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Statement Regarding the Final Visitor Use Management Plan for the Formerly Trailless Catskill High Peaks

The Catskill 3500 Club appreciates the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) considerable work in developing the final Visitor Use Management (VUM) Plan for the Formerly Trailless Catskill High Peaks. We recognize the importance of this effort and commend the DEC for undertaking a comprehensive, science-based assessment of the increasing recreational pressures on these sensitive areas of the Catskill Forest Preserve.

We also recognize that the implementation of this plan will bring meaningful changes to the traditional Catskill 3500 experience for current and future members. For generations, the formerly trailless peaks and their summit canisters have been defining features of the Club's hiking challenge and an important part of its history and identity. Establishing preferred routes on many of these peaks represents a significant shift in that experience. It is understandable that these changes may bring a sense of nostalgia and mixed feelings among longtime members who value the traditions associated with hiking these mountains. At the same time, we recognize that traditions must be balanced with our responsibility to protect the natural resources that make these mountains special in the first place. As an organization whose members have a longstanding connection to these mountains, the Club recognizes both the value of recreational access and the responsibility that comes with enjoying and protecting these public lands.

The Club supports the direction of the VUM Plan, particularly its emphasis on concentrating visitor use along designated preferred routes, rehabilitating unnecessary and damaging informal trails, and using ongoing ecological monitoring to guide management decisions. We believe that a coordinated approach to managing visitor use is essential to reducing the cumulative impacts of recreational activity while maintaining responsible opportunities for people to experience the Catskills.

We also recognize the role that hiking organizations and recreational challenges play in influencing visitation patterns. We take our responsibility seriously. Our position is that recreational opportunities must evolve in a manner consistent with responsible stewardship.

The Club supports the plan's emphasis on visitor education and Leave No Trace principles. Consistent with our mission, we are committed to educating our members and the broader

hiking community on responsible, sustainable hiking practices that help protect natural resources and promote stewardship of public lands.

The Club also recognizes the importance of continued monitoring and collaboration between the DEC and its stewardship partners. For nearly two decades, the Club has collected and provided summit canister sign-in data to the DEC, contributing to the long-term understanding of visitation patterns on these peaks. We value this partnership and believe that continued data collection, ecological assessments, and transparent evaluation of management outcomes will be critical to determining the effectiveness of the plan over time.

As the plan moves into implementation, we encourage continued communication between the DEC, the Catskill 3500 Club, and other regional stewardship organizations. The Club welcomes opportunities to contribute its volunteer resources, institutional knowledge, and longstanding stewardship experience to support successful implementation of the plan.

While some aspects of the hiking experience may evolve, the Club believes that preserving the ecological integrity of the Catskills must remain our highest priority. We appreciate DEC's leadership in addressing these challenges and look forward to continuing our longstanding partnership in protecting the natural resources and unique character of the Catskill Park for future generations.

Approved: November 20, 2026

Catskill 3500 Club Board of Directors
"*The Stewards of the Catskills"*