

# Leave No Trace Report Offers Recommendations To Relieve Overcrowding In The Adirondacks

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A report from the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is offering a number of recommendations to help reduce overcrowding on popular trails in the Adirondacks. One of the most controversial may be a suggestion to require permits in the High Peaks region.

It's become common when driving along roads in the eastern High Peaks region to see cars ballooning out of designated parking areas alongside the roadway. There's also more visible trash and trail damage.

In August 2019 an effort was launched to begin a study and to educate hikers about their impact on the Adirondacks. At the time [Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics](#) Outreach Manager Mitch Warnick said the Adirondacks had been

designated a Hot Spot – an area experiencing severe impacts from overuse. “The Hot Spot program is our flagship program where we work with select parks and protected areas that are experiencing extremely high levels of recreational impacts. And we work with the stakeholders and community to further implement Leave No Trace and better the landscape as a whole.”

The Leave No Trace Center has now issued a report: [“Managing Recreation-Related Impacts in the Adirondack Park and Building a Culture of Wildlands Stewardship.”](#) It surveyed land managers and stakeholders and determined that hiking, water activities, camping, peak bagging and winter sports were the most popular activities. The highest concerns are overuse, crowding, trail degradation and erosion, human and pet waste, parking issues, and unprepared visitors.

[Adirondack Council](#) spokesman John Sheehan says the report highlights the challenges the region has been facing for several years. “We’ve seen the trends all continue in the same direction despite the fact that we have a global pandemic and the Canadian border is closed. So we’re a little stunned by how many people have shown up in the Adirondacks this summer both in the back country to hike and camp but also out on the water to boat and recreate that way.”

Officials have been trying to get people to use areas outside of the High Peaks region. One of the recommendations in the Leave No Trace report that is garnering some attention is a permit system for high use areas. It notes that national parks use permits. Sheehan says permits are already required in some areas of the Adirondacks. “For example if you want to camp on one of the islands on Lake George you’ve got to reserve it. The Department of Environmental Conservation is also doing things in the High Peaks Wilderness Area that they aren’t doing in other places such as there is a lower number of group sizes allowed in the High Peaks Wilderness than in other places. And really I think since 1999 the state has had permission to consider permits for this area but it’s been reluctant to pull the trigger on that. But I think it’s becoming very clear that we need to do something to limit access to the most popular places.”

[Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve](#) has been advocating for a permit or limited entry system in the High Peaks since 2016. Managing Partner David Gibson says indirect methods to control overcrowding aren't working. "Some direct methods are now needed and one of those methods used around the country, which Leave No Trace acknowledges, is limits on entry. But it has to be well studied and fair to the public and to the hiking community across the state."

The report also provides short- and long-term recommendations including enhanced visitor education, improved waste management and trail maintenance funding. Sheehan says the report points out a number of management changes that could make a substantial difference in the Adirondacks. "Having a game plan for how to proceed once we have the money and political will in place to address the problem is very important and we think that this can provide just that game plan for the state."