

ADIRONDACK PHOTO-MONITORING PROGRAM

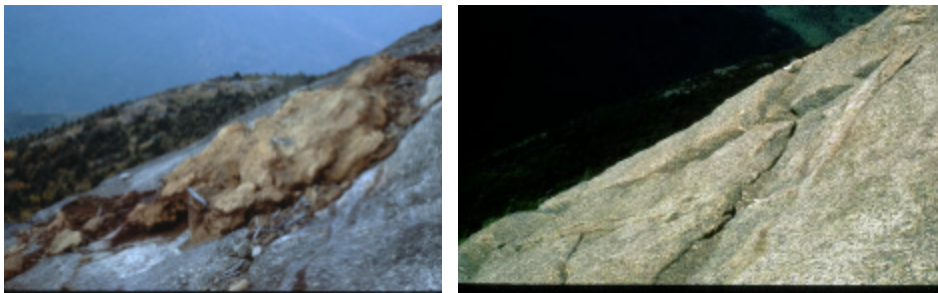
In 1999, in recognition of the tenth anniversary of the Adirondack Summit Steward Program, The Nature Conservancy and its partners, Adirondack Mountain Club and NY Department of Environmental Conservation, launched a project to assess the state of the summits.

Matt Scott, a former steward, was hired as an alpine ecologist, to set up a photo-monitoring project in the alpine. The goal of this project was to assess whether areas are deteriorating, holding steady, or recovering. Using photos that Dr. Edwin H. Ketchledge had taken in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, Scott was able to set up visual comparisons – then and now - that gave a qualitative measure of the progress of the summits.

The results are often striking. We have areas that show a decline, areas that are in a steady state, and areas that have been improved.

DECLINE

Damage does not take long to occur in these fragile areas. Natural processes, such as erosion, may contribute to decline. However, the more common result of a decrease in vegetation is the result of hiker trampling.



Where the grade is steeper, the soil often can't hold on for long enough for the process of recovery to take place. In 1966, Cascade was showing signs of damage. Exposed soil was vulnerable to erosion, particularly in a relatively steep area. By 1999, nearly all of the soil was gone, washed to lower elevations. It will take hundreds, if not thousands, of years for a comparable amount of soil to build up in this area.

STEADY STATE

A few areas in the alpine have remained essentially the same. These areas tend to be away from trails and on gentle slopes.



IMPROVEMENT

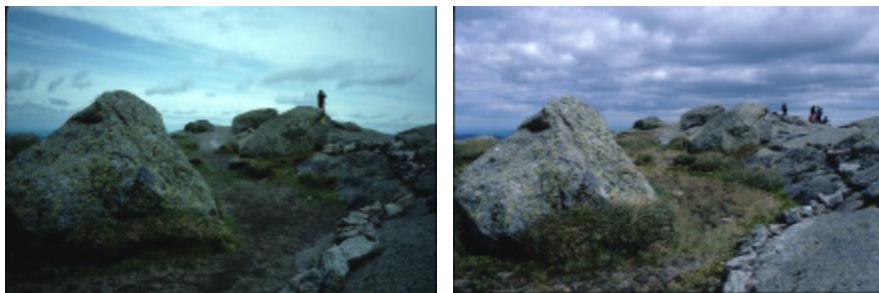
Recovery, years in the making, is promising, but also shows how slowly damaged areas improve. Recovery is the result of restoration efforts (rock stabilization and meadow rehabilitation), trail work, and education.



In 1981, camping was still permissible above 4000 feet, and the summit of Mt. Marcy was heavily impacted by hikers wandering off the bedrock. By 1999, thanks to new regulations, increased awareness and the nearly-continual presence of a summit steward, the summit had recovered a great deal.



In the early 1970's, this area on Algonquin benefited from the application of seed and fertilizer. It also benefited from being away from the trail, and from the fact that hikers were becoming increasingly careful to stay on rock. By 1999, the area shows enormous recovery. This is a hopeful reminder that the alpine plant communities of New York are resilient and hardy, and will flourish if we minimize our impact.



In 1992 the Summit Stewards discretely diverted use away from this trampled section of Mt. Marcy by building a scree wall. A dramatic improvement can be seen after as little as seven years of redirected foot traffic.

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