

# THE WATERMAN FUND GRANT APPLICATION

**Project Administrator:** Wes Lampman, Director of Field Programs

**Organization:** Adirondack Mountain Club

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## **Project Name and Location:**

Summit Stewardship Coordinator Position — Summit Steward Program  
Adirondack Park, High Peaks Wilderness Area, Essex County, NY

## **Grant Information:**

Grant Requested =	\$6,000.00
Match pledge =	\$24,351.00
Project total =	\$30,351.00

## **I. ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW:**

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) is dedicated to the protection and responsible recreational use of the New York State Forest Preserve and other parks, wild lands and waters vital to our members and chapters. The Club, founded in 1922, is a member-directed organization committed to public service and stewardship. ADK employs a balanced approach to outdoor recreation, advocacy, environmental education, and natural resource conservation.

ADK has over 30,000 members who are either members-at-large or belong to one of our 25 chapters across New York State and one in New Jersey.

ADK is a member-directed organization, with a volunteer board of directors responsible for steering all aspects of the organization with fifteen volunteer committees overseeing the activities of our programs and services along with volunteer governance of each chapter.

Volunteers participate in back country stewardship through ADK's Adopt-a-Lean-to, Trail Steward, and Adopt-a-Wildland programs. Over one hundred and fifty lean-tos and over fifty stretches of popular hiking trails throughout the Adirondack Park are adopted by hundreds of ADK volunteers who take personal responsibility for reporting and maintenance projects. Many chapters also coordinate separate trail maintenance projects in the Adirondacks and parks in their local areas. All told, over 4000 hours of volunteer trail work is completed each season. Specifically within the summit steward program, one highly committed volunteer has contributed an estimated 1,150 hours of service over the last six seasons.

Eighteen years of the summit steward program is a testament to the success of the partnership between ADK, the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy (ANC), and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This program staffs four summit stewards on the summits of Mount Marcy, Algonquin Peak, and several other high peaks to educate hikers about the unique alpine ecology, teach them about the fragility of the arctic tundra vegetation, and to urge them to stay on the trail and bedrock to minimize erosion.

During the summer and fall of 1999, a system of photopoint monitoring was developed for the Adirondack alpine using historical photographs (from five to thirty-five years old) as baseline information. Photopoints were established at approximately fifty locations on eight mountains. Each photopoint was carefully established to ensure that future images could be easily duplicated. Photopoint monitoring is a simple system of monitoring that can illustrate changes in vegetation and the landscape and can to some degree quantify the rate and nature of landscape changes in the alpine zone. During the 2007 field season, fifteen photopoints were re-taken on six different summits.

In coordination with the New York Natural Heritage Program (NHP), a botanical steward began to research and develop monitoring plots that will enable scientists to estimate, as precisely as possible, the sub-population and total population sizes of selected rare plants growing on Adirondack summits. The population data collected will be used for further work monitoring climate change in the alpine zone. Over the course of the 2006 and 2007 field seasons, the botanical steward successfully completed 411 plots equaling over 11,750 square meters of alpine vegetation surveyed. Along with counting all of the target species in each monitoring plot that was created, over 20 new occurrences of alpine plant species were discovered.

Due to the lack of usable rock for scree wall building on many high peak summits, the Carry-a-Rock Program was instituted in 1999. Hikers are encouraged to bring fist-sized rocks to specified summits with alpine vegetation. The summit stewards use the rocks to fend off erosion of alpine plant communities by building stabilization walls and defining the path for hikers above tree line. This program gets hikers involved in the management of the alpine vegetation; we have found that this has proved to be an excellent avenue for stewards to make direct contact with participating hikers. The trail work completed by the summit stewards has effectively controlled the movement of the hikers on Mount Marcy and Algonquin Peak, and the work of ADK volunteers and ADK's professional trail crew has helped to direct hiker traffic on the other summits with alpine vegetation.

One of the thirty-five guides and maps currently published by ADK is *Adirondack Alpine Summits: An Ecological Field Guide*. This unique publication uses precisely worded text and striking color photos to teach the reader about the ecology and vegetation of the alpine zone and its different plant communities. The field guide also contains a chapter outlining the ongoing conservation efforts that take place in the High Peaks Region and discusses the summit steward program in detail.

**In an effort to save the Northeast's forests and water bodies, including the red spruce and other prominent high elevation vegetation, ADK's advocacy staff and volunteers are working hard to stop the devastating effects of acid rain and mercury emissions. ADK submitted a portion of the legal brief in the New Source Review lawsuit in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, and won. When the EPA and power industry appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, ADK argued that the Court should not hear the case. The Supreme Court denied the appeal, thus upholding the stronger laws aimed at reducing the threats of mercury and acid rain. Most recently, one of the giant polluters, American Electric Company, agreed to a settlement with the EPA as a result of the Court of Appeal's decision in favor of greater clean air protections.**

ADK is in an ideal position to educate the public as a highly respected source for information on backcountry recreation in the Adirondacks. Over 70,000 people a year visit ADK's Heart Lake Program Center. The Heart Lake Program Center is home to the most popular trailhead in the Adirondacks that leads to New York State's tallest mountains. Facilities at the Heart Lake Program Center include the High Peaks Information Center where ADK staff provide current trail information, gear, and restrooms for backcountry users; the Adirondak Loj, a hikers' overnight lodge; and the Heart Lake Wilderness Campground, another base camp opportunity for aspiring backcountry users. ADK also operates John's Brook Lodge which is a thirty-guest backcountry lodge

located over three miles in on the Phelps Trail to the Great Range: Gothics, Saddleback, Basin, Haystack, and Marcy—all mountains with alpine vegetation.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

### Project location and description –

**Summit stewards are responsible for educating the hiking public about the rare and fragile alpine plant communities that exist in the Adirondack High Peaks Region. A summit steward's foremost goal is to encourage hikers to walk on solid bedrock above timberline, thereby protecting threatened and endangered flora of the alpine zone. As educators and interpretive naturalists, summit stewards teach hikers about:**

1. Minimizing their impact on alpine summits.
2. The significance of alpine vegetation in the context of the state's natural heritage.
3. Alpine ecology.

The alpine zone, a total of approximately eighty-five acres on the summits of New York State's sixteen tallest mountains, is a unique collection of flowers, grasses, mosses, and lichens that are typically found only in the arctic tundra of northern Canada, Alaska, and Greenland. This flora has existed for ten thousand years; it is the greatest concentration of rare and endangered species in New York State. Throughout the summer hiking season, four summit stewards are stationed on the summits of Mount Marcy and Algonquin seven days a week. Summit stewards provide coverage on other high peak summits such as Mount Colden and Wrights Peak.

The summit steward program has been successful in accomplishing its original mission of increasing awareness among hikers of what they can do to help preserve alpine plant communities. Since 1990, the summit stewards have educated over 241,000 hikers on the summits of Adirondack high peaks. As the program moves towards the end of its second decade of existence, educating the public will still be held as its paramount objective. But, there are elements that cannot be adequately addressed with the program's current structure. To successfully take on new initiatives a dedicated year-round position would be needed.

The summit stewardship coordinator position would provide the continuity needed to expand the program and confidentially accept new endeavors, meanwhile maintaining the core program component of educating hikers on the summits. The current configuration of hiring a seasonal chief summit steward has limited the growth of the program in many ways. It takes at least one full season for a chief summit steward to learn how to operate the program effectively. Historically, the chief steward works only one season with the program. As a result of the high turnover rate, there is rarely a chance for new initiatives to be realized since each season a new chief steward has to spend all of his/her time becoming acquainted with the complicated logistics of the program.

Due to the short length of the field season, limited time is available for the chief summit steward to master and teach alpine ecology to the rest of the stewards. Familiarity with the alpine zone is imperative for stewards to effectively educate the public. At the same time, stewards must identify and relocate plant species to update the rare plant list maintained by the NHP. In the past, botany projects have been initiated, such as photopoint monitoring, and most recently, population monitoring plots. Although these botanical projects have been successfully completed, the season is not long enough to add the findings into the summit steward program's teachings. During the summer season, the chief summit steward has time to conduct only two program presentations to the public. ADK would like to conduct outreach to a broader audience by increasing the number of presentations, and offering them in a variety of locations. Again, due to the seasonal limitations currently in place, little or no time is available to the chief summit steward to recruit or train additional volunteer summit

stewards. One of the ADK volunteer stewards has provided over 90 days of coverage on the summits when a paid steward was unavailable or during pre and post regular season periods. More training time for the chief steward translates into more knowledgeable volunteers and therefore, more mountain top protection. With full funding, ADK intends to increase the number of volunteer summit stewards, especially during the spring and fall when there are only one or two stewards working. On multiple weekends last September and October, the two paid stewards reported talking to over 200 hikers on each of their respective summits.

A year around summit stewardship coordinator position would serve three primary objectives. First, increase botany training to the stewards and volunteers throughout the entire field season instead of concentrating it all into a one week training session. Second, increase the number of program presentations to be conducted throughout the year to a minimum of ten. To reach a broader audience, targeted outreach to educational institutions, outdoor recreation clubs, and community groups would be undertaken to schedule presentations. Third, the volunteer summit steward program would be increased by recruiting at least four more volunteers by the end of the summit stewardship coordinator's first full year.

### **Materials and Methods –**

The summit steward program protects the alpine zone through low key educational discussions that are conducted on various high peak summits. Summit stewards also maintain the trail corridors that pass over the summits by properly delineating the walking tread for hikers and with rock stabilization walls that prevent exposed plant communities from eroding. These founding program objectives will be fundamental for the continued preservation of the Adirondack alpine ecology. This proposal focuses on the introduction of a full time, year-round summit stewardship coordinator. The coordinator would be an alpine ecologist with the expertise needed to facilitate a richer understanding of the alpine zone and to expand on the good foundation already laid by the summit steward program. The plan described below deals with the expansion of staff and volunteer training, program outreach, and the volunteer summit steward program.

#### **Training Staff and Volunteers**

More opportunities would be made available to stewards outside of the normal weeklong training period by assigning each steward a plant list and summit(s) to be responsible for updating the rare plant list. This strategy has worked well in the past because it establishes a sense of ownership amongst the stewards while creating an incentive to learn more about the alpine ecology. With a full time, year-round coordinator, there would be ample time to apply and build on the knowledge gained each season as well as time to assimilate the information gathered by each steward. In addition, the partnership with the NHP would be strengthened by having the coordinator serve as the permanent liaison. Current and future research objectives conducted with the NHP would be more effectively integrated into the summit stewards training and field season work. The summit stewardship coordinator would be available to provide assistance with teaching alpine ecology to each steward throughout the season. During the botany training sessions, there would also be increased opportunities to consult on necessary trail work and other trail delineation projects.

#### **Program Outreach**

ADK's goal is to have hikers aware of the existence of the rare alpine vegetation that exists on the summits and how fragile it is to footsteps *before* they begin their hike. To achieve this goal, ADK proposes increasing the number of program presentations that would be conducted by the summit stewardship coordinator throughout the year. Presentations would be targeted to user-groups that typically visit the High Peaks Region such as college outing clubs, local schools, and hiking clubs like the Alpine Club of Canada. To tailor the message to each group, several different presentations will be developed. Information related to the summit steward program on the ADK website will be updated regularly by the summit stewardship coordinator. Through additional promotion and exposure of the program, we expect greater success with recruiting future summit steward staff and volunteers.

#### **Volunteer Summit Steward Program**

Expanding the number of volunteer summit stewards within the program has been identified as a need ever

since the first volunteer joined the ranks in 2002. The volunteer summit steward has become the summit steward program ambassador within the community, representing the program at various social gatherings and award banquets. Increasing the number of reliable volunteer summit stewards would provide more opportunities to connect with local communities and hikers, expanding the knowledge of the alpine zone. With more volunteer stewards, the educational message on the summits would be delivered more effectively by providing dual coverage on the summits during extremely busy holiday weekends and by stewarding on high peaks that are not typically covered. The summit steward program recently started placing a steward on Cascade Mountain one or two days a season. Cascade Mountain is usually visited by at least 16,000 hikers annually, and is easily accessed by a short trail. Because of the easy access, it is usually the first high peak for most aspiring forty-sixers and those venturing into the region. Stewards were amazed at how many hikers they saw on the summit during a non-holiday weekend with some visits up to 200 in a day. This is one of the many opportunities that a larger force of volunteer summit stewards could take advantage of.

Along with utilizing volunteer summit stewards on the summits to educate hikers, the summit stewardship coordinator would organize and manage a citizen science initiative such as a phenology study much like the Appalachian Mountain Club's Mountain Watch Program. Since there are not stewards working in the early spring and fall seasons, ADK has not been able to participate in the program. The phenology data that would be collected would not only provide valuable information about global climate changes to the alpine zone, but the training provided by the summit stewardship coordinator would create a cadre of volunteer summit stewards that could help train future stewards and would ultimately increase the level of education provided to hikers visiting the alpine zone.

### **Organizational Commitment to Operation and Maintenance**

As the nonprofit organization present at the major trail heads to all sixteen summits with substantial alpine vegetation, ADK has been in the forefront of the efforts to understand and protect the alpine zone.

ADK, in partnership with TNC and DEC, has administered the summit steward program since 1990.

ADK has worked with Dr. Edwin Ketchledge on studying and protecting the alpine zone since the 1980s.

In 1992, ADK published *85 Acres: a Field Guide to Adirondack Alpine Summits*, a book devoted to teaching about the alpine zone. A new edition of this field guide, *Adirondack Alpine Summits: An Ecological Field Guide*, was published in 2007 and is available to the hiking public.

ADK coordinates the summit steward program along with TNC and DEC. ADK's role is to administer the day-to-day operations and oversight of the summit steward program and provides its base of operations at ADK's Heart Lake Program Center. ADK is the employer of the summit stewards.

ADK operates the High Peaks Information Center and Johns Brook Lodge. These two information centers are located at the two main trails to the sixteen summits with rare alpine vegetation.

Since 1933 ADK has published the hiking guide to the Adirondack High Peaks. ADK's *Guide to Adirondack Trails: High Peaks Region* is used by the majority of hikers in the high peaks.

### **Sources of Match**

ADK will match the funds provided by the Guy Waterman Alpine Stewardship Fund with donations that the summit steward program receives. The summit steward program is sponsored in part by the 46R Conservation Trust, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, individual donations, and ADK membership dues.

### **Work schedule for project**

The summit stewardship coordinator position will begin on March 1, 2008.

**III. PROJECT ATTACHMENTS:**

Please see attached letters of support.

**IV. PLAN FOR FINAL REPORT:**

Final reports will be submitted by December 2008 and December 2009.

**V. BUDGET:**

Project Name: Summit Stewardship Coordinator Position — Summit Steward Program

	<u>Foundation Funds Requested</u>	<u>Matching Funds</u>
<u>Salaries &amp; Benefits:</u> (Summit Stewardship Coordinator only)	\$6,000.00	\$24,351.00
Equipment:	\$0	\$0
Total Funds Requested:	<b><u>\$6,000.00</u></b>	
Total Matching Funds:		\$24,351.00
* \$10,000 donated by the DEC		
* \$14,351 donated by the 46R Conservation Trust		

Dates	Position	Week	Hours/wee	Tota	Hourl	Sub-total	21.6%	TOTAL

**Total Trust Request**

**\$6,000.00** – Funding for a full time, year-round summit stewardship coordinator position