

To: **Summit Steward Program Partners, Supporters and Friends**

From: Krista Nelson, Chief Summit Steward

Date: October 15th, 2005

Re: 2005 Summit Steward Final Report

It is hard to believe that the 2005 Summit Steward season has come to a close. Thanks to the efforts of our great crew and the support of many, we have had another successful season in the High Peaks. After three seasons with the program, I feel an incredible sense of satisfaction when I note not only the physical changes in the alpine habitat after just several years, but the evolving attitude of most hikers. Mountain Sandwort populations continue to colonize new areas and the number of summit visitors already familiar with the fragile nature of the alpine zone grows everyday. While areas of improvement are visible, so too are areas of increasing erosion and trampling. Changes in the summits remind us of the hearty, resilient nature of these plants and too, their delicate balance of survival that is so easily disturbed.

After 16 years of public education and restoration work on the summits, the Summit Stewardship Program has successfully reached its primary goal of educating the public about the rare and endangered alpine plant populations in the State. While we should be proud of our collective efforts to protect New York's remaining alpine areas, we are currently at a stage in the program where we must re-evaluate our goals. As the alpine etiquette and knowledge of hikers continues to evolve, there is much room for the Summit Stewardship Program to evolve as well.

With our presence on the peaks known, our message well spread, and our program long established, we have the ability to expand beyond our current goals. We have the potential to take on more challenging projects, create more public outreach opportunities, and participate in larger research operations. All we need is vision and a little added support. In this final report of the 2005 season, I will outline the work we have accomplished in the past few months. I will also take the opportunity to share my thoughts on the future of the Summit Stewardship Program.

Personnel and Scheduling

This summer we had four full-time stewards and one part-time volunteer working for the program. We were able to provide full coverage of Marcy and Algonquin everyday and schedule many valuable project days. During the fall Jamie, Frank and I provided coverage on the weekends and worked on projects for the remainder of the week.

Sarah Hoskinson- A native of Scotia, New York, Sarah returned to the Adirondacks after spending a semester studying ecology in Australia. An education intern for the Adirondack Mountain Club last summer, Sarah was excited to be back working in the mountains as a steward. She recently returned to Colby College to complete her undergraduate degree in Biology.

Tom Coleman- This was Tom's first season working in the High Peaks. After receiving an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science and Sustainable Development from Plattsburgh State last year, he was happy to come work as a steward.

Krista Nelson- My third summer with the program has come to a close, and I couldn't have been happier with the 2005 season. I plan to graduate in the spring from Hampshire College, where I study global environmental politics and literary journalism.

Frank Kreuger- Frank returned for his fourth season as a volunteer summit steward and was an integral part of the program. Devoting 1-2 days a week to stewarding, his dedication to education and trail work was invaluable.

Kyle Shenk- Returning for his second season as a summit steward, Kyle's has been a great help to the program. He returned to Shippensburg University to complete his undergraduate degree in Geo-Environmental Studies.

Jamison Laubach- Jamie came on as our fall steward after spending the season as an Assistant Forest Ranger in the Stillwater Reservoir. He enjoyed the fall on the summits. His experience made for a smooth transition into the later half of the season.

Weather

The weather this summer made for great summit stewarding. The number of sunny, warm days this season was countless. While the fall seemed a bit wetter, it too provided many ideal hiking days. The nice weather is surely one of the reasons we saw more people this summer than in some years past.

Usage

May 2005 Contacts

Algonquin 284 (4 coverage days)

Marcy 184 (3 coverage days)

Total Contacts 468 (7 total coverage days)

June 2005 Contacts

Algonquin 646 (13 coverage days)

Marcy 700 (13 coverage days)

Colden 29 (1 coverage day)

Total June 2005 1375 (27 total coverage days)

Total June 2004 1289 (21 total coverage days)

June 2003 1366 (27 total coverage days)

June 2002 1287

June 2001 1427

June 2000 1410

June 1999 1630

July 2005 Contacts (as of 7/29)

Algonquin 1708 (28 coverage days)

Marcy 1790 (27 coverage days)

Colden 206 (9 coverage days)

Wright 52 (2 coverage days)

Total July 2005 3756 (66 total coverage days)

Total July 2004 3287 (56 total coverage days)

July 2003 3047 (55 total coverage days)

July 2002 3997

July 2001 4361

July 2000 4488

July 1999 4500

August 2005 Contacts

Algonquin 1912 (28 coverage days)

Marcy 2246 (30 coverage days)

Total Aug 2005 4158 (58 coverage days)

Total

August 2004 2398 (36 coverage days)

August 2003 4078 (49 coverage days)

August 2002 4824

August 2001 5103

August 2000 4535

August 1999 5223

2005 Labor Day Contacts

Algonquin 448 (4 coverage days)

Marcy 337 (4 coverage days)

Total Labor Day 785 (8 coverage days)

Fall 2005 Contacts

Algonquin 1329 (13 coverage days)

Marcy 936 (11 coverage days)

Total Fall 2005 2265 (24 coverage days)

Total Fall 2004 3053 (28 coverage days)

Fall 2003 2541 (28 coverage days)

Fall 2002 3074

Total 2005 Contacts	12,022
Total 2004	10,436
Total 2003	11,032
Total 2002	13,182
Total 2001	14,515
Total 2000	14,297
Total 1999	16,099

Total Program Contacts: 1990-2005 213,504

Equipment and Campsites

New equipment purchases this season were a great help to the program. New raincoats donated from Campmor mid-season made for much more comfortable days on the summits. Boots donated from Vasque were also much appreciated by the stewards.

For the most part, the rest of our equipment is in good shape. MSR was kind enough to repair a broken Dragonfly stove free of charge. Our supply of functional trekking poles is shrinking as they continue to be used heavily every season. We also lack a supply of waterproof rain pants. Four new sets should be acquired for the 2005 season.

The purchase of a digital camera should be high on the priority list for next season. A digital camera is essential for public outreach events, trail work records, plant identification and many more projects. I used my personal camera this season to document new trail work, photograph our trail logs and to show plant populations to other stewards.

The gear at the campsites is in relatively good shape. The Algonquin site would benefit from the purchase of a cook tent, especially during black fly season. We may want to think about relocating the Marcy site, due to its close proximity to the trail. This is something to be considered for next season.

2005 Projects

We were able to visit many peaks this season and perform much needed trail work. Highlights include a reblazing of Haystack, map production of Basin and scree wall construction on Skylight, rock packing on Colden, trail definition on Wright, basic trail maintenance on Marcy and Algonquin and cairn repair on Iroquois.

In late September, Frank and I constructed a treadway on Mt. Marcy. The area in front of the plaque had always been a problem, not only because it was highly impacted, but because hikers continued to walk on exposed soils after we had explained the importance of avoiding these very areas. In the beginning of the summer, Sarah and I rearranged the string fence in order to minimize the area of exposed soils people could walk on when viewing the plaque. I was amazed to count nearly 20 Mountain Sandwort populations in the recently roped off area in September. Frank and I tried to make the new revegetation area permanent by lining a rock walkway in front of the plaque. Hopefully, we will continue to see this area recover in the following years.

In an effort to increase our message on steward-less peaks, I have ordered many new signs through the Department of Environmental Conservation. Hopefully these signs can be permanently secured on more remote peaks. They include not only a message to avoid walking on the plant life, but a little background information, as well. Ideally, these signs can go up early in the 2006 season.

As noted in earlier reports, this season we started a trail log system, in which we brought surveyors wheels to the summits and recorded what work needs to be done at specific locations, being careful to include as many landmarks as possible so other stewards can return to the same sites and find specific locations. Our hope is that with trail logs, stewards will be more motivated to conduct trail work, high priority areas will be taken care of first, and new stewards in the coming season will have a better idea of not only what work should be a priority, but when and where past work was accomplished. Hopefully, we will be able to keep

better records regarding the effectiveness on our work, its durability, and the time period it takes for areas to begin to revegetate after scree walls are erected and rock packing is performed. Trail logs were completed for Wright, Algonquin and Marcy this year. Copies were distributed to all the stewards, who have begun recording their trail work. In the fall, the logs were supplemented with photographs.

Much of our fall was spent updating peak health reports. I devised a scheduling system for peak health reports this season. Due to the fact that some peaks are changing frequently and others very little, I felt that our time could be better spent if we updated little changing mountains every two years instead of once a season. We updated nine peak health reports this season, and those that we did not visit this year should be updated next fall.

Outreach

This season, we had several public outreach opportunities. I presented a slide show at Johns Brook Lodge and the High Peaks Information Center. The turnout was impressive and we were able to sell many of our fundraising T-shirts. The PBS show Adirondack Explorer, aired recently and will hopefully provide us with good exposure.

Future of the Program

It often seems that by the time a steward crew gains the experience necessary to evaluate trail work and prioritize future projects, it is too late in the season to schedule project days. In 2004, the crew developed many ideas for future work, but found that we could not accomplish all we wanted. Matt Diskin, former Chief Steward, wrote down many of our ideas in various peak health reports and in his paper titled, *"Suggestions for the Adirondack Mountain Summit Steward Program."* I found this very helpful in the beginning of the 2005 season. I was able to go through past peak health reports to schedule project days. I based many of the 2005 projects off of Matt's suggestions. This season I outlined suggested projects for next season. They include two-day projects on Haystack and Skylight, many more projects on the other peaks, and also touch upon projects that could expand the program.

One suggested project that could lead the program in a new direction is the development of better program publicity, possibly a new informational pamphlet or guide up one of the peaks through the different ecological zones. I also suggested, as Matt Diskin has, increasing our presence at Whiteface. It would also be nice to have more volunteer workdays on the summits, where stewards teach the public about the alpine while performing trail maintenance. This could work in conjunction with scheduling more guided hikes, lectures and slideshows. We could also work in conjunction with the Adirondack Mountain Club Education Department to develop an alpine ecology lesson for the community outreach program in local schools, as education director Jen Kretser has mentioned. There are many possibilities to aid in the expansion of the program and it is up to future stewards and program supporters to determine the direction of the summit stewards.

The botany aspect of our program is something we could strengthen easily and relatively quickly. We should continue to talk with Natural Heritage Foundation botanist Steve Young to develop specific botany projects for each season. With specific botany goals in mind, more work is likely to be accomplished. Perhaps a botany intern could be hired for the 2006 season. This person would come into the program with an existing knowledge of alpine ecology, and work with the stewards on a project of his or her own choosing. As it currently stands, it's difficult for the crew to tackle large botany projects, largely due to most stewards' lack of botany expertise. I hope these suggestions are helpful during future seasons.

Thank you again to everyone that has assisted with the program this year. It has been a fantastic season and we owe many thanks to all our supporters. I am happy to have been a part another wonderful summit steward crew and I am grateful for all the assistance we have been provided with this season. Please feel free to contact me for any reason.

Sincerely,

Krista Nelson
2005 Chief Summit Steward
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