



Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail
c/o Scenic Hudson
85 Civic Center Plaza, Suite
300 Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
hhft.org

Contact:

Lori Moss, Communications Manager
lmoss@hhft.org / 845-625-3301

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 5, 2024

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, Inc. (HHFT) Presents Visitation Projection and Visitor Management Strategy to Local Community Members

ORCA Consulting shares results of field work on visitor data collection and analysis, and HHFT's toolkit for managing visitation

FISHKILL, NY — On the evening of April 3, ORCA Consulting shared visitation projections and discussed the evolving framework for HHFT's visitor management strategy. Over 200 people registered for the event, which was facilitated by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), at Dutchess Manor.

John Moss and Al Shacklett of ORCA shared findings from their field work in the Fjord Trail project area and their experiences in managing visitation in communities near National Parks and other park and cultural destinations across the country.

ORCA's field work in the Fjord Trail project area was conducted from May through October 2023, including holiday weekends of Memorial Day, July Fourth, and Labor Day, as well as a peak foliage weekend in October. Shacklett presented three data-based simulation models to the audience, all representing peak fall weekend data: 1) present day pedestrian behavior in the Village of Cold Spring; 2) what pedestrian behavior would look like in 2033 without the Fjord Trail; and 3) what pedestrian behavior would look like in 2033 with the mitigating infrastructure and visitation management strategies of the Fjord Trail. Simulations were based on ORCA's field sampling in Cold Spring and other communities, as well as survey results, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference trail steward counts, census data, and data from other sources, including the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and other comparable parks and trails.

ORCA explained that visitation projections are based on number of visits, rather than number of individual visitors, i.e., one hiker from Cold Spring or another locality could account for 52 visits in a year if they use the trail weekly. With the entirety of the Fjord Trail built, ORCA projects an increase of 204,900 visits to the Fjord Trail corridor in the year 2033. Currently, 56% percent of arrivals occur in the southern portion of the trail corridor (the Village of Cold Spring and Little

Stony Point/Washburn Trail). With the Fjord Trail fully operational in 2033, including implementation of visitor management strategies, roughly half of all visits are projected to shift to the middle of the Fjord Trail route, including the planned Dutchess Manor Visitor Center and new parking lots, north of the Village of Cold Spring.

HHFT's planned enhancements to the Breakneck Ridge Metro-North Railroad station at "the heart of the trail," including restrooms and wayfinding signage, will encourage train travel directly to Breakneck Ridge and other popular trailheads. The parking, amenities, and programming at the Visitor Center at Dutchess Manor also will encourage arrivals to the heart of the trail. Projections indicate that with these improvements, behavior will shift the majority of new peak day visits to the heart of the trail, reducing arrivals to only 20% percent in the southern portion, thereby relieving pressure on the community of Cold Spring on peak visitation days.

ORCA reviewed a wide range of proven visitation management tools which are being considered to help control the impact of trail-bound visitors on busy weekends to Cold Spring and other local communities. These include communications strategies like better wayfinding signage and an online app, and operational recommendations like timed entry at certain trailheads and/or a parking reservation system. They also discussed measures to better balance peak and non-peak visitation to make weekends more comfortable for local residents and businesses.

ORCA indicated that implementation of its visitation management strategies would be dynamic and adjusted in real-time to respond to changes in visitation. Specifically, if projections underestimated levels of visitation on a peak weekend, immediate actions could be taken to reduce the impacts on the trail and on neighboring communities.

Participants had the opportunity to submit questions on provided index cards, which were randomly drawn by CBI facilitators for the panelists to answer. The panelists, which also included Mike Beattie and Steven Gates of the environmental engineering firm AKRF, also answered attendees' additional questions one-on-one after the meeting concluded.

An interactive presentation tool was used to collect live feedback from the audience on topics including how to improve congestion in the Village of Cold Spring, a paid parking reservation system, and respondents' park visitation and trail usage during the past year. The full results of the live poll will be posted on the hhft.org website. The session was recorded in its entirety and will be available on HHFT's website after April 8, 2024.

HHFT hired ORCA (Operations Research Consulting Associates) in May 2023 to study visitation and help implement the project's visitor management objectives, which include relieving pressure on neighboring communities using a combination of tools and trail operation strategies.

ORCA has many decades of expertise in capacity and visitor flow planning and facility operations for cultural and recreational public spaces, including the National Parks Service and the Smithsonian Institution.

HHFT continues to work with the local intermunicipal Visitation Data Committee, and funds the independent consultant who assists the committee in interpreting and commenting on the pedestrian counts, visitation projection, and traffic study that will inform the GEIS. The committee was established by HHFT to aid project area municipalities in providing input on the Draft Generic

Impact Statement (DGEIS) during the public comment period later this spring. While that work continues, HHFT's hosted the April 3rd public forum to keep the broader public informed and to receive their feedback, particularly as relates to visitation management, which is a central concern of the project and adjacent communities.

This was the second of two public sessions in which HHFT provided information on the Fjord Trail project to local community members in advance of the DGEIS. HHFT continues to host monthly informal information sessions for community members wishing to learn more about project details.

#

About HHFT

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, Inc. (HHFT) is a subsidiary nonprofit of Scenic Hudson, Inc., an organization devoted to sustaining and enhancing the Hudson Valley's inspirational beauty and health for generations to come. HHFT's mission is to plan, build 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, which is planned to be completed in 2031, 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, visit hhft.org.