



Hudson Highlands Fjord
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Improvements in Breakneck/ Route 9D Corridor Result in Improved Safety

Number of rescue calls significantly reduced after addition of Breakneck Upper Overlook this season; new Trail Steward Station will improve emergency communications

BEACON, NY — According to the Putnam County Bureau of Emergency Services (PCBES), there have been three rescue calls on Breakneck Ridge since March 2023, which represents a 70% decrease from 2022 and an 80% decrease from 2021.

A combination of factors are likely to have been responsible for the decrease in emergency calls, including HHFT's improvements at Upper Overlook, which were made earlier this year, early safety improvements to the Breakneck train station made in 2022, and the addition of the Nimham Trail, constructed in 2021, which provides an alternative, less strenuous route to the popular Breakneck flagpole.

"Although it is significant to note that the Breakneck trailhead was closed for four months, or roughly half, of the 2023 season, rescue calls are still proportionately way down from the past several years," said PCBES Deputy Commissioner Ralph Falloon. The Wilkinson, Nimham and Washburn/Cornish trailheads were all open for the full season providing alternate routes to Breakneck Ridge peaks and Bull Hill and were widely used.

Another significant factor in lower emergency calls on the mountain: a larger presence of Parks staff available to assist hikers along the trails, as well as the NY-NJ Trail Conference trail stewards stationed at Breakneck, who orient and counsel hikers before they even begin their ascent.

"Over the last two years, there has been a decrease in emergency responses to the Breakneck Ridge and Mt. Taurus areas in the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve. This is likely due to an increase in the presence of park staff who can assist with lost hikers and other non-emergency situations," said Cold Spring Fire Company No. 1 Chief Jeff Phillips, Jr.

Completed in July of this year, the work at the new Upper Overlook at the Breakneck Ridge trailhead included repair of severe erosion and unsafe conditions on the trail, closing of social trails that often led hikers to dangerous areas, and construction of a new Trail Steward Station to support the work of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) stewards and New York State Parks staff.

The Steward Station's green roof was completed in October, with solar panels installed by Heitmann Builders and Pidala Electric. The panels will provide power for New York State Parks staff and NYNJTC trail stewards, as well as first responder communications equipment and a new AED, which will improve emergency response capabilities at this very popular trailhead.

"The creation of the Nimham Trail has been critical in reducing the number of hikers getting lost or injured off trail when they realize that they are not able to complete the Breakneck ascent," said Evan Thompson, Director of Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve. "In addition, park staff have created designated loops at Breakneck and Bull Hill that direct hikers safely to their destinations, while offering a variety of hikes from one to four hours long to match the abilities of visitors. We appreciate the infrastructure support provided by HHFT and will continue to work closely with local fire departments and emergency responders to prevent future issues, and respond quickly when they do occur."

The work at Upper Overlook marks the beginning of Phase 1: Breakneck Connector & Bridge of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail project. The next phase of construction is slated to begin in early 2024, which will result in closures for the Breakneck Ridge and Wilkinson trailheads, as well as the Breakneck Ridge Metro-North station.

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About HHFT

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, Inc. (HHFT) is a subsidiary nonprofit of Scenic Hudson, Inc., an organization devoted to protecting the natural beauty of the Hudson Valley. HHFT oversees the direct planning and construction of the Fjord Trail, which is slated for completion in 2031. HHFT's mission is to create and steward a 7.5-mile linear park along the Hudson River that solves existing safety concerns around visitation, provides welcoming access to people of all abilities, restores and protects natural resources, and enhances quality of life for local communities. The Fjord Trail, envisioned by locals nearly two decades ago, aims to address safety, manage visitation, and respect the landscape. It will add organized parking, public restrooms, trash/recycling collection, and distribute users of the park along a 7.5-mile route with six main access points. For more information, news, and timely announcements on the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, [please visit hhft.org/news](https://hhft.org/news).