



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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2024 Natural Resource Steward Program Report

PROGRAM DATES: MAY THROUGH OCTOBER



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About the Natural Resource Steward Program

The Natural Resource Steward Program is a collaboration between the Student Conservation Association and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, which placed a cohort of stewards across many of the most scenic lands in the state. The program is funded by the Environmental Protection Fund, through a contract administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. This year the volunteers performed a wide range of stewardship duties and worked in environments ranging from high-visitation trailheads to remote backcountry wilderness.

Stewards enrolled in the program complete a field season of either 16 or 24 weeks. The season begins in late May during a virtual orientation to prepare the stewards for their upcoming season.

Throughout the season the members of this program interact with the rest of the conservation ecosystem in New York, as well as the public. The Stewards work alongside DEC program partners and staff, Forest Rangers, Assistant Forest Rangers, and other volunteers. The networks they build while in the field offer valuable takeaways such as friendship and career building.

The Natural Resource Steward Program is built on over a decade of success of the Backcountry Steward Program. All the members of the 2024 cohort are also AmeriCorps members and are part of a larger network of volunteers across our country that invest time and energy into our most precious natural resources. They perform integral tasks and gain invaluable real-world experience along the way.

About the SCA

The mission of SCA is to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of our environment and communities by engaging young people in hands-on service to the land.

SCA was founded in 1957 by Elizabeth Putnam. While at Vassar College, she developed her senior thesis around the concept that a commonsense solution to the abuse and under-maintenance of America's treasured public lands would be putting to good use the energy, talent, and hard work of a force of youthful volunteers.

In the intervening 65 years, SCA has deployed a force of more than 100,000 members, completing 26 million hours of conservation service in 550 parks, forests, wildlife refuges and urban green spaces at the national, regional, state, and municipal level in all 50 states.



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By the Numbers

2024 Natural Resource Stewards Service Work Outputs

3 members served in 2024, providing over 1900 hours of service

5 acres of land/waterways improved

Over 80 campsites monitored and maintained

5 privies relocated

120 feet of shoreline improved

Over 160 hours of education provided to members of the public

Description of Work

Each site offers different experiences to the Stewards, though some tasks are ubiquitous. Often, visitor use dictates the Stewards' tasks and schedules. Weekends and holidays are spent engaging with the public, while quiet weekdays are spent performing trail work or campsite maintenance. Stewards are able to take part in ecological monitoring, campsite maintenance, and visitor use monitoring.

Trail Maintenance

All the stewards performed trail maintenance, though some performed this task more frequently than others. Stewards are prepared with onsite training, tool safety instruction, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The stewards work through their Regions trails with hand tools to trim trail corridors, clear drainage structures, and remove blown down trees that do not require a chainsaw. The stewards communicate with their DEC site partners about bigger obstacles and the overall quality of trails.



Campsite Maintenance

The DEC provides countless rustic campsites across the state, free of charge to the people of this state. Although some require a permit, many are first come, first serve, and have no electricity or running water. They do however boast privies and splendid views, as well as access to New York's extensive trail networks. Pictured to the right is a vista at the Cedar River Campground, in the Moose River Plains.



Structures Built or Maintained

Throughout the season the stewards were able to participate in a few special projects that involved building or maintaining structures for the DEC.

Specifically, the Steward at Moose River Plains had the opportunity to do trail work with a trail crew and build an anti-beaver device at a culver that is routinely clogged by beavers.



Privies are an integral part of how the DEC and the NRS program

keep our precious resources and the folks who enjoy them safe. Many of the Stewards monitor and maintain existing privies, but others have had the honor of building and relocating numerous privies.

Education and Outreach

All of the Stewards engage in at least some education and outreach to the public during their term of service. The Stewards work in a variety of environments, ranging from high use, recreation areas to remote wild forest.

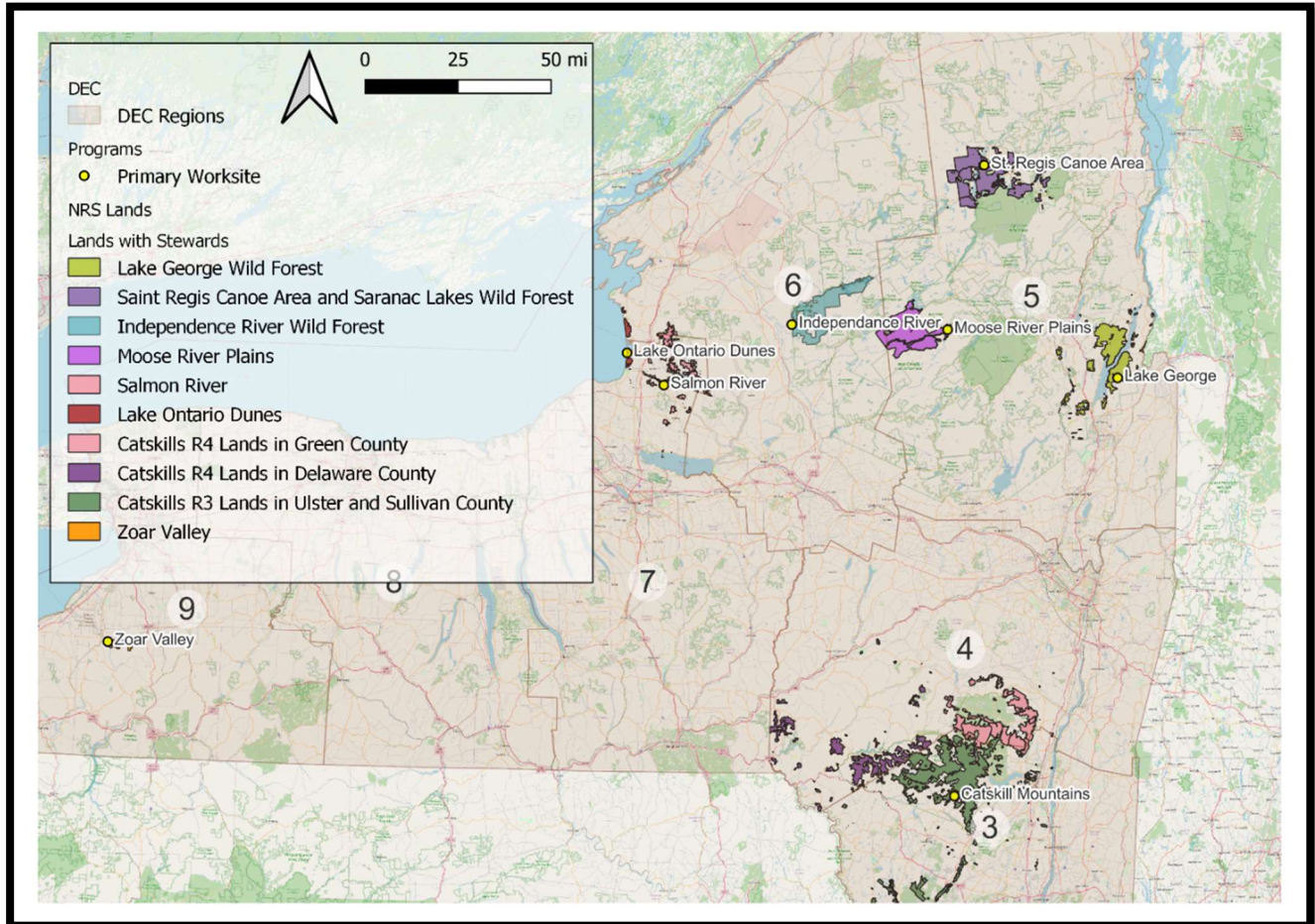
The Steward serving in the St. Regis Canoe area spent over 160 hours of service providing education to members of the public. This included interactions with people at campsites, trails, parking areas and beyond.

Site Locations

The Natural Resource Steward Program has sites throughout the state of New York. Below are the sites that were populated with members this year. Even though many sites had to make do without Stewardship this year, much good work happened at the sites that did have stewardship, which are listed below.

Title of Position	
<u>St Regis Canoe Area</u>	
<p>This 18,400-acre area is the only designated Canoe Area in New York and is patrolled, by canoe, by one steward this season. The steward patrols the waterways, checks on remote campsites, educates the public on Leave No Trace, and maintains and monitors campsites.</p>	
<u>Independence River Wild Forest</u>	
<p>This Wild Forest is made up of 78,600-acres. The individual Steward serving at this site spends much of her time patrolling the popular Otter Creek Assembly Area, which hosts multiple camping loops for equestrian recreationalist. She also monitors and maintains the trails adjacent to the Assembly Area and throughout this beautiful region.</p>	
<u>Lake Ontario Dunes</u>	
<p>This 5,800-acre area is known for its sandy dunes and delightful, little Piping Plovers. It is a popular beach and recreation area. It is also a Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat, as well as an Important Bird Area. As the charismatic Plover faces ongoing hardship, the Stewards at this site help patrol the beach for everything from raucous beach parties, to unleashed dogs to protect the delicate habitat and wildlife. These Stewards perform monitoring, education, and outreach related to the Plovers. They also do trail work to maintain the beaches, trails, and boardwalks in the area.</p>	

Below is a map of New York, with the 9 DEC regions, and the nine land units that have volunteers performing stewardship on them each year. Data for this map was collected from the NYS GIS Clearing house, as well as from Open Street Map.



DEC Links:

Catskills <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/120094.html>

Catskills Region 3 (Southern / Lower Hudson Valley) <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7804.html>

Catskills Region 4 (Northern Region) <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7801.html>

East Otto State Forest <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/67743.html>

East Otto State Forest Map https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/eastottoweb.pdf

Eastern Lake Ontario (Lake Ontario Dunes) <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/38944.html>

Lake Champlain Islands Complex: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/places/lake-champlain-islands-complex>

Lake George Wild Forest <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/53165.html>

Moose River Plains in the Central Adirondack Forest Preserve <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/53596.html>

Siamese Ponds: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/places/siamese-ponds-wilderness>

Salmon River Falls Unique Area <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/63578.html>

Salmon River State Forest <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/63552.html>

Wilcox Lake: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/places/wilcox-lake-wild-forest>

Zoar Valley <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/36931.html>

Independence River Wild Forest: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/places/independence-river-wild-forest>