



SUMMER 2025

# TRAILWALKER

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



## Trail Accessibility

Improving Access to  
Nature for Everyone

An Important Update  
About AmeriCorps and  
Our Conservation Corps  
Program

We Hit the Trails with  
Volunteer Champion  
Julie McGuire!



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## TRAIL WALKER

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### 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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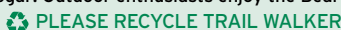
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Cover photo by Jeremy Apgar: Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy the Bear Mountain All Persons Trail



### Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

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# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The past few months have tested us. On April 28, we learned that AmeriCorps operations in New York State and across the country were abruptly halted. This news from the federal government left thousands of service members—and the organizations that rely on them—without a clear path forward.

For us, it meant that our AmeriCorps-powered Conservation Corps program was suddenly in jeopardy.

Since 2012, Corps members have played a vital role in our mission. They build and maintain trails throughout our vast region, remove invasive species choking out native plants, and help the next generation find purpose and direction in service. These aren't just seasonal workers—they're future leaders, passionate about making a difference in the outdoors and beyond.

Losing that program overnight wasn't something we were willing to accept. So, we went to work.

We partnered with state leaders, dug into the statutes, and found a way to move forward. Thanks to a provision in New York law, we're able to operate a restructured, scaled-down version of our Conservation Corps. This has presented its own challenges, but it's a path forward. And sometimes, that's all you need.

Of course, this issue is bigger than just one program. The effects of these cuts are being felt far beyond our region. The Appalachian Trail has lost key support, and federal land management agencies like the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service are stretched perilously thin. It's left to local nonprofit organizations like the Trail Conference to fill the gaps.



**JOSHUA HOWARD**  
*Executive Director*

That's why we're not staying quiet. We're talking with elected officials at every level—making sure they understand the stakes. But we need your voice, too.

This isn't about left or right; it's about support for the trails. It's about forests, fresh air, and the places we go to feel grounded. We need to

remind our representatives—state and federal—that the outdoors matter. Tell them you hike; tell them you vote and tell them that this work and the AmeriCorps program deserve support.

Even as these challenges unfold, our volunteers remain a wonderful force for good in this world. Their commitment hasn't wavered. In fact, it's stronger than ever. And it's that steady presence—people showing up, week after week—that gives me real hope.

This year marks 104 years of the Trail Conference. That's a long time to be doing anything, let alone stewarding over 2,000 miles of trails. But we're still here. Still adapting. Still driven by the same belief: that the land is worth protecting, and that people, when given the opportunity, will rise to meet that responsibility.

Thank you for walking this path with us.

**Josh Howard**

# OUR IMPACT IN 2024

2024 was a transformative year for the Trail Conference. Our determined staff and volunteers spearheaded major storm recovery efforts in Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park, revitalizing vital sections of iconic paths like the Appalachian Trail after severe weather damage from the previous year. When unprecedented wildfires swept through New Jersey and New York in the fall, we responded swiftly, alerting our community to park closures and supplying first responders with up-to-date Trail Conference maps for the hardest-hit areas.

Our intrepid Trail Stewards educated over 22,000 trail visitors across the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains, including 13,500 hikers at Breakneck Ridge. Our Invasives Strike Force removed 58,000 invasive plants to safeguard native ecosystems, while our Conservation Dogs Program led the pack in specialized habitat preservation efforts—protecting threatened species like the native New England cottontail and helping to reduce invasive Scotch broom in Harriman State Park by nearly 60%.

Volunteer trail teams like the Long Distance Trails Crew and the West Jersey Trail Crew made significant strides on beloved routes like the Long Path and Pochuck Boardwalk. Meanwhile, our Conservation Corps members continued to be the trail superheroes they always are, enhancing pathways in popular parks across the region.

Throughout 2024, our trail family gathered for standout celebrations like the Trail-A-Thon, Volunteer Appreciation Event, and our annual gala. Each gathering highlighted the extraordinary impact we achieved—thanks to our staff, partners, volunteers, and supporters like you.

## YOUR PARKS AND TRAILS

We maintained and protected nearly  
**2,200**  
miles of trails across the Northeast, including nearly

**1,400**  
miles of trails in New York and  
**800**  
miles of trails in New Jersey

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**260+**  
parks served

**25+**  
counties served

---

**160+**  
public and private agency partners

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**25**  
new miles of multi-use trails adopted in  
Morris County, New Jersey

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**58,000**  
invasive plants removed by the  
Invasives Strike Force

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North-South Lake from Sunset Rock. Photo by Steve Aaron



## COMMUNITY IMPACT

**2,000+**

volunteers dedicated  
**95,000+** hours  
to preserve our  
parks and trails

**42**

AmeriCorps members  
contributed **33,000**  
hours of service to public  
trails in our Conservation  
Corps program

**22,000**

hikers educated  
by our  
Trail Stewards

**619,100**

outdoor enthusiasts  
reached across our  
digital and print  
platforms

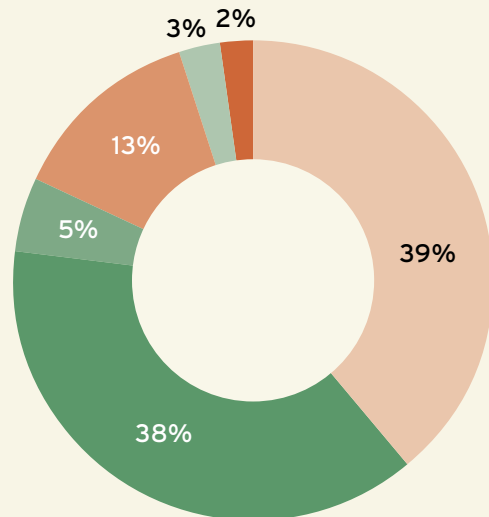
## FY 2024 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

**4,198** individual donors, foundations, and corporate partners

### REVENUE

- Contributions:** \$1,602,445 (39%)
- Grants & Contracts:** \$1,542,604 (38%)
- Membership:** \$205,554 (5%)
- Net Investment Income:** \$515,233 (13%)
- Sales of Books, Maps & Other Items:** \$119,176 (3%)
- In-Kind Contributions:** \$73,347 (2%)

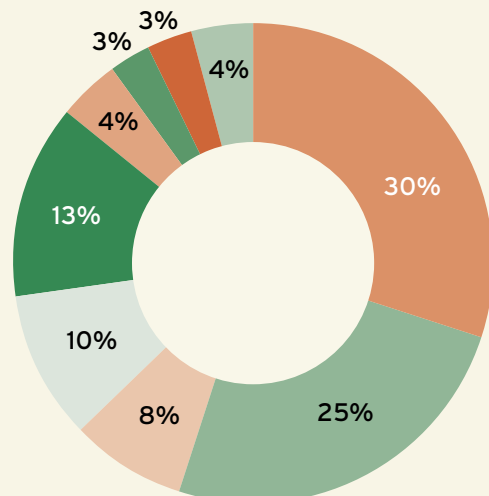
**TOTAL: \$4,058,358**



### EXPENSES

- Trail Programs:** \$1,176,710 (30%)
- Stewardship:** \$987,641 (25%)
- Volunteer:** \$316,976 (8%)
- Management & General:** \$391,513 (10%)
- Fundraising:** \$496,868 (13%)
- Membership:** \$167,123 (4%)
- Darlington Headquarters:** \$133,511 (3%)
- Outreach:** \$98,674 (3%)
- Publications:** \$150,865 (4%)

**TOTAL: \$3,919,882**







### David Togut

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

David Togut recently retired after 14 years as a Senior Managing Director from Evercore ISI, a leading institutional equity business owned by Evercore focused on equity research, sales and trading and equity capital markets. Thirty-seven years ago, David began his career in investment research, including 33 years focused on the payments, fintech and IT services industries. Every year from 1994 to 2004, David was rated the #1 or #2 equity research analyst in his industry by *Institutional Investor* magazine or Greenwich Research Associates. More than 50 years ago, David began

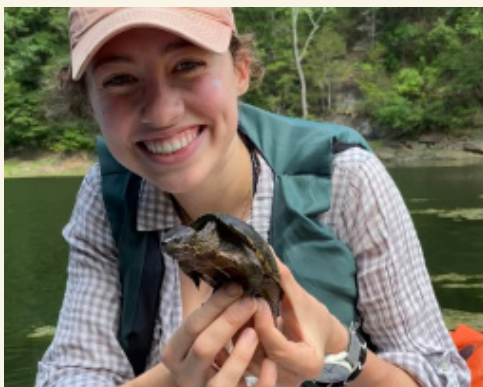
hiking in the Adirondack Mountains, primarily in the Lake Placid and Keene Valley area. For the past 20 years, David has hosted a summer hiking trip for family and friends to the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Mountains. David earned his BA from Brown University, his MBA in finance and accounting from Columbia Business School, and is a Chartered Financial Analyst. David lives in Manhattan with his wife and has two sons.



### Patrick Erb

#### NEW JERSEY PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Patrick joined the Trail Conference in late 2024 as the New Jersey Program Coordinator. After graduating from Ramapo College with a B.S. in Environmental Science, he volunteered as an AmeriCorps member working on trails in the Smoky Mountains. Since then, he has worked alongside the U.S. Forest Service in California, land trusts in Washington, and many other non-profits across the country. Patrick has a deep connection to the forests and hills of northern New Jersey where he grew up. Fishing, hiking, and connecting with people are his passions. Please welcome Patrick to our team!



### Elinor Stapylton

#### INTERIM EDUCATION AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Elinor Stapylton joins our Stewardship team as a leave replacement for the Education and Outreach Coordinator position with Lower Hudson PRISM. She holds a M.S. in biomimicry from Arizona State University and B.A. degrees in biology and environmental urban studies from Bard College in upstate New York where she's from. Elinor also holds a teaching certificate in sustainable construction methods from Earthship Biotecture in Taos, New Mexico. Her research spans plant-based ecological wastewater treatment systems to native agro-ecology practices and her work focuses on accessible solutions for living in reciprocity with nature. Please welcome Elinor to our team!





# Trail Accessibility: Improving Access to Nature for Everyone

By Peter Dolan

**At the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, we believe the joys of nature belong to everyone. Our mission is clear: *"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."***

And yet, this mission presents a paradox. Our outdoor spaces are often minimally altered, with rustic trails designed to traverse challenging terrain and embrace wild landscapes. Rock scrambles, stone hops across streams, and steep mountain ascents to scenic vistas are cherished elements of the backcountry trail experience for many. Unfortunately, what presents a fun challenge for one person can be an impassable barrier for another.

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Our newly designed trailhead kiosk at the Bear Mountain All Persons Trail.

Imagine, for a moment, being turned away from the trails you love: your favorite park lands, beloved paths, and most prized overlooks are suddenly no longer accessible to you. When you ask where you can go instead, you're directed to a paved path at a nearby park or playground to "enjoy nature." What sense of loss—of outrage—would you feel?

This scenario, of being told that most trails are effectively off-limits is the reality for many nature-lovers who have a mobility-related disability.

For each and every one of us, living without a disability is, at best, a temporary condition. We are all one unexpected slip in the driveway or medical emergency away from living our lives with a mobility challenge. Inevitably, even the process of aging imposes limits on what our bodies can accomplish.

**For these reasons and more, accessibility in nature is something that every outdoor enthusiast should be passionate about—if not for others, then for your future self.**

The Trail Conference is proud of our legacy in trail accessibility. The completion of the Bear Mountain All Persons Trail is a prime example of this commitment, as are our successful efforts in expanding accessibility along the Pochuck Boardwalk section of the Appalachian Trail. As we move beyond our first hundred years of service and look toward the future, we're redoubling our efforts to raise awareness and improve access to nature for all people.

## Making Nature Accessible for All: What Is Trail Accessibility?

"Accessibility" is a complex term that varies depending on the person and situation. At its core, accessibility refers to the **presence or absence of physical barriers along a trail** that can impact the progress of an individual traveling along the path.

People often treat accessibility as a binary—a trail either "is" or "is not" accessible, based on whether it meets official requirements for wheelchair accessibility. In reality, all trails are accessible to some people and not accessible to others.

Imagine starting a hike one morning with a diverse group of loved ones: a friend who uses a wheelchair, a young nephew, an elderly parent, and a friend on crutches after foot surgery. You begin the trail together, but at what point is someone forced to turn back? That point represents a barrier for them.

The rest of your group continues the hike. By the end, how many people are still with you? The more people who complete the hike, the more accessible the trail. A trail that allows everyone to fully enjoy the experience without having to turn back is often called a "barrier-free trail," or a "trail for all."

**By imagining this scenario each time you begin a hike, you'll start to see trails through a new lens: the lens of accessibility.** You'll begin to spot small fixes and alterations that could make your favorite trails more accessible to more people. And, if you're a Trail Conference volunteer, you may even begin implementing these fixes—helping to create a more accessible trail network for everyone!



Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy the Bear Mountain All Persons Trail.





Peter Dolan and Jamie Dolan, Peter's brother.  
Photo courtesy of Peter Dolan

## How Do You Make a Trail More Accessible?

In most cases, it's extremely difficult to upgrade an established natural-surface trail to meet the barrier-free trail standards described by the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG). These "trails for all" are usually planned early in the development phase to meet FSTAG's requirements before being laid out and built.

Even if full compliance isn't feasible, however, we can still find significant opportunities to **make an existing trail more accessible while preserving its natural character.**

An important part of improving accessibility is recognizing that even small changes open up trails to many more people. For example, consider a steep and eroded section of trail studded with ankle-rolling rocks—a common sight here in the Northeast. While you may not think of stone steps as an "accessible structure," building a staircase at this location would make the trail much safer and more accessible for someone who has impaired balance. My brother, who has cerebral palsy, knows this firsthand: trails that were previously inaccessible to him have been made more accessible through the addition of stone steps.

On the other hand, adding stone steps might make a trail less accessible to someone with a limited range of motion in their knees or hips. Ideally, rerouting the trail to a smoother and more gradual path would remove the barrier for both individuals.

Trail accessibility, therefore, isn't as straightforward as adding one feature or removing another. An array of factors goes into the decision-making process, including construction resources, land manager approvals, and the presence of other barriers or features along the trail. Adding stone steps to a trail that already has them, for example, would not create a new barrier. Adding the first staircase to a trail, however, must be considered carefully so that the addition doesn't create a new obstacle.

The good news is that nearly all accessibility improvements to existing trails deliver a double benefit—not only are more people able to traverse the path, but **these improvements also make the trail more sustainable.** Accessibility upgrades like moderate slopes, firmer surfaces, and regular grade reversals or switchbacks improve a trail's durability and water-shedding capacity. These enhancements refine the trail experience for all users and benefit the surrounding environment.



Visitors celebrate the ribbon cutting ceremony of the Bear Mountain All Persons Trail.

## Trail Accessibility Gains Traction in New Jersey and New York

The Trail Conference is not alone in its push for greater trail accessibility. In New Jersey, the Pinelands Preservation Alliance (PPA) is a powerful force of change for accessible trails. The organization launched its own accessible trail finder map ([AccessNatureNJ.org](http://AccessNatureNJ.org)) and established the Access Nature Forum, a community-driven initiative

designed to improve access to nature and connect trail organizations across the region. In New York, land managers like the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the Department of Environmental Conservation are designing new trailhead signage that makes it clearer to visitors where to find accessible trails, and what conditions to expect.

Here at Trail Conference HQ, we're committed to elevating our own contributions by centering accessibility in new and upcoming trail projects. A few highlights include:

- ✓ Collaborating with Sean Kane-Holland, Nature and Disability Advocate at the PPA, to blend his organization's accessibility expertise with our trail construction prowess, producing well-informed, actionable trail recommendations for park partners.
- ✓ Partnering with PPA to develop innovative trail construction resources that will guide our trail builders in creating barrier-free structures while minimizing environmental impact. This also improves communication with park managers, facilitating quicker navigation of the permit and compliance processes.
- ✓ Hosting Trail U workshops to teach our volunteers about accessible trail design and assessment, with the goal of Trail Conference volunteers contributing to regional accessibility databases.
- ✓ Helping land managers to design new accessible trailhead signage with clear maps and information about technical trail conditions.
- ✓ Planning brand-new accessible trails in our region alongside our park partners. While these large-scale projects often require multi-year lead times for funding, permit, and compliance work, we hope to share success stories in future issues of *Trail Walker*. Stay tuned!



Photo by Jeremy Apgar

Among trail organizations and park managers throughout the tri-state region, the Trail Conference stands out in its scope and scale. We maintain over 2,100 miles of trail and actively steward and protect landscapes across more than 260 parks, working in collaboration with 90+ management agencies. This unique position empowers us to amplify new ideas, resources, and best practices across county, state, and agency lines. By working together with our partners, the Trail Conference will play a vital role in the future of trail accessibility, fostering new connections, sharing unique solutions to trail-building challenges, and accelerating accessible trail progress throughout the region.

**"Everyone should be able to enjoy the wonderful backcountry and wilderness sites we New Jerseyans have protected, but there are too few trails that are accessible for people with mobility challenges. The Trail Conference is a key partner in trying to overcome this problem. They bring incredible expertise in trail design and construction to working with regulatory agencies and land managers, as we seek to streamline approval processes and bring together the resources to improve more trails, so we can all explore wild places together."**

**Carleton Montgomery**, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Pinelands Preservation Alliance







SPRING/SUMMER 2025

# New York Trail Updates

## **Hudson Nor'Westers Trail Crew 2024-2025 Season Accomplishments**

The Hudson Nor'Westers Trail Crew of New York had a productive 2024-2025 season, dedicating nearly 1,000 volunteer hours to work on trail improvements across multiple locations in the Hudson Valley. Through their efforts, they enhanced trail safety, durability, and sustainability, ensuring that these natural spaces remain accessible and enjoyable for future generations. Below is a recap of their major projects from the season.

### **Black Rock Forest: Mine Hill Trail**

The crew made significant improvements to the steep section of trail at the beginning of the Mine Hill Trail in Black Rock Forest by installing twelve stone steps, reinforcing the stability of the trail and reducing erosion. They also worked to reroute the path over exposed tree roots, constructing four additional stone steps and a short stone wall, and carved a step directly into rock to provide a more secure footing for hikers. These enhancements have made this section of the trail much safer and more navigable.

### **Storm King State Park: Stillman Trail**

A key project at Storm King involved reconstructing the intersection where the Stillman Trail meets a woods road that caused confusion for trail users about the correct path of the trail. The crew removed existing, unused stone steps and replaced them with six new, properly placed steps to facilitate easier access. To further support the trail's realignment, they built a 24-square-foot crib wall, which helps maintain the structural integrity of the trail. The crew was able to successfully redirect the trail to a more sustainable route that connects efficiently with the woods road while blocking off unnecessary side paths to prevent trail widening and habitat degradation.

## **Minnewaska State Park Preserve: Mossy Glen Trail, Mud Pond Trail, and Jenny Lane Trail**

At Minnewaska, the crew focused on addressing erosion and trail stability along the Mossy Glen Trail. To mitigate the impact of exposed roots and areas where water pools and creates mud or ice in the winter, they laid down stone to improve the trail tread, enhancing the trail's durability. Because the trail has been muddy in areas, there were many side paths that had formed from trail users attempting to go around these areas. The crew worked to naturalize those other paths so that they can revegetate to their original state.

In another ambitious project, the crew completed the first phase of a reroute on the Scenic Trail at Mud Pond. Prior to the reroute, the trail navigated around the northeast side of the pond where beaver activity has led to the trail being underwater most of the year. The new route brings the trail around the south side of the pond to intersect with the Mud Pond Connector Trail. This reroute is expected to enhance the hiking experience and protect sensitive natural areas, with additional work planned for future seasons.

The crew placed three larger stepping stones at the Sanders Kill crossing along the Jenny Lane Trail, improving stability and accessibility for trail users navigating the water crossing.

### **Looking Ahead**

The 2024-2025 season showcased the Hudson Nor'Westers Trail Crew's commitment to improving and preserving the region's trail systems. While many successful projects were completed, the work continues in 2025, with final adjustments needed on the Mossy Glen Trail and further development on the Mud Pond reroute. Thanks to their dedication, these trails will remain a cherished resource for hikers, trail runners, and nature lovers alike.



SPRING/SUMMER 2025

# New Jersey Trail Updates

Milton Fire Tower - Mahlon Dickerson Reservation

Photo by Karl Weiss

## **The Rad Trail Crew Gears Up for an Epic Summer in Mahlon Dickerson Reservation**

Exciting projects are on the horizon in Mahlon Dickerson Reservation and Abram S. Hewitt State Forest as the winter and early spring planning seasons come to an end.

Mahlon Dickerson Reservation, located north of Lake Hopatcong in Jefferson Township, offers beautiful woods and over 27 miles of multi-use trails. Major trail improvements have been underway thanks to volunteer supervisor Karl Weiss and his team of dedicated maintainers. Barred owls and the aurora borealis graced the team as they built turnpiking and major drainage improvements at the end of last year. As summer 2025 approaches, Weiss and his maintainers have coalesced into their own trail crew—the newly minted Rad Trail Crew, dedicated to improving many more miles of trails in Mahlon Dickerson Reservation. Keep an eye out for the crew as they hit the trails this summer and get to work on major projects.

## **The Future of the State Line Trail Looks Bright and Beautiful**

The State Line Trail in Abram S. Hewitt State Forest boasts beautiful views of Greenwood Lake and leads hikers to the picturesque Surprise Lake. Nick McKenna, Local Trail Chair and now newly appointed Regional Chair, has worked with his supervisors and maintainers to nurture the State Line Trail into what it is today. At the end of 2024, with the help of dedicated volunteers and the Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization Trail Crew (MEVO Trail Crew, for short), a small

yet challenging reroute was completed on the trail. Looking ahead to 2025, McKenna is poised to continue working on the State Line Trail, creating exciting new overlooks and sustainable treadway.

## **MEVO Trail Crew Gears up for a Busy 2025**

New Jersey trail crews are always on the move. Karl Weiss with his new Rad Trail Crew is an exciting addition to the family, while the West Jersey Trail Crew has an extensive history of major trail improvements throughout North Jersey and beyond. This year, the MEVO Trail Crew is set to work alongside Trail Conference staff and volunteers throughout New Jersey's trail lands, with a focus on Ramapo Valley County Reservation, one of the most popular parks in New Jersey. Last year, the MEVO Crew improved over 4.5 miles of trails in New Jersey and installed numerous staircases. 2025 is shaping up to be yet another banner year for them.

## **John Bylancik Steps Up as Local Trail Chair of Northwest Jersey**

Northwest Jersey is home to High Point State Park, Stokes State Forest, and Swartswood State Park. Thousands of hikers visit each of these parks every year in search of stellar views and outdoor serenity. John Bylancik is the new steward of these forests as Local Trail Chair. Bylancik has served for years as a dedicated Trail Maintainer and is an exemplary volunteer. Howie Liebmann, the longtime trail chair of the region and a close member of the Trail Conference family, has graciously passed the torch to Bylancik. The beautiful trail lands of Northwest Jersey are all the better for having Bylancik and dedicated volunteers as their stewards.



## IN CONVERSATION

# We Hit the Trails with Julie McGuire

**The volunteer champion shares her passion for the Catskills, her adventures of empowerment, and the importance of giving back**

If you've spent time exploring the spectacular Catskill region, there's a good chance you've crossed paths with Julie McGuire. An avid outdoorsperson, Julie is a backcountry skier, high school English teacher, and Trail Conference volunteer who divides her time between New York City and the Catskills. In January 2021, she joined the ranks of the Catskill 3500 Club, earning the highly coveted member number #3500 (and no, we're not jealous). In November 2024, she reached yet another milestone: becoming the first woman and third person ever to ski all 33 Catskills high peaks!

In addition to her trail prowess, Julie is an enthusiastic Trail Conference volunteer and outdoor advocate. She's a Trail Maintainer in the Kaaterskill Wild Forest, is the Trail Conference liaison with the Catskill 3500 Club (where she also serves on the board), and is a member of the Trail Conference's Strategic Planning and DEI committees. She's also committed to empowering the next generation of trail stewards. Throughout the school year, Julie orchestrates volunteer trips with her students, leading her class from the South Bronx to the Catskill wilderness for rewarding days of giving back to the mountains. Last fall, Julie and her student-volunteer crew helped maintain a section of the Long Path between the Curtis-Ormsbee Monument and Table Mountain, clearing the corridor and cleaning out water bars. More volunteer trips are scheduled for the spring and fall.

We recently caught up with Julie to discuss her passion for the Catskills, the importance of volunteering, and the future of environmental conservation and stewardship.



Julie McGuire joins her Longwood Prep students on a 2024 volunteer trip to Slide Mountain in the Catskills.

**TC: Thanks for sitting down with us, Julie! Can you tell us a bit about your background and what inspired you to get involved with the Trail Conference?**

JM: While I was married, I had gotten into hiking and wanted to continue that after my divorce. After getting comfortable enough navigating in the woods alone, I decided to try and hike all the Catskills high peaks. I wasn't sure if I'd finish them as the bushwhacks seemed intimidating to me, but I ended up finishing all the peaks within a few months.

I heard people in the hiking community talk about being a Trail Maintainer with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference and it piqued my interest. I decided to look up what trails might be available and saw that there were some around Kaaterskill Falls, so I jumped at that opportunity. Who wouldn't want the honor of maintaining the best-known landmark in the Catskills? When you love something, there's a natural desire to protect it. Volunteering my time as a Trail Maintainer seemed like the best way to do that.

**“The trips my students take are eye-opening for them. They come back more relaxed with a greater appreciation of nature and our role within the world.”**

**TC: When did you begin leading volunteer trips with your students?**

JM: During Covid, I was able to teach remotely from my home in the Catskills for a year-and-a-half. It was during that time that I realized what a different state of consciousness I was in versus when I'm in the city. I didn't have to be on high alert anymore and my nervous system was able to relax. I experienced a palpable connection to the universe and felt like I was being guided in some way.

I asked the universe to let me introduce my students to nature so that they could get exposure to this other way of being. After Covid restrictions eased and I returned to the city, the universe granted me that wish.

It started with getting my kids involved in skiing and snowboarding through the Winter4Kids program. Soon thereafter, I joined the Trail Conference's Strategic Planning committee. In the first meeting, we talked about DEI initiatives. I proposed a program in which high school students from the city would volunteer on the trails. Trail Conference Board Secretary Charlie Gadol saw my vision and said that we could do something in the Catskills. He and I worked together to organize trail maintenance with my students on Slide Mountain in the spring of 2024.

**TC: How did that first trip go?**

JM: It went so well! At first, I was nervous because I wanted the kids to have a great time, but I thought they might struggle with the insects, heat, or elevation gain. Granted, I was right about the students not enjoying hiking uphill, but they loved being out in nature. They treated that trail and every creature they saw like it was the most precious thing in their lives. Everything was new and exciting

to them. They were amazed by salamanders and caterpillars, and even excited to see worms. They also did an amazing job clearing 25 water bars. After that, I knew I wanted to host these volunteer trips with my students on a regular basis.

**TC: What lessons do you think your students learn from these volunteer trips? What lessons do your students teach you?**

JM: As a teacher, I've realized that we think we know our students because we see them every day in class, but we don't really know who they are.

When I'm in nature with my students, this is what I see: I see inspirational young people pushing themselves even when they're exhausted. I see students helping and motivating one another. I see how funny they are. I see how appreciative and loving they are to the environment and I see their commitment to working with the adults as we volunteer together.



To be successful with students, we need to get out of the classroom and see one another in a different light. When I'm working with my students to clean water bars, we're working toward a common goal. This helps facilitate cooperation, trust, and respect—sentiments we all carry back into the classroom.

I asked my students for their perspective on what they learned. One student told me that it was hard work, and she likely lost a few pounds while doing it, but the sensation she felt afterward, of knowing that what she did was for a good cause, made everything worth it. Other students remarked that these trips helped build new connections; they got to know peers they normally don't talk to. They



also enjoyed spending time with their teachers and volunteering as a team. The teachers don't just direct the students; they participate in the trail work right alongside them.

**TC: The trail lands of New Jersey and New York—and particularly, the Catskill Mountains—clearly mean so much to you. What about our region's trail lands and hiking community inspires you?**

JM: I think people underestimate the Catskills. They believe they're small and, therefore, not challenging. However, as you explore more of the region, especially when you venture away from the most popular trails, you discover a rugged and rewarding beauty. The Catskill Mountains boast rockslides, waterfalls, swimming holes, awe-inspiring summit views, and terrain so rocky that I dare any mountaineer not to be challenged. You must explore the Catskills in depth to understand its soul and what it offers.

I think there's a lesson in that. We often judge things superficially and draw conclusions based on limited information. But just like I thought I knew my students when I really didn't, most people don't really understand the Catskills. Even if you've hiked the high peaks, there's still so much more to experience.

In addition to its natural splendor, the region's hiking community embraced me in a way for which I'm truly grateful. I've always been a loner and never felt like I belonged to any sort of group, but the hiking and ski communities of the Northeast have taught me what it feels like to be included. I thank everyone so much for giving me that experience that I've always longed to have.

**TC: You mentioned earlier that you were hesitant at first to hike the high peaks of the Catskills. As an accomplished outdoorsperson today, what advice would you give someone beginning their own hiking journey?**

JM: If you're nervous about going out into the woods alone, you should go on group hikes with a leader until you're comfortable. The Catskill 3500 Club leads group hikes throughout the year. Group leaders possess a wealth of knowledge and can help you acquire the skills you need to become more

independent and confident on the trail. I'd also recommend joining Facebook groups like Hiking the Hudson Valley and Catskill Trail Conditions to get more information and meet your fellow hikers.

**TC: What advice would you give to someone looking to get more involved in outdoor conservation and protecting our trails?**

JM: The Trail Conference and Catskill 3500 Club, for starters! Both organizations welcome volunteers and offer a range of volunteer opportunities, from single-day group events to longer term volunteer positions in trail stewardship. Those are great places to start.

**TC: Environmental conservation faces a challenging present, filled with both promise and uncertainty. What does the future of environmental conservation look like to you—in particular, the path to inspiring the next generation of environmental leaders?**

JM: If conservation organizations want to think long-term about motivating and mobilizing new volunteers, then they need to start reaching out to young people and increase opportunities for those who don't have easy access to the outdoors.

My students in the South Bronx are at a distance from most trails in New York and New Jersey because the cost of transportation is an obstacle. By increasing access, you break down barriers and open the door to new ways of living. The trips my students take are eye-opening for them. They come back more relaxed with a greater appreciation of nature and our role within the world. Facilitating participation like this not only boosts volunteer participation, it exposes young people to potential careers in the outdoors, gets them invested in conservation at an early age, and helps them realize that the environment is something we need to preserve and protect.

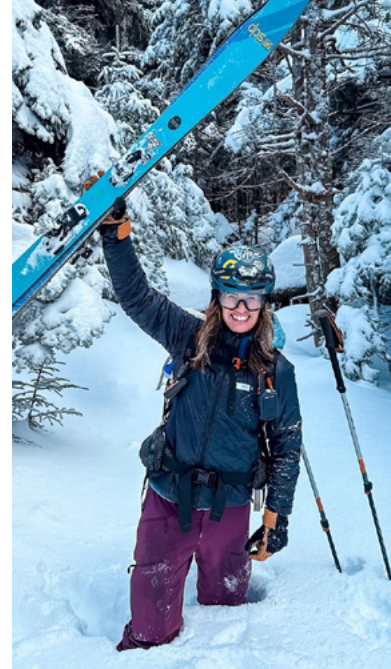


Photo by Jamie Kennard

# Camp Smith Trail Turns 30

**This iconic trail boasts a rich history and gorgeous views**

By Eileen West

The Camp Smith Trail—a 3.9-mile route from the Bear Mountain Toll House in the Town of Cortlandt, New York, to a junction with the Appalachian Trail above Route 9D—is celebrating its 30th birthday this year. The trail is known for its rugged terrain and challenging series of ups and downs rewarded by multiple views of the Hudson. It culminates in an unforgettable panorama from Anthony's Nose of the Bear Mountain Bridge, with the river below and Bear Mountain-Harriman State Park beyond.

Access to the Anthony's Nose view was a goal of conservationists and hikers long before the Camp Smith Trail was built. The Appalachian Trail originally went directly to it, ascending on a steep and rocky path opposite the bridge on property owned by Camp Smith, a unit of the New York State National Guard. That changed during World War II when the military, concerned about saboteurs carrying explosives in their backpacks, requested a relocation. Hikers were directed onto Route 9D, and while the restrictions were lifted after the war, the Trail was closed again in 1950 when Camp Smith enlarged its artillery range.

For the next couple of decades, the trail remained off-limits—officially, anyway. While attempts were made to reinstate authorized access to the Nose, the answer from the military remained a resounding “no.”

Then, one day in 1992, a conversation took place that changed the course of events. Jane Daniels, then the Trail Coordinator for the Greenway Heritage Conservancy, was on the sloop *Clearwater*. A Greenway advocate happened to mention that Camp Smith was looking for ways to justify its extensive land holdings. What better way to do that, they thought, than to give the public access to the property?



Arrangements were made to meet with Camp Smith personnel. Discussions began in October of 1992. A year later, a formal agreement was signed to reopen public access to the property.

What had changed after years of refusals? It was simple: Daniels had not asked for a transfer of the land. Instead, she merely asked for permission to use it.

In a 1996 interview with *Trail Walker*, Camp Smith's Col. Patrick Garvey credited “Tenacity Jane” with being the bridge necessary to bring the parties together. “She pacified the military and militarized the pacifists,” he said, to accomplish a goal that benefited everyone.

Extensive trail work commenced, and in 1994, the Trail Conference took command of the Camp Smith Trail revitalization project. The route was officially made part of Hudson Highlands State Park in 1999.

Hikers have appreciated the trail ever since. Alice Benash, a Westchester Trails Association hike leader, explained the allure of this route. “It’s a rigorous up and down in both directions with great climbs and stunning views along the way”, she said, “especially at the summit. It’s the toughest hike in Westchester County, and I’ve returned to it time and time again year round.”



# My Life-Changing Experience in the Conservation Corps

**Melanie Schuck shares her journey from Hudson Valley Trail Steward to Maine Ridgerunner**

By Melanie "Bambi" Schuck

"You'd make a great trail steward!" Sometimes I attribute my conservation career to that one moment of encouragement. Trail Conference Conservation Corps Manager Tori Finn said it to me almost five years ago at a college career fair. I had been trying to break into the conservation field for three years at that point and was getting more frustrated by the day. As Tori explained the Conservation Corps program and the experience it offered, I listened intently. What I didn't realize at the time was that the program she described would put me on track to make my conservation dreams a reality, overcoming many personal challenges and doing the most rewarding work I could ever have wished for.

I became a Hudson Valley Trail Steward serving in the 2020 and 2021 seasons with the Conservation Corps. Yes, I broke into my field at the start of the Covid pandemic, working with an extremely high volume of people. I masked up in the heat and was terrified of getting sick thanks to a chronic condition that compromises my immune system. Our crew saw record numbers of hikers that season at Bear Mountain and Breakneck Ridge. We were constantly engaging with outdoor enthusiasts, explaining hiking routes, and, at times, handling medical emergencies. One specific trail emergency was assisting in getting a seven-year-old boy who was critically injured off a popular trail during a holiday weekend and into paramedics' care. Together, my fellow crew member and I helped save that child's life. Dealing with that emergency together bonded us and we're still friends to this day. Despite the challenges, this job gave me purpose and drive during a scary time. I found that I got so much joy out of engaging the public about



hiking. During the quieter moments on shift, I would sometimes just look around at the park I was in, marveling at the majesty surrounding me.

Not only did this job give me a sense of purpose in my career, but it also got me through a very difficult time in my life thanks to a health crisis. While struggling through this, I knew that I wanted to get back on the trail. I had to, because I knew I was making a difference by protecting these incredible parks. I had to keep going and continue my journey, first as a Trail Steward in Northern New Jersey and then as a Ridgerunner for the New Jersey section of the Appalachian Trail.



The summit of New York's Bear Mountain Photo by Melanie Schuck

Becoming a Ridgerunner on the Appalachian Trail was a major leap forward. I went into the season with no backpacking experience, even though the position required me to do weekly patrols on sections of trail, stay overnight at various shelters, and educate hikers about topics I was still learning myself. In what would be a season where I questioned my decision many times, I gained the sense of independence and confidence I had longed for. My office and bedroom became the Appalachian Trail. I received my trail name (Bambi) from a weekend backpacker the day after my 30th birthday. My colleagues were amazing and helped me adjust to backpacking. I taught them about educating on the trail and the NJ state park system.

Just this past summer I became the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Ridgerunner for the Northern Maine section. I worked at the base of Katahdin helping thru-hikers as they headed towards their



Maine's Mt. Katahdin from a footbridge, with a moose. Photo by Melanie Schuck

final stretch or those just beginning their journey to Georgia. I split my workweeks between that spot and the ATC visitor center in Monson and jokingly referred to myself as a "bookend of the 100-mile Wilderness" since those two spots are on opposite sides of it. I lived over 500 miles from home for five months. I met hundreds of thru-hikers and learned their stories. I helped them interpret the complex rules of Baxter State Park so they could finish strong. I even climbed Katahdin myself on the Autumn Equinox. It was the biggest adventure I've ever been on.

Looking back, I sometimes still can't believe what I've done and who I've become since putting on my first Trail Conference t-shirt. I am a completely different person from the one who walked into that career fair nearly five years ago. And it all started with a word of encouragement to join the Conservation Corps program.

Sunset at a backpacker campsite in New Jersey's Worthington State Forest. Photo by Melanie Schuck





# AmeriCorps and the Conservation Corps: An Important Update

In April, we learned that all AmeriCorps operations ceased in New York State. This followed the furlough of 85% of AmeriCorps agency staff and the elimination of the National Civilian Community Corps.

The development has profoundly impacted our 2025 Conservation Corps season and Corps members—members like Melanie, whose life-changing experiences you just read about.

Despite this setback, we're determined to overcome the challenges and emerge stronger than ever with the support of our incredible community.

## A Collaborative Force for Nature

AmeriCorps is a vital national service program that promotes volunteerism. From coast to coast, its members lead the way in conservation and community-building projects, supporting nonprofits to create lasting and meaningful change.

Since 2012, the Trail Conference has proudly partnered with AmeriCorps in our Conservation Corps program. Up until this point, all Conservation Corps members were AmeriCorps members, and the positive effect they've had on the environment is immense. Over the last twelve years, more than 300 Corps members dedicated 280,000 collective hours to sustainable trail building initiatives and native habitat restoration programs across the Northeast.

Together, they protected precious landscapes and expanded access to nature as they transformed into the next generation of environmental leaders.

April's closure of AmeriCorps operations in New York State means that our partnership with AmeriCorps, at least for now, is over. It has ended vital funding and prematurely terminated the AmeriCorps service agreements of members who had planned to join us this season, many of whom were already en route from across the country to begin their crucial work.

The loss to the outdoor community is serious. Nevertheless, our resolve is absolute. When challenges arise, we tackle them head-on, together.

## The Trail Conference Steps Up

In response to the news, we went to extraordinary lengths to restructure our 2025 Conservation Corps season, working tirelessly to retain as many of this year's Corps members as possible. We also embraced the support from our 2,000-strong volunteer community, finding innovative solutions to keep our upcoming trail projects on track.

We're pleased to share that we secured temporary roles for a number of our 2025 Corps members, welcoming them into our trail family in seasonal positions. Meanwhile, our partners at New York State continue to work with us to ensure essential programming can still be implemented this year.

Although the 2025 Conservation Corps season now looks strikingly different, we remain committed to supporting our team and the trail lands we love. But let's be clear: The work is far from over.



## What Happens Next to AmeriCorps?

The loss of federal funding for AmeriCorps has upended community service programs across the country and imperiled public trail lands in our own backyard.

If you believe in the power of community-driven service, we urge you to take action by advocating for AmeriCorps' preservation.

Scan the QR code or visit [nynjtc.org/news/act-now-to-protect-ameri-corps](https://nynjtc.org/news/act-now-to-protect-ameri-corps) to contact your elected officials today. Let them know: We must protect AmeriCorps at all costs and preserve its contributions to the lands we love.



## PUBLICATIONS UPDATE

# Introducing Our Brand-New Guidebook: *Afoot in Morris*

The Trail Conference's Publications Committee is thrilled to announce the publication of our brand-new guidebook, ***Afoot in Morris: Walking the Parks and Trails of Morris County***, available now for purchase!

While perhaps not often featured as a top hiking destination, Morris County actually offers a wealth of open space and interesting hiking opportunities. More than 400 miles of trails traverse the wide variety of federal, state, county, and local parks and preserves in this New Jersey county, all of which are rich in natural and cultural history.

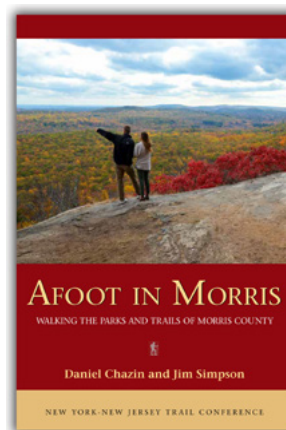
***Afoot in Morris***, by authors Daniel Chazin and Jim Simpson, features in-depth descriptions of the trails and parks throughout Morris County, highlighting more than 50 parks, preserves, sanctuaries and other protected open space. Historical notes, sidebars on interesting facts and lore, recommended hikes, driving directions with GPS coordinates, and public transportation information are also provided. Nearly 100 detailed topographic color maps accompany the park descriptions, and full-color images throughout the book offer a glimpse of what you might expect to see out on the trails.

From a county park system that forms the core of outstanding trail experiences, to engineering marvels like the Morris Canal and historic treasures like Jockey Hollow, to a varied terrain shaped by unique geologic

forces, this guidebook highlights an array of walking and hiking opportunities.

Whether you choose to visit a federal, state, county or local park, Morris County is the perfect place for a day of adventure or a quiet retreat into nature. Whether you want to climb a mountain and scramble over some ancient rocks in the Highlands, or prefer a level run along a flat course—whether you seek postcard vistas or prefer a walk through a deep forest, a wild meadow or a formal garden—Morris County is the place for you. Grab the new ***Afoot in Morris*** guidebook and pick a park to explore, or better yet, plan on hiking them all!

Scan the QR code or visit **[store.nynjtc.org/products/afoot-in-morris](https://store.nynjtc.org/products/afoot-in-morris)** to learn more about the book and purchase your copy today!



*Special thanks to volunteer authors Daniel Chazin and Jim Simpson and all the volunteers and park partners who helped produce this book, along with graphic designer Nora Porter and cartographer Jeremy Apgar. Production of this book was made possible by a very generous donation, so thank you to these anonymous donors!*

## AWOOOO: Join Our NEW Volunteer Dog Surveyor Program!

Do you love exploring the outdoors with your dog? The Trail Conference's Conservation Dogs Program is thrilled to introduce the Volunteer Dog Surveyor Program. This program is open to anyone with a curious, sniff-loving dog. You'll learn how to introduce your pup to the scent of an invasive plant species and contribute to conservation efforts.

Training is self-paced after attending a few start-up workshops and can be completed from home.

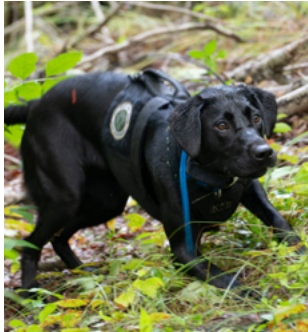
Scan the QR code or visit **[bit.ly/volunteer-dog-surveyor](https://bit.ly/volunteer-dog-surveyor)** to learn more about the program.





# Stewardship Department Highlights

This year, the Stewardship Department is excited to embark on many new projects and initiatives that help preserve the beauty and ecological health of our region.



The Conservation Dogs Program (CDP) enters 2025 with more capacity, resources, and skills than it has ever had before. In February, the CDP helped organize the inaugural Noses for Nature Conservation

Canine Community Conference in Santa Paula, California. The team takes the knowledge it has gained into the year to work on several native turtle survey initiatives, invasive plant detection, and cutting-edge pilot projects. Stay tuned for more news about what these canine superheroes are doing!



As for our Invasives Strike Force (ISF) Crew, they are excited to use weed torches to remove invasive plants this year! This method aims to wilt plants (rather than burning them) with a controlled flame in wet and fire-safe conditions. The weed torch wilting process bursts cell walls rendering plants unable to regenerate. Partners utilizing this method have reported promising results. The ISF Crew is excited to evaluate this method's effectiveness on different species as a non-herbicidal tactic that minimizes soil disturbance.



Moving on to the Trail Steward Program, this year Stewards will continue to provide outreach and education to visitors at trailheads, summits, and through interpretive guided hikes and workshops. Additionally, plans for 2025 include the installation of a boot brush station at Lake Skannatati in Harriman State Park. These stations serve as both a practical tool and a visual reminder to help visitors follow Leave No Trace and PlayCleanGo principles, preventing the spread of invasive species while promoting responsible recreation.



Finally, the search is on for our Surveyor Volunteer Program! This year, Surveyors will help identify "lingering trees," specifically hemlocks, ash, and beech trees that remain alive when greater than 80% of the surrounding trees have succumbed to their respective forest pests

of hemlock woolly adelgid, emerald ash borer, and beech leaf disease. The goal is to identify individual trees that likely have some heritable resistance that can be used in future restoration programs. This work is being done in support of the Nature Conservancy's Trees in Peril Project.



# Revitalizing Our Membership Experience for a More Sustainable Future

Photo by Steve Aaron

Exciting change is afoot!

If you're a New York-New Jersey Trail Conference member, you've likely received a message about updates to our membership program, announcing an array of fresh benefits and perks and an enhanced pricing structure.

The Trail Conference builds, maintains, and protects over 2,100 miles of trails, and our members are the lifeblood of our organization. Since 1920, membership gifts have provided vital support that sustains trail stewardship and protects our wild landscapes.

Preserving our cherished trail lands is more essential than ever, and the work required to do so continues to grow. To ensure we meet the evolving needs of our environment, our supporters, and our team, we're implementing a membership update in 2025—our first adjustment in nearly a decade.

This change strengthens the long-term resilience of our nonprofit organization and the passionate community that drives our mission. It also presents an opportunity to revitalize the membership experience, introducing new benefits such as exclusive speaker series, premium gifts, and unique VIP events for our high-level supporters. What's more:

All members, regardless of the level they select, will now enjoy joint membership benefits at no additional cost, meaning two individuals in your household will

have full access to member perks as you support the lands you love.

To further improve the membership experience, we're introducing new monthly giving options that make supporting our trails more flexible than ever. By choosing a recurring monthly gift, you can sustain trail stewardship across the tri-state region at the level that's right for you!

We're so thankful to all our members for their continued support. We truly could not do what we do without you.

Please visit **[nynjtc.org/membership](https://nynjtc.org/membership)** or scan the QR code below to learn more about updates to our membership program.







**Save the Date for  
our 2025 Gala!**  
Friday, October 3, 2025  
The Garrison, Garrison, NY

# A Night to Remember: Celebrating Our 2024 Trail Conference Gala

All of us here at the Trail Conference wish to express our gratitude to the guests, supporters, and sponsors who made the 2024 Gala so special. On October 17th, 2024, we gathered together in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, to toast the organization’s accomplishments and celebrate our 2024 honoree, philanthropist and long-time Trail Conference volunteer Bob Ross.

Bob’s impact on the Trail Conference is nothing short of transformational. His steadfast commitment to the organization has significantly strengthened our region’s trails, from the instrumental role he played in acquiring and protecting critical lands surrounding the Long Path, Shawangunk Ridge, and Highlands Trail, to his funding and support of a state-of-the-art floating walkway across Terrace Pond in Wawayanda State Park.

Those who know Bob describe him as an enthusiastic soul with a deep love of the outdoors and passion for supporting the local hiking community. As Bob himself

likes to say about his decades-long involvement with the Trail Conference: “I came for the trails and the land, but stayed for the people.”

Bob’s enthusiasm brightened the room that evening as he accepted his award. The magical gathering was made all the better by the delicious food and delightful company. Among our distinguished guests was former New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, who also took to the stage to champion our region’s natural splendor and remind us all that our trail lands don’t maintain themselves. Indeed, our trails require an impassioned community of volunteers and outdoor enthusiasts, just like the community present in Franklin Lakes that evening, to ensure they continue to thrive for generations to come.

Here’s to another year of sustaining and celebrating the lands that we love—ideally, with a tasty beverage at the ready and excellent company by your side!

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

### Diamond



### Emerald



### Gold



### Silver



### Bronze





## VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

# Howie Liebmann

For Howie Liebmann, there's no bridge he can't cross. One winter day, as a young man hiking among the foothills of New Hampshire, Howie arrived at a bridge over an icy river. Grateful to the builders of the bridge for sparing him from having to remove his boots and splash through freezing waters, Howie dreamed that someday he could improve the trail experiences of hikers just like him.

Championing outdoor stewardship is one of Howie's passions, as evidenced by his history leading the Boy Scouts and his longtime commitment as a volunteer with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. In 2013, Howie became the Northwest Jersey Trail Chair and took control of supervising a span of Jersey parklands, which for a time had no volunteer supervisors. Within a year, Howie walked the nearly 80 miles of trails across his region, familiarizing himself with the landscape and identifying crucial points of improvement. He was also active on multiple committees involved in fundraising and outreach.

During his time as Trail Chair, Howie built lasting connections with Swartswood State Park, Stokes State Forest, and High Point State Park. From the start, Howie knew the key to success was to build strong connections between supervisors, partners, and staff, then channel that support back to the on-the-ground trail maintainers. Under Howie's leadership, multiple bridges were built in Stokes State Forest, including the construction of a long wooden bridge at Stony Brook with the help of the West Jersey Trail Crew. The creation of the popular Blue Mountain Loop in Stokes, and the adoption of the famous Lusscroft Farms of High Point, are due in part to Howie's determined efforts.

This year, Howie passed the torch of the Northwest Trail Chair position to volunteer John Bylancik. The Trail Conference is a better place because of Howie. We're so grateful for his leadership and see him as a shining example of what volunteers are capable of accomplishing.



Anyone lucky enough to have a chat with Howie will instantly establish a connection. He's a natural leader who inspires trust and happiness—a true builder of bridges between people.



## Donor Spotlight: Veolia North America

Veolia is an innovator in resourcing the world, delivering solutions in energy efficiency, water management, and waste recycling for communities and industries near and far. Operating 8,500 water and wastewater facilities globally, Veolia's commitment to sustainability and operational safety ensures enhanced water quality and service as it strives for better ways to manage the world's environmental resources.

Closer to home, Veolia North America and its New York and New Jersey divisions also seek out ways to give back to the communities and environments that sustain them. One such effort is Veolia North America's support for the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to keep public trails open and protect surrounding landscapes.

In 2024, Veolia North America generously donated \$20,000 to support our trail restoration project in Bear Mountain State Park, a site that was severely impacted by massive storms in the summer of 2023.

The extreme weather event devastated over 40 miles of trails in Harriman and Bear Mountain State Parks, destroying many popular hiking routes, including a section of the Appalachian Trail. The Trail Conference's massive restoration efforts included replacing washed-out bridges, clearing away scree fields of rocks and debris, repairing vital pathways with enhanced erosion control, and rerouting trails that were no longer usable.

Veolia North America's funding played a vital role in the success of this project, allowing the Trail Conference to enhance recruitment and training efforts, engage its Conservation Corps crews and partner organizations, and acquire essential tools to complete the immense undertaking.

"Veolia's financial support [was] crucial in our efforts to sustainably restore these century-old trails, making them more resilient to climate



change and erosion," said Trail Conference Executive Director, Joshua Howard.

Veolia North America's support for the Trail Conference extends to our Stewardship team as well. In 2023, their substantial backing empowered our Conservation Dogs Program to monitor native box and wood turtles in Westchester and Rockland counties.

Native turtles are bellwethers of high-quality water and a healthy ecosystem. Yet they're also quite difficult to detect! To properly survey these species of special concern and manage their habitat, we harnessed our intrepid Conservation Dogs to guarantee survey success. The dogs' enhanced ability to sniff out the elusive reptiles helped illuminate key data points in their population size and health, enabling researchers, biologists, and land managers to make better decisions in protecting the native turtles while also improving the overall health of the ecosystem and surrounding trail lands.

Thank you, Veolia North America, for making initiatives like these possible. We look forward to continuing our collaboration, ensuring healthy trails and vibrant local ecosystems so everyone can enjoy their journey into nature.

# 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 recently contributed \$1,000 or more, or who made a gift in honor or memory of someone special. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports us and our mission.

## TRIBUTES

SEPT. 1, 2024 - APRIL 30, 2025

*From Deb, Diana, and Ingrid  
in Honor of Paul Douglas Fisher*  
Deb O'Connell

*In honor of David Applegate  
& Barb Chubb*

Samuel Del Propost

*In honor of David Togut  
on the occasion of his birthday*  
Mary Millman

*In honor of Steve Klauack*  
Charlotte Grove and  
David Kinosky

*In honor of Michael Lenhardt*  
Michael Lenhardt

*In honor of Michael Kassak Diekmann*  
Mark Diekmann

*In honor of Tallhouse wins Chess.com  
Tournament*  
Robin White

*In honor of Bruce D Shriver, Jr*  
Bruce and Beverly Shriver

*In honor of Michael Lenhardt*  
John Billiel and Eileen Wynne

*In honor of Ariana Vaquerano*  
Wenjun Hou

*In honor of Alfred &  
Eleanor Drasheff*  
Judy Paris

*In honor of Kathie Laug*  
June Fait

*In honor of George Butch Erico*  
Janine and Jim Bixler

*In honor of Suzanne Meier*  
Adam Meier

*In honor of Felicity Arengo*  
Gail Koller

*In honor of Aruna Gokhale*  
Vikram Gokhale

*In honor of Kim Levitsky*  
Richard Trenk

*In honor of Jack Fagan's "From the  
Ridge" art show at the Mohonk Preserve*  
Maeve Maurer

*In honor of Anna Niwinski*  
Michael Niwinski

*In honor of Edmund Morrison and  
Nancy Morrison*  
Sean Morrison

*In honor of Nancy J. Schoeck*  
Michael Schoeck

*In honor of Kenneth Posner*  
Bob and Constance Eby

*In honor of Robert Bonkowski*  
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*In honor of Patricia O'Hara*  
Mauricio Miranda  
Michael Falso

*In honor of Scott Singer*  
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*In honor of Eric Friedman*  
Kimberly Henderson

*In honor of Katie Kingsbury*  
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*In honor of Joseph Mallett*  
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Dani Wolber

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Daniel Weisberg*  
Benjamin Weisberg

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*In honor of JASMINE*  
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*In Memoriam of Kenneth Malkin  
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*In honor of Lenape Run 35 miles 2025*  
Benoit Verdickt

*In honor of Rita B Kropf*  
Judy and Noel Kropf

*In honor of Don Weise*  
Monica Smith

*In honor of Nancy Batterman and  
Ricky Greenberg to celebrate their  
65th Birthdays*  
Alan Lieber and Alice Heffner

*In honor of Rose Bonanno  
from the Newport Gals*  
The Newport Gals

*In honor of The Ranch Hudson Valley*  
Paul Michaud

*In memory of Howard Givner*  
Howard and Laura Givner

*In memory of Stephen Venezia*  
Carolyn Poliks

*In memory of Michael Lenhardt*  
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*In memory of Jakob Franke*  
Robert Barth

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# IN MEMORIAM

## Arch Seamans

Arch Seamans, a devoted outdoorsman, passionate runner, and longtime Trail Conference volunteer, passed away in January 2025 at the age of 92.

After retiring from his job as a chemist, Arch focused his energies on giving back to his community, delivering food for Meals on Wheels and serving as a Trail Maintainer for the Trail Conference. Ever the explorer, Arch hiked trails near and far and enjoyed geocaching in his spare time, having located over 600 caches on his excursions across the United States. He was also an avid runner who participated in recent Trail Conference-Sassquad Trail Running races and completed his last 5K on September 28, 2024, in Woodbourne Park, New Jersey.

When Arch wasn't lacing up his running shoes, he enjoyed playing disc golf, attending concerts and plays, watching football on TV, going to Rockland Boulders baseball games, and Rummikub every Monday night with close friends.

Arch's impact lives on in the loving friendships he kept and the trail lands he helped protect for future generations. His dedication to giving back and boundless zest for life stand as an inspiration to us all.



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## FEATURED HIKE

# Bear Mountain All Persons Trail

**Location:** Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park

**Distance:** 0.75 miles

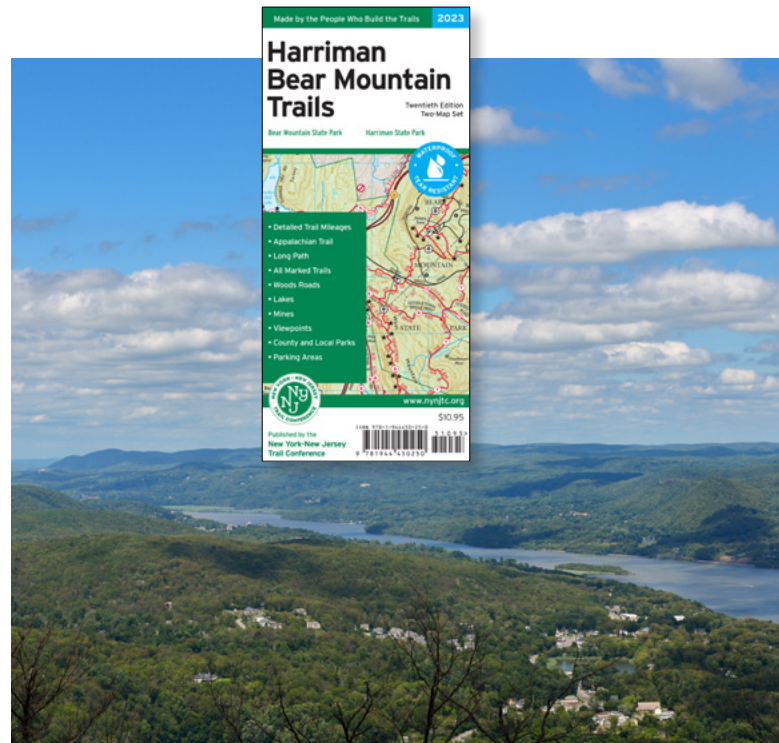
**Difficulty:** Beginner

This exceptional hike on the summit of Bear Mountain includes the Bear Mountain All Persons Trail, which invites outdoor enthusiasts of all abilities to connect with nature and soak in spectacular views.

The hike begins at the Perkins Memorial Tower where you'll find a sign for the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) on the northwest side of the parking area. Follow the white blazes of the A.T. and the red-ring-on-white blazes of the Major Welch Trail as they bear east. The first 0.35 miles of this outstanding hike is the **All Persons Trail**, an accessible pathway comprised of crushed gravel that allows outdoor enthusiasts of all abilities and accessibility levels to enjoy a beautiful section of the A.T.

In 500 feet, you'll cross a gravel service road. To the right, atop a massive boulder, are the concrete foundations of a former fire tower (replaced in 1934 by the Perkins Memorial Tower back at the parking lot). Then, a quarter mile from the start, you'll come to another huge boulder on the left side of the trail.

Pause to look around here. If the immediate environment appears different or the canopy cover overhead is thinner and letting in more sunlight, it's because this forest is still recovering from a brush fire in 2022.



Continue along the A.T., navigating a short and accessible connector loop (see our full trail guide for more info). After ascending the maximum grade of the All Persons Trail at 8%, you'll reach your rewarding vista: A spectacular north-facing scenic overlook with sweeping views of the Hudson River, the Bear Mountain Bridge, Anthony's Nose, and the hills of the West Point Military Reservation.

For the full hike description, please visit [nynjtc.org/hike/hike-bear-mountain-summit-loop](http://nynjtc.org/hike/hike-bear-mountain-summit-loop).

Explore this trail and all our hiking and map resources at [nynjtc.org/trail-head](http://nynjtc.org/trail-head)