

# DEC, Adirondack group to test parking reservations

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*The West River Trail is a popular route for High Peak hikers who set off from the Ausable Club trailhead in St. Hubert's, just south of Keene Valley on Route 73.*

**PHOTOGRAPHER: MILES REED**

In a first for the Adirondacks, the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Adirondack Mountain Reserve will launch a parking reservation system to test limiting hiker use in part of the Adirondack High Peaks, where concerns about hiker overuse are reaching new heights.

The reservation system will control access to the reserve, which is made up of thousands of acres owned by the private Ausable Club, but open to the public with restrictions. The three-year pilot plan announced Monday is intended to improve management at a spot where it's become very typical for vehicles to overflow available parking.

Once those lots fill up, drivers heading for the woods sometimes park illegally along Route 73, at a spot where the end of a steep grade and a bend in the road make for hazardous conditions.

“In recent years pedestrian traffic, illegal parking, and roadside stopping along Route 73 have created a dangerous environment for hikers and motorists alike,” DEC officials said in announcing the program.

The Adirondack Mountain Reserve’s 7,000-acre property includes routes to several interior trails, including to the Indian Head overlook, and the trails for Noonmark and Round mountains. It has unpaved public parking lots just off the highway, but in summer they overflow early each day.

“With the increasing number of visitors to trailheads accessed through AMR, exacerbated in 2020 by New Yorkers looking for a nature break as a respite from COVID-19, DEC and AMR are working together to promote sustainable recreation and protect public safety,” said DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos.

The announcement of the free reservation system comes just weeks after DEC’s High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group released a long-awaited report on High Peaks overuse issues that concluded that capacity limits are needed to preserve the quality of visitors’ experiences and protect the character of the High Peaks.

“We have no doubt that the pilot will contribute to improved management of hiking pressures off of Route 73,” said one wilderness advocate, David Gibson of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve. “It will help protect this limited wilderness resource, enhance opportunities to experience more wilderness solitude and naturalness, respect the private landowner providing access since 1978, and increase public safety in the town of Keene along this heavily traveled corridor.”

“Our expectation is that traffic and hiker congestion at this particular hiking hub will begin to ease and the hiking public will come to appreciate even more the wilderness values they are there to experience while minimizing public health and safety risks for the entire community,” Gibson added.

“We are very excited to see this program getting underway,” said John Sheehan, director of communications for the Adirondack Council. “We hope it will be a rousing success, embraced by all who really want to preserve Adirondack Wilderness for current and future generations, and something

the DEC will want to learn from and spread to other popular Forest Preserve locations soon.”

Sheehan said the system will also be fairer than the current first-come, first-parked situation, which he said favors those who live in or close to the Adirondacks, and who own vehicles.

Beginning May 1, and running through Oct. 31, reservations will be needed for the 70 available parking spots at the AMR parking lot. Walk-in users without a reservation will not be permitted. Those arriving at Keene Valley via Greyhound or Trailways bus lines may have access with a valid bus ticket from within 24 hours of arrival. The AMR parking lot will only be accessible between the hours of 5 a.m. and 7 p.m. daily, with the exception of permitted overnight parking.

Keene Town Supervisor Joe Pete Wilson said the town, which has been looking for better ways to manage High Peaks visitor crowds and traffic, supports the plan.

Visitors can begin registering at a new hiker reservation web portal, [hikeamr.org](http://hikeamr.org), which will launch April 15. Those being dropped off at AMR or arriving by bicycle will also need to have reservations.

Reservations can be made two weeks in advance. Visitors can make reservations for day or overnight use. All bicycles must be left at the hiker parking lot where a bike rack will be provided and portable restrooms will be available at the parking lot.

Parking is limited at other popular trailheads along the Route 73 corridor, and DEC in the last couple of years has urged visitors to come prepared with back-up plans in case trailhead parking lots are full.

The permit system for day use is a first for the Adirondacks, but not unprecedented: DEC has required an advance permit to visit Peekamoose Blue Hole in the Catskills on weekends and holidays since 2018, due to heavy public use of the area.