

Chapter III.O:

Other Planning Effort – Breakneck Ridge Visitor Use Management Plan – Fjord Trail North

Hiking on the Breakneck Ridge Trail and in the surrounding Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve (HHSPP) is a popular activity. The rugged beauty and easy access make the trails in the area some of the most popular in New York’s State Parks system. Like many recreation areas, this frequent use has had an impact on the natural resources, operations management, and visitor experience of HHSPP, and on the quality of life of residents in the Village of Cold Spring.

The NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) partners with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) to provide a Breakneck Ridge Trail Steward Program. Counts conducted by the Trail Stewards showed a steady increase in visitors from 2015 to 2020 from about 113,000 annual visitors to about 126,000 annual visitors. Visitation declined in 2021 to about 87,700 annual visitors and increased slightly to 92,000 annual visitors in 2023. Some of this decline may be attributed to weather and other factors, as well as a shift in users from the Breakneck Ridge Trail to the Washburn Trail. Nevertheless, HHSPP and its trail remain very popular and well-used. See “Visitor Projection Study” of Chapter III.L, “Traffic and Transportation – Fjord Trail,” for more details on visitation to the area.

OPRHP is in the process of developing a Visitor Use Management Plan (VUMP) for the Breakneck Ridge Trail Area within HHSPP. Natural resources in HHSPP include a number of rare species and natural communities of statewide significance (per the New York Natural Heritage Program). The VUMP seeks to address the challenges and impacts occurring in this area resulting from the anticipated increased number of visitors owing to the proposed Fjord Trail. While there are a number of issues that could be addressed with a broad management plan for HHSPP, the VUMP is focused on those issues more closely associated with the visitor use in the Breakneck Ridge Trail Area.

To date, the goals of the draft VUMP include:

1. Ensuring visitor safety;
2. Protecting natural resources;
3. Providing enjoyable recreation; and
4. Supporting Park operation and management.

The planning process for the VUMP is ongoing. The planning effort is considering a variety of frameworks that have been developed and implemented by land management entities over the past 40 years to address visitor management in outdoor recreation areas. The VUMP intends to address the specific issues of concern found in the focus areas through a blend of approaches rooted in these frameworks that are best suited to OPRHP.

The VUMP is expected to indicate strategies to achieve the noted goals and identify action steps and priorities for implementing the VUMP. As of the date of publication of this DGEIS, the VUMP was still being developed. *