



FALL/WINTER 2025-26

TRAILWALKER

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

Stewardship in Motion: Powering Conservation Through Community

Thank You for a
Phenomenal National
Trails Challenge '25

We Hit the Trails
with Robert and
Kasper Jack

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TRAIL WALKER (USPS Permit #970-100) (ISSN: 0749-1352) is published by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference as a benefit of membership. Periodical postage paid at Mahwah, N.J., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to the address below.

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Opinions expressed by Trail Walker authors do not necessarily represent those of the Trail Conference. Submission of photos and news for print consideration are welcome from members and nonmembers.



TRAIL WALKER

VOLUME LIII, FALL/WINTER
No. 2 2025-26

PREVIOUS TRAIL WALKER: SUMMER 2024 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 Krysti Sabins: Invasives Strike Force members search for hemlock woolly adelgids

PLEASE RECYCLE TRAIL WALKER

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

Trail Walker is a magazine published by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, 600 Ramapo Valley Road, Mahwah, NJ 07430. The managing editor is Matthew Thompson, at the same address. The annual subscription price is \$15; contact person is Matthew Thompson; telephone number is 201-512-9348. Magazine layout and design by Trillion. 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.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I'm an optimist. Give me lemons, and I'll make you a sparkling lemonade with a twist of fresh basil, along with a cheese platter, dried fruit, and nuts.

Over the past year, the Trail Conference has served up its own brand of delicious beverages and charcuterie.

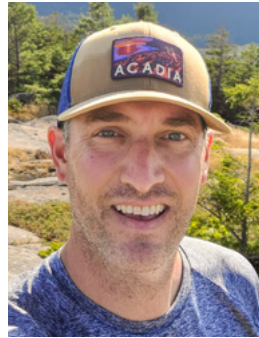
In the face of adversity, we rallied through federal budget cuts to protect the Trail Conference Conservation Corps, ensuring we could continue to support our Trail Stewards, empower our Invasives Strike Force, and field our trail crews.

Active projects like the Long Path draw more communities together and unite people around a shared goal: fostering deeper connections to nature through trails.

Our revitalized Trail University program is an enormous success. Passionate volunteers pack our workshops and training sessions, demonstrating that the work we do and the people who do it are the secret ingredients to our long-term success.

And the rise of two innovative community-driven initiatives within our Stewardship Department—the Volunteer Dog Surveyor Program and the Trail Ecology Surveyor Program—reimagine what conservation can achieve in an ever-evolving world.

As we've seen before, people turn to the outdoors in times of crisis for solace, recreation, and improved well-being. Now more than ever, the Trail Conference aims to collaborate with like-minded organizations so that the public has access to safe, sustainable trails within healthy, biodiverse open spaces.



JOSHUA HOWARD
Executive Director

When I learned that Trail Conference volunteers reported over 100,000 hours of service last year, it fueled my optimism. When partners like Scenic Hudson and the Open Space Institute actively protect new lands and open them up for the public to enjoy, it fuels my optimism.

There's a lot to worry about these days. Nevertheless, the Trail Conference remains committed to working with our partners so that everyone has the opportunity to hit the trail and escape the pressures of life.

I'm excited to have your help and support as we squeeze more lemons and serve up something delicious.

Josh Howard



Josh Howard and his family enjoying the trails in Maine's Acadia National Park.



Margaux Bouniol

FRONT DESK ASSOCIATE

Margaux joined the Trail Conference in July 2025 as the Front Desk Associate. Having grown up just down the street from the Trail Conference Headquarters and the Ramapo Reservation, Margaux has a long-standing personal connection to the organization's mission and work. After spending four years abroad, Margaux earned a BA in Social Sciences from Amsterdam University College and an LLM in Global Environment and Climate Change Law from the University of Edinburgh. Now back in their hometown, they are excited to be hiking the trails they love with their dog

Polo, supporting the Trail Conference's day-to-day operations, and continuing their volunteer work with the Invasive Species Surveyor project. Welcome, Margaux!



Paula Casey

TAKES ON NEW ROLE OF FINANCE & OPERATIONS SENIOR ASSOCIATE

We extend our warm congratulations to Paula, who first joined the finance team in 2021, and now takes on the new role of Finance & Operations Senior Associate. Paula has enjoyed a long and accomplished career in hospitality, with roles in Information Technology and Operations, and most recently as General Manager at the Stony Point Center, which is part of a wider association of Presbyterian Camps and Conference Centers focused on Outdoor Ministry. A proud North Rockland community member, Paula is thrilled to continue her work with the Trail Conference and help others connect with nature. Congratulations, Paula!



Peter Dolan

TAKES ON NEW ROLE OF SENIOR TRAIL PLANNER

We're delighted to announce that Peter has stepped into the new role of Senior Trail Planner. Peter first joined the Trail Conference in 2013 and previously served as Trail Program Manager. In this new position, Peter leads the creation of technical documents for land managers and partners, including trail plans, assessments, layout and design proposals, GIS data collection, and regulatory reform recommendations. A range of outdoor experience informs Peter's planning work, including a degree in field zoology and animal behavior from Bucknell University, guide work with an emphasis on inclusion and accessibility, multiple seasons of trail construction, and active service in wilderness Search and Rescue. Congratulations, Peter!



Thank You for a Phenomenal National Trails Challenge '25

Your generosity made all the difference, thank you!

During this year's National Trails Challenge, you helped us soar past our \$50,000 match goal, raising over \$110,000 to protect public trail lands, restore native habitats, and keep crews in the field after a loss in federal funding.

That's an extraordinary achievement, trail family—and we rose to meet the challenge together.

Taking Action for the Trail Lands We Love

In April 2025, the Trail Conference learned that AmeriCorps operations in New York State had ceased for the year due to federal funding cuts. This sudden loss put our trail lands at risk, and it threatened the future of our Trail Conference Conservation Corps, a vital program powered through AmeriCorps that changes lives, launches careers, and improves public landscapes across the Northeast.

In response to these setbacks, we acted swiftly to restructure our 2025 Corps season, transitioning as many roles as possible into seasonal positions. We made significant progress—but to keep our upcoming projects on track, we turned to the support of our community.

That's why we launched the National Trails Challenge: to celebrate our trail lands and work together to sustain our trail crews and volunteers in the wake of funding gaps.

The campaign, which ran from May 20 to June 7, 2025, was a resounding success. Thanks to your generous support, we:

- Kept essential trail-building crews on high-priority projects identified by our regional partners
- Deployed our restructured Conservation Corps crew on critical habitat restoration efforts
- Provided outreach and education services to popular summits in the Catskill Forest Preserve and Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve
- Empowered volunteers and staff to step up where federal support had pulled back

We heard from so many of you during the National Trails Challenge, and your encouragement fueled our resolve. While more work indeed lies ahead, your commitment empowers us to find bold new solutions that will move our mission forward.

From everyone here at the Trail Conference: thank you for showing up and standing with us. Together, we're keeping trails open, safe, and thriving for everyone.



Stewardship in Motion: Powering Conservation Through Community

Brent Boscarino, the Trail Conference's Director of Land Stewardship, leads volunteers on an invasives identification walk.

The Trail Conference is dedicated to nurturing and protecting the natural world through conservation, sustainability, and thoughtful action. Our steadfast commitment to stewardship strengthens ecosystems and supports the well-being of both people and the environment.

We're proud to boast diverse and impactful programming through our Stewardship Department. Our **Trail Stewards** lead the way in promoting

responsible recreation across our parks, preserves, and forests. Our **Ecology Programs** advance habitat restoration through forest surveys, plant management, and ongoing monitoring. Our intrepid **Conservation Dogs** harness the extraordinary olfactory abilities of canines to detect invasive species, survey for endangered wildlife, and track ecological change. And our **Invasives Strike Force**, composed of dedicated **Trail Conference Conservation Corps** members, defends precious terrestrial natural resources across the Northeast through strategic management of invasive species.

These programs play a key role in the Trail Conference's mission to protect and preserve our natural spaces for generations to come—and they're bolstered by a growing family of volunteers who help collect valuable data along our trails.



A New Era of Community-Driven Conservation

This year marked the rise of two innovative initiatives within our Stewardship Department that reimagine what community-driven conservation can do in the 21st century.

Our recently launched Volunteer Dog Surveyor Program is a smash success, training enthusiastic participants and their scent-savvy pups to identify and track invasive plant species in our forests. Together, they contribute to meaningful conservation efforts, all while following leash laws and enjoying time on the trail.

Since the program's debut in spring 2025, 61 volunteers and their canine companions have joined the effort, surveying along trail edges to detect signs of Siebold's viburnum, an invasive plant species. Forty-two teams have advanced through hands-on training workshops and self-study sessions, contributing over 1,000 volunteer hours to date. Impressively, 11 teams have completed full scent-detection training and now have their own trail assignments!

Meanwhile, our Trail Ecology Surveyor Program is hard at work finding hope in our forests. Over the course of the 2025 season, 91 volunteers took to the trails in search of native trees exhibiting resistance to invasive pests. More than 130 miles surveyed

revealed a host of trees that appear miraculously healthy. These exceedingly rare discoveries—made possible by our volunteers—offer vital evidence of genetic resistance to invasives in our native forests, illuminating a path toward future forest restoration!

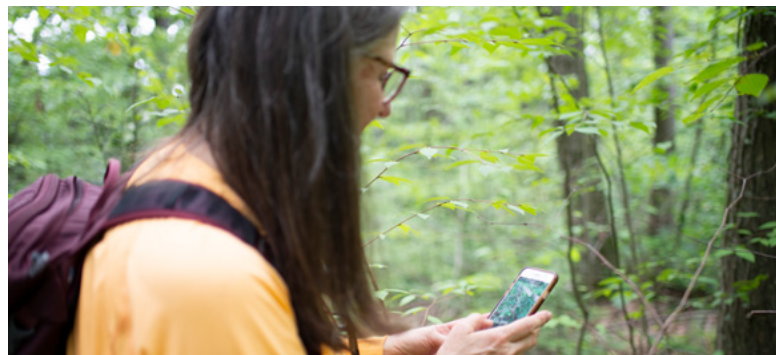
Protecting Our Trails Together

The Trail Conference is determined to lead with innovation, reinventing volunteerism to meet the needs of the moment and envisioning bold new ways to empower our volunteers. Our Stewardship Department's community-driven programs welcome everyone, regardless of their scientific background or experience. A shared passion for conservation is what matters. Together, we can document crucial data about invasive and native species in our region and protect the natural world that sustains us all.

The rise of our Trail Ecology Surveyor Program could not have occurred at a better time. In recent decades, many of our forests have come under threat from invasive pests and pathogens like the emerald ash borer, beech leaf disease, and hemlock woolly adelgid. We're working closely with our conservation partners to study such threats and slow their spread—and you can help too.

This fall and winter, join us in the search for hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA)—a harmful invasive insect decimating our Eastern hemlock trees. With their distinctive bark, feathery evergreen needles, and delightful pinecones, hemlocks stand out in a season when most deciduous trees have shed their leaves, making them ideal specimens to study.

Turn the page to learn more about the mighty hemlocks, discover how to identify HWA, and find out how you can join us in conserving and protecting our forests!



What does a healthy hemlock look like?

Eastern hemlocks are moisture-loving, shade tolerant conifers often found along north-facing slopes or beside winding streams.

These subtle lowlands don't just cradle trees; they funnel water underground that sustains entire ecosystems!

Hemlocks greet you with their feathery boughs, marked by white racing stripes along the underside of each needle.

Their scaly bark varies from red to purple, with deep longitudinal furrows.

A few of the great things hemlocks do...

- Eastern hemlocks are crucial for water quality as they help filter out pollutants from our water supply.
- These ecologically-significant beauts also provide shelter and food for wintering birds and wildlife.
- And thanks to their ability to form dense stands that shade the forest floor, hemlocks create cool, moist microclimates that support unique plant communities—especially mosses, ferns, and lichens.



What is hemlock woolly adelgid? (HWA)

HWA is an invasive, aphid-like insect that feeds on hemlocks by piercing twig tissue. As the tree tries to heal, nutrient flow to new buds is blocked, preventing growth.



How do I identify HWA?

From November through April, look for these fuzzy white masses—always clumped on twigs near the base of the hemlock needles.

Pro tip: An infestation is often best spotted by checking the underside of a hemlock twig.

How do I get involved?

By becoming a Trail Ecology Surveyor Volunteer!

Your efforts will play a key role in preserving our landscapes and combating invasives like HWA.

No experience required—just a passion for conservation.

Sign up today!



bit.ly/SurveyorVolunteer



Photo of volunteers by Elinor Stapyilton;
all other photos by Krysti Sabins



FALL 2025

New York Trail Updates

Photo by Michael Pashley

Hudson Nor'Westers Trail Crew

The Hudson Nor'Westers, led by Crew Leader Dave Webber, wrapped up a multi-year project by completing the improvements on the Scenic Trail reroute in Minnewaska State Park. This reroute shifted the trail off a swampy section and onto a ridge with a scenic viewpoint. The crew also made lasting improvements along the Mossy Glen Trail by reopening culverts and building stone turnpikes to manage water drainage. On the Rainbow Falls Trail, they installed two 10-foot bog bridges, eliminating muddy conditions and reducing the creation of social trails.

East Hudson Trail Crew & Bash Bish Builders Trail Crew

The East Hudson Trail Crew and the Bash Bish Builders, led by Crew Leader Andrew Seirup, made significant progress on their projects this year. The East Hudson Crew focused on critical storm recovery, working on a reroute of the Sugarloaf Trail near Castle Rock in Hudson Highlands State Park. Their work bypassed a steep section of trail washed out by the 2023 storm, restoring sustainable access to this popular route. The Bash Bish Builders improved the South Taconic Trail near the summit of Alander Mountain in Taconic State Park. By rerouting the trail, they protected sensitive snake habitat while preserving a high-quality hiking experience.

Trail Tramps Trail Crew

The Trail Tramps, led by Crew Leaders Michael Pashley and Connie Stern, took on a major relocation of the White Trail at Hudson Highlands Gateway Park. Their work replaces a steep section with sustainable switchbacks, creating a more accessible route. The crew blazed roughly 50% of the project this season, with plans to finish by the end of 2025. The crew also invested countless hours improving trail conditions throughout Westchester County, addressing overgrowth and water

management challenges, clearing ditches, maintaining water bars, and keeping corridors open.

Catskills Trail Crew

This year, the Catskills Trail Crew, led by Crew Leaders Matt Smith and Clint Sikes, proudly adopted the Touch Me Not Trail and its surrounding network near Little Pond Campground in the Delaware Wild Forest area and the Millbrook Ridge Trail in the Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest. Their efforts focused on clearing overgrowth along these rugged trails. The crew's success ensures hikers will continue to explore and enjoy this gorgeous corner of the Catskills.

Catskills Lean-to Crew

The Catskills Lean-to Crew, led by volunteer Crew Leader Eric Friedman, made remarkable progress this year in enhancing backcountry facilities throughout the region. At the Balsam Lake Mountain Lean-to, the crew stained structural elements, rebuilt the fire pit, installed a new privy, and replaced a rotten bottom log to extend the shelter's lifespan. They also replaced the roof at the Long Pond Lean-to and completed site improvements to ensure these popular shelters remain safe and welcoming for hikers.

West Hudson South Trail Crew

The West Hudson South Trail Crew began an exciting reorganization effort this year under new crew leader, Kathy Hecht. With a team of six volunteers, the crew took inventory, cleaned out, and organized the storage shed, while also investing in new tools to better support future projects. The crew also spent an additional work day clearing overgrown brush from the shed access to improve functionality. The crew also hosted an introductory trail maintenance day for the Appalachian Mountain Club at their camp in Harriman State Park, which included brush clearing around the camp area.



FALL 2025

New Jersey Trail Updates

RAD Trail Crew

The Ring-a-Ding Trail Crew—aka the RAD Trail Crew—logged hundreds of hours improving Mahlon Dickerson Reservation this season. One accomplishment was the rerouting of the Yellow Trail, shifting it away from an old woods road and onto a new multi-use trail. Between April and August, the crew completed twelve trips, including work days with the Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization Trail Crew (MEVO) and volunteers from the Jersey Off Road Bicycle Association (JORBA). At least four areas required significant side hilling and rockwork. Our team blazed the trail, removed flagging, and officially opened the pathway for recreation.

Updates from New Jersey's Fanny Region

In the Fanny region, which lies roughly between Rockaway, New Jersey, and West Milford, New Jersey, volunteer leaders accomplished several trail projects.

The Four Birds Trail near Timberbrook Pond has been rerouted away from an unsustainable dam crossing and now follows a safer route along a woods road.

A reroute at the State Line Trail, which leads to Surprise Lake in Abram S. Hewitt State Forest, is anticipated to open this fall. The reroute includes a vista on the climb up and winds through a pitch pine ridge, guiding hikers at a more gradual grade.

In Wawayanda State Park, three new trails opened and are being formally blazed. While these trails were primarily multi-use trails for mountain bikers and hikers, they were never formally adopted by the park. Now, hikers and bikers can explore Wawayanda thanks to our volunteer blazers and partnership with park staff.

MEVO Trail Crew

MEVO, the Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization, has long been a partner of the Trail

Conference, working alongside our volunteers to tackle difficult projects with great success.

This season, the crew improved trails in the Ramapo Valley County Reservation, setting stepping stones, and reducing erosion on the Yellow Trail along the river.

In Abram S. Hewitt State Forest, the crew worked on the State Line Trail reroute, where they side-hilled the formerly flagged route.

At Mahlon Dickerson, the crew worked alongside members of the RAD Trail Crew and JORBA to open the new multi-use Yellow Trail.

And in Norvin Green State Forest, MEVO worked with JORBA on the new Tapawingo Multi-Use Connector.

West Jersey Trail Crew

The West Jersey Crew has been busy constructing a new 2 1/4-mile-long trail in Stokes State Forest. The trail starts at the Red Maple Trail approximately 2/3 mile from the Red Maple Trail trailhead at Lake Ashroe, and extends west to the Shay Trail. The entire trail is now clear and passable—although, as of this writing, it remains marked with flagging tape. The crew continues to work on the trail, adding steps, retaining walls, and sidehill tread in damage-prone areas.

In addition, this past spring, the crew executed an emergency repair on the Appalachian Trail along Dunnfield Creek, installing a 5-foot-wide by 10-foot-high rock wall in a single day, to repair the damage left after a tree uprooted and fell downhill. This fall, the crew will also spot-replace another 60 planks on the Appalachian Trail's 2,000-foot-long puncheon walkway near the Wallkill Wildlife Refuge. Looking ahead, the crew is exploring a potential extension of the Wawayanda Loop Trail's raised walkway, first constructed by the crew in 2022, by approximately 100 feet to address an unexpected expansion of the wet area.

IN CONVERSATION

We Hit the Trails with Robert and Kasper Jack

The father-son duo reflect on their journey as trail volunteers and their shared commitment to protecting our forests

Kasper Jack, recipient of the 2025 Next Generation Award, is an inspiration to land stewards and budding citizen scientists of all ages.

In 2024, 11-year-old Kasper and his father, Robert, began volunteering with the Trail Conference's Stewardship team as trail ecology surveyors, monitoring forest health by documenting native and invasive species along our trails.

Focusing on Harriman and Bear Mountain State Parks, the duo completed six surveys while hiking an astonishing 110 miles together, logging over 45 volunteer hours. Their field work advances our mission to safeguard forests from ecological threats like beech leaf disease and hemlock woolly adelgid, generating crucial data for research partners like the New York State Hemlock Initiative and Cornell University that will protect our native landscapes for future generations.

We caught up with Kasper and Robert to hear more about their inspiring adventures on the trail, what drives them to volunteer, and their hopes for the future of our forests.

TC: Thank you for joining us, Robert and Kasper—and Kasper, congratulations on receiving the 2025 Next Generation Award! Could you tell us a bit about yourselves?

KJ: I'm Kasper Jack, I'm 11 years old, and I volunteer with my dad for the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference as a trail maintainer and trail ecology surveyor. I also play tennis, guitar, and piano, in addition to hiking and reading a lot.

RJ: Kasper and I live in Brooklyn, and being in an urban environment, we enjoy getting out of the city to backpack, camp, and explore nature. We both appreciate and enjoy our time outdoors, trying to



Robert and Kasper Jack at Wawayanda State Park.

fit in as many days of wandering in the woods as we can, visiting well-known spots, and exploring new curiosities.

TC: What first got you both interested in nature and volunteering with the Trail Conference?

KJ: When I was six, my dad took me on a two-day, 14-mile hike. I realized that hiking and nature are truly amazing things, and I just kept going. Sometime around my fifth hike, I saw trail maintainers marking a trail in Harriman State Park, where I usually hike. I really liked the idea of giving back to the trails that I loved, and so both my dad and I joined the Trail Conference as volunteers. We became trail maintainers, but we still wanted to do more. We found out about the volunteer Trail Ecology Surveyor Program and joined it as well.

“It’s been great for both of us to learn more about the flora, fauna, and the interactions that occur in the forest. It’s also a great feeling knowing we’re helping to protect the land we enjoy.”

Robert Jack

RJ: I’ve long enjoyed backpacking and camping, going back to my days as a Boy Scout. I’ve always enjoyed the rhythm of walking in the woods over long periods, the sounds of nature and the feel of the air at night up on a ridge, of waking up early in the morning to take a sip of ice-cold water. When Kasper was young, he liked being outdoors, so I brought him on his first overnight hiking trip when he was six. He loved it and kept wanting to get out hiking as much as we could.

When we met trail maintainers in Harriman State Park, Kasper was intrigued. I told him we could do that too, and soon afterwards, we started maintaining a section of trail in Harriman. I discovered the Trail Conference’s Trail Ecology Surveyor Program and thought it would be a great

way to get Kasper more invested in understanding the environment we enjoy.

It’s been great for both of us to learn more about the flora, fauna, and the interactions that occur in the forest. It’s also a great feeling knowing we’re helping to protect the land we enjoy.

TC: What’s a typical day like for a volunteer surveyor?

KJ: Our day starts normally. We get out of our tent, make breakfast, and then we pack up and start our day. Every 1/20 of a mile of trail, we make an imaginary 100-foot-long rectangle on the trail. We then look for the plant species we’re trying to find—or the invasives we’re hoping not to find. I note the findings on a paper spreadsheet, while my dad notes them on the iMap Invasives app. We repeat this process until the end of our survey section, which is typically about two miles long.

RJ: It’s really a simple procedure. At first, I thought I’d need to know more to be useful to the program, but the Trail Conference provides training each year that covers everything we need to get out and do the field work. We get assigned a section of trail, and then we head out when it’s convenient for us. We have a spreadsheet where we collect data on the plants we’re looking for. We also capture info in the iMap Invasives app, which then gets entered into a database for tracking different species.

This year was fun because we were also searching for several native species facing competition from invasive plants. When we’re surveying, it’s a very different approach from our usual hiking trips. We move slowly to examine our surroundings and identify any plants relevant to the species we’re trying to find. We examine along the edges of





existing trails to collect samples. Together, the data we collect and the data collected by other volunteers help create a picture of what's happening in our environment, documenting the spread of different species across the region.

TC: How do you feel knowing your work helps researchers protect our trees and forests?

KJ: It's amazing knowing that, in writing a few letters and numbers down, I'm saving forests and trees all over the place. I hope in the future the trails are clean, well taken care of, devoid of sick trees and invasive plants, with healthy chestnuts, beeches, and hemlocks.

RJ: Having learned about the challenges facing our forests, from urban stresses to introduced diseases, I want to contribute to their protection. It's very satisfying to get out and enjoy myself while also collecting data that deepens our knowledge of local ecosystems. I hope that the information I collect, combined with the data collected by many others, will lead to greater insight into the interactions occurring in our forests.

If researchers can use this info to help formulate more informed decisions that will better protect our land, I'll feel gratified. I want the remaining forests in our region to be stronger and more resilient when Kasper is an adult. It will take the work and care of a whole community, but the more people participate, the more others will hopefully see the benefits and join in. I enjoy talking to people when we're out, as many of them are surprised to see someone along a trail with a clipboard and spreadsheet. In letting others know what we're doing, they'll also get involved.

TC: Volunteering as a trail ecology surveyor is so special—it opens your eyes to an entirely new way of seeing nature. What's something you've learned about our forests that surprised you?

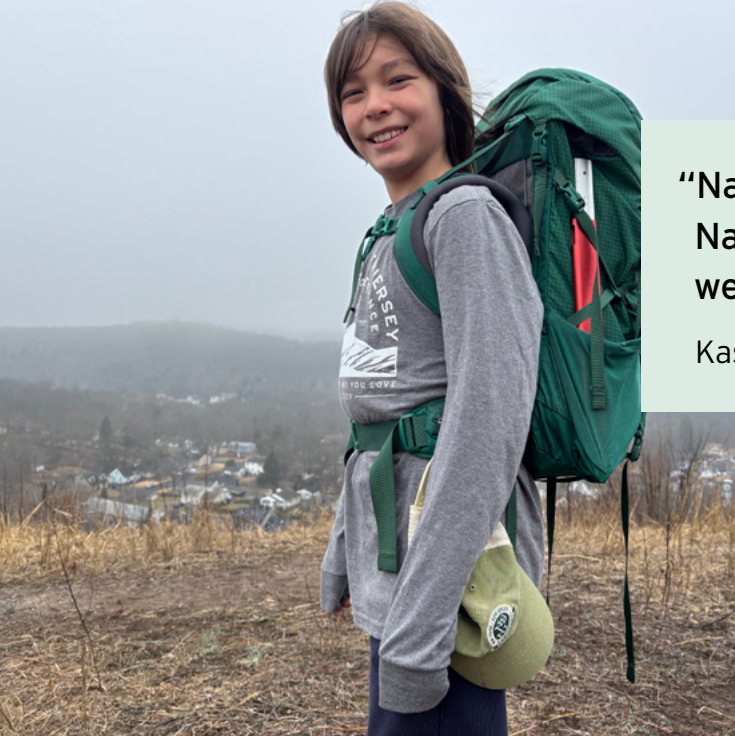
KJ: I think it's the diversity in plant life. There's always something different about each plant, even down to the tiniest detail.

RJ: Surveying has helped us see and understand more while we're out, and has given us a greater appreciation for the complexity of the ecosystem around us. Every time we go out, we encounter things that puzzle or surprise us, and so we try to learn why something is the way it is.

I've learned so much about the resilience of forests and their vulnerabilities. We've come across areas that sustained fires, possibly from lightning strikes, that are charred and blackened. A few



years later, fresh growth has almost completely obscured the damage, and a whole new community of opportunistic plants has recolonized the area. I've also seen new 'shortcuts' appear along trails. In no time, the thin layer of topsoil wears away, and erosion takes hold. By seeing changes over even



**“Nature helps us. Nature protects us.
Nature sustains us. If we want to survive,
we have to preserve it.”**

Kasper Jack

just a couple of years, I’ve become aware of how seemingly small actions can have lasting impacts on the environment for generations to come.

TC: What’s been the most rewarding part of volunteering together?

KJ: I’ve learned pretty much everything I know about plants, backpacking, hiking, and science from my dad. The most rewarding part is that we can share surveying duties. I write the observations down on the paper sheets, and he enters them in iMap Invasives app. Working together increases our chances of spotting plants we’re searching for. We also get bragging rights when one of us receives an award. The score is 1-0 for me, right now!

RJ: The time we spend together has just been fun. I enjoy watching Kasper develop his awareness of

nature in a way that would never have happened if we had not been on the trails. He’s strengthened his wilderness expertise and deepened his understanding of the environment around us. These experiences will stay with my son forever, and may even lead to a future in the life sciences.

For me, there’s nothing better than spending time together while contributing a small part to the bigger project of protecting the ecosystem we enjoy being in. I hope the work we and many others do will make Kasper’s future greener.

TC: If you could tell everyone one thing about protecting nature, what would it be?

KJ: Nature helps us. Nature protects us. Nature sustains us. If we want to survive, we have to preserve it.

RJ: It comes down to caring about what we do in our lives. If someone wants to help protect the environment, they should try to understand more about how nature works. By learning about nature, I’ve come to appreciate its complexity and importance more deeply. Dedicating my time and energy to protecting the environment is an evolving process of learning, which is very rewarding in itself.

Interested in joining the Trail Ecology Surveyor Program?

Flip to page 8 and discover how you can get involved!

Nuclear Lake: A Foreboding Name for a Great Place to Hike

This gloomy-sounding destination boasts surprisingly peaceful vibes

By Eileen West

It was the summer of 1993. My husband Dick and I had recently started hiking the Appalachian Trail in sections, and today we were heading north from Pawling, New York, through the rolling hills of Dutchess County. During our eight-year journey, we encountered many challenges. This was to be our first—attempting to safely pass a body of water known as Nuclear Lake.

The guidebook said we had nothing to worry about. But how could we be sure? On that summer day, we were sprinters, not hikers, racing down the trail and hastily leaving the area, worried we would return home to find that we glowed in the dark.

Needless to say, we survived. Since then, I've come to learn about the place we bypassed so quickly, discovering Nuclear Lake's infamous past and its promising future as a haven for outdoor recreation.

An Ideal Setting for "Secret Experiments"

The sprawling 1,100-acre tract served as a hunting preserve until 1955, when Nuclear Development Associates bought the property for conversion into a nuclear research center. According to a 1955 article in *The New York Times*, the site was selected because it could be "adequately guarded for secret experiments."

By 1958, a private company called United Nuclear Corporation began conducting government-licensed nuclear research at the site. Then, in December of 1972, a chemical explosion occurred, knocking out windows and blowing plutonium dust into the air. The blast caused significant radioactive contamination in several rooms and, according to the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, also spread to the surrounding forest and lake shore.

The land was cleaned up for \$3 million. Three years later, the federal government declared it to be safe.



NPS Clears a Path for the Appalachian Trail

The National Park Service bought the property in 1979. At the time, much of the Appalachian Trail in Dutchess County traveled along roads, and the purchase was hailed as one of the most significant acquisitions in the federal government's attempt to relocate the A.T. into the woods. Although safety of the proposed A.T. route was not an issue, the Park Service found documents implying that radioactive waste might have been dumped in the lake. They recommended thorough testing before public access was allowed. In the meantime, the A.T. remained on the road.



Photos by Mike Todd and hikethehudsonvalley.com

Tests showed that the land was fine, but “unusual objects” were seen in the water. The newly established A.T. route was officially opened in the summer of 1986, “blazed carefully,” *The New York Times* reported, “to avoid a shimmering pond with the ominous name of Nuclear Lake.” Hundreds of “no entry” signs were posted, warning of potential radioactive danger at the lake.

An investigation later found that the objects in the water were nothing more than rocks, tree stumps, a sunken jeep, and a sunken boat. In 1998, the Appalachian Trail was finally relocated near the shore of Nuclear Lake, providing hikers with expansive views of the water. The former route was blazed blue and renamed the Beekman Uplands Trail. A yellow-blazed trail on the other side of the lake was opened in 2001.

A New Chapter: The Trail Conference Leads the Way

Today, the trail system around Nuclear Lake, which is overseen by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, is a welcoming place to hike. Work recently began

to reroute a segment of the Appalachian Trail even closer to the lakefront. As part of the project, the Trail Conference’s Invasives Strike Force and Long Distance Trails Crew partnered with volunteers from the Dutchess-Putnam A.T. Committee to clear away Autumn Olive, an invasive shrub from eastern Asia. This was the first time the Trail Conference incorporated invasive species management into a trail realignment project. It was “an exciting opportunity to have collaboration between the Trail Conference’s Ecological Stewardship and Trails programs,” said Zachary Cole, the Trail Conference’s Long-Distance Trails Program Coordinator.

The reroute is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The trails and the lake are beautiful at any time, so don’t hesitate to head out and enjoy them.



Bodies in motion tend to stay in motion.

Mobility and accessibility exist on a grander scale here. Expand your horizons and exercise your right to explore the wilderness of Ulster County.



Summit View: Reflections from a Season of Stewardship

**2025 Catskill Summit Steward
Myra Traves looks back on her
season of service, sharing insights
on protecting the wild places
of the Catskills**

By Myra Traves

Working as a Summit Steward offers not only the opportunity to protect the Catskill Forest Preserve but also the space to reflect on our place within the natural world. Hiking alone through these mountains provides time to observe, to listen, and to think. For many of us, walking the trails in the Catskills is a reminder of our deep connection to nature, yet also of how modern life often separates us from it. For visitors coming from urban areas like New York City, the Catskills can serve as both a reprieve and a mirror, reflecting our shared place in the broader ecosystem.

We often encounter the impacts left behind such as trash, fire scars, or hastily abandoned campsites. These moments reinforce the need for stewardship and education. Our presence on the trail serves as a gentle reminder that nature is not separate from us, but something we are all a part of and responsible for.

Wherever we are in the Catskills, we also enjoy exchanging stories with hikers, learning locals' favorite spots, and sharing our own knowledge with those curious to know more. These conversations enrich the experience for everyone involved and help cultivate a community of care and respect for the Catskills.

We steward in all conditions, from snow flurries in early spring to torrential rain in the shoulder seasons.



While foot traffic may slow on these days, the interactions we do have are especially meaningful. There's a mutual understanding between hiker and steward: we're out here because we care deeply about these mountains.

In the end, what unites all of us is a love for the wilderness. As stewards, we're proud to serve not only as caretakers of the landscape, but as reminders that humans are, and always have been, connected to nature.

PUBLICATIONS UPDATE

Our Newest Guidebook is a Hit! Have You Checked It Out Yet?

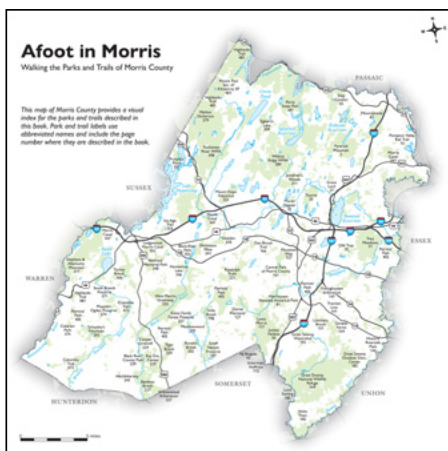
Afoot in Morris: Walking the Parks and Trails of Morris County, written by volunteer authors Daniel Chazin and Jim Simpson, is sure to deepen your appreciation of our cherished trail lands. The guidebook features in-depth descriptions of pathways and public lands across Morris County, New Jersey—highlighting more than 50 parks, preserves, and sanctuaries—and includes detailed maps, full-color images, and a wealth of historical and cultural information.

Afoot in Morris hit shelves in May, and we're thrilled to share that it has had a successful launch, including several well-attended author talks throughout the region. To everyone who has already purchased *Afoot in Morris*, thank you for your support. Please help spread the word about this excellent new guidebook: consider writing a review, sharing it with your friends and family, or even gifting a copy to someone special this holiday season!

If you haven't picked up your copy yet, now's a great time to start exploring. Grab *Afoot in Morris* today and discover your next outdoor adventure. Scan the QR code or visit store.nynjtc.org/products/afout-in-morris to learn more!



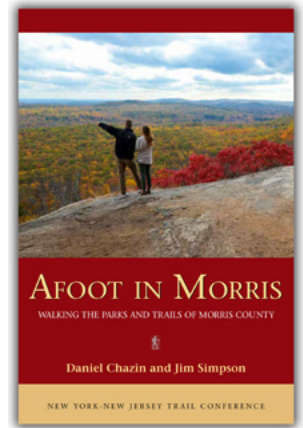
In addition to the successful launch of *Afoot in Morris*, the Publications Committee has also been busy preparing updated maps. Be on the lookout for revised



editions of **Westchester Trails** and **Delaware Water Gap & Kittatinny Trails** in the months ahead.

Our revised **Westchester Trails** maps will feature several trail updates since the first edition was released in early 2020, including new trails in and around Rockefeller State Park Preserve and other trail updates in Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, Teatown, and nearby parks. Our **Delaware Water Gap & Kittatinny Trails** maps, now in their 9th edition, will feature trail updates throughout their coverage area, including High Point State Park, Stokes State Forest, Worthington State Forest, and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. New editions of these maps, both in print on waterproof and tear-resistant Tyvek and in digital format through the Avenza Maps app, are expected to be available in late 2025 or early 2026.

Lastly, together with producing the new guidebook and advancing our map revisions, the committee continues to lead strategic discussions and pursue new initiatives. Changes in the publishing industry and how people access trail details underscore the need to carefully evaluate our long-term goals and ensure we remain the trusted source for high-quality trail information and maps. We're also developing a process to better integrate with the OpenStreetMaps platform and expand our digital reach. If you're interested in assisting Publications in the vital work we do, please reach out to volunteer@nynjtc.org.



STEWARDSHIP DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS



This 2025 field season, the Stewardship Department was hard at work launching new initiatives and continuing boots-on-the-ground efforts to help protect the land we love.

After four years of work at the former Arnika Preserve in Ulster County, New York, the last of a 13-acre Japanese spiraea monoculture has been removed by our Invasives Strike Force! This long-term project highlights collaboration between the Invasives Strike Force, Catskills Trail Stewards, Hudson Valley Trail Stewards, and Scenic Hudson staff. By freeing resources for native species to expand, it also safeguards a rare sedge once threatened by the infestation. Together, these partnerships demonstrate what's possible in the fight against invasive species.

Our Trail Stewards, stationed at outdoor destinations throughout the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains, focused on connecting with visitors and sharing the joys of responsible recreation. From trailheads to summits, they engaged hikers in conversations about Leave No Trace, local wildlife, and park rules and regulations, sparking curiosity and fostering appreciation for the outdoors. Beyond outreach, Trail Stewards successfully



completed a host of trail maintenance projects to ensure trails remained safe and accessible. We're proud of the season's impact: educating and inspiring the public while protecting the trails we all love.

This season also marked the rise of two exciting community-driven volunteer initiatives: our Volunteer Dog Surveyor Program and Trail Ecology Surveyor Program!

Both are covered in detail in our feature story, "Stewardship in Motion: Powering Conservation Through Community" Flip to page 6 to learn more about the initiatives and discover how you can get involved.

We're so excited to see our growing family of volunteers put their newly developed skills into action in the field—making a positive impact on our trails along the way.

Celebrating Twin Wins in 2025 for the Long Path

It was a banner year for the iconic long-distance trail!

The Long Path is a true New York treasure. Spanning 358 miles from New York City to the Adirondacks, this epic long-distance trail invites adventurers on a rewarding journey through New York's stunning landscapes and vibrant communities.

The Trail Conference proudly maintains every mile of the Long Path, working with partners and our extraordinary volunteers to expand its reach, elevate its impact, and connect more people with nature. Two recent success stories demonstrate the bright future of this mighty trail.

The Long Path Is Reborn at Tallman Mountain

On September 6, 2025, we gathered with the Long Distance Trails Crew (LDTC), the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC), and members of the outdoor community to celebrate the completion of a multi-year restoration of the Long Path at Tallman Mountain in Sparkill, New York.

The LDTC team led the way on this three-year initiative, working with the PIPC to blaze a new and improved path. More than 50 volunteers contributed 9,000+ hours of service to tackle the monumental task of rebuilding this heavily worn trail, using only traditional hand tools and rigging to move stone slabs into place and construct a pathway built to withstand heavy rainfall and high-volume foot traffic.

The revitalized section features 212 stone steps, each weighing between 300 and 600 pounds, set along 1,300 square feet of stone retaining wall. New rest spots invite visitors to soak in the sweeping views of the Hudson River.

The result is a safer, more resilient route, one that honors the legacy of the Long Path while improving access to the outdoors.



Community leaders unveil a new Long Path kiosk in Altamont, NY. Photo by Melissa Howard

The LP Levels Up in Altamont with a New Landmark

On September 27, we traveled northward to join community leaders and jubilant locals in Altamont, New York, to celebrate a major milestone in the Long Path's evolution: the unveiling of a brand-new interpretive kiosk in Altamont's Orsini Park.

The newly unveiled kiosk now marks the official northern terminus of the Long Path for end-to-end hikers, thanks to a connecting footpath completed by volunteer trail crews in spring 2025.

Altamont joins a growing network of Long Path trail towns—communities that benefit from the trail's growing popularity and the tourism opportunities it supports. Following a joyous ribbon-cutting, the day unfolded with music, food, and activities for all ages.

We're grateful to the special guests who joined us for both celebrations.

At Tallman Mountain, we welcomed Rockland County Legislator Dr. Dana Stilley, Orangetown Supervisor Teresa Kenny, and Village of Piermont Deputy Mayor Mark Blomquist.

In Altamont, we were joined by U.S. Representative Paul D. Tonko, New York State Senator Patricia Fahy, Assemblymember Gabriella A. Romero, Albany County Legislator Mark Grimm, Albany County Legislator Jeff Perlee, Amanda Beedle of the Guilderland Town Board, Nicholas Fahrenkopf of the Altamont Village Board, and Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy Executive Director Mark King.

Together, these events build momentum for the Long Path and the future of sustainable outdoor recreation in New York State. Here's to many more celebrations ahead!

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

Eric Rivas

Meet Eric Rivas, Trail Conference volunteer superstar and the first person to complete all three Trail U curriculum tracks!

In 2018, Eric Rivas was on a mission: He wanted to get back into hiking and deepen his connection with the outdoors. He began exploring the abundant hiking paths of New Jersey, and while hiking up to the Bearfort Fire Tower in the Newark Watershed, he spotted a Trail Conference map with an open call for volunteers.

Soon, Eric had signed up to volunteer, received his training, and began maintaining trails. Wanting to learn more about trail maintenance and ecological stewardship, he also signed up for Trail University—a free hands-on training program founded by the Trail Conference that empowers volunteers with the skills and knowledge they need to care for the lands they love.

One class led to another... then another... then another. Before long, Eric was hooked. What began as a journey to expand his trail maintainer abilities soon transformed into something bigger. As of September 2025, Eric is the first person to complete all three curriculum tracks in Trail U!

Over the years, Eric has attended Trail U workshops on invasive plants, technical stonework, drainage structures, trail construction, and more. Trail U offers a little bit of everything, which kept Eric coming back. One week you might learn about invasive plant management; another week, you're taught how to design and lay out a brand-new hiking trail.

One of Eric's favorite workshops was the stone steps workshop with the Jolly Rovers Trail Crew. Eric enjoyed the technical components of the session and the raw challenge of working with stone in the field.

"You can be a complete beginner in these workshops," Eric says, "yet still feel like you're making a difference and learning something."

Not only do Trail U workshops offer invaluable trail-building skills, but they also encourage you to get outside, connect with the outdoor community, and make friends—which is becoming increasingly important in the digital age.



Trail U offers three curriculum tracks: Expert Trail Maintainer, Expert Trail Builder, and Expert Ecological Steward. Each track is composed of three core classes and two electives.

All in, that's 15 workshops to complete in Trail U. Ever the trailblazer, Eric went above and beyond, completing 17 workshops on his way to earning his Trail Conference graduation patch with corresponding rockers.

We're so grateful for volunteers like Eric—and inspired by his commitment, curiosity, and drive. Even though he's a Trail U graduate with his patch with rockers, Eric still plans to attend workshops. Sign up for a workshop and maybe you'll meet Eric yourself!

What is Trail U?

Trail University, proudly sponsored by Subaru Distributors Corp., is the Trail Conference's hands-

on training program for outdoor enthusiasts who want to build a stronger connection to public lands. Trail U workshops are taught by professional trail builders, veteran volunteers, and Trail Conference staff, and cover everything from basic trail design and ecological stewardship to specialized seminars on stone building, invasive plant management, Leave No Trace awareness, and more.

Thanks to our Trail U volunteers, the Trail Conference is able to maintain and protect more than 2,100 miles of trails across New York and New Jersey.

Interested in learning more? Whether you're just getting started or looking to deepen your skills, Trail U has something for you. Start your journey today by scanning the QR code or visiting nynjtc.org/trail-u!



CHASING THE GRID
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TRIBUTES: MAY 1, 2025 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

In Honor of Bruce D Shriver, Jr
Bruce and Beverly Shriver

In Honor of The Running Kind
Aimee Kohler

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FEATURED HIKE

Forest View Trail/ Closter Dock Trail Loop

Location: Palisades Interstate Park

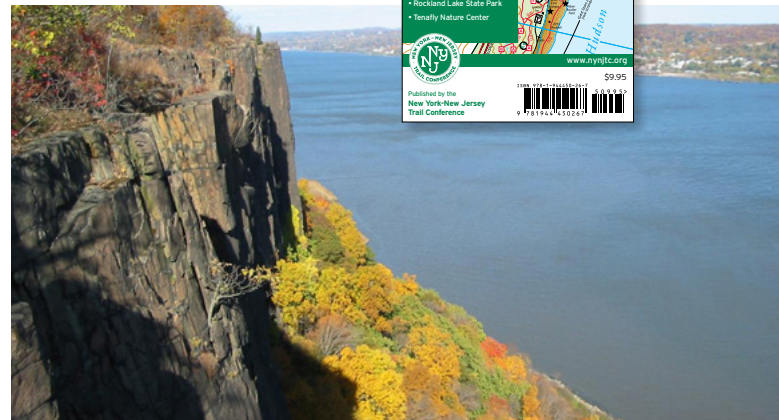
Distance: 4-6 miles

Difficulty: Moderate/Difficult

This rewarding loop hike invites you along a striking stretch of the Palisades, blending cliffside vistas, Hudson River history, and rugged adventure—all just minutes from the George Washington Bridge.

The hike begins on the iconic aqua-blazed Long Path, tracing the clifftops above the Hudson with spur trails leading to dramatic viewpoints like Grey Crag and Ruckman Point, where you'll stand hundreds of feet above the rolling river below.

Midway through, the hike visits the Women's Federation Monument, an intriguing 1929 stone structure honoring early conservation efforts by women's groups to protect the Palisades from quarrying. From there, a steep descent down century-old rock steps brings you to the banks of the Hudson,



where your adventure mellows into a serene riverside stroll beneath towering Palisade cliffs, far removed from the thrum of traffic above.

Along this final stretch, the hike guides you past remnants of old picnic areas, bunkers, waterfalls, and—if you choose the spur—offers a visit to the historic Kearney House at Alpine Boat Basin. A steady climb returns you to the top of the cliffs, completing a dazzling loop through one of the region's most scenic destinations.

For the complete hike description, visit bit.ly/ForestViewTrail.

Explore this trail and all our hiking and map resources at nynjtc.org/trail-head