



Connecting People with Nature since 1920

# New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

## Better Outdoor Opportunities Through Stewardship (BOOTS)

Trail Conference Conservation Corps  
2017 End of Season Summary

- Hudson Highlands State Park
- Fahnestock State Park





**The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference creates better outdoor opportunities through user education, public participation, and sustainable, on-the-ground solutions.**

**The Trail Conference Conservation Corps is an integral part of this effort.**

Public trails and trail lands have a critical role to play in our communities and throughout the region—and the Trail Conference is committed to making sure these resources remain open, safe, and enjoyable for all. One approach we deploy is the Trail Conference Conservation Corps (TCCC).

The TCCC provides outdoor service-learning opportunities for youth and adults interested in acquiring skills and hands-on experience in:

- building and improving public trails;
- protecting native trail habitats;
- and recruiting and training volunteers for service on public lands.

The TCCC supports AmeriCorps members serving on four to six-person trail crews. Each member signs a 450 or 900-hour service commitment, serving 5 days per week from May through October. They receive a robust training program that provides a diversified set of technical trail-building skills, volunteer management techniques, and experiential knowledge through active service engagement. Members also receive a living allowance and may be eligible for an educational award through the AmeriCorps program. The TCCC develops new, conservation-minded leaders for our trail projects and stewardship activities.

The TCCC provides land managers with a cost-effective solution to improve trail and land quality by implementing sustainable building and restoration solutions. The program multiplies labor productivity by combining the efforts of a dedicated trail crew with a diverse group of volunteers, providing a unique environment to receive training and on-the-ground experience.

Our model enables individuals and groups to volunteer for a day and make a positive and meaningful contribution. Through their work, TCCC AmeriCorps members and volunteers have an immediate impact on the quality of trails and parklands in our region.





## Making a Difference: The Back Country Trails Program

The Back Country Trails Program is designed to provide New York State's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) with a much-needed trail-building resource to implement trail plans and repair trails that have been damaged from decades of use.

The Trail Conference's professional trail builders and volunteer leaders coordinate with OPRHP regional and main office staff to identify priority trail projects, conduct assessments of these projects, develop a seasonal work plan, and implement the selected projects. Trail construction projects may include sidehilling, excavation, and trail tread definition; the creation of rock crib walls, bridges, and stairs; soil retention measures; and the construction of water control devices and other tread improvements.



The Back Country Trails Program fills four to six trail crew positions utilizing AmeriCorps members from our partner The Corps Network. The work performed by these crew members is supplemented with the recruitment and training of volunteers. This crew model allows the Trail Conference to both develop future outdoor recreation leaders through the AmeriCorps program, as well as grow a base of knowledgeable and motivated volunteers to assist with ongoing trail maintenance and construction needs.



## Taconic Trail Crew

As part of the Back Country Trails Program, the Taconic Trail Crew has served in OPRHP's Taconic region building and improving trails east of the Hudson River since 2014. They have repaired and rerouted the Appalachian Way Trail at Canopus Lake in Fahnestock State Park, which connects to the Appalachian Trail, and have rerouted a section to North Redoubt in Hudson Highlands State Park.

To address the high volume of trail use on Breakneck Ridge in Hudson Highlands, the Taconic Crew began working on the Wilkinson Trail in 2015, focusing on tread and drainage repairs. They completed a reroute of Wilkinson in 2016, and also began repairs on the Undercliff Trail that season.

The 2017 Taconic Crew included four AmeriCorps members working on two high-profile projects: Constructing sustainable trails to withstand the heavy foot traffic on Undercliff, and building a new section of the long-distance Highlands Trail. Over the course of the season, the Corps members were joined by 63 volunteers who donated 317 hours to these projects. In total, the crew served 3,943 hours improving the public's access to the outdoors.

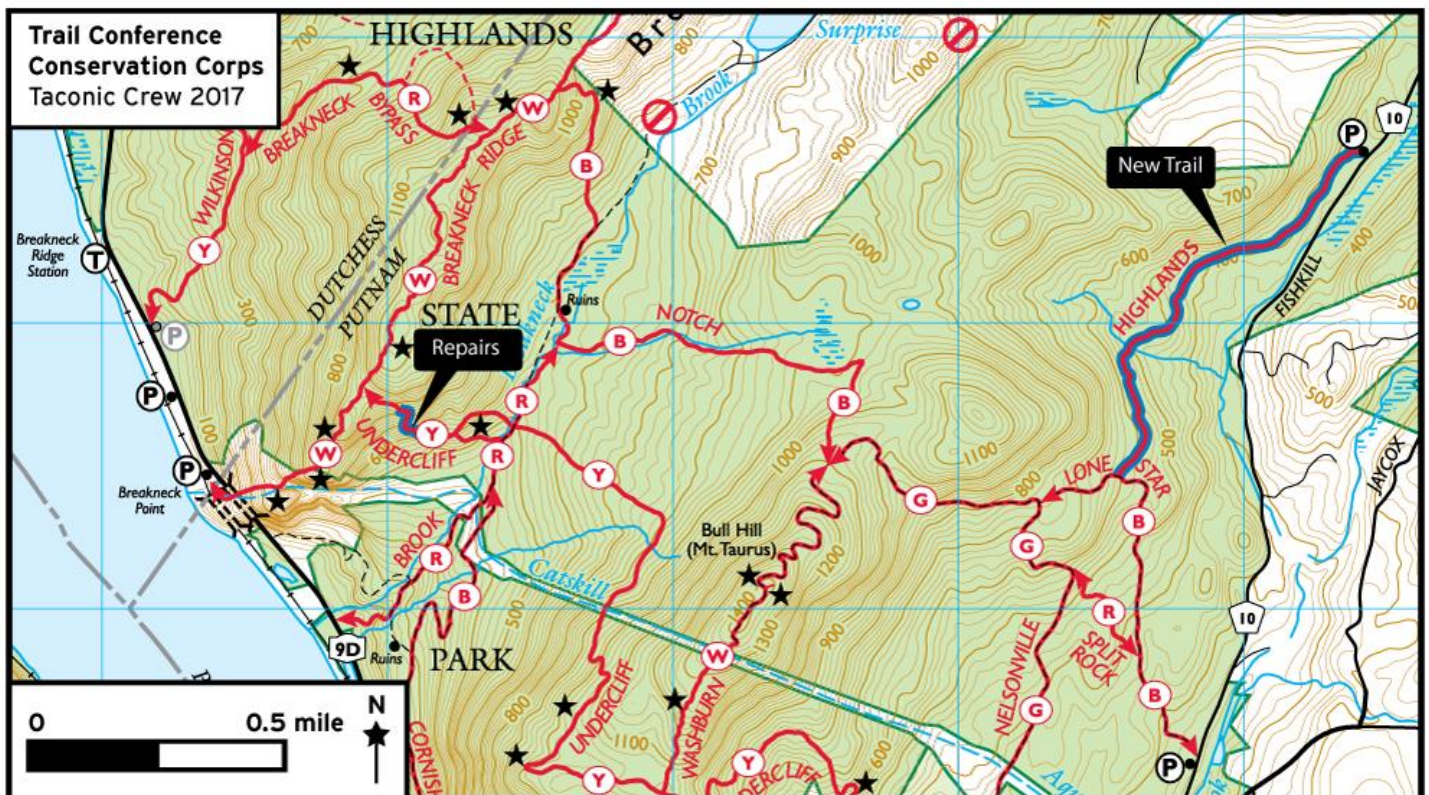
**TACONIC CREW:  
2017 AT A GLANCE**

**62**  
VOLUNTEERS  
ENGAGED

**318**  
VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

**4**  
AMERICORPS  
MEMBERS

**3,626**  
AMERICORPS  
HOURS





## Hudson Highlands State Park: The Issue

Breakneck Ridge in Putnam and Dutchess counties' Hudson Highlands State Park may be the most popular hiking destination in North America. In a survey among hikers on Trails.com, it received more than 10 million votes—more than hikes in Acadia or Yosemite national parks. As a consequence of its popularity, however, rugged and beautiful Breakneck Ridge is at risk of being damaged beyond repair.

Over the past 5 years, the number of visitors at Breakneck Ridge has increased at an alarming rate—it is estimated that more than 100,000 people climb this mountain each year. Factors including social media, word of mouth, easy public transit access, and population density in the greater New York metropolitan region have created a perfect storm for trail overuse and environmental degradation.



There is no one solution to mitigating the effects of such remarkable popularity. However, the Trail Conference and OPRHP have deployed a multifaceted approach to providing an on-the-ground solution for a high-use destination that requires educational components to better inform and prepare visitors. The repair and improvement of the Breakneck Ridge trail system is one method in our systematic approach to improving hiker safety and lessening the ecological impact on the mountain.



## Hudson Highlands State Park: The Corps Solution

The Undercliff Trail exists to offer Breakneck Ridge hikers the opportunity to descend the mountain early, rather than make three ascents to the summit or turn back the way they came. Undercliff provides an “escape route” just after the second ascent. Because of this function, it has become necessary to more clearly define the Undercliff Trail and rehabilitate sections degraded or damaged from use.

The Trail Conference Conservation Corps began work on rehabilitating the Undercliff Trail in 2016. In the Taconic Trail Crew’s second season on the project, four Conservation Corps members continued efforts to define the tread, make the trail a little more user-friendly for the clientele, and harden the surface to make it more sustainable.

Though the terrain has been difficult to work on given the steepness of the slopes, bedrock outcrops, and sometimes high-traffic volumes, this year alone, the

Taconic Crew set more than 100 stone steps on the Undercliff Trail. Their work will make a substantial difference in mitigating the effects of heavy foot traffic on the mountain.

The new trail, along with the closure of social trails, has also reduced lost hiker calls to the park and has made a significant impact on the experience for users who desire a shorter, less-challenging hike.



Undercliff Trail: 2017 Project Totals	
<b>120</b> STONE STEPS SET	<b>13</b> SQUARE FEET OF CRIB WALL BUILT
<b>57</b> FEET OF SIDEHILLING	



## Hudson Highlands State Park: Before and After







Better Outdoor Opportunities Through Stewardship

## Hudson Highlands State Park: Before and After





## The Highlands Trail: The Issue

The Highlands is a unique geographic region that traverses Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. Under the stewardship of the Trail Conference, the Highlands Trail was conceived as a backbone connecting protected lands from Pennsylvania to Connecticut, highlighting scenic and historic attractions along the way. It earned the Millennium Legacy Trail designation, one of only 50 in the United States.

Currently, the contiguous section of the Highlands Trail extends over 150 miles from Riegelsville, N.J., on the Delaware River to Storm King Mountain on the Hudson River. This route is a combination of co-alignment on established trails, new trails, and road walking.

The first section of the Highlands Trail built east of the Hudson River was opened in 2010 in Wonder Lake State Park. In 2017, the Trail Conference set out to build a new section of the Highlands Trail connecting Hudson Highlands and Fahnestock state parks.





## The Highlands Trail: The Corps Solution

As excitement builds for new and improved trails east of the Hudson River, there has been an increase in momentum behind projects like the completion of the Highlands Trail. Construction of the Highlands Trail was a perfect complement to the Taconic Crew’s work on Undercliff in 2017. TCCC AmeriCorps members serve Thursdays through Mondays—over the weekends, which is when the trails near Breakneck Ridge see the most foot traffic. We needed an alternative worksite for Saturdays and Sundays; the answer was to build this brand new section of Highlands Trail each weekend.

The Taconic Crew built a mile of the Highlands Trail in Cold Spring, N.Y., to connect Hudson Highlands and Fahnestock state parks. Their work involved clearing corridor and sidehilling nearly 2,000 feet of trail. They built stone steps in a few places where the grade of the trail was high in order to protect the trail from erosion and make climbs more comfortable for hikers. The crew also placed many stepping stones—a beautiful hallmark of this new trail—where the path crosses seasonal streams and low points.



Highlands Trail: 2017 Project Totals	
<b>1,947</b> FEET OF SIDEHILLING	<b>13</b> STONE STAIRS SET
<b>64</b> STEPPING STONES SET	



## The Highlands Trail: Before and After





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## The Highlands Trail: Before and After





Better Outdoor Opportunities Through Stewardship

## The Highlands Trail





## About the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is the region's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to building, maintaining, and protecting trails and the lands they traverse. Powered by volunteers, the Trail Conference connects outdoor-loving people with stewardship opportunities to preserve the integrity of trails and natural areas and inspire a deeper appreciation for the care that open space requires.

Since 1920, the Trail Conference has been partnering with land managers and mobilizing volunteers and advocates to care for the trails and parks that belong to us all. Every person who hikes, rides, or walks on a trail has an important role in keeping them safe and accessible. The Trail Conference educates and assists the public in upholding this shared responsibility.

More than 2,150 miles of trails in 140 parks across the region are cared for by Trail Conference volunteers. Over 2,400 Trail Conference volunteers donate more than 104,000 service hours annually. Approximately 9,000 Trail Conference members join their voices to speak up for issues affecting the protection of our parklands. The Trail Conference is a vigilant force in ensuring that the trails and natural areas we share are sustainable and accessible for all to enjoy for generations to come.



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