

# Hiker parking reservation system coming

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*An Adirondack Mountain Reserve parking lot near the Roaring Brook trailhead in St. Huberts is full of cars on Oct. 5, 2019. (Enterprise photo — Elizabeth Izzo)*

**ST. HUBERTS** — A new parking reservation system is coming to a popular trailhead parking lot in the Keene hamlet of St. Huberts.

The new three-year pilot system at a parking lot operated by the Adirondack Mountain Reserve, a private entity associated with the Ausable Club, was announced by the state Department of Environmental Conservation on Monday. Hikers will be able to start making reservations on April 15 at [hikeamr.org](http://hikeamr.org).

Not only will reservations be required for the 70 parking spots in the AMR lot starting May 1, but hikers who walk to the AMR lot from elsewhere and don't have a reservation won't be allowed to access to trails on the property, nor the trailheads to Round and Noonmark mountains, which are accessed by

walking through the AMR property. Hikers who access the wilderness elsewhere — such as if they hike in through the Elk Lake Pass — will still be allowed to exit through the AMR property, according to the DEC.

Reservations have to be made at least two weeks before arrival, according to the DEC. Even those without vehicles must make a reservation. Those who take a bus to Keene Valley can access the property with a valid bus ticket within 24 hours of arrival. The AMR lot is open from 5 a.m. and 7 p.m., and hikers will be required to check-in. Overnight parking will be an option when hikers make their parking reservations.

The reservation system will be operated by AMR between May 1 and Oct. 31.

Many locals have long suspected that the AMR parking lot would be the location of this pilot program. Rumors of these restrictions were circulating last summer, when AMR reduced the number of available parking spaces in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Many people speculated that something like these new parking reservation restrictions, which AMR has been discussing with the DEC for some time, would be put in place before Columbus Day last year — but that didn't happen.

For years, the AMR lot has filled up quickly on long holiday weekends and some good-weather days. The area near the entrance to the lot, off of state Route 73, becomes a pinch point on mornings when the lot is full.

Rather than deter out-of-town visitors from making the trek to the Adirondacks, the coronavirus pandemic brought even more visitors to the High Peaks region last year as people looked for outdoor escapes after months of being indoors. An influx of first-time visitors also brought more instances of littering and misuse of public lands.

On the Saturday before Columbus Day last year, the AMR parking lot was full by 5:30 a.m. More cars kept arriving, creating a traffic backup at times as driver after driver made U-turns to exit the lot. Hikers started parking illegally along Route 73 and walked onto the AMR property in the darkness, some without headlamps.

This type of scenario, which has gotten worse in each recent year, is one the DEC attempted to quell in 2019 by imposing a roadside parking ban on a section of Route 73, upping enforcement of parking restrictions and more recently by issuing alerts about the parking lot through the 511NY traffic alert system. The DEC also established pop-up hiker information booths in Keene, Lake Placid and North Hudson last summer to help educate visitors.

A committee created by the DEC in 2019 was asked to submit recommendations for how to address hiker traffic in the High Peaks Region. The High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group recommended in its final report that the DEC consider parking passes or permits as an option to limit hiker traffic into wilderness areas.

"This reservation system helps to address public safety and protection of the environment, which are important issues addressed in the HPAG Report," said HPAG member and Keene town Supervisor Joe Pete Wilson Jr. in a statement. "The reservation system is also an effective strategy for a private landowner to manage the high levels of use their easement attracts."

AMR President Roland Morris hailed the initiative as "a groundbreaking private/public partnership intended to improve hiker safety and the wilderness experience, while also protecting the natural resource for generations to come."

The Adirondack Council also praised the announcement of the program.

"This is a big leap forward for fair access to the High Peaks for everyone," Adirondack Council Communications Director John Sheehan said in a statement. "Until now, people with homes inside the park and people with access to cars had a huge advantage over the rest of the state when it came to finding a parking space or campsite in the High Peaks. A system like this really levels the playing field. It doesn't cost anything, but it gives everyone an equal shot to get your own spot, even on a holiday weekend. All you have to do is reserve a parking spot and go.

"This is an important step for diversity and inclusion on the Forest Preserve," he added. "No matter where you live or how rich or poor you are, everyone with access to a smartphone, computer, or public library will have access to the most popular locations in the Adirondacks too. You don't need to be an insider or have friends who can save a place for you. You don't even need a car."

Adirondack Wild also hailed the program.

"We have no doubt that the pilot will contribute to improved management of hiking pressures off of Route 73," the green group's Managing Partner David Gibson said in a statement. "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."

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## Hiker reactions

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The reaction from hikers to the announcement of the new parking system was mixed.

In the Adirondack Backcountry Hikers Facebook group, where thousands of hikers talk about all things hiking, one man, Daniel Graziano, noted that making a reservation so far in advance could be difficult.

“Kinda hard to plan a hike 2 weeks in advance when you can’t forecast the weather that far. My only complaint. But oh well,” he wrote.

Tom Gerace questioned why hikers without reservations wouldn’t be able to walk through the property.

“I can somewhat ‘get’ the parking lot issue,” he wrote. “Preventing people from walking in though? They should be encouraging shuttles or drop-offs.”

Carla Izzo was angered by the announcement.

“This is ludicrous and pisses me off,” she wrote. “As someone who night hikes often, and has come out of the woods as late as midnight or 1 a.m., they can suck it.”

“It’s a shame it’s come to this, but it is their property,” wrote Emil Klymkow. “The way I see it is the hiking community brought this on themselves.”