

## SNAPSHOT OF RECREATIONAL USERS IN THE ADIRONDACKS 2020

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### INTRODUCTION

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According to Manning et al. (2017), the dual mission of parks is to provide access to authentic wilderness experiences and protect ecological systems. Unfortunately, attempting to do both can lead to management paralysis. Increasingly, popular recreation areas are faced with trends that include off-trail hiking, illegal camping, improper waste disposal, and a multitude of *Leave No Trace Principles* violations (Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, 2019; Weiss 2020). Agencies and NGOs report that recreation areas in the Northeast are experiencing unprecedented levels of use, especially in 2020 (Adirondack Mountain Club 2020; Howard, 2020; National Park Service, 2020). Meanwhile, agencies struggle to keep up with maintaining recreational areas and keeping the public safe with little budget and little empirical data (*Adirondack Explorer*, 2022; High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group, 2021).

Park management, supporting NGOs, and recreation scholars would benefit from empirical baseline data regarding users in popular trail areas. Baseline data are essential for establishing benchmarks for limits of acceptable change and monitoring change in conditions over time, which can inform management decisions, education programs, and more (Hockett et al., 2017; Manning et al., 2017; Stankey, 1973). The High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group (HPAG), The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and other persons in the field of recreation management are interested in

accessing empirical data to confirm or deny anecdotal observations about shifts in the hiker population in terms of identity and interests (*Adirondack Explorer*, 2022; NYSDEC HPAG, 2020; HPAG 2021).

In the late spring of 2020, the partners in this project, The Adirondack Council (TAC), the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF), and the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), recognized the need for more empirical data and that 2020 was proving to be an unprecedented year for heavy recreational use. In a matter of weeks, an in-kind partnership was formed in which TAC and ADK would provide staff and materials, and ESF would provide study design, training, and analysis.

The purpose of this study is to build on recent research and address empirical data gaps by characterizing recreational users of the High Peaks Region in 2020. This is a first step in better understanding their recreation choices and preparation, and gaining their current perspective on management practices that address user capacity. The management questions will update researchers and management on whether or not such measures have support from different user types. It is our hope this pilot is one of many efforts to establish benchmarks and monitoring plans for the users of these beloved areas. With a snapshot of recreational users, we may contribute to the picture of recreational use during the Covid 19 pandemic and set agendas for both education and research that would positively impact capacity management in the High Peaks Region and beyond (Bradford & McIntyre, 2007; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980; Henderson, 1994; Hockett, Marion & Yeung, 2017; Schneller et al., 2021).

## BACKGROUND

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### *Understanding Conditions*

Recent studies in the Adirondacks illustrate that recreational user perception of place and hiking impacts are changing, align with national trends, and are worth more exploration (Olstad, 2017; Scheller, Binzen, Cameron, Taggart-Vogel & Barden, 2021; Van Riper, Manning & Reigner, 2010). Capacity issues have been made worse by the Covid 19 pandemic that encouraged more users to get out outside (Adirondack Mountain Club 2020; Rice et al., 2020).

These conditions are not simply regional. Increased visitor use is well documented in the National Parks (Rice et al., 2020). According to a law review article by Timmons (2018), three elements may have created a perfect storm of unprecedented visitorship with no mechanism to slow it: (1) park promotion at the federal (e.g. NPS Centennial Celebration) and state (e.g. Utah's "Mighty 5" Campaign) level in 2016; (2) the swift uncoupling of research and action in federal agencies by the Trump administration; and (3) generational interests in National Parks completism (e.g. retirees; Instagrammers). Such visitation trended out to recreational areas at all levels across the U.S. (Lawhon et al., 2019).

In 2018 the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics identified 133 sites through a nomination process considered "hot spot" areas; areas that were "being loved to death" (LNT, 2019). These sites all suffer from the same things (1) mismatch of trail design, capacity, and use; (2) increased use over the past decade; (3) diverging recreational intent, use, and behaviors; and (4) decrease in recreational impact knowledge among visitors (LNT, 2019; Timmons, 2018; Weiss, 2020). The Eastern High Peaks Wilderness of the Adirondacks was one of the seventeen hot spots selected for review in 2019.

Compounding assessment and resolution of the situation, user activities are diversifying and there is less agreement on what constitutes overcrowding, overuse, and acceptable behaviors across users (Frank, 2019; Kuentzel et al., 2020; Lawhon et al., 2019; Stankey, 1973). Rice et al. (2020) agree with this assessment and state that increased visitor use rationalizes increased monitoring, which would assist in prioritizing management actions.

Monitoring behaviors and intent along with perception are essential for a complete picture of assessment (Manfredo, Driver & Tennant, 1996; Zanon, Doucouliagos, Hall, Lockstone-Binney, 2013). The contemporary hiker of the 2020s demonstrates behaviors and motivations possibly different from a hiker with more traditional wilderness ethics (Goren & White 2018; Waterman & Waterman, 2000; Weiss 2020). Interviews of recreation managers in the Northeast in 2017, 2019, and 2020 revealed a divergence in hiker behaviors and a great increase in inexperienced recreational users and this finding has been supported by hiking clubs such as ADK and the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) (Miles, 2020; Goren & White, 2018; Weiss, 2020). Further findings included an increase in depreciative behavior such as rock stacking or removal, improper disposal of human waste, tributes, and litter, rescues caused by lack of preparedness or technology problems, and conflicts brought about by peak bagging and FKTs (fastest known times) (Weiss, 2020). The increase in depreciative behaviors may be outpacing the increase in recreational users suggesting a newer population of hikers may be the cause, or perhaps a diversification of intent and motivations (Weiss, 2020; Schneller et al., 2021). Our understanding of how recreational users perceive the places they visit and their own experiences is improving along with the place knowledge and trail ethics of the hikers (Goonan et al., 2010; Olstad, 2017; Peden, 2005; Schneller et al., 2021; VanRiper et al., 2010). But increased use is outpacing these gains. It is not surprising to those that work in recreation that users under-report overcrowding and ecological damage, as they may be a one-time visitor, or not familiar with what healthy ecosystems look like. Further, using visitor experience as the sole measurement does not answer systemic questions.

### *Establishing Benchmarks*

Perhaps it is here where we can see the tension around access best. If the park is for the public, does the public have a right to access without limitations?

In a preliminary analysis of NYSDEC public comment data regarding the HPAG process, one can see extreme polarization around questions of access (Weiss n.d.). For example, shuttles that bring hikers from off-site lots to trailheads are championed by recreation professionals and town leadership, citing congestion and safety issues around street-side parking. Conversely, some bemoan that a shuttle full of unassociated hikers starting towards a peak all at the same time creates an unintended crowd. Thus, negatively affects hiker's ability to access solitude, or what they imagine to be a wilderness experience (Weiss, 2020). Public comment participation requires effort and attracts those with very strong motivations (Patton, 2014). Surveys, on the other hand, are more controlled and can help explore that middle voice regarding management actions that address capacity.

In an excellent article by Manning et al. (2011), they describe a "management-by-objective framework" that aligns well with the HPAG recommendations. It suggests establishing indicators and benchmarks and then monitoring those indicators to track change. Once a threshold is met, that spurs action (Manning et al. 2011).

The NYSDEC does employ a framework that meets these criteria, Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), but it does not include a social science component (HPAG, 2021). LAC is a tool used in land management to establish benchmarks that represent the desired level of function, usually to serve the ecology and the purpose of the area (Stankey, 1985). This approach is fully supported by the adaptive management framework in use by the National Park Service (NPS, 2019). The methodology has been honed by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework (VUMF) (Cahill, Collins, McPartland, Pitt & Verbos, 2018). VUMF may be employed at different scales and considers ecology, infrastructure, and visitors side by side.

HPAG recommended establishing benchmarks for limits to acceptable change to protect the ecology, the infrastructure, and improve the visitor experience (*Adirondack Explorer*, 2022; HPAG, 2021). This directive aligns with the High Peaks Unit Management Plan (RUMP High Peaks 1999-2018; Kelsey, 2006).

### *Connecting Management with Research*

Information gaps are standing in the way of decision-making. We aim to put recreational user findings back into the hands of managers quickly, to the benefit of recreationists, the ecology of the parks, and the communities that rely on both. HPAG found that management actions can be more proactive rather than reactionary. This requires that agencies have the resources and skilled staff to do the work (HPAG, 2021). In the meantime it is possible for researchers to contribute.

Research is important for maintaining recreation sites sustainably. First, the establishment of benchmarks for ecological and use monitoring as discussed above. Second, it can occupy a middle area between academia and practical applications, tying theory to experimentation to both the human and ecological communities and hopefully yielding promising practices and better policies (Henderson, 1994; Kraus & Allen, 1987; Mitra & Lankford, 1999). Third, research is independent while researchers may partner with non-academic institutions and may support sustainability, they are necessarily tied to their data. Agencies, NGOs, and the public can benefit by having access to empirical results, which makes for better infrastructure design, messaging, and education (Manning, 2011; Mitra & Lankford, 1999; Weiss, 2020). The last connecting piece about recreational users in the High Peaks is behavior. This survey pilots a few questions that lead us down a chain of understanding: (1) beliefs; (2) attitudes and opinions; (3) intent, and (4) behavior (Fishbein 1975). Used in conjunction with ecological monitoring social science data collection replenishes our well of information, making what we know about these systems more durable (Manning, 2011).

The landscape, both literally and figuratively, is rapidly changing (Lawhon et al., 2019; Manning et al., 2017). Decisions are being made right now to protect the ecology and address overcrowding amidst radical community and administrative change here in the Northeast and across the U.S.

Our research questions for this pilot study are: (1) What are the demographic and interest attributes of recreational users during this study period?; (2) Are users intentionally choosing to recreate in the High Peaks Region to attain a wilderness or solitude experience?; (3) What information and planning sources are recreationists using and how far in advance of their trip?; and (4) Do recreationists in this study support management actions that impact capacity in these areas?

## METHODS

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While this research has gone on to serve as a pilot for several ongoing studies, the work presented here meets the original goals of the partners, to present a snapshot of activity, preparation, and perception of management actions among Adirondack recreational users in late summer of 2020 during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our approach was governed by the following conditions: The primary purpose of the study was to get data back into the hands of the partners and the NYSDEC as soon as possible. The secondary goal was to pilot methods and questions to be used in larger, formal studies that followed. New York State set guidelines for interacting with the public to reduce virus transmission, which shaped our recruitment methods. Last, travel and staffing constraints necessitated the use of non-academic staff, so the protocols were simplified.

TRAILHEADS	DATES IN 2020
Ampersand	8/12, 8/29, 10/3
AMR	8/8, 9/12, 10/10
Cascade	8/15, 9/5, 10/7
Elk Lake	8/19, 9/4, 9/30
Heart Lake*	8/5, 8/9, 8/13, 8/22, 8/23, 8/28, 8/30, 9/4, 9/26, 10/3
Marcy Field	8/26, 10/2
Rooster Comb	8/21, 9/11, 10/11
Round Pond	8/7, 9/9, 9/25
Seward	8/22, 9/2, 9/26
The Garden	8/5, 10/9
Upper Works	8/14, 8/28, 9/23

\*Data collection by ADK staff was limited to the Heart Lake area, property, and fee parking area owned by ADK.

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*Table 1. List of trailheads included in the study and data collection dates. All events took place between 7 a.m. and 2 p.m. during August, September, and October of 2020.*

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This study utilized a purposive sample rather than a randomized model for we wished to survey informants at particular sites engaging in particular activities. We sought a minimum of 500 participants to enable the statistical tests we wished to perform. Data collection took place between August 11 and October 11, 2020. We held 39 recruitment events at 12 trailheads that lead to popular High Peaks destinations on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays (Table 1). Dates were selected randomly and recruiters were present from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day of data collection to maximize outreach.

The staff of our partner organizations, the Adirondack Council, and the Adirondack Mountain Club recruited participants through tabling at trailheads following NYS Covid 19 safety protocols. To further ease concerns about virus transmission, we offered the survey on paper at the site or the option to snap a QR code to take the survey on their own device through the secure Qualtrics interface. A bookmark with the QR code was also provided to mitigate the problem of poor or no phone signal in most of the areas.

Respondents completed an anonymous, 5-minute, 20-question survey. The content of the survey was negotiated between the partners and the NYSDEC as part of our Temporary Revocable Permit application, which is required to collect data on state land. The survey asked about their experience with the Adirondack High Peaks in the following areas: (1) Demographics, (2) Intent and Preparation, and (3) Support of Management Actions.

Demographic questions were limited to age, ethnicity, group size, home postal code, and visit frequency. Regarding preparation, we asked respondents if Covid 19 influenced their decisions to recreate in the High Peaks when they began planning their visit, where they obtained their information for their visit, and to rate the accuracy of that information. We also asked if they were familiar with *Leave No Trace* (LNT) principles. For intent, we asked about the primary activity of their visit and if they came to the High Peaks to experience wilderness and solitude.

In the support of management actions area, we asked respondents for input about conditions and management actions that may manage capacity in popular parking and trailhead areas of the Park. Such actions conserve ecology and infrastructure and may promote safety, but affect the visitor experience. Respondents were asked first if they were able to park at the location they planned. Next, they were asked if they supported shuttle buses that take users from an offsite lot to a trailhead. Then they were asked if they supported temporary parking lot closures when they reached capacity.

Respondents were asked if they would support trail closures when conditions are dangerous or use would damage the trail or ecology. This was followed by two questions involving controlled access: (1) a system that would guarantee a parking space at the trailhead on arrival; (2) National Park-style access permits to manage capacity in wilderness areas of the park where use is degrading the trails and ecology.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Raw data were processed using Microsoft Excel 365, which was also used to create additional charts and tables. Non-consent and invalid responses were removed from further analysis. Minitab Statistical Software Version 21.1 was utilized for calculating descriptive and inferential statistics. Question responses were standardized and coded (e.g. Age 18-24 became "1", 25-44 became "2", and so on). ArcGIS 10.8.1 was used to analyze postal codes.

For this snapshot report, we further explored support of management actions by performing statistical comparisons between demographic and intent groups and support of five management actions that address capacity issues (Table 2). A set of Chi-Square Tests for Independence were completed to examine age against management actions and familiarity with LNT.

To perform Fisher's Exact Test, answers regarding home postal code, visit frequency, and seeking wilderness were recoded to create two categories, typically "Neutral/No/Not sure" vs. "Yes". This was done to accommodate Fisher's Exact Test, which retains usefulness at low sample sizes, which were found in certain subcategories. Then we proceeded with the comparison (Table 2).

**ATTRIBUTES****MANAGEMENT ACTIONS**

## Age of Respondents\*

- 18-24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65 and older

Support of Shuttle Buses

Support of Temporary Lot Closures

## By postal code †

Support of Parking Reservations

- Local\*
- Non-Local

Support of Trail Closure to Protect Trail/ Ecology

Support of Naional Park- Style Use Permits

## Visit Frequency †

Familiarity with LNT

- First-time Visitor
- Previous Visitor

## Seeking Wilderness and Solitude †

- Yes
- Neutral/No/Not Sure

\* Chi-Square Test for Independence

† Fisher's Exact Test

‡ Local status was tied to postal codes inside the border of the Adirondack Park or Blue Line.

*Table 2. Comparisons were performed to explore support of management actions and Leave No Trace familiarity.*

**RESULTS**

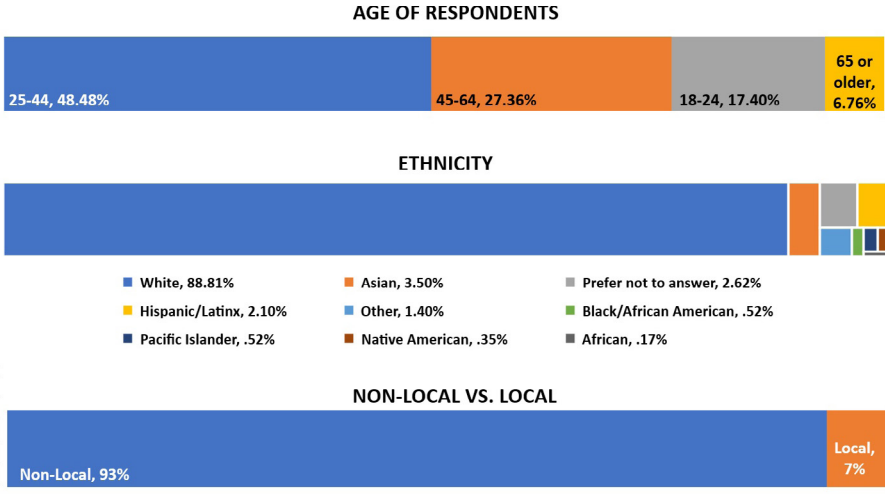
The study resulted in 592 valid responses (560 on paper and 32 completed online). No significant differences were found between the two groups. Further, no significant differences were found between respondents at trailheads with fee parking areas (e.g. Heart Lake) and those with no fee (e.g. Rooster Comb).

Our respondents ranged across all ages with 76% between the ages of 25 and 64 (Figure 1). Fifty percent responded they were traveling in a group of two. When asked about Ethnicity, respondents identified 89% as White, 8% as Non-White with 3% of respondents preferring not to answer (Figure 1).

The last demographic question we asked was about their home postal code. When filtered for Local vs. Non-Local (using the boundaries of the Adirondack Park or Blue Line), our participants are 94% Non-Local and 6% Local (Figure 1).

The majority of respondents came from the Interstate corridors of I-87 and I-90 with greater concentrations in the New York City and Albany areas (Figure 2). The discrepancy between our valid

*Characterizing Recreational Trail Users*



*Figure 1. Demographics*

questionnaire count (n=592) and the heat map production (588) is due to postal codes that are accepted for US Mail delivery but are not part of the latest US Census data set that is used for creating the map.

A question was asked about primary activity and we instructed the informant to make only one selection. Eighty participants (12.4%) circumvented the instructions on the paper survey and selected multiple answers. This invalidated the question and it was removed from the study. Seventy-eight percent reported they would be recreating in the High Peaks regardless of Covid 19 (Figure 3).

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New Visitors represented a minority of respondents (18%), while the majority, 63%, reported they visited 1-5 times in the past year, and 8% reported more than 10 times in the past year (Figure 3). Sixty-one percent reported that they planned for their trip between 1 week and 1 month in advance (Figure 3). While only 3% reported they did not plan at all.



## Respondent Home Zip Code Heat Map

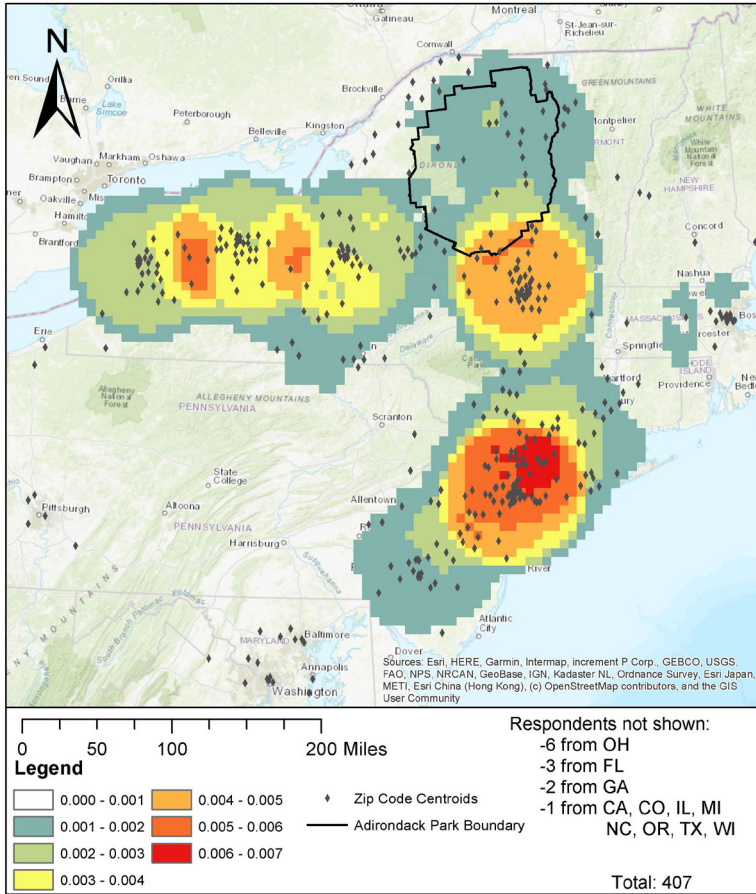


Figure 2. Heat Map of respondent origins.

Regarding wilderness, respondents were not asked for nor provided with definitions for wilderness or solitude. That said, the majority of respondents, 77%, cited they came to the High Peaks for this reason (Figure 3). A majority of 94% of respondents confirmed they are familiar with *Leave No Trace* principles (Figure 3). Participants were not tested for their LNT knowledge.

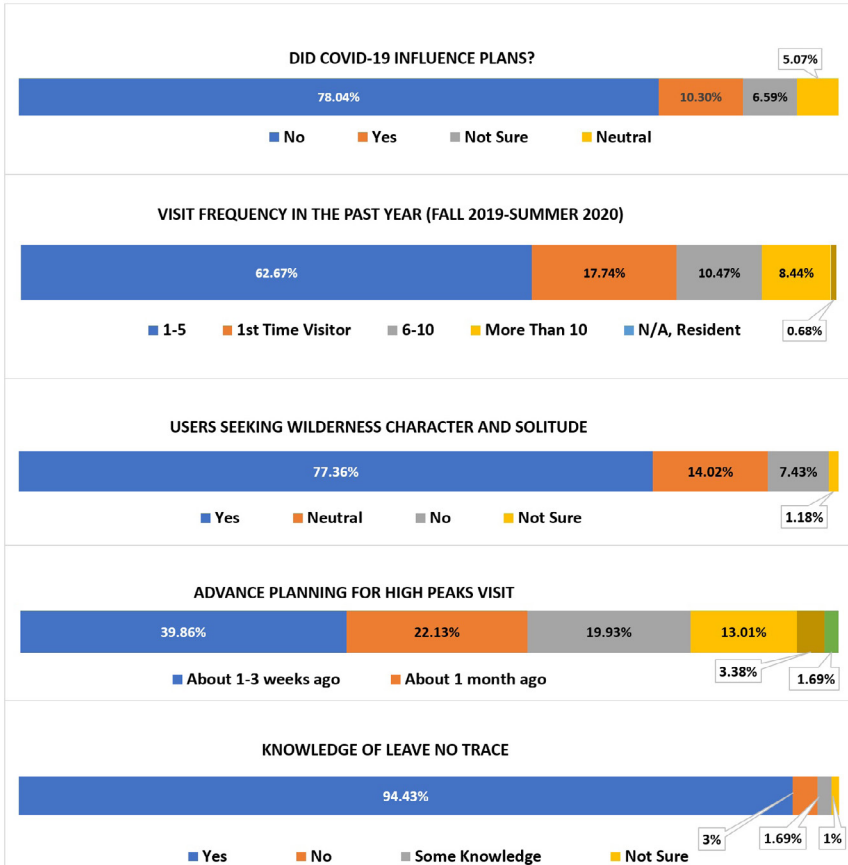


Figure 3. Intent and preparation

Participants were asked to share where they obtained information for their visit. Respondents were able to select any sources they used (Figure 4). Previous Personal Experience was the most popular and was selected 314 times. Friends or Family Members was selected 222 times and the information and navigation mobile phone app and website *AllTrails* was selected 179 times representing 14% of all selections. Besides *AllTrails*, twelve websites and six other apps were reported. Setting aside NYSDEC and hiking club websites, internet research has a 32% share of all selections. Newspapers, magazines, and television, places where most advertising dollars are spent, for tourism ranked very low to non-existent. The majority (83%) of respondents reported that the information they found in the sources they used was either accurate or very accurate.

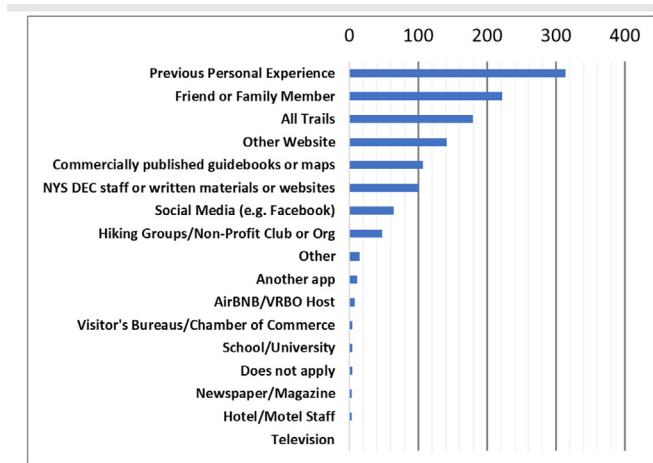


Figure 4. Information sources selected by respondents.

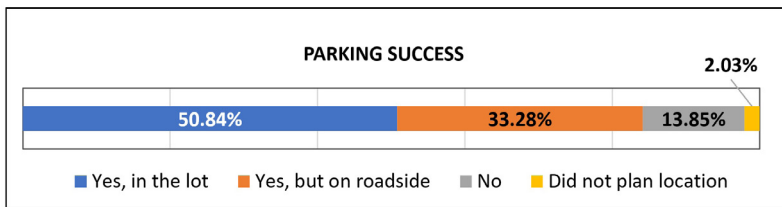


Figure 5. Parking availability.

### Support of Management Actions

Participants were asked if they were able to park where they planned that day, and the majority (84%) said Yes, they were able to park in the lot or on the shoulder of the road as they planned. 14% said No, and 2% claimed they did not plan for a particular parking location (Figure 5).

Respondents showed very strong support (72%) for a shuttle bus system that would take them from an offsite parking area to a trailhead (Figure 6). When asked if they would support temporary parking area closures when a trailhead parking lot had reached capacity, 57% said Yes, 19% were Neutral, 14% said No and 10% claimed they were Not Sure (Figure 6). When asked if they would support a parking permit system that would guarantee a parking space at a trailhead on arrival, 49% said Yes, 24% said No, 18% said they were Neutral and 9% claimed they were Not Sure (Figure 6). Respondents were also asked if they would support temporary trail closures when conditions were dangerous or when foot traffic would cause damage to the trail surface or ecology. This also received overwhelming support at 78% (Figure 6). When asked if they would support access permits similar to what is in use at National Parks to manage capacity in a wilderness area where use is degrading the trails and the natural environment, 59% said Yes, 20% were Neutral, 12% said No and 9% claimed they were Not Sure (Figure 6).

*Support of Management Actions by Attribute*

Chi-Square Tests for Independence revealed no significant difference between age groups and their support of management actions except for when asked about the support for National Park-style access permits for wilderness areas (Table 3).

Fisher’s Exact Test presented no significant difference between the participant attributes of being a local, a new visitor, or seeking wilderness and solitude and support of management actions.

*Familiarity with LNT*

Fischer’s Exact tests revealed no significant difference between first-time versus previous visitors and their support for various management actions except when asked for the familiarity of *Leave No Trace* principles,  $p = .00004$  (Table 3).

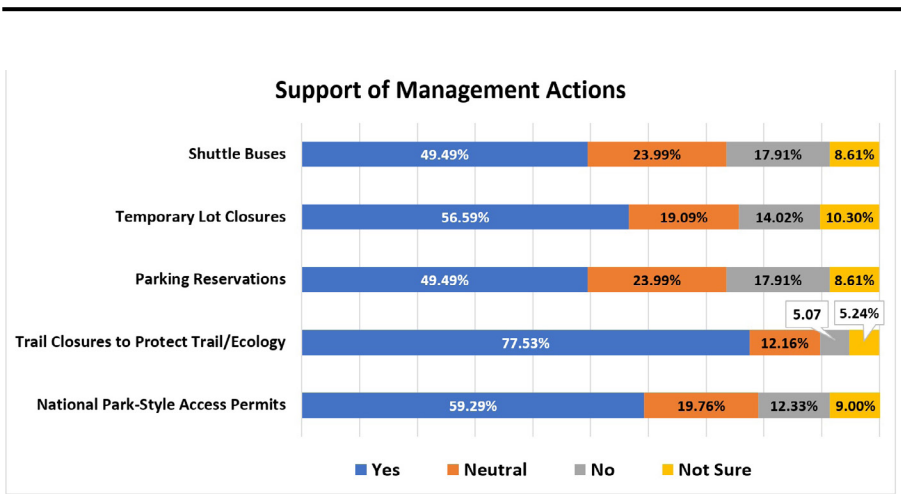


Figure 6. Support of management actions.

	SUPPORT OF SHUTTLE BUSES	SUPPORT OF TEMPORARY LOT CLOSURES	SUPPORT OF PARKING RESERVATIONS	SUPPORT OF TRAIL CLOSURES	SUPPORT OF NATIONAL PARK-STYLE PERMITS	FAMILIARITY WITH LNT
Age †	.505	.295	.740	.545	.017*	- ‡
By Postal Code §	.864	.088	.216	.063	.432	.164
Visit Frequency §	.710	.217	.740	.285	.734	.00004*
Seeking Wilderness and Solitude §	.444	.683	.239	1.00	.424	.084

\* Significant result  $p = <.05$

† Chi Square Test

‡ Chi Square requires more than 0 responses for each category, so this test was not run.

§ Fisher's Exact Test

\* Data collection by ADK staff was limited to the Heart Lake area, property, and fee parking area owned by ADK.

Table 3. P-value results for inferential statistical tests regarding Support of Management Actions and Familiarity with Leave No Trace.

## DISCUSSION

This study is a direct response to the findings of HPAG, whose Guiding Principles included "... to bring proven expertise, science, and best management practices into the process... [and to use] the best methods for assessment of conditions and development of action plans" (HPAG, 2021). In gathering and analyzing the data, we were able to both confirm and refute anecdotal claims about recreational users in 2020 providing a clearer picture of best management practices.

### Characterizing Recreational Users

We found that blame for many issues across the Park was placed on new hikers, yet only a small percentage of our respondents were first-time visitors and almost all claimed awareness of *Leave No Trace*. This could indicate LNT violations are due to the diversification of intent and motivations and not new hiker populations.

We found that Covid-19 did not factor into our respondents' decision to come to the High Peaks, contrary to previous capacity issue claims, but it may have influenced their travel opportunities and the number of persons with which they hiked. We found that most of our respondents reported being white, young to middle-aged adults, meaning that the 2020 season did not further diversify Park visitorship. To

increase visitor diversity, more effort can be made in messaging and education that takes other voices and communication channels into account. It is up to universities and agencies to create spaces and employment paths that will attract a broader population.

### *Wilderness and Solitude*

A great many of our respondents wanted a wilderness or solitude experience. This emphasizes the importance of wilderness within the park and may warrant further study on how recreational users form their concepts of wilderness and solitude.

### *Preparation*

It was also rumored that completely unprepared visitors were a common occurrence. However, our respondents indicated their engagement in planning and accessing information from what they felt were trustworthy sources, including *AllTrails*, the app, and the website. The drawback of relying on *AllTrails* in the Adirondacks is the spotty phone signal. So while some may pay to access their maps offline, it was informally observed that some were not aware that was necessary. Besides the continued study of this topic, perhaps state agencies can partner with *AllTrails* to include safety and education information alongside their Adirondack maps.

### *Support of Management Actions*

Regarding support of management actions, our findings show less negative responses on all issues when compared with public comment in a preliminary analysis. Support for some measures was clear, but it is difficult to say much about any given subgroup.

In detail, shuttle buses do have support, but it is not overwhelming. Support for lot closures, parking reservation systems, and access permits all reached around 50%, which diverges from what has been reported in the news and casual conversations with professionals. On the one hand, this is encouraging in that testing some of these actions to establish affirming benchmarks of LAC may receive more support than expected. Conversely, across all four management questions, around 25% of the respondents were in the No or Not Sure categories. This may mean they do not have enough information and or are not sure how the systems will help them meet their recreation goals on their own terms.

Last, we did have a significant finding in the Age/ Support of Access Permits, which needs a closer look to explore generational differences in perceptions of management actions. We also had a significant finding for the Visit Frequency/LNT cross tab, but that correlation is predictable. LNT has become ubiquitous. More frequent visits to U.S. recreation areas would mean more exposure to LNT.

### *Limitations and Future Study*

The nature of working within a partnership, moving quickly, and doing so during a pandemic created some limitations for this study. We had trained but nonacademic recruiters, which led to respondent errors for the question regarding primary activity. Starting in 2021 the SUNY-ESF team was able to travel and will be onsite more often going forward. Also starting in 2021 we collected contact and refusal data, allowing us to calculate a response rate.

While data from the twelve trailheads is of interest for some of the reasons described earlier, it is difficult

to generalize and show a difference between respondents at one or another site. Further, these data cannot be generalized for comparison in other states. In future study, we can seek parity between sites or a representative collection of sites.

Both the wilderness and *Leave No Trace* questions did not provide definitions nor test the respondent in their claims. Going forward, we are using the Hike Smart New York 10 Hiking essentials, testing for awareness of the program, and carrying items as a measure of preparedness. We may be able to get at the wilderness question through qualitative data collection in 2022 when we will be conducting focus groups.

Taking the lessons learned from this project, we collected data with improved instruments in the summer of 2021, and will do so again in 2022-23. This first is *Characteristics of the New Hiker: A survey of experiences and perceptions of alpine trail users in the Northeast*, which includes data collection across four states. The second is a study of the parking reservation system at the Adirondack Mountain Reserve. These studies feature improved versions of several questions regarding recreational user attributes, motivations, and support of management actions.

## CLOSING

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This pilot study answered the call for empirical data characterizing contemporary recreational users at popular trailheads in the Adirondacks. These findings speak to the issues in the park, are in the hands of those on the ground, and are leading to future study.

We have to take an intermediate look, somewhere between the lofty vision of the Adirondack Park's creation and the immediate day-to-day needs to form a long-term strategic plan for this special and peopled landscape (Porter, 2009; NYSDEC HPAG, 2020; Rice et al., 2020; HPAG, 2021).