Visitor-Use Management and Wildlands Monitoring of Forest Preserve Lands in the Adirondack Park

Guidance Team Members:

Rick Weber, APA

Walt Linck, APA

Kevin Prickett, APA

Karyn Richards, DEC

Josh Clague, DEC

Background

"…an assessment of physical, biological, and social carrying capacity…with particular attention to portions (of land) …threatened by overuse in light of its resource limitations and its classification under the master plan."

- APA Act, Original Act 807
- APSLMP, 1972-present
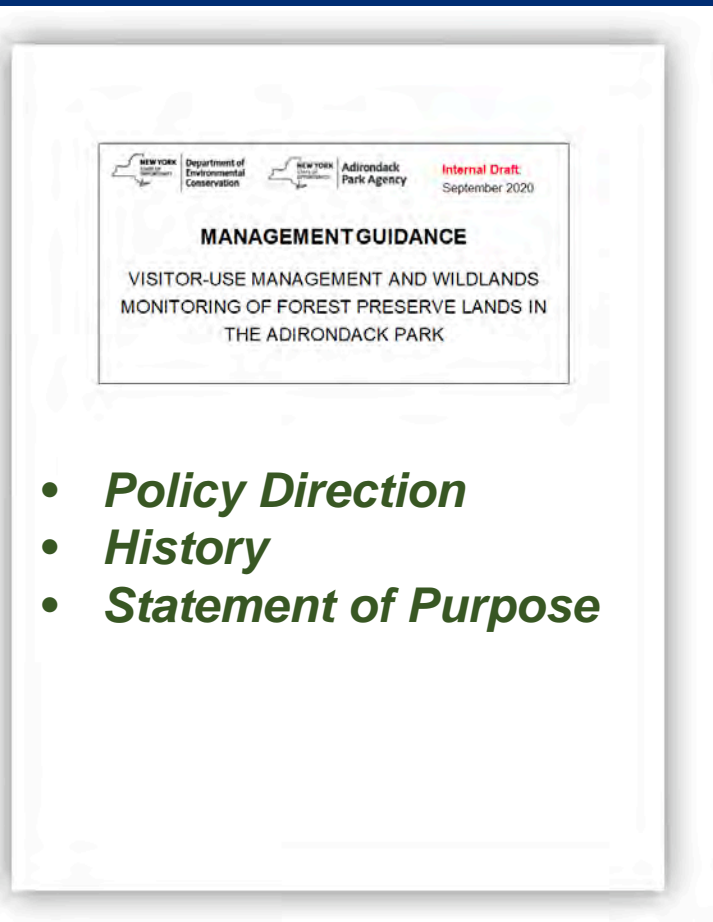
History of the Issue

- "**Carrying capacity**" and "**limits of acceptable change**" have taken time to develop.
- 2015 - Boreas Ponds tract acquisition concluded multi-phased Finch-Pruyn deal
- 2018 - classification of tract, followed by UMP Amendments
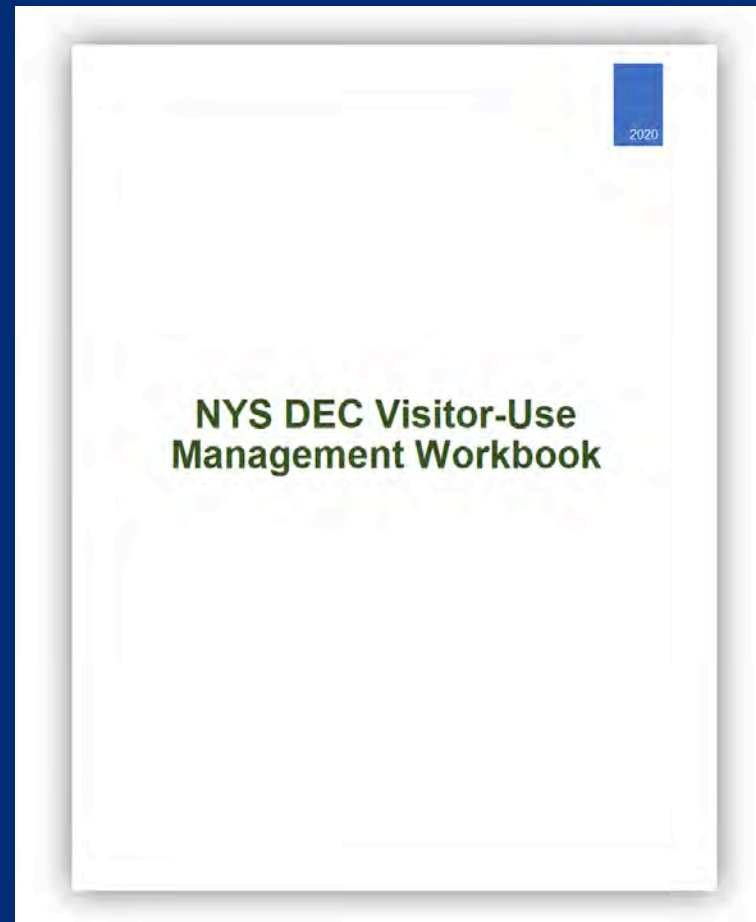
History of the Issue - continued

- Unprecedented use in the High Peaks over last 5 years
- Parallel effort at Federal level has led to a Visitor Use Management Framework ("VUM") for Federal lands
- 2018 - APA/DEC staff team assigned to formalize concepts from UMP into a guidance document.

The Visitor Use Management Framework is...

I. Introduction

MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

VISITOR-USE MANAGEMENT AND WILDLANDS MONITORING OF FOREST PRESERVE LANDS IN THE ADIRONDACK PARK

Internal Draft September 2020

- *Policy Direction*
- *History*
- *Statement of Purpose*

II. Workbook

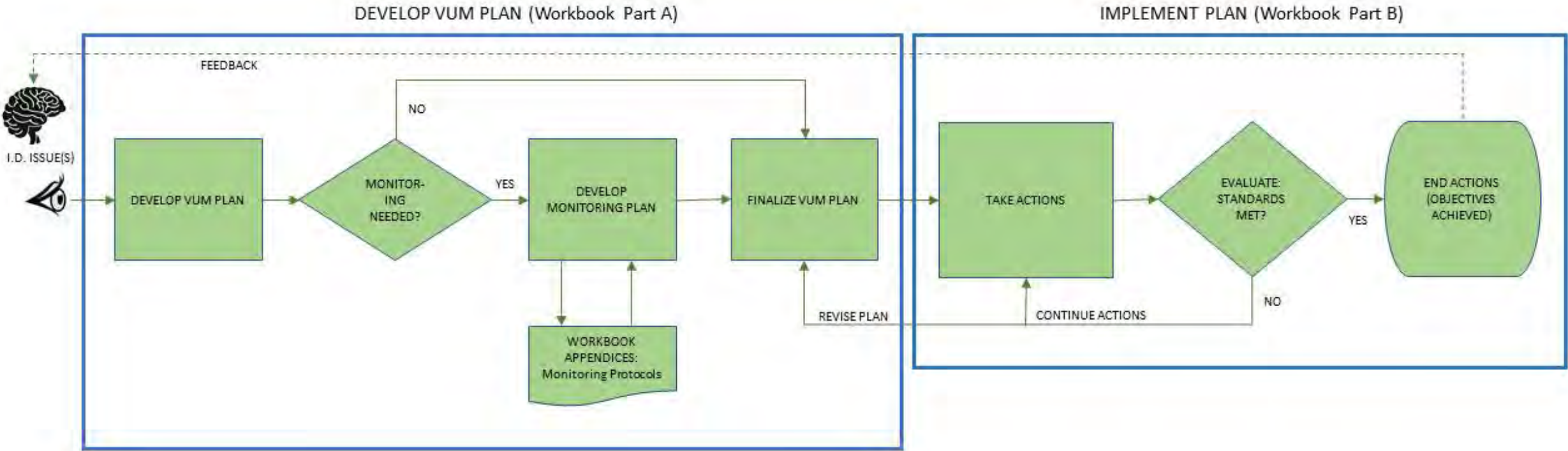NYS DEC Visitor-Use Management Workbook

III. Wildland Monitoring

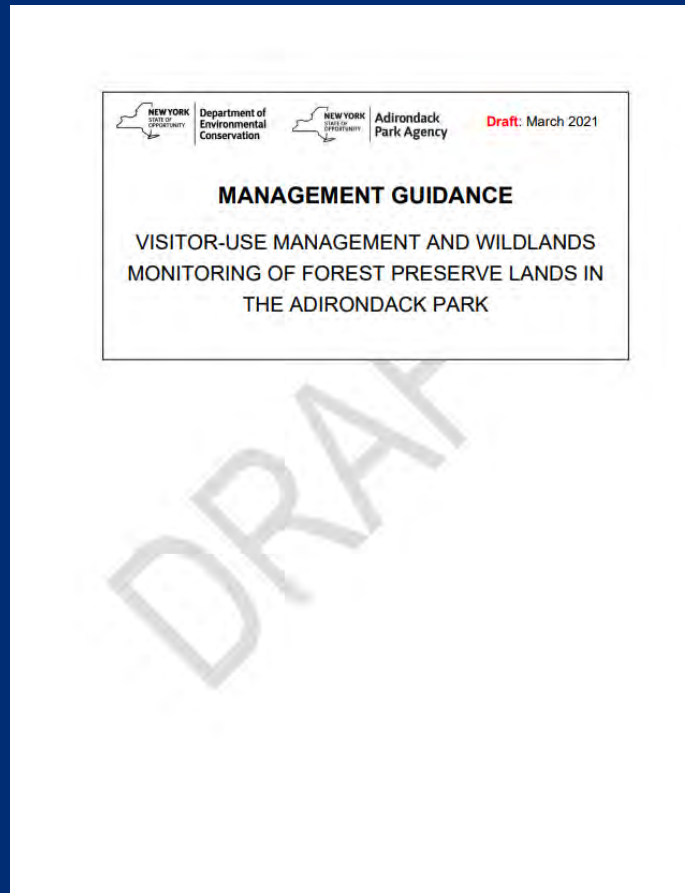- *Desired Conditions*
- *Indicators and Standards*

IV. Monitoring Protocols

- *Primitive Tent Site Conditions*
- *Hiking Trail Conditions*
- *Trail Use Estimation*
- *Visitor Experience*
- *Ecological Integrity*

PROCESS OVERVIEW

DEVELOP VUM PLAN (Workbook Part A)

IMPLEMENT PLAN (Workbook Part B)

FEEDBACK

I.D. ISSUE(S)

DEVELOP VUM PLAN

MONITOR-ING NEEDED?

NO

YES

DEVELOP MONITORING PLAN

WORKBOOK APPENDICES: Monitoring Protocols

FINALIZE VUM PLAN

TAKE ACTIONS

EVALUATE: STANDARDS MET?

YES

END ACTIONS (OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED)

NO

REVISE PLAN

CONTINUE ACTIONS

NYS DEC Visitor-Use Management Workbook

1. SPECIFY MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

- **Narrative describing the setting**
- **Overarching visitor-use concern**
- **Issue or issues that comprise the problem**
- **Objectives to be achieved through addressing the issue(s)**

2. REVIEW THE AREA'S PURPOSE AND RELEVANT EXISTING MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVES AND GUIDANCE
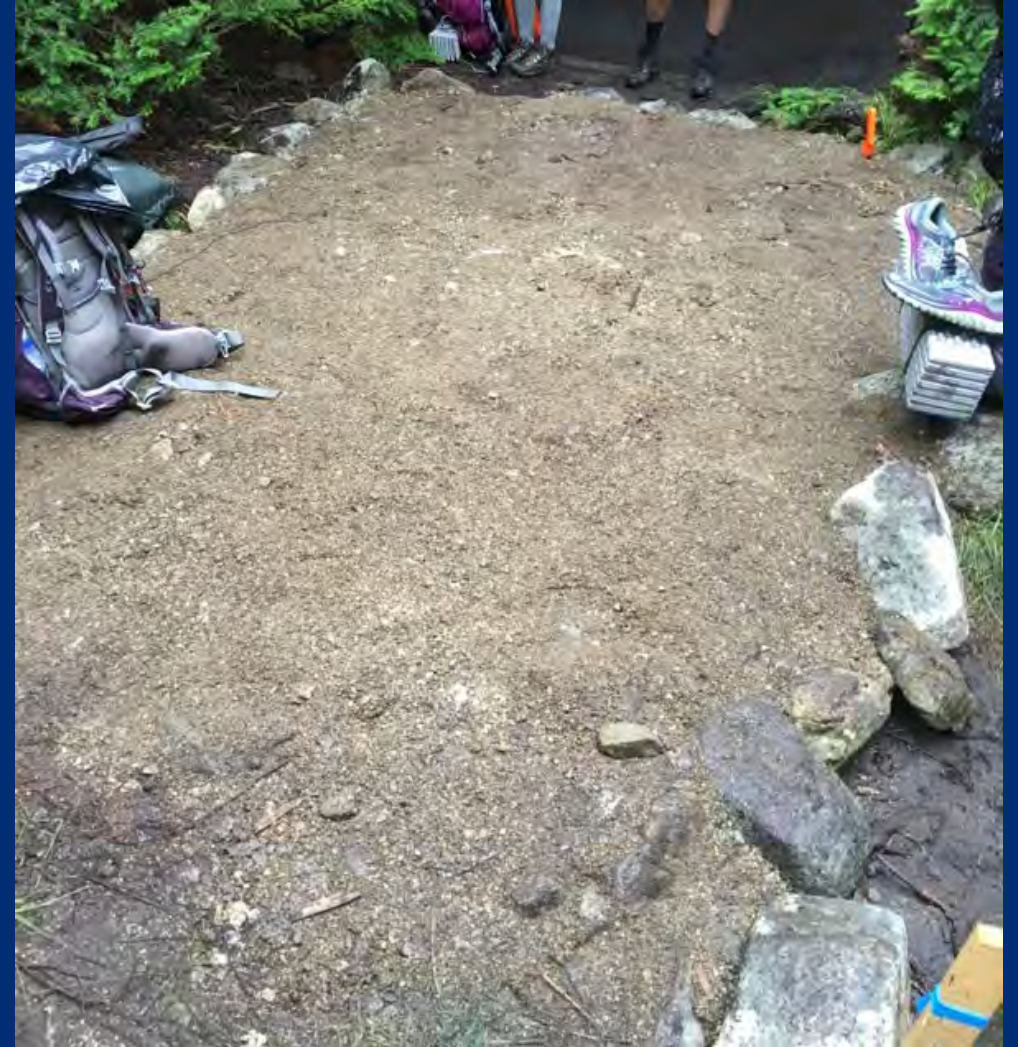
- State land classification category (or categories) and APSLMP definition(s) of the same
- APSLMP guidelines and criteria of special relevance
- DEC policies and/or regulations of special relevance
- Other

3. COLLECT INFORMATION ABOUT CURRENT CONDITIONS AND ASSESS NEED FOR MORE

- **Mapped location (s)**
- **Photograph(s)**
- **Written (general) description (s) of site conditions**
- **DEC "condition reports"**
- **What else may be helpful?**

4. CHOOSE APPROPRIATE FACILITIES AND SERVICES (AND/OR VISITOR ACTIVITIES) FOR THE AREA

- **Identify and provide rationale**

5. OUTLINE PLAN

- **Project team members** (*if appropriate, scale dependent*)
- **Project timeline**
- **Public outreach and/or public participation plan** (*if appropriate, scale dependent*)

6. DOCUMENT COMPARISON OF CURRENT CONDITIONS WITH DESIRED CONDITIONS, USING INDICATORS AND STANDARDS

- Identifying the current conditions
- Identifying desired conditions
- Comparing the differences between existing and desired conditions.

6. DOCUMENT COMPARISON OF CURRENT CONDITIONS WITH DESIRED CONDITIONS, USING INDICATORS AND STANDARDS

Step 1. Identify the current conditions

- **Describe *current* conditions**
- **Monitoring**
  - What is the status and trend of characteristics of visitor use?
  - What is the status and trend of visitor demographics?
  - What are peoples' expectations and preferences?

6. DOCUMENT COMPARISON OF CURRENT CONDITIONS WITH DESIRED CONDITIONS, USING INDICATORS AND STANDARDS

Step 2. Identify desired conditions

6. DOCUMENT COMPARISON OF CURRENT CONDITIONS WITH DESIRED CONDITIONS, USING INDICATORS AND STANDARDS

Step 3. Compare the differences between existing and desired conditions

7. DECIDE UPON A MONITORING STRATEGY

- **Monitoring is…**

  1. Indicators and thresholds
  2. Observations
  3. Analysis

Monitoring

1. **Indicators** (*measurable resource attributes*) and **thresholds** ("*line in the sand*")
2. Observations
3. Documentation

Indicators and thresholds

- Indicator: Percentage of vegetation cover
- Threshold: 75 –100 percent of vegetation cover in a backcountry campsite

Indicator: Percentage of vegetation cover

Monitoring

1. Indicators and thresholds
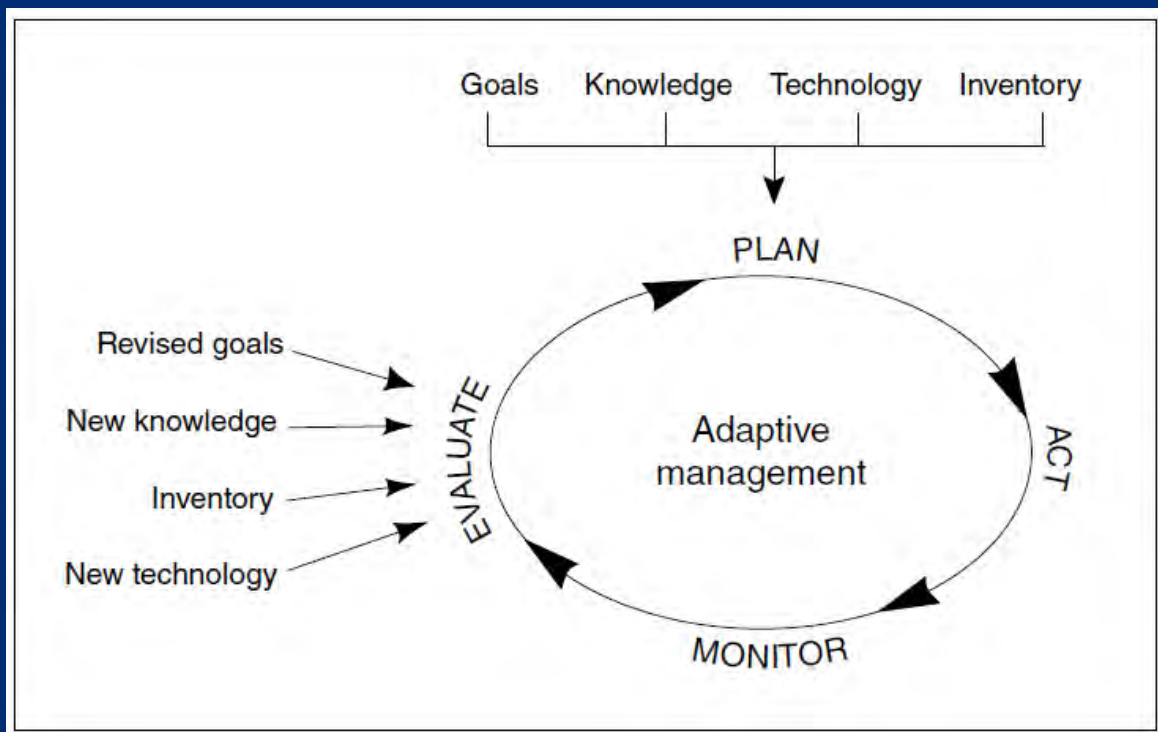2. **Observations** (*resource data collection over time*)
3. Documentation

Monitoring

1. Indicators and thresholds
2. Observations
3. **Analysis** *(what does the data tell us?)*

8. COMPLETE PLAN

- Site management
- Education
- Regulation enforcement

Adaptive Management

Goals   Knowledge   Technology   Inventory

PLAN

Revised goals
New knowledge
Inventory
New technology

EVALUATE

Adaptive management

ACT

MONITOR

Systematic approach for improving resource management by learning from management outcomes

Adaptive Management, The U.S. Department of the Interior Technical Guide

Forest Preserve Management

Monitoring Protocols

- Primitive Tent Site Conditions
- Hiking Trail Conditions
- Trail Use Estimation
- Visitor Experience
- Ecological Integrity

Primitive Tent Site Conditions:

<u>Potential indicators:</u>

- *Condition Class*

- *Vegetation Disturbance*

- *Soil Condition*

- *Tree Root Exposure*

- *Site Screening*

- *Human or Solid Waste*

- *Naturalness*

Hiking Trail Conditions:

Suitability indicators based on the following design parameters:

- *Maximum Average Slope*
- *Maximum Sustainable Grade*
- *Running Grade*
- *Full Bench Construction*
- *Tread Surface Durability*
- *Contour Curvilinear Alignment*
- *Integrated Water Control*
- *Environmental Integration*

Hiking Trail Conditions *(continued)*:

Condition indicators based on the following:
- *Use Level*
- *Type of Use*
- *Length*
- *Grade*
- *Trail in Waterway Drainage*
- *Drainage Dip and Water Bars*
- *Muddy Soil*
- *Tread Width*
- *Informal and Braided Trails*

Trail Use Estimation:

Potential Indicators:

- *Daily Use*
- *Weekend Use*
- *Weekday Use*
- *Seasonal Use*

Visitor Experience

Recommended Indicators:

- *Number and type of visitor-to-visitor encounters and interactions*
- *Amount and location of visitor crowding*
- *Amount of visitor-to-visitor conflict*
- *Visitor preferences for management rules and regulations*
- *Visitor preferences for resource conditions*

Ecological Integrity (i.e. "Scorecard")

- The Development of an Ecological Scorecard is underway pursuant to a contract with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

- This tool will eventually be integrated into the VUM/Wildlands Monitoring Guidance.

Next Steps

This field season…

- Hardware (tablet) and software development and deployment
- Pilot projects
- Improving workbook based on lessons learned (both broad and specific)
- Further developing monitoring protocols, including field testing process and equipment

Next winter to check in again…

Next Steps

Seeking input…

- DEC and APA Staff welcome comments from the public to improve the guidance.
- This is not a formal public comment period with time limits.
- Comments should be directed to:

    SLMP_Comments@apa.ny.gov