

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway, 14th Floor, Albany, New York 12233-1010
P: (518) 402-8545 | F: (518) 402-8541
www.dec.ny.gov

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Dear Members of the High Peaks Advisory Committee*:

I am grateful for your willingness to advise DEC on the sustainable management of the High Peaks region of the Adirondacks and to provide recommendations addressing critical issues regarding public use. You have taken your charge seriously and have remained focused on the task at hand even during the challenging times we face during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am impressed with the concern you have shown for protecting the health and safety of Adirondack residents, as well as the visitors who seek recreation and respite in the High Peaks region. Your thoughtful deliberations and recommendations are helping DEC develop comprehensive and coordinated responses that take advantage of diverse resources and expertise from multiple agencies and partners. With the increase in public use of the High Peaks, it has never been more important to protect these public lands for future generations by promoting sustainable recreation and protecting resources.

I appreciate the significant time and effort you have collectively devoted to developing the High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group's (HPAG) Immediate Action Recommendations Report. This Interim Report will assist DEC in addressing the most pressing and time-sensitive challenges we will face during these unusual summer and fall seasons.

DEC and our State and local partners are already acting on many of your recommendations to manage use of some of the busiest trailheads in the High Peaks region during the summer months. These actions include:

- Collaborating with an independent visitor information group to provide relevant data and analysis to the State and stakeholders;
- Strictly enforcing parking regulations with (1) an increased presence of New York State Police, DEC Forest Rangers and Environmental Conservation Police Officers on State Route 73; and (2) active management of parking by the Town of Keene on town roads to effectively reduce the number of illegally parked cars, providing a safer experience for visitors and more acceptable situation for residents;



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- Educating hikers on social distancing and the use of face masks and providing information on alternate hiking and parking locations by utilizing variable message boards, trailhead signage, social media, and in-person communication by DEC staff and partners to prevent the spread of COVID-19, limit impacts to natural resources, and better inform the recreating public;
- Working with AMR to temporarily reduce the parking capacity at AMR lots at Roaring Brook Falls to 28 vehicles;
- Advising motorists about limited trailhead parking and closures using electronic variable messaging boards, additional signage on I-87 and Route 73, and through the NYS Department of Transportation's '511NY' platform, which provides the traveling public with near real-time notification when major parking lots along Route 73 are full;
- Working with the Town of Keene to place portable toilets in high-use locations along Route 73, the Garden, and AMR parking lots to manage human waste issues;
- Using social media and other platforms to educate hikers about the [seven principles of Leave No Trace \(LNT\) while hiking](#);
- Working with Essex County and the Town of Keene on a shuttle system and timing for such; and
- Advancing a Transit Study to best advise on how a shuttle system could improve parking and recreational access in the High Peaks region.

As we continue to evaluate COVID-19 safety protocols, budget implications, and timing for effective implementation of additional actions this summer, DEC will continue to set the stage for:

- Supporting stewardship programs for the High Peaks region, including Keene Front Country Stewards, Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewards, Assistant Forest Rangers, Student Conservation Association, and various other groups who assist with stewardship. We recognize that front-country stewards can assist in monitoring enforcement of existing parking restrictions and deviation from social distancing requirements as established by the New York State Department of Health (DOH); and

- Assessing critical trails in the High Peaks region to:
 - Identify locations and nature of existing trail issues;
 - Inform on resources necessary to address critical impacts to the environment and recreation experience in the High Peaks region of the Adirondacks;
 - Work with partners and continue to pursue resources and build capacity for trail maintenance and construction; and
 - Provide data to support a wild lands monitoring program with an emphasis on trail assessment using updated technologies.

As we evaluate the effectiveness of the measures put into place this summer, we will revisit recommendations involving such things as placing limits on use, increasing parking fines, providing alternatives to portable toilets, and working as a partner in transitioning to an e-shuttle system. I look forward to receiving your full report later this year and reading your continued thoughts on these issues and others.

Your efforts are critical to informing how to best act in shaping future use in the High Peaks region and the rest of the Adirondacks. I appreciate your dedication to meeting the challenge and look forward with great interest to receiving the final report from HPAG this fall.

Sincerely,



Basil Seggos
Commissioner

**Dr. Jill Weiss, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Joe Pete Wilson, Supervisor, Town of Keene
Rocci Aguirre, Adirondack Council
Pete Nelson, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates
Charlie Wise, The Mountaineer
Seth Jones, Adirondack Mountain Club
Teresa Cheetham-Palen, Adirondack Rock and River Guide Service and Lodge
James McKenna, Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism
Shaun Gilliland, Chair, Essex County Board of Supervisors
Sandra Allen, Esq.*