trail runner, hiker, bushwhack lover, and a volunteer Trail Maintainer and Trail Chair in the Catskill region for the Trail Conference.



Sara Kleinberg

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

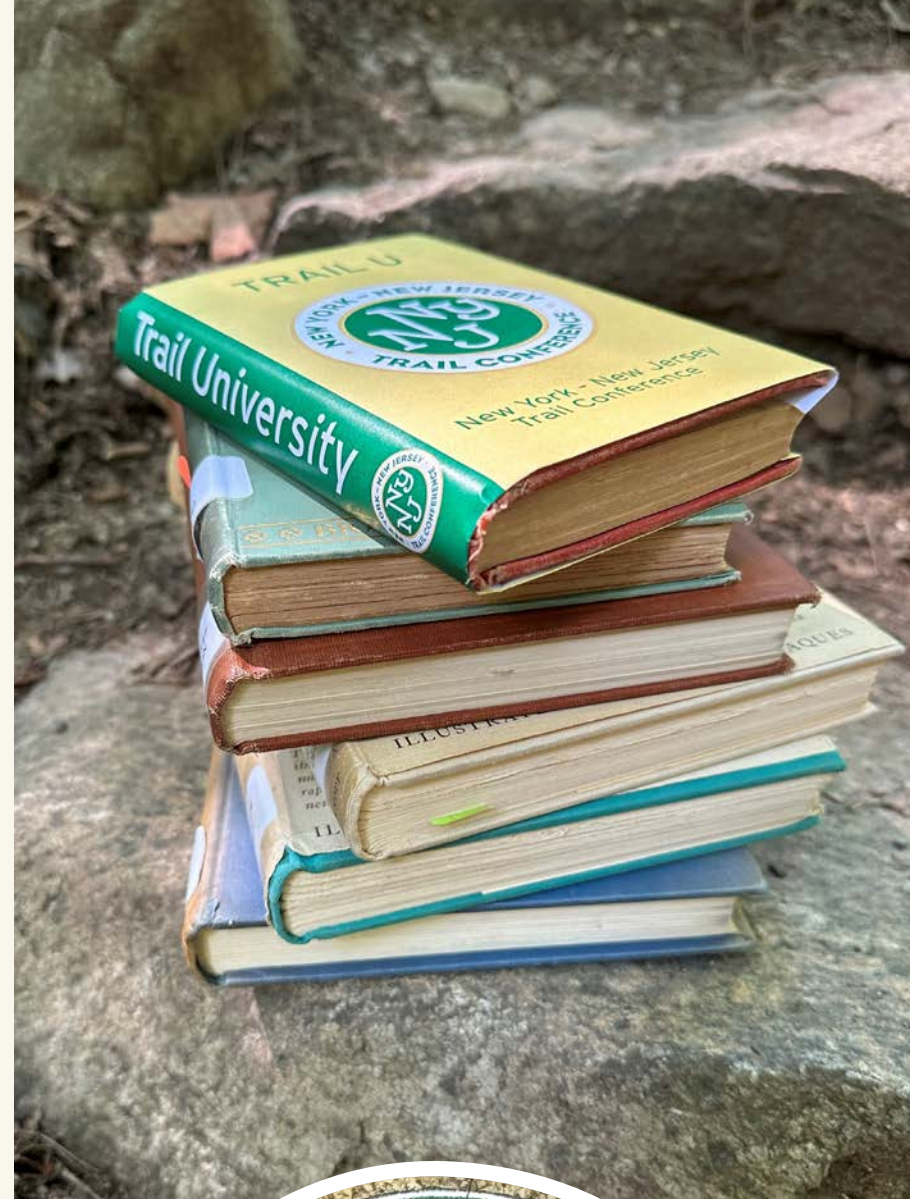
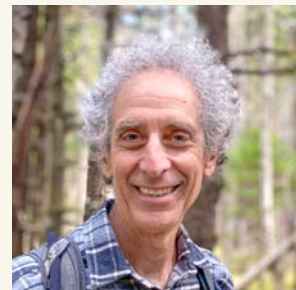
Sara, a Senior Director at Google, specializes in User Experience, holding an M.B.A. from the Wharton School and a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania. Previously active with Girls on the Run, she also served on the board of the Discover Outdoors Foundation, a non-profit connecting city youth with the outdoors. While she has hiked around the world, Sara holds a soft spot for the Catskills.



Seth Reichlin

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As an active hiker, mountain biker, skier, paddler, and musician, Seth embodies a well-rounded zest for life. His involvement with the Trail Conference focuses on trail building, strategy, fundraising, and marketing. Additionally, he chairs Palisades MTB, a non-profit building and maintaining multi-use trails in Bergen, Orange, and Rockland counties. Following a career at Pearson Education, Seth co-founded CollegeAPP, leveraging databases and machine learning to assist colleges in student recruitment.



TRAIL UNIVERSITY: WHERE TRAIL ENTHUSIASTS BECOME EXPERTS

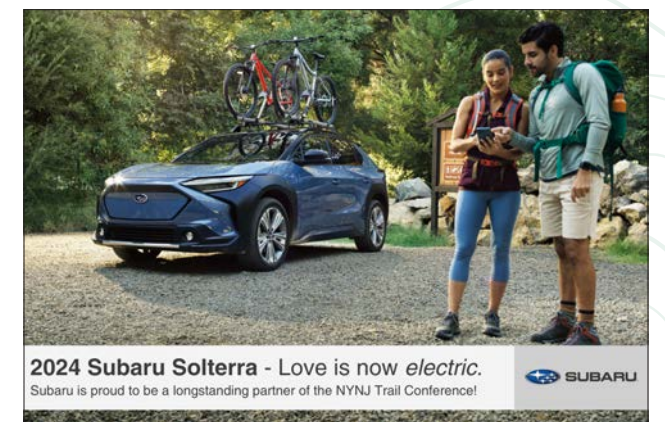
Whether you're new to trails or a seasoned pro, the Trail Conference's newly improved Trail University, or "Trail U," is your gateway to trail mastery!

Trail U equips outdoor enthusiasts with the skills needed to build and maintain trails. Start your journey with an introductory workshop, then dive into more technical courses, such as rock shaping and invasive plant identification. Led by industry professionals and experienced Trail Conference volunteers, participants can choose from three curriculum tracks: Expert Trail Maintainer, Expert Trail Builder, and Expert Ecological Steward. Complete all workshops in a track and you'll receive a Trail Conference patch! Ambitious students can earn multiple patches by completing additional tracks.

For more information on how to participate, visit nynjtc.org/trail-u.



Trail U is generously sponsored by our partners at Subaru Distributors Corp.



OUR IMPACT IN 2023

2023 marked a groundbreaking year for the Trail Conference. Our staff, volunteers, members, and supporters joined forces as never before to assess, plan, and kickstart restoration efforts following last summer's historically destructive storms. Our Trail Stewards assisted over 21,000 trail users in the Hudson Valley and Catskills, while the Invasives Strike Force surveyed 572 acres of land in the fight against invasive species. Volunteer trail crews made significant progress on long-distance trails, such as the Long Path and the Appalachian Trail, and our Conservation Corps members continued enhancing trails in popular parks across the region. Our Trail Family gathered for some of our most successful events yet, including the Annual Gala and Trail-A-Thon, and we updated and printed map sets covering over 1,100 miles of trails, furthering our legacy as a go-to resource for the trail community. Here are some additional highlights showcasing the impact of our efforts in 2023, thanks to the incredible support of our dedicated community.

YOUR PARKS AND TRAILS

2,192

miles of trails maintained in NY, NJ, MA & CT

268

parks served

27

counties served

166

collaborative partners that worked with us to achieve our mission

61,000+

invasive plants removed by the Invasives Strike Force across New York State

1,048

spotted lanternfly egg masses removed by the Conservation Dogs Program

PUBLICATIONS

6

revised maps published

40+

free maps available on our website

Interactive digital map of the Long Path created and published on nynjtc.org



COMMUNITY IMPACT

2,000+

volunteers dedicated **86,000** hours to parks and trails

38

AmeriCorps members served **28,188** hours in the Conservation Corps Program

21,696

park visitors assisted by our Trail Stewards across New York State

643,000

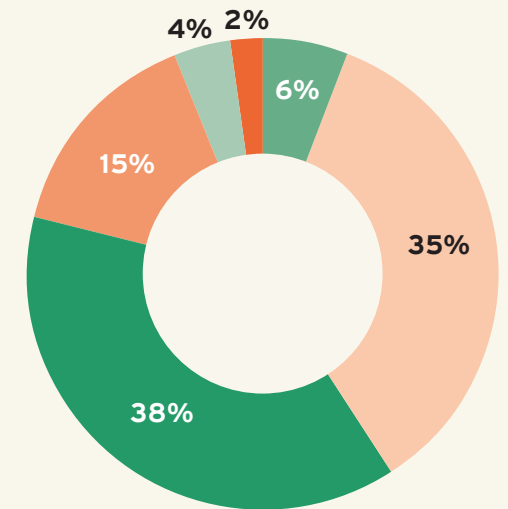
outdoor enthusiasts reached across our social media platforms

2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

4,793 individual donors, foundations, and corporate partners

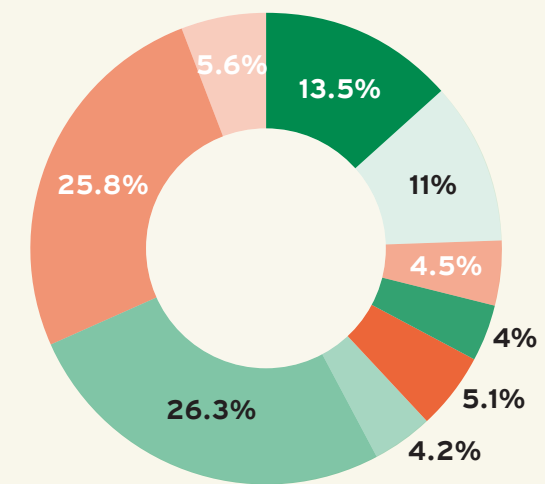
REVENUE

- Membership: \$217,055.46 (6%)
 - Contributions: \$1,352,996.55 (35%)
 - Grants & Contracts: \$1,456,142.37 (38%)
 - Net Investment Income: \$575,181.23 (15%)
 - Sales of Books, Maps & Other Items: \$138,438.42 (4%)
 - In-Kind Contributions: \$85,988.15 (2%)
- TOTAL: \$3,825,802.18



EXPENSES

- Fundraising: \$503,493.69 (13.5%)
 - Management & General: \$410,716.86 (11%)
 - Membership: \$168,664.56 (4.5%)
 - Darlington Headquarters: \$149,143.92 (4%)
 - Outreach: \$191,301.16 (5.1%)
 - Publications: \$155,957.63 (4.2%)
 - Stewardship: \$976,499.66 (26.3%)
 - Trail Programs: \$962,735.74 (25.8%)
 - Volunteer: \$209,057.79 (5.6%)
- TOTAL: \$3,727,571.01



Protecting Our Wild Spaces, One Sniff at a Time

Is it possible that the nose of a dog can mean the difference between a healthy forest and a failing ecosystem? The Trail Conference believes so.

At the heart of the Trail Conference's conservation efforts lies a groundbreaking initiative – the Conservation Dogs Program. Beyond the important trail maintenance and construction that the Trail Conference has long been known for, this program is the first of its kind in the Northeast and stands as an innovative force in the fight against invasive species and the preservation of our region's precious natural landscapes.

The inception of the Conservation Dogs Program dates back nearly a decade with the establishment of the Invasives Strike Force (ISF). Initially relying on

volunteers, the program saw a significant evolution with the introduction of four-legged companions, the Conservation Dogs, in 2018. Specially trained by our experienced staff, these dogs use their exceptional sense of smell to detect invasive plants and insects, playing a crucial role in protecting our ecosystems. From sniffing out invasive plants to detecting destructive insects like the spotted lanternfly, our dog-handler teams have elevated the Trail Conference's conservation efforts to unprecedented levels, ensuring the health and vitality of the ecosystems surrounding our trails.

One recent success includes the program's work on Scotch broom, an emerging invasive plant in New York State. Working alongside the ISF Crew, the dogs have helped reduce the number of Scotch broom plants in Harriman State Park by nearly 60%, demonstrating the program's effectiveness.

The Conservation Dogs Program's achievements are not confined to just invasives detection. The dogs' unique olfactory abilities are being harnessed to help survey for rare and threatened species like the small whorled pogonia orchid and elusive species like box and wood turtles, enhancing the Trail Conference's understanding of habitat health and ability to protect our region's biodiversity.

This year, the program embarks on a new chapter of its mission, collaborating with local, regional, and state partners to survey for the New England cottontail, a species of special concern and the only native rabbit east of the Hudson River, as well as several other rare and threatened species, while continuing its efforts to detect and manage invasive species like kudzu, sticky sage, and crested late-summer mint in coordination with the Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM).



Above: Trail Conference Conservation Dog Program Coordinator Arden Blumenthal and Conservation Dog Peat work together in the field and share a strong bond. Left: Conservation Dog Dia uses her nose to find invasive insects.

continued on page 10 >>

Supporting the Fight Against Invasives

Having established a successful dermatology practice in Manhattan, Dr. David Orentreich's passion for horticulture and botany stems from his interest in understanding the correlation between human health and the diseases that affect it. Alongside his wife Marina, a classically trained portrait artist and celebrated designer of couture millinery, their journey into conservation began with observing the impact of invasive species around their property and a neighboring state park during walks with their dog. As animal lovers, David and Marina recognized the potential of dogs' extraordinary sense of smell in detecting these harmful species, sparking an interest that led them to support initiatives like the Trail Conference's Conservation Dogs Program.

David's commitment to conservation extends beyond his support of the Conservation Dogs Program. He also oversees the Orentreich Foundation for the Advancement of Science, dedicated to research on the prevention, suspension, or reversal of disorders that decrease the quality and length of life, as well as the Orentreich Family Foundation, through which he contributes to environmental causes, including research on American elm trees and the Trail Conference's Tree Health Program.

David believes that community efforts are crucial in preserving our natural environment for future generations. By supporting initiatives like



Dr. David Orentreich with his wife, Marina

the Conservation Dogs Program, David hopes to inspire others to take action – both monetarily and by volunteering their time – and to make a positive impact on our forests and ecosystems.

Through the unwavering support from organizations like the Orentreich Family Foundation and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Trail Conference remains steadfast in its commitment to preserving the ecological integrity of our region. To learn more and support the Trail Conference's programs, visit nynjtc.org/conservationdogs.

NEW YORK TRAIL UPDATES

Rebuilding Trails: A Storm Response Update

As we reflect on the aftermath of last summer's devastating storms, the resilience of our trails stands as a testament to the dedication of our volunteers and staff. While the damage was extensive, the Trail Conference has been hard at work alongside our partners to restore the paths we cherish.



Debris on trail after a destructive storm in July 2023

Throughout the latter half of 2023, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC), together with the Trail Conference and other partners, conducted comprehensive trail assessments in Bear Mountain and Harriman State Parks, a vital step in the rebuilding process. These assessments were nec-



Major trail washout in Bear Mountain State Park

essary to evaluate the extent of the damage and determine the most effective course of action. Due to the scale of destruction, PIPC had to prioritize repairs to essential park infrastructure and roads before turning attention to the trails.

Looking ahead to the coming months, Trail Conference staff and volunteers are gearing up to assist PIPC and New York State Parks in repairing storm damage along the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) in Bear Mountain State Park. Our collective goal is to reopen these trails by the summer. Work will include removing washed-down boulders and debris, rebuilding stone walls and rock structures, and repairing a bridge on the A.T. The Trail Conference Conservation Corps' trail crews will also be working throughout the summer and fall to make additional storm-related repairs to these and other Bear Mountain trails.

One notable achievement since the storms is the installation of stepping stones in Black Rock Forest by the Hudson Nor'Westers Trail Crew. These stones, which span a river crossing, were initially put in place back in 2015. Despite enduring nearly eight years of wear and tear, they succumbed to the intensity of the 2023 summer storms. Now, thanks to the efforts of this dedicated crew, this vital crossing has been restored.

The road to full trail restoration will be a lengthy one, requiring strategic planning and careful execution from many of our partners. Trails will be re-opened when they and the connecting trails are deemed safe for visitors. It's a lengthy process, but with the dedication of our volunteers and Corps members, we are committed to expediting it!

NEW JERSEY TRAIL UPDATES

25 Miles of Trails Adopted in Morris County



View from Milton Fire Tower

PHOTO BY KARL WEISS

The Trail Conference is excited to take on the new responsibility of maintaining 21 miles of multi-use trails at Mahlon Dickerson Reservation, a 3,500-acre park in Jefferson Township, NJ. The trails cater to varying hiking abilities, including paths leading to Headley Overlook, one of Morris County's highest points, and excellent spots for bird and nature-watching. The park also provides opportunities for off-road

cycling, seasonal camping, snowshoeing, and more. Additionally, the Trail Conference has adopted 4.5 miles of trails at Silas Condict County Park, which spans 1,513 scenic acres. This park features meandering trails, scenic overlooks, picnic sites, and a tranquil seven-acre lake surrounded by weeping cherry trees – a great destination for outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hydro Flask Awards Trail Conference Grant for New Jersey Conservation Efforts

The Trail Conference is a proud recipient of the 2024 Hydro Flask "Parks For All" grant! The "Parks

For All" program supports non-profit organizations focused on building, maintaining, and restoring trails, and providing equitable access to parks. We extend our gratitude to Hydro Flask for their

support in funding our efforts to maintain and protect trails and trail lands in New Jersey.



Connecting With Nature, and Returning Safely



PHOTO COURTESY OF NJ SEARCH AND RESCUE

The Trail Conference's mission is to connect people with nature, but there is another important element which we rarely speak about. After people get out into nature, what does the Trail Conference do to ensure they get safely back out of it?

On a recent hike, long-time volunteer Mary Dodds experienced troubling discomfort. When she called for assistance, first responders were unfamiliar with local trails – and that lack of familiarity led to big delays in the time it took to reach Mary. Afterwards, Mary said: "How did I feel? Really surprised that not one of the seven responders knew the trails, chilled to the bone, and profoundly grateful it was not a major heart attack." Had Mary's issue been more serious, the delay in reaching her might have had life-changing consequences. And without the work of the Trail Conference to provide first responders with accurate trail information, many more people would be having frightening experiences like Mary's.

The Trail Conference has a long history of supporting first responders, and in recent years - with more people than ever on trails - we have been growing these relationships. Community Search and Rescue (COMMSAR) representatives attend and participate in our West Hudson Regional Trails Council, giving them a voice in Trail Conference decisions and a preview of trail changes and map updates. New Jersey Search and Rescue (NJSAR) has a dedicated Trail Conference liaison. Both organizations have adopted and maintain trails, giving them hands-on insight into how trails are maintained, and both use Trail Conference print and digital Avenza maps extensively for training, drills, and real-life operations.

The Trail Conference has even begun to offer its office space for collaborative training with



Top: NJSAR team member utilizes a Trail Conference map during a training drill. Above: Team members review a Trail Conference map at a NJSAR tabling event, helping educate the public on safe hiking and map reading skills

Search and Rescue teams. Darlington Schoolhouse – our headquarters – recently hosted Incident Command System 200 and 300-level FEMA certification courses, Managing the Lost Person Incident training, Wilderness First Aid, and CPR specifically for first responders. It has also been used as the Incident Management Unit command center location for nearby drills and mock searches.

The next time you see trailhead maps, well-maintained trails, and bold blazes, consider them not just for recreational use but as essential components of public safety infrastructure, bringing trail users safely home again.

Do you know of a first response agency that could benefit from learning more about their local trails? Contact PDolan@nynjtc.org so we can connect them with maps, tools, and resources for their region.

IN CONVERSATION

Meet Kuumba Edwards, 2023 Conservation Corps Member

We recently caught up with Kuumba Edwards, a member of the 2023 Conservation Corps' Taconic Trail Crew, who fully embraced the Corps experience. Kuumba lived at the Welch Trail Education Center in Harriman State Park, where many of our Corps members reside, and completed the full 900-hour service term from May to late October last year.

Thanks for catching up with us, Kuumba! Let's start from the beginning. What inspired you to join the Conservation Corps?

"I was always outdoors as a kid and after high school, I started hiking a lot more, especially during COVID. I found it to be a great hobby and I wanted to do more to protect the trails that I used so much. I was buying maps from the Trail Conference a lot, but I didn't know who made them. One day, I looked at the map and realized, 'Wow, an organization this close to me makes these maps!' So, I checked out the Trail Conference website, saw that you had positions available, and applied to the Corps. I really like working with my hands and working on projects, and I had landscaping experience, too, so that inspired me to apply for the trail crew position specifically."

What were some of your memorable experiences during your time at the Trail Conference?

"I was on the Taconic Trail Crew, and we built multiple sets of staircases on the Wilkinson Memorial Trail. We worked on that from the beginning of the season until September, and it turned out beautifully. I learned so much on the trail, and I wouldn't change anything about the experience. I also really liked working with the volunteers. As a special project, we built water bars on Mount Beacon with a few volun-



teers, and they were amazing people to hang out with. It was such a great time.

One of my other favorite things about my time in the Corps was living at camp and interacting with the other service members. A lot of people were from New Jersey and New York, but we also had members from Florida and New Hampshire, and even people from overseas. There were so many people from different backgrounds, different paths, and different futures. It was so nice for everybody to come together because we all love the same thing. We're all here because we love nature. We love being outside. We love the Earth. It's beautiful to have something like that in common with so many other people."

Were there any challenges you faced?

"I joined the Conservation Corps because I really wanted to see what direction I wanted to go in life. Throughout my entire trail crew experience, going to work every day, waking up in the morning and leaving in the afternoon, I don't think I ever had a bad day. I left with a smile on my face every day. I really enjoyed the people that I was blessed to hang out with."

Were there opportunities the Corps provided you for networking and a career in conservation?

"Absolutely. We had a lot of opportunities to network and I've met a lot of people who have helped me get where I am today. Ben Sugar, the Trail Conference's Senior Trail Builder, really advocated for me to go to the Emerging Leaders' Summit through the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. I wanted to learn new leadership skills, but also about the Appalachian Trail and additional trail techniques from people who have been working on trails for a long time. My trail crew experience was also invaluable for me getting my current job in the Parks and Recreation Department for Montgomery Township in Somerset County, New Jersey."

How did your time on the Trail Crew prepare you for your current role?

"There's the team aspect of it – working in a group

of small people who are trying to accomplish big things. Everyone must be able to put the appropriate amount of 'go hard' into it. I find it a lot easier to ask for help if I need it now, too. There were so many times on the trail crew where I said, alright, I need to put this down and ask for some help. Or sometimes, when I thought I needed help, I just needed encouragement. I had a lot of people encourage me to do tasks by myself. We encouraged each other all the time. And the physical aspect of it. Just being outside and working with tools prepared me for this role."

What are your plans for the future?

"I want to take some more steps into the conservation field. I'm looking at using my AmeriCorps grant to apply for some certifications so I can get more education under my belt. I'm going to either get a SOAR certification or some kind of land management certification. Afterwards, I definitely want to work on more trail crews – possibly a long-distance crew."

Was there anything else that you took away from your time in the Corps that you wanted to share?

"Actually, yes. I learned how to cook a lot more! I already knew how to cook, but when you live at the camp, there's no way to take the easy route out. If you want breakfast, you have to make yourself breakfast. Living at camp and being in the Corps taught me how to be accountable for myself."

Any advice for someone who might be thinking about joining the Conservation Corps?

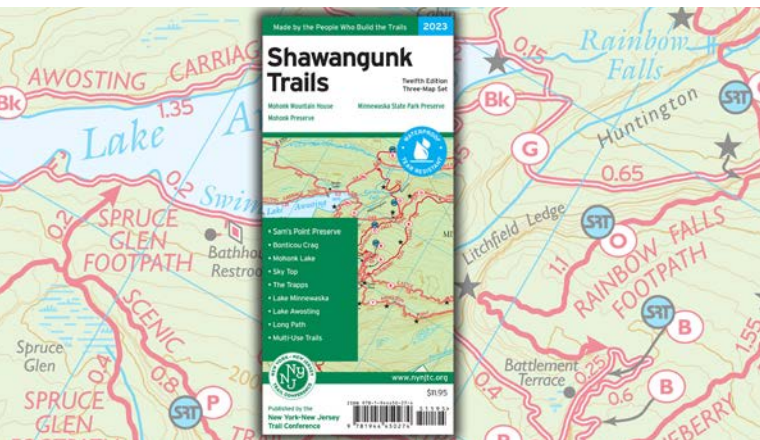
"Don't overthink it. If you really want to do it, you love nature, and you have the time – do it!"



PUBLICATIONS UPDATE

New Shawangunk Trails Maps and Upcoming Publications

The Trail Conference's Publications Committee rounded out 2023 with a sixth map revision for the year, our updated 12th edition of **Shawangunk Trails**. This three-map set covers 200+ miles of maintained trails and carriage roads in the northern Shawangunks of New York, including Minnewaska State Park Preserve, Mohonk Preserve, Shawangunk Ridge State Forest, and the Mohonk Mountain House property.



This revised map includes several trail updates, including changes to the Long Path in the area impacted by recent forest fires, updated blaze colors, and new names for some trails in Mohonk Preserve, as well as new trails such as the Split Rock Loop and the Lost City Escarpment Trail. A new inset map has been prepared to show nearby trails in the Rosendale area, and other improvements include updates to viewpoint stars and parking access.

The maps include trail mileage numbers, 20-foot elevation contour lines, viewpoints and other points of interest, an enlarged map of the Mohonk Mountain House area, and much more. They are available in print format, in vibrant color on waterproof, tear-resistant Tyvek, by shopping online

at nynjtc.org/shop, or visiting our headquarters in Mahwah, NJ. They are also available in digital format on Apple and Android devices through the *Avenza Maps* app. Built on 90 years of mapping experience, Trail Conference maps are "Made by the People Who Build the Trails" and are regularly updated with changes to the trails. Sales of these maps directly support our organization's efforts to keep the trails open and safe for all to enjoy.

Special thanks to volunteer project manager Daniel Chazin and to all the volunteers and park partners who helped produce this latest map revision! This map was also produced with support from Thruway Sporting Goods, a proud supporter of our volunteers.

Coming Soon!

Our Publications Committee continues to make progress on several other publications to serve the trail-using public, so stay tuned for updates throughout 2024!

- The 4th edition of *South Taconic Trails* will include up-to-date trail information.
- The 2nd edition of *Westchester Trails* will include several updates to this map set that was first produced in 2020, covering such popular parks as Rockefeller State Park Preserve, Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, and Teatown.
- A brand-new guidebook to trails throughout Morris County, *Afoot in Morris*, is nearing completion and will provide comprehensive descriptions of the hundreds of miles of trails throughout the county.



Trail Community Gathers to Celebrate Conservation and Advocacy

This past Fall, on October 13, more than 150 members of our trail community gathered for an unforgettable evening at our Annual Gala, hosted at The Garrison, a stunning venue overlooking the scenic Hudson Highlands.

We had the privilege of honoring Anne Todd Osborn and Fred Osborn III, two exceptional environmental leaders whose dedication to conserving our region's precious lands has left an indelible mark on the landscape and our community. Their contributions as volunteer supporters for nearly four decades, including serving on numerous advisory boards and volunteer committees, have been invaluable.

The evening was made welcoming by our Master of Ceremonies, George Whipple III, and former New York Governor George Pataki, who provided a heartfelt introduction of our honorees. We extend our gratitude to all of our sponsors, donors, volunteers, and Board of Directors, whose generosity and support made the Gala a success. From providing beverages, services, and decor to donating time and talent for our visual program, each contribution helped create an unforgettable experience for all.

Thank you to everyone who joined us in celebration! Be sure to mark your calendars for our 2024 Annual Gala, to be held Thursday, October 17 at the Indian Trail Club in Franklin Lakes, NJ. We will be honoring Bob Ross for his commitment and dedication to the Trail Conference for over 60 years. More information to come.



ASK THE STAFF

Myra Romano, Trail Steward Program Coordinator

What are some common challenges faced by our Trail Stewards, and how do you support them in overcoming these challenges? What are some challenges you've seen increase over the years for the Stewards?

As we dive into another season of exploration and adventure across the region, it's important to acknowledge the invaluable efforts of the Trail Conference's Trail Stewards. These dedicated individuals serve as on-the-ground educators and ambassadors of our outdoor spaces, offering guidance and fostering a deeper appreciation for the natural world around us.

In recent years, our trails and park lands have experienced a surge in visitors, many of whom are stepping into these environments for the first time. Coupled with unpredictable weather events – extreme heat and drought, wildfires and smoke, torrential rainstorms, and flooding – the role of the Trail Stewards becomes ever more vital.

Their mission extends beyond offering trail guidance – they aim to establish meaningful connections with visitors, empowering them to make informed decisions that protect themselves while preserving the delicate ecosystems that thrive alongside our trails. Much of the knowledge they impart to visitors focuses on Leave No Trace principles, hiker safety and preparedness, park rules and regulations, map reading and trail navigation, and alternate hike suggestions. Additionally, they



Myra Romano (right) with the 2023 Trail Stewards during a training at Giant Ledge in the Catskills

share knowledge of native, non-native, and invasive plants, 'PlayCleanGo' principles, and the importance of cleaning boots and gear between hikes to prevent the spread of invasive species.

As Program Coordinator, I'm privileged to support the Trail Stewards by providing guidance and support both in and out of the field. Throughout the months of May and June, I prepare and lead training sessions, making sure our Stewards are equipped to deliver their messages to the public effectively. They receive certifications in Leave No Trace and Wilderness First Aid through multi-day trainings. In collaboration with our park partners, I provide on-the-ground training at our ten stewarding locations and encourage the Stewards to familiarize themselves with the local trail networks. By becoming experts in these areas, they can assist a diverse range of visitors in both frontcountry and backcountry settings. By leading by example, the Stewards cultivate a culture of respect for our natural spaces, instilling a sense of responsibility and stewardship in all who traverse our trails. So, next time you run into a Trail Steward, be sure to thank them for their hard work and dedication!

GRATITUDE FOR OUR DONORS

Our efforts at the Trail Conference rely heavily on the remarkable generosity and backing of our community of donors. Listed below are supporters who contributed \$1,000 or more in 2023, or who made a gift in honor of or in memory of someone special. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who supported our mission last year.

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Advocating for Trails: Landmark Achievement for New Jersey's Outdoor Spaces



Long Pond Ironworks State Park, Passaic County, New Jersey

The Trail Conference's advocacy efforts have made significant strides for New Jersey's outdoor recreation planning and funding. Our pivotal role in shaping the 2023-2027 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, recently adopted by New Jersey and approved by the National Park Service, marks a significant milestone.

The *Outside Together!* Advisory Committee, represented by Board Member Juan Melli, staff member Don Weise, and Trail Conference supporter Jim Lyons, alongside stakeholders from several partner organizations, also strongly advocated for increased investment in North Jersey's trail systems,

helping to garner Governor Murphy's commitment to boost funding for parks, trails, and open spaces.

In January, Governor Murphy signed S1311/A594, establishing a non-profit State Parks and Open Space Foundation within the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The foundation will raise funds for the maintenance and development of state, county, and municipal parks and forests.

These achievements highlight the Trail Conference's commitment to advocating for the interests of our local communities and securing better-funded parks and trails across New Jersey.

Preserve Your Legacy and Protect Outdoor Spaces for Future Generations

Looking to the future is a vital step in protecting the land we love, and planning your legacy ensures that future generations can enjoy our public trails and natural areas for years to come. **The Trail Conference has partnered with FreeWill to offer a simple, cost-free estate planning tool on our website!** In just a few minutes, create your will and

include a planned gift to the Trail Conference. **For every new gift notice we receive, a generous donor will contribute \$500! Plan your legacy today and make an immediate impact on the organization you love.** Visit our website or contact Don Weise, Director of Donor Advising, at DWeise@nynjtc.org to learn more.

LONG DISTANCE TRAILS

Discovering Strength and Healing on the Long Path

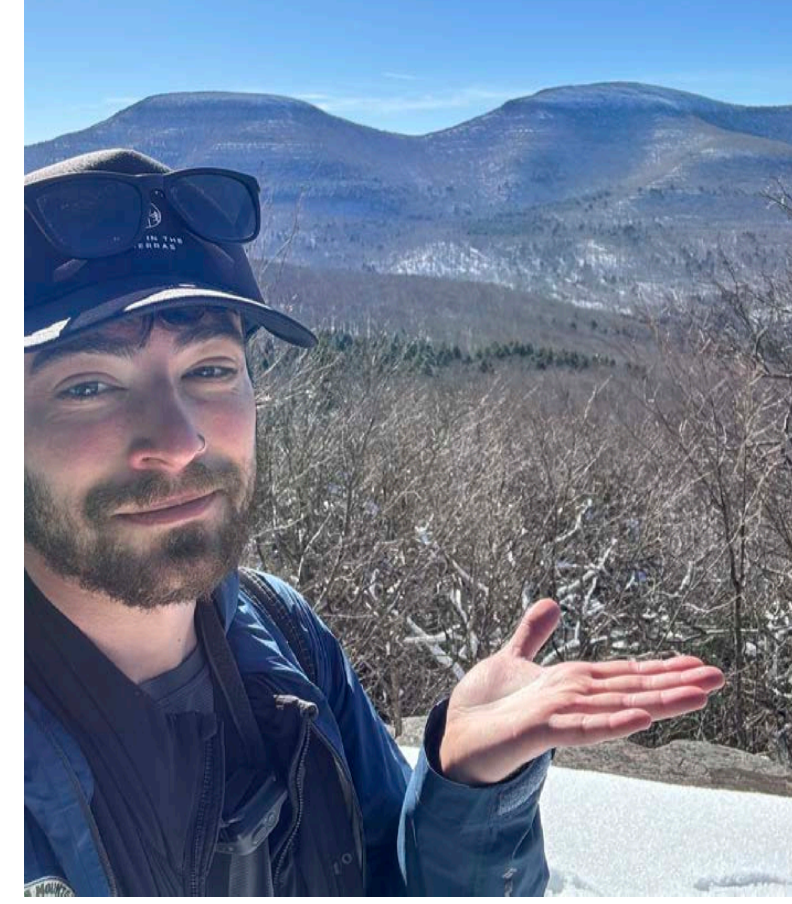
Shaun's journey of recovery and self-discovery has been closely tied to the trails he's hiked. Struggling with addiction and depression, Shaun's life felt like an endless winter – "an ongoing darkness where every task felt like climbing a mountain" – until he found solace in the wilderness. Shaun completed a recovery program for addiction in 2015 and, inspired by stories from the Appalachian Trail, set out on teaching himself how to hike, embarking on a journey of healing and empowerment.

Hiking became more than a pastime for Shaun – it was a lifeline, a way to reclaim his self-worth and redefine his identity beyond addiction. Since completing the recovery program, Shaun has hiked more than 10,000 miles on long-distance trails across the country, including the Appalachian Trail and Pacific Crest Trail, as well as the Long Path – three times.

Shaun set out on his most recent trek of the Long Path, an end-to-end hike this past winter, to challenge himself yet again and bring attention to one of New York's "most underrated trails." He says: "The Long Path is unique from other trails because it goes from New York City, the largest city in the country population-wise, to the Adirondacks, the largest park in the continental U.S."

Despite gear failures and unpredictable weather conditions, Shaun is appreciative of the opportunity the Long Path gave him to learn how to hike long distances in cold temperatures, while also standing as a reminder of his resilience and how far he has come since 2015. "Something simple like brushing my teeth used to feel like climbing Everest. So now, camping on a trail in the cold feels like a cakewalk. It made me feel alive, like I'm living my life to the fullest, and that I can do anything."

Reflecting on his journey, Shaun emphasizes the



profound impact of trails on his personal path to recovery. "The Long Path has been such an epic journey. I was emotional when I got to the end point. It's a huge milestone to finish in the Adirondack Park. But hiking, for me, is more than 'peak bagging' or collecting patches. It feels like coming home. It's where I can take the mask off and truly be myself. Trails shouldn't be an individual's only form of recovery, but they can help."

Shaun's experience has inspired him to volunteer with the Trail Conference, wanting to give back to the trails that have given him so much. As he continues to explore new trails and share his story, Shaun encourages others to explore the Long Path and support the Trail Conference, recognizing our organization and our "army of volunteers" as the backbone of the trail.

The Long Path, a signature project of the Trail Conference, is a 358-mile trail that extends from New York City to the Adirondack Mountains, connecting many of New York's parks, preserves, and state forest land. It is lovingly cared for by hundreds of Trail Conference volunteers. To learn more, visit nynjtc.org/region/long-path.

IN RECOGNITION

Volunteer Honored for Work in the Community

Rich Rockwell's dedication to environmental conservation and community service has been recognized and celebrated in various ways. Last August, Rich was named the top NJ Community Leader Everyone Should Know About, a designation acknowledging community leaders who are driving positive change throughout the state. A month prior, he was honored by the Essex County Board of Commissioners during their inaugural Pride Month celebration, receiving an award for his exceptional leadership and impact in the community.

Rich began his Trail Conference journey in 2017, initially contributing to the Lenape Trail project. His role expanded as he joined our Invasives Strike Force (ISF) Program, where he became an invasives surveyor. Rich eventually obtained a pesticide applicator license and made history as the Trail Conference's inaugural volunteer-led ISF Crew Leader.

Rich's commitment to invasive species mitigation through hands-on experience with the Trail Conference has established him as an expert in the community. He is currently a councilman in the Township of Bloomfield in Essex County, NJ and serves as Council Liaison to the Morris Canal Greenway Com-



Rich Rockwell works on a project to protect native plants at Swartswood State Park.

mittee, actively participating in town preservation and conservation projects. Recently, he assumed the role of Land Steward at Manitoga, the Russel Wright Design Center in Philipstown, NY, where he helps identify and remove invasive plants and plant native species. He hopes to continue working on special projects at Manitoga in collaboration with the Trail Conference and Lower Hudson PRISM.

Beyond his conservation efforts, Rich is a dedicated advocate within the LGBTQ+ community. His appointment as councilman in 2018 marked a significant milestone for LGBTQ+ representation in local government, solidifying his role as a community leader.

Rich's commitment to the outdoors and serving the community truly embodies the spirit of the Trail Conference's mission. We are incredibly proud to have him as a volunteer and congratulate him on his well-deserved recognition!

New Jersey LGBTQ+ Community Finds Connection in Nature

The Trail Conference partnered with the Bergen County LGBTQ+ Alliance for a memorable hike at Ramapo Valley County Reservation this past fall. As part of the collaboration, Trail Conference staff guided

attendees along the picturesque yellow-blazed Vista Loop Trail, past the waterfall. Hikers engaged in lively conversation, identified mushrooms along the trail, and savored peaceful moments by the MacMillan Reservoir. The day concluded with a leisurely picnic lunch, fostering connections and a true

sense of camaraderie among the group. This joint adventure provided an opportunity for members of the Bergen County LGBTQ+ Alliance not only to unwind and socialize, but also to appreciate the beauty of the outdoors together. For more information on the organization, visit bergencountylgbtq.org.

IN MEMORIAM

Jane Geisler

Long-time member, volunteer, and Appalachian Trail (A.T.) enthusiast Jane Geisler passed away in October 2023 at the age of 100. Jane's love for the A.T.



began in 1972 when she took on the monumental task of rerouting the trail around a Girl Scout Camp in Dutchess County, NY. She also supervised the Trail Conference's volunteer A.T. Corridor Monitors and Trail Maintainers until 2010. Eventually, Jane transitioned from trail work to greeting hikers at the A.T. Metro-North station, occasionally providing a shuttle for injured or weary hikers.

Jane's zest for life and the outdoors was evident in her warm smile and wealth of knowledge. Beyond the A.T., her interests spanned across many fields, including local history, environmental education, conservation, and involvement with many community organizations. Her playful demeanor and sense of humor made her a welcome presence anywhere.

In 1995, Jane received the Trail Conference's Hoeflerlin Award for her dedication and contributions. Her impact continues beyond her lifetime; as a Trail Angel, she remembered the Trail Conference in her estate plan, ensuring future generations' access to the trails she cherished. Her legacy of stewardship and kindness will continue to inspire us all.

George Petty

George R. Petty Jr., a longtime Trail Conference volunteer with more than 20 years of service, passed away in April 2023 at the age of 94. George was an



author, poet, editor, and retired college professor who contributed his skills and interests toward many different roles in the organization. He started volunteering in 1993 and served most prominently as part of the Publications Committee, including as Committee Chair for two years, Project Manager for books such as *Hiking Long Island* and *Kittatinny Trails*, and author of *Hiking the Jersey Highlands*, published in 2007. George was also a Trail Maintainer in the Fanny Highlands and Southern Wyanokies of New Jersey for many years, a *Trail Walker* article contributor, an at-large delegate, and a volunteer in ecological stewardship projects such as the A.T. Natural Heritage Monitoring Program and our Invasives Strike Force Program. George was recognized with Trail Conference awards in 2008 and 2014 for his significant contributions. George's words of wisdom, dedication to the work of the Trail Conference, and exceptional commitment to the Publications Committee will be missed.

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FEATURED HIKE

Overlook Fire Tower

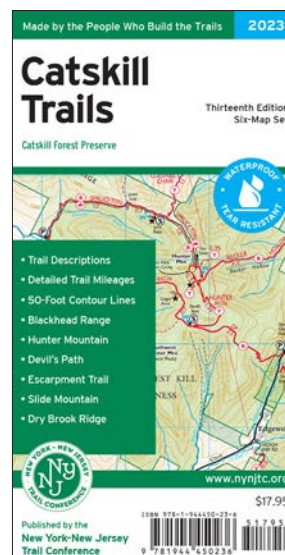
Location: Woodstock, NY

Time: Approximately 2.5-3 hours

Difficulty: Easy-moderate

This graded gravel road hike leads to the ruins of the former Overlook Mountain Lodge and the Overlook Fire Tower, offering sweeping views of the Catskill Escarpment. After two miles of following the red-blazed *Overlook Spur Trail*, you'll arrive at the site of the former Overlook Mountain Lodge, built in 1833 and rebuilt several times before being destroyed by a fire in 1923. A short distance beyond, you reach a junction, where you turn right and continue to follow the red-blazed *Overlook Spur Trail*. In another 0.4 mile, you'll pass the caretaker's cabin and reach the base of the Overlook Fire Tower. Climb the tower to take in a panoramic view of the Catskills. For a bonus view, a short trail to the right beyond the fire tower and caretaker cabin leads to a ledge overlooking the Ashokan Reservoir.

Before heading out on your adventure, be sure to visit nynjtc.org/shop to grab our newly updated Catskill Trails map to accompany your hike.



If you are a retail business, contact us at orders@nynjtc.org for exciting opportunities to carry our top-rated maps, trail guides, and more for your store!

Explore this hike and others in the region using our interactive Hike Finder Map at nynjtc.org/hike-finder-map.