

SPRING RECREATION



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Be safe and protect natural resources

Early Spring Brings “Mud Season,” Unpredictable Weather, and High Waters

In early spring, people are eager to get out into the warming weather or squeeze in the last of winter recreation. Mud season presents unique challenges for outdoor recreation. Weather is often volatile: rain, sleet, freezing rain, snow, and even thunderstorms can occur, sometimes on the same day. Trails are muddy, and high, fast-moving waters make stream crossings on trails dangerous. Seasonal access roads remain closed while they dry and spring maintenance is completed.

Guidelines for a safe and enjoyable experience

Whether you are hiking, mountain biking or paddling, follow these guidelines to stay safe and protect trails and natural resources:

- Carry rain gear and other equipment for various weather conditions.
- Return to your vehicle if conditions worsen.
- Heed high water warnings and find a safer alternate route or trip.
- Banks along rivers and streams can be slippery and rocks may be icy from spray. Keep a safe distance away to avoid ending up in water.
- Avoid muddy trails as plants and trail surfaces are especially vulnerable to degradation and erosion.



Hikers and Mountain Bikers

- Check trail conditions, advisories, and regulations (see links below).
- Trails are wet, slushy, or even icy in early spring; wear waterproof footwear, gaiters, and crampons.
- Avoid all ice. Ice on ponds, lakes and other water bodies is thinning and likely covered with water.
- Avoid snow/ice bridges over streams; they are weak and likely to give way.
- Walk through, not around, mud and water on trails to avoid trampling vegetation and widening trails.
- Bike only on dry and hardened trails. Biking on muddy trails damages tree roots and erodes trails, making them difficult and dangerous for riding.

Paddlers

- Always wear a personal flotation device (PFD) (required before May 1). Water temperatures are cold. A person in the water can quickly lose the ability to keep their head above water.
- Use caution entering and exiting your canoe or kayak.
- Heed high water warnings and find a safer alternate route or trip.
- Expect high water levels and swift currents. Research your trip ahead of time and heed any warnings or advisories for select paddling routes.
- Watch closely for trees, branches, rocks and debris both above the surface and underwater.

High Elevation Peaks in the Adirondacks and Catskills

Thin soils and steep slopes make high elevation trails and vegetation more susceptible to damage than those at lower elevations. Conditions at trailheads may be different from what you'll find further up the trail. For example, temperatures may be warm and the ground dry where you start out, but further up the trail you may encounter deep snow, ice, and cold temperatures. In the higher elevations, temperatures can be of 20-25 degrees lower, with wind chills below freezing. Rain at the trailhead may be falling as snow or sleet in the higher elevations.

- To prevent trail erosion and damage to plants during mud season, avoid hiking trails above 3,000 feet until they have dried.
- Before you go, check trail conditions at the links below. Pack rain gear, hat, gloves, and extra warm layers for higher elevations.
- Wear or carry snowshoes, crampons or other traction devices.
- Use of snowshoes is necessary as the snowpack melts, softens, and becomes "rotten." Hikers without snowshoes can sink to their knees, thighs, or even hips on or off trails.
- As snow next to trails melts, compacted ice in the center creates "monorails." Use crampons and other traction devices for walking directly on the monorail to avoid post-holing in trailside snow or trampling vegetation.
- Stream crossings can be tricky. They may be impassable altogether. Or low water levels in the morning can make crossing easy, but become treacherous or impassible as the day warms and melting snow raises water levels.
 - Check conditions and plan routes to avoid these crossings.
 - Do not try to cross through cold, high, fast flowing waters. Stay where you are and call for assistance.

Planning and Emergencies

Planning ahead helps you avoid most emergencies. Make sure you know what to do you find yourself in trouble.

Check Weather and Trail Conditions

- Adirondack Trail Conditions: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7865.html
- Catskill Trail Conditions: www.nynjtc.org/content/catskill-trails-updates

Emergencies

- Remember that cell service isn't always available in the backcountry.
- Always sign in at trailhead registers.
- Be sure someone knows where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Learn about hiking safety; www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28708.html

Report backcountry emergencies, such as lost or injured hikers, and wildland fires to the DEC Forest Rangers at (518) 408-5850.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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