



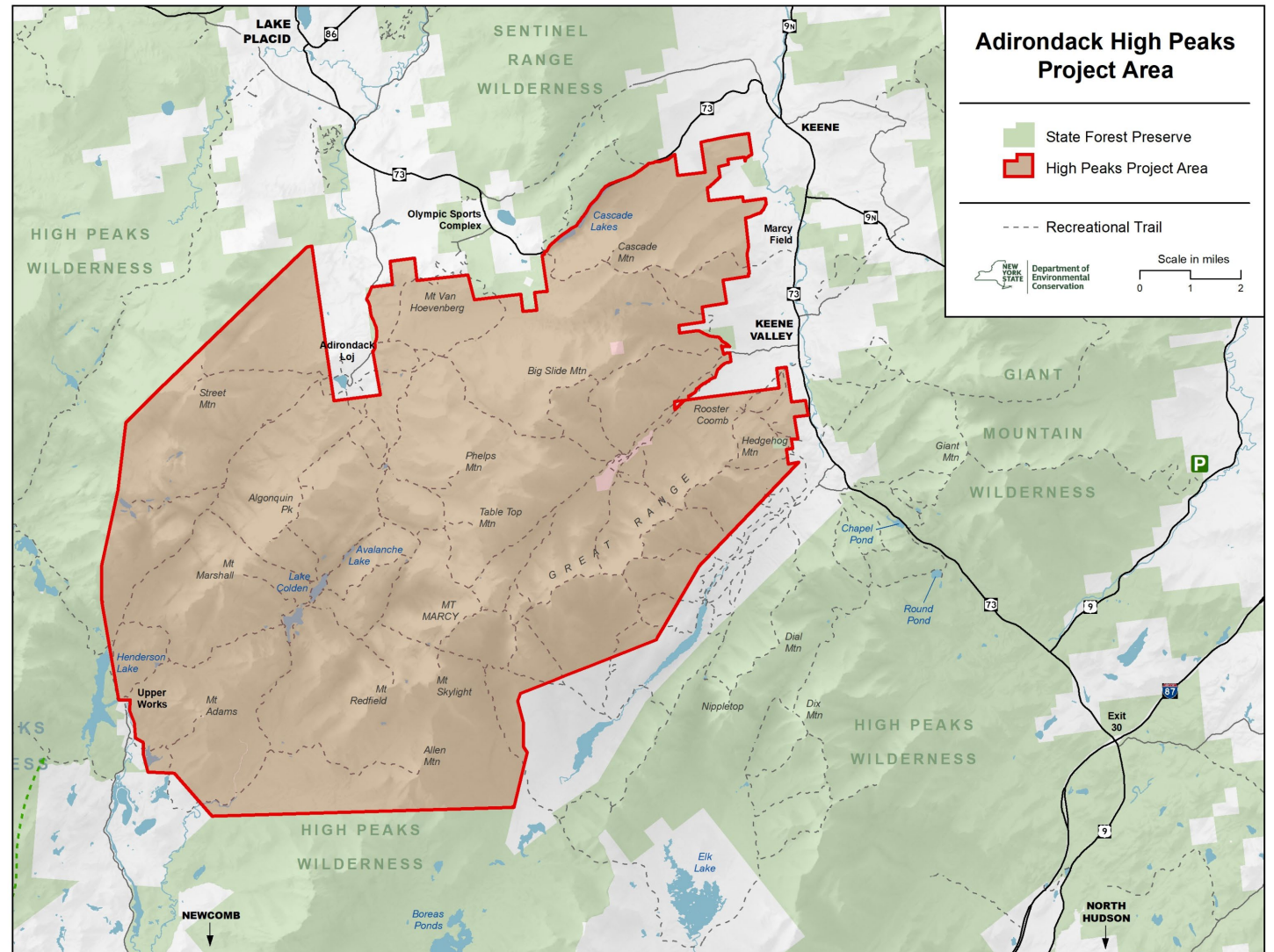
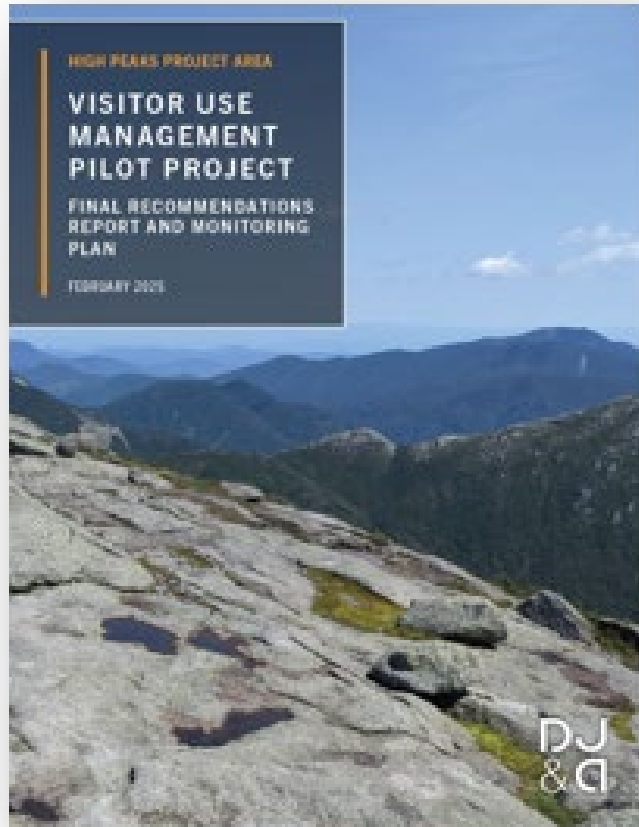
Department of
Environmental
Conservation

HIGH PEAKS VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT PILOT PROJECT

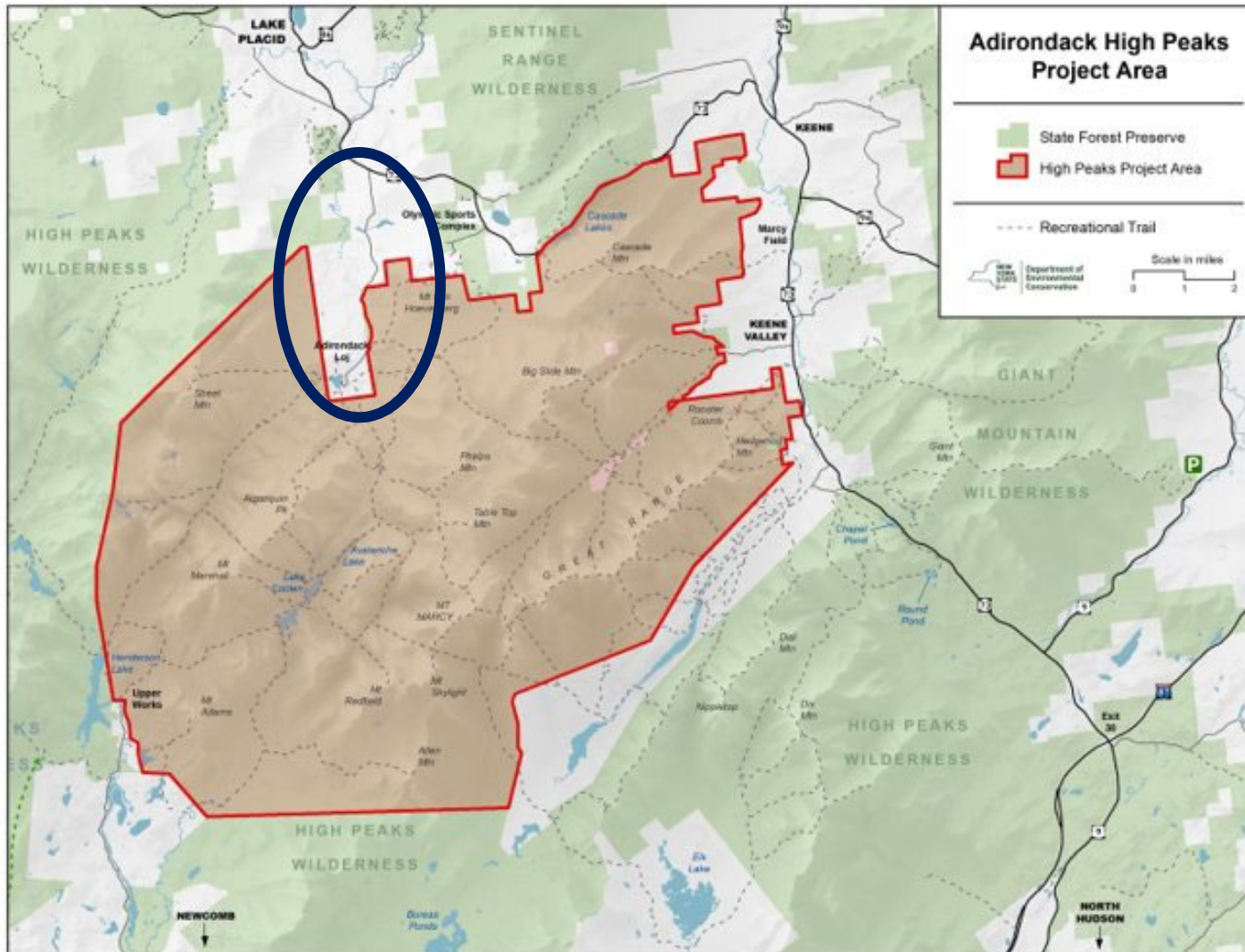
RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT SUMMARY

April 22, 2026

PROJECT LOCATION

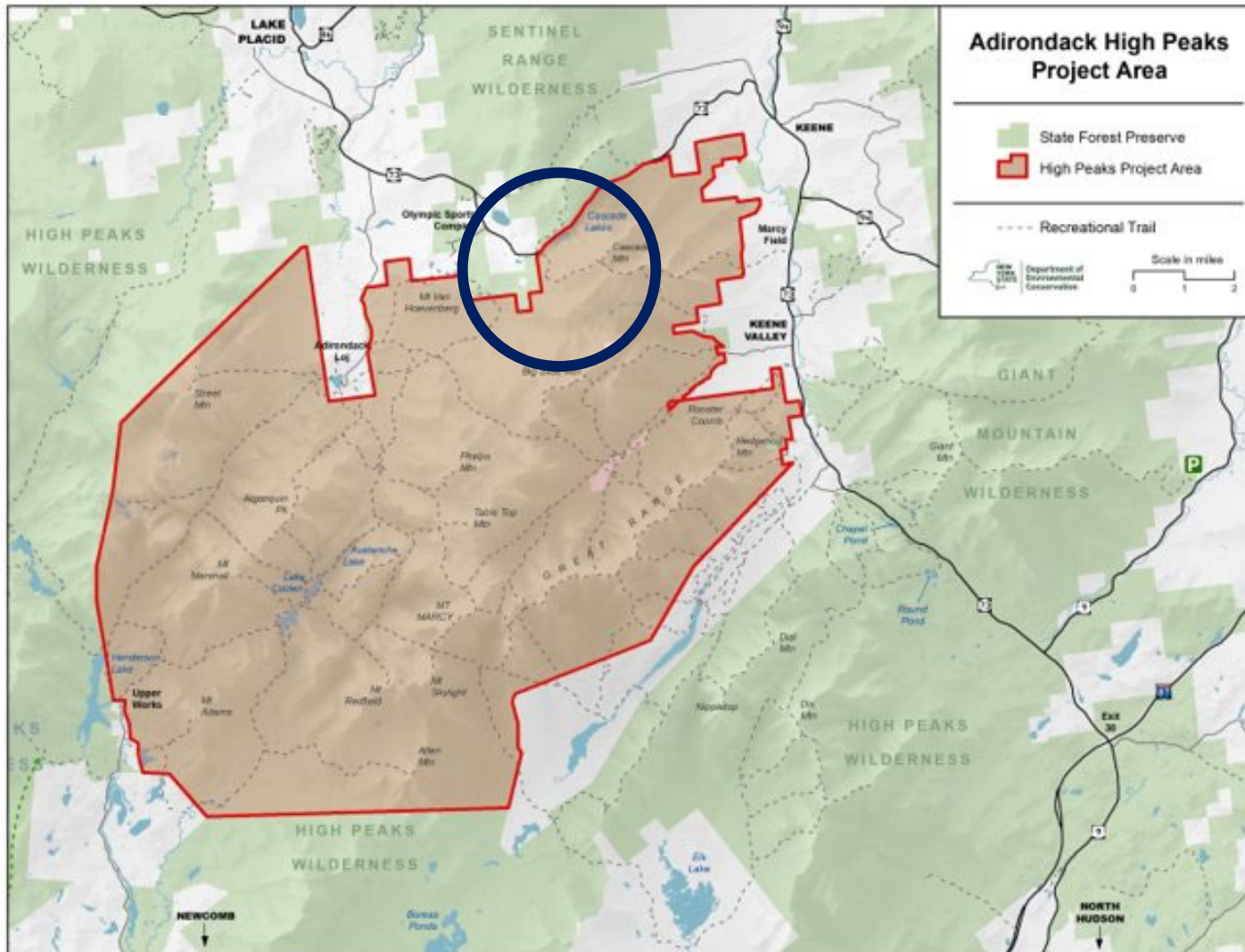


PROJECT LOCATION



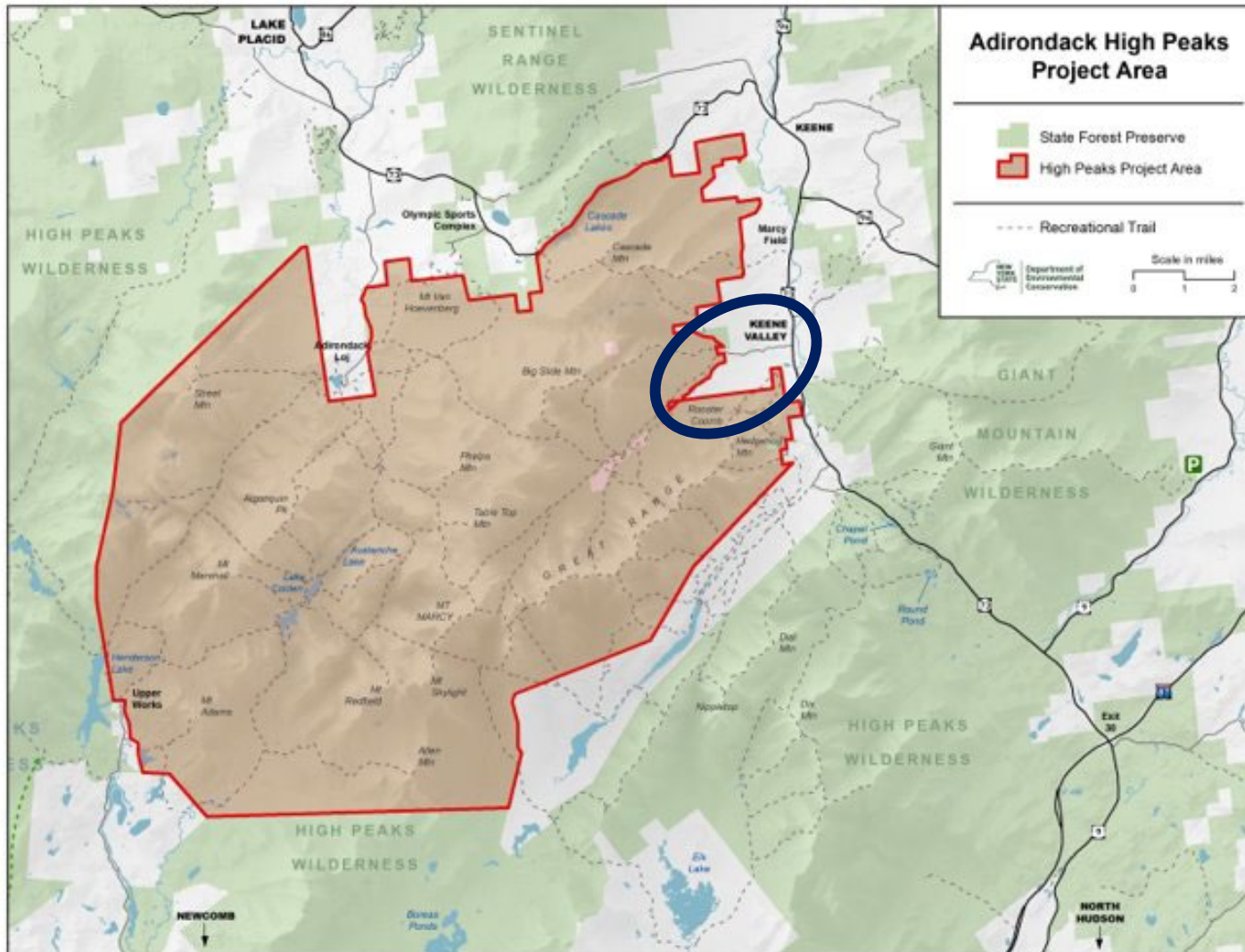
Adirondack Loj sub-region

PROJECT LOCATION



Cascade sub-region

PROJECT LOCATION



John's Brook sub-region

BACKGROUND

*“The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, **shall be forever kept as wild forest lands**. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed”*

- Article XIV, NYS Constitution (Forever wild clause)

THE
CONSTITUTION
OF THE
STATE
OF
NEW YORK

ARTICLE XIV
CONSERVATION



[Forest preserve to be forever kept wild; authorized exceptions]

Section 1. The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed.

BACKGROUND

- *...where man's influence is not apparent.*
 - *(have) outstanding opportunities for solitude or a **primitive and unconfined type of recreation**...*
 - *...measures will be taken to **limit such use** to the capability of the resource.*
- Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, Wilderness Guidelines



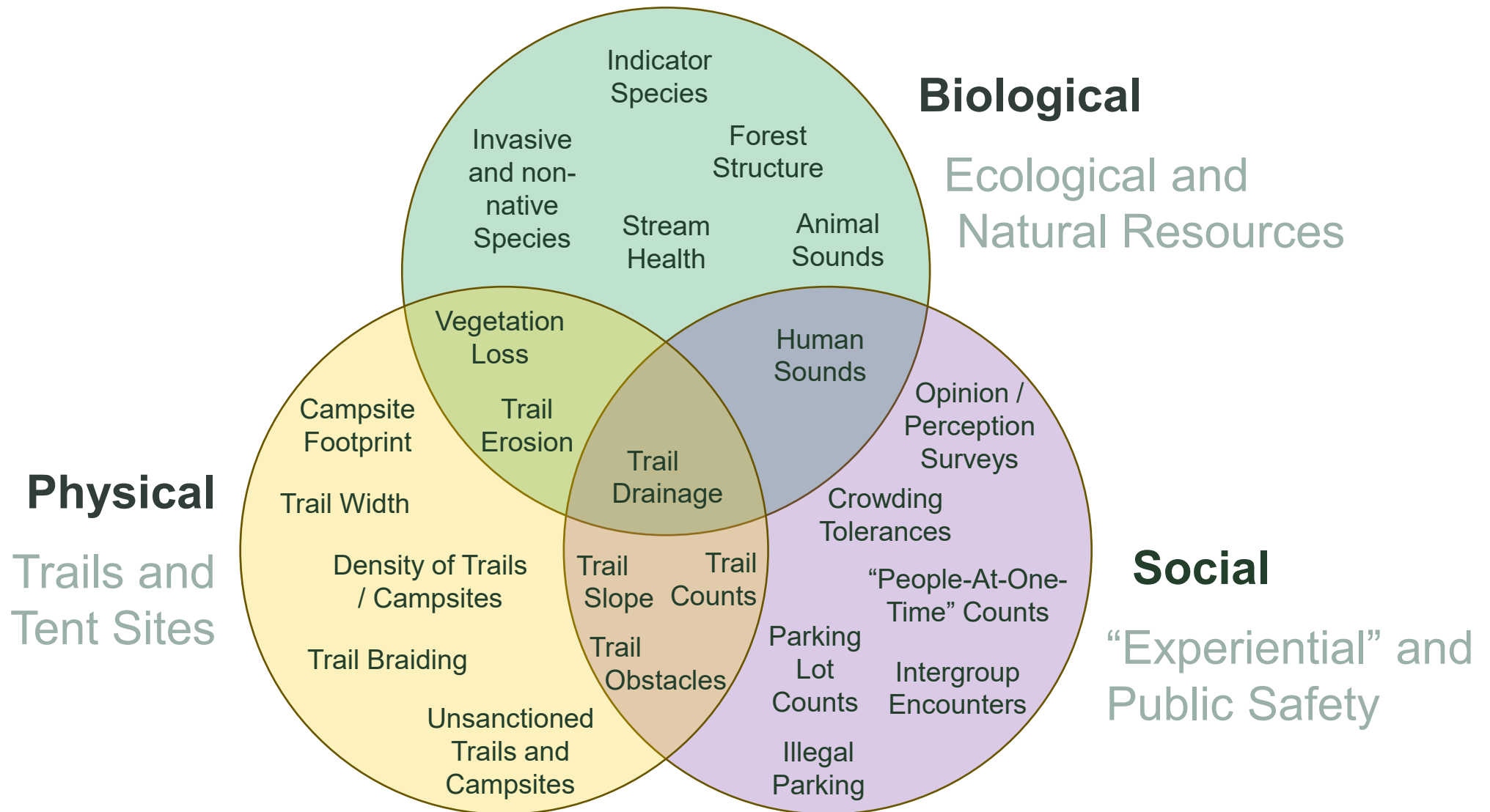
BACKGROUND

“...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.”

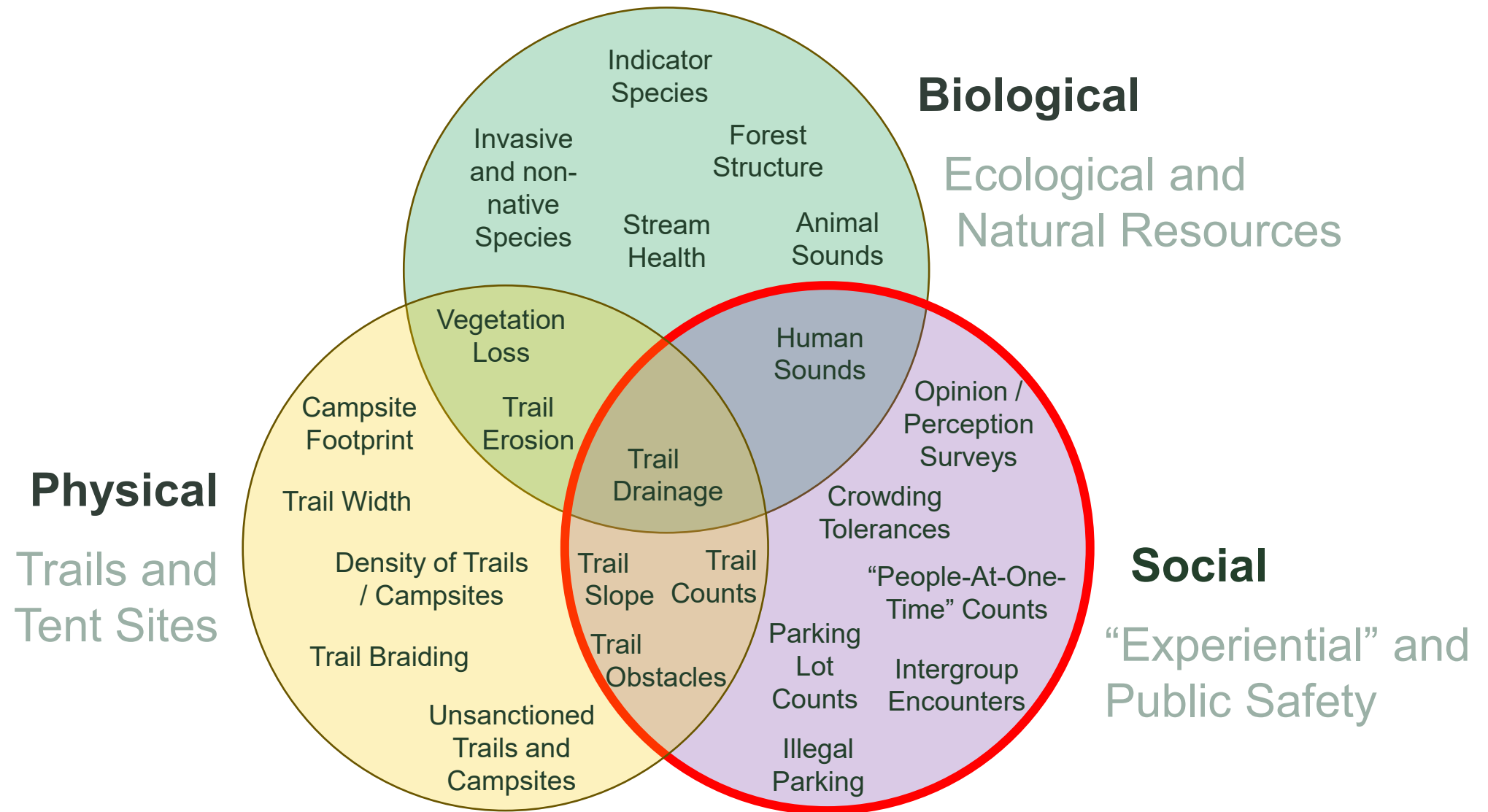
- Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan



BACKGROUND



BACKGROUND



BACKGROUND

Traffic and parking congestion at key points of access



BACKGROUND

Visitor safety concerns



BACKGROUND

Crowding related impacts



BACKGROUND

Visitor crowding on summits and trails



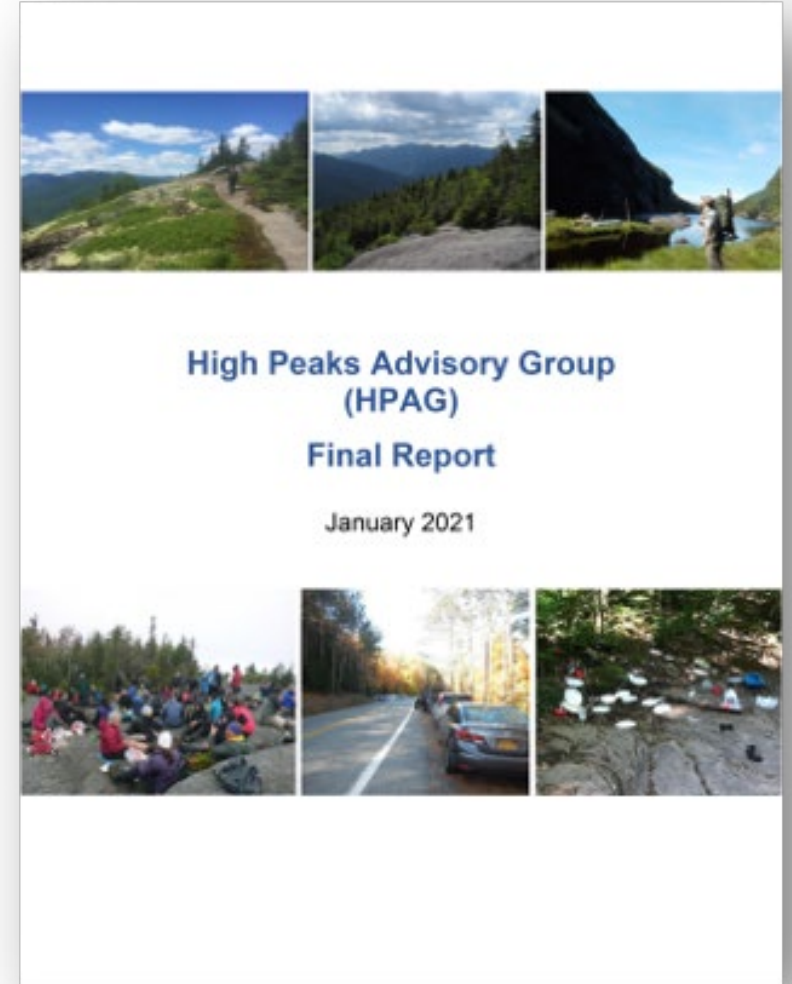
BACKGROUND

*“Using a **Visitor Use Management Framework**, establish baseline measures for indicating community capacity limits.”*

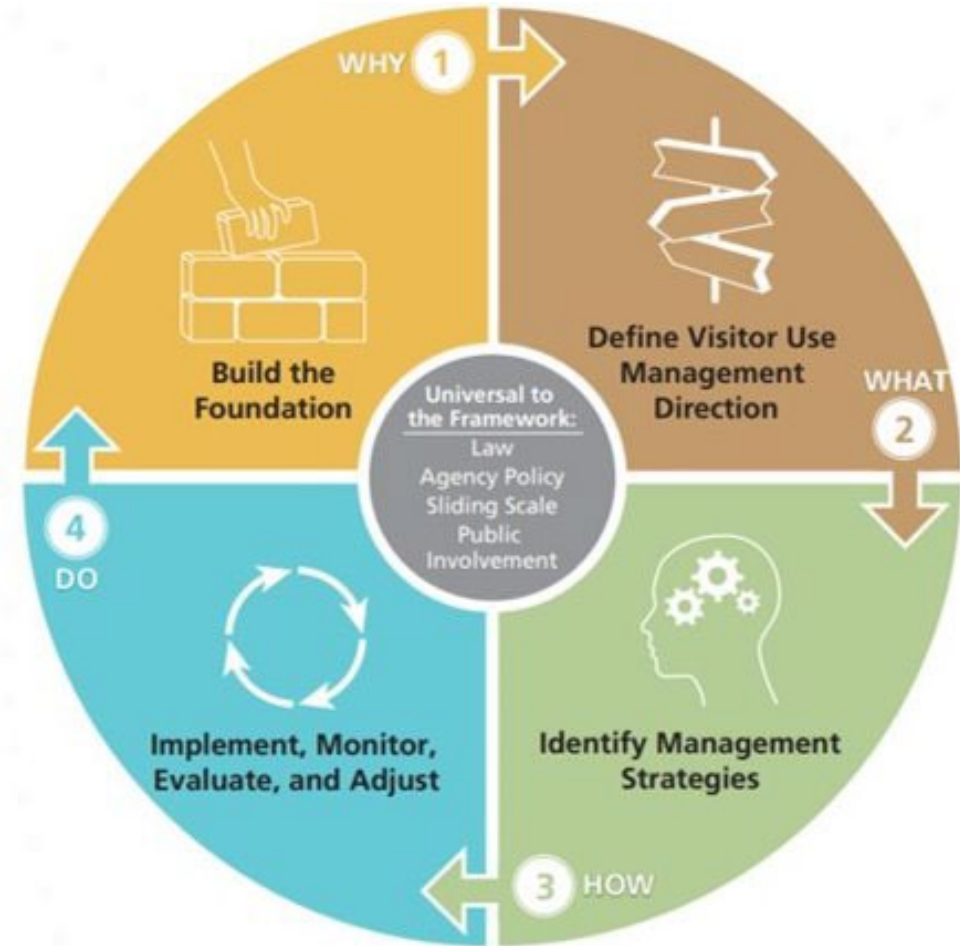
*“Monitoring of data for ongoing management using the **Visitor Use Management Framework** to guide an iterative process.”*

*“Adoption of the National Park Service’s **Visitor Use Management Framework (VUMF)** as the adaptive management tool.”*

- HPAG Final Report, 2021



WHAT IS VUM?



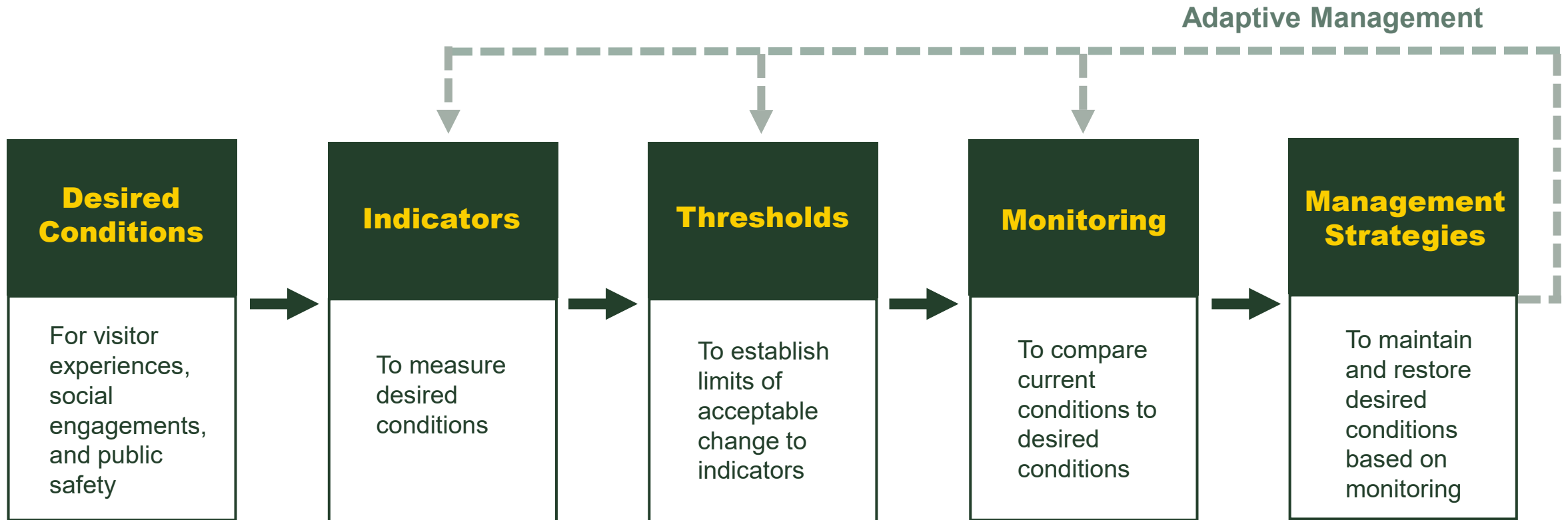
WHAT IS VUM?

*“Visitor use management is the **proactive and adaptive process** for managing characteristics of visitor use and the natural and managerial setting using a variety of strategies and tools to **achieve and maintain desired resource conditions and visitor experiences.**”*

- Interagency Visitor Use Management Council

WHAT IS VUM?

VUM Core Components



FUNDING AND CONTRACT

2022

- \$600,000 allocated in EPF carveout for “comprehensive planning”
- RFP issued to...

*“To conduct a visitor use management planning process, with a focus on **experiential, social, and public safety** elements of visitor use management and visitor capacities, to promote sustainable visitor use.”*

FUNDING AND CONTRACT

2022

- \$600,000 allocated in EPF carveout for “comprehensive planning”
- RFP issued

2023

- Contract awarded to Otak
- Sub-contract with DJ&A



ENGAGEMENT

- **12+** staff from **3** DEC divisions
- **10+** stakeholders
- **3** State agencies
- **9** workshops
- **2** public meetings
- **1** dedicated project website
- Continuous public comment opportunities

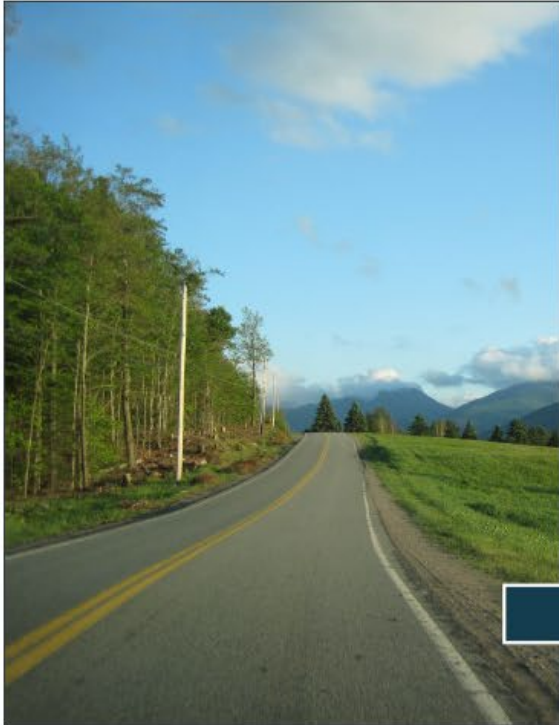


DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

- **Describe current conditions**
 - Recreation use levels and patterns
 - Recreation-related impacts
- **Evaluate recreation use conditions**
 - Visitor-based thresholds
 - Perceptions, preferences, tolerances
 - Attitudes and opinions
- **Identify relationships between recreation use and impacts**



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS



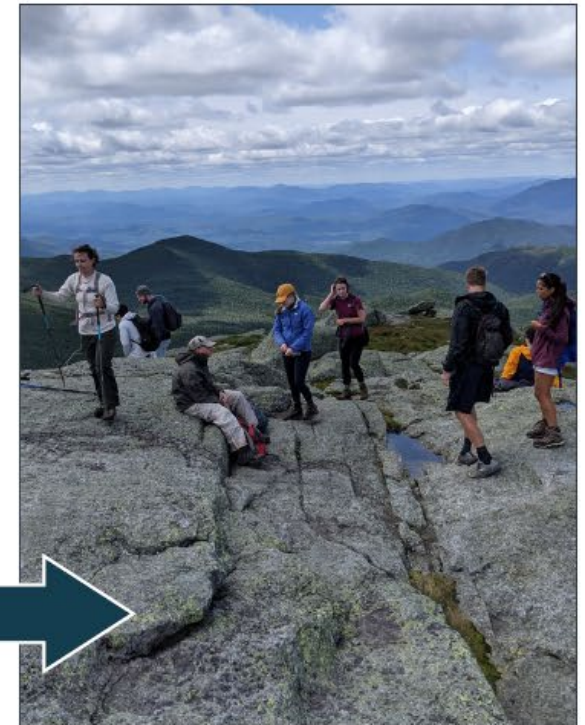
Roadway traffic volumes



Vehicles-at-one-time (VAOT)



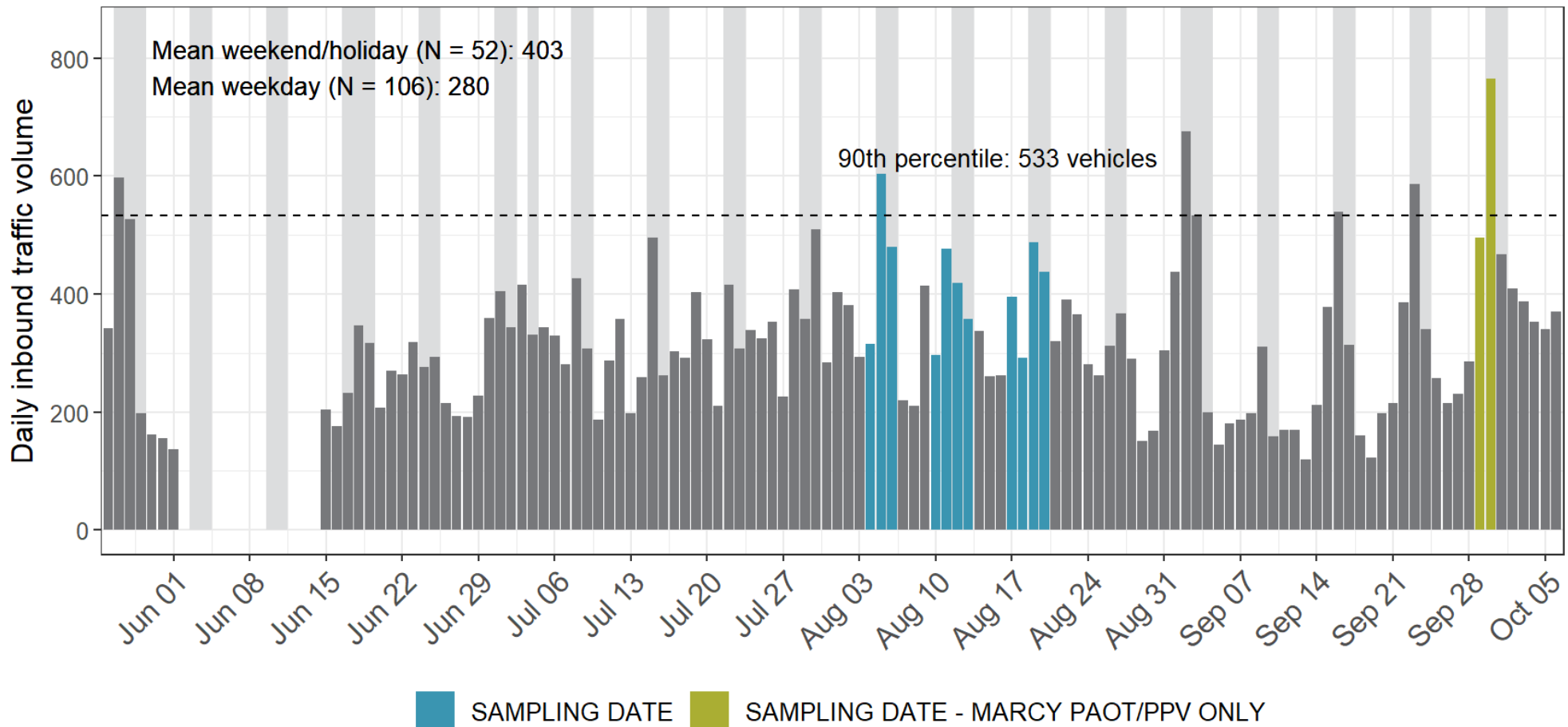
Trail use volumes and patterns



People-at-one-time (PAOT)

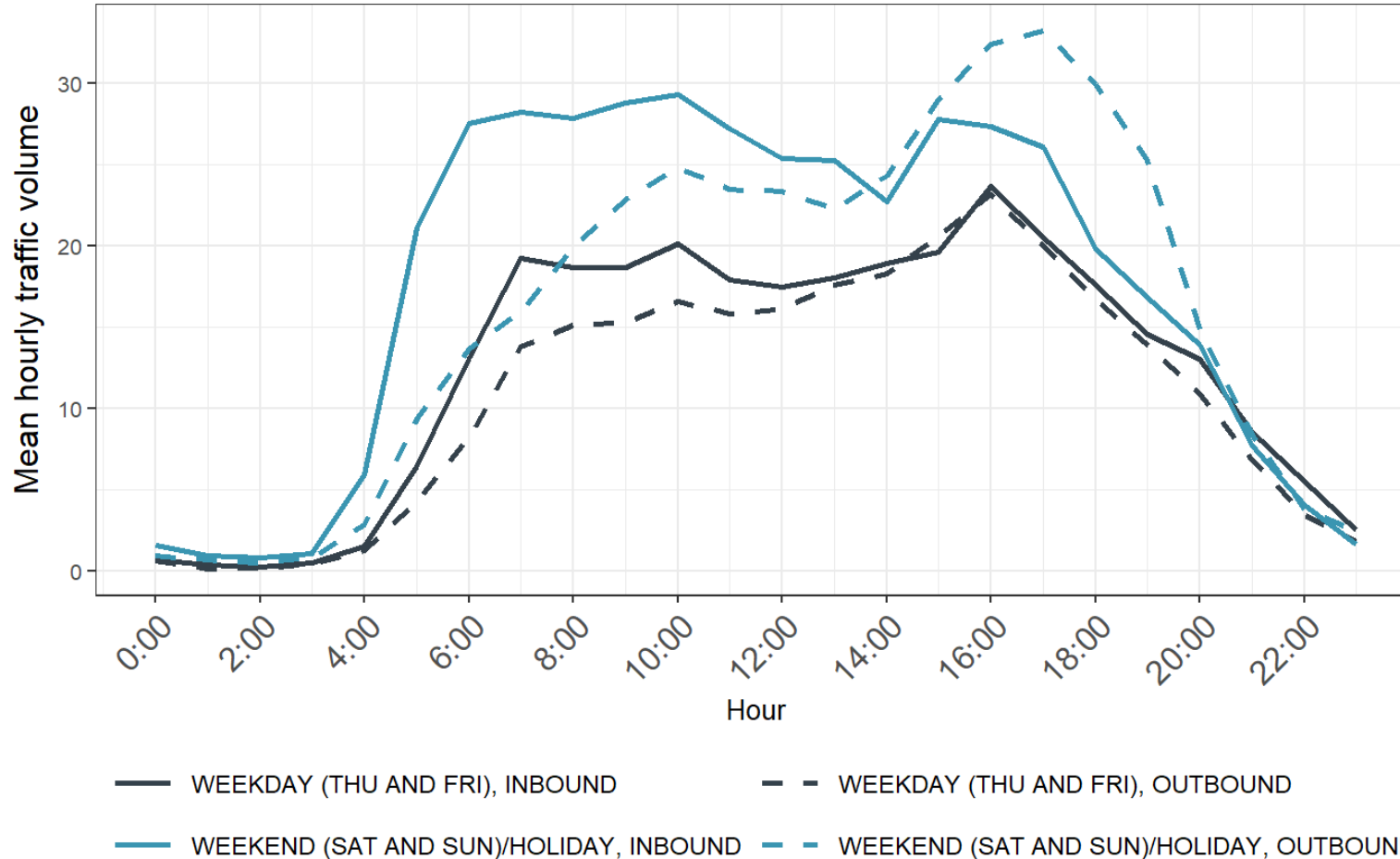
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Daily inbound vehicle traffic, Adirondack Loj Road



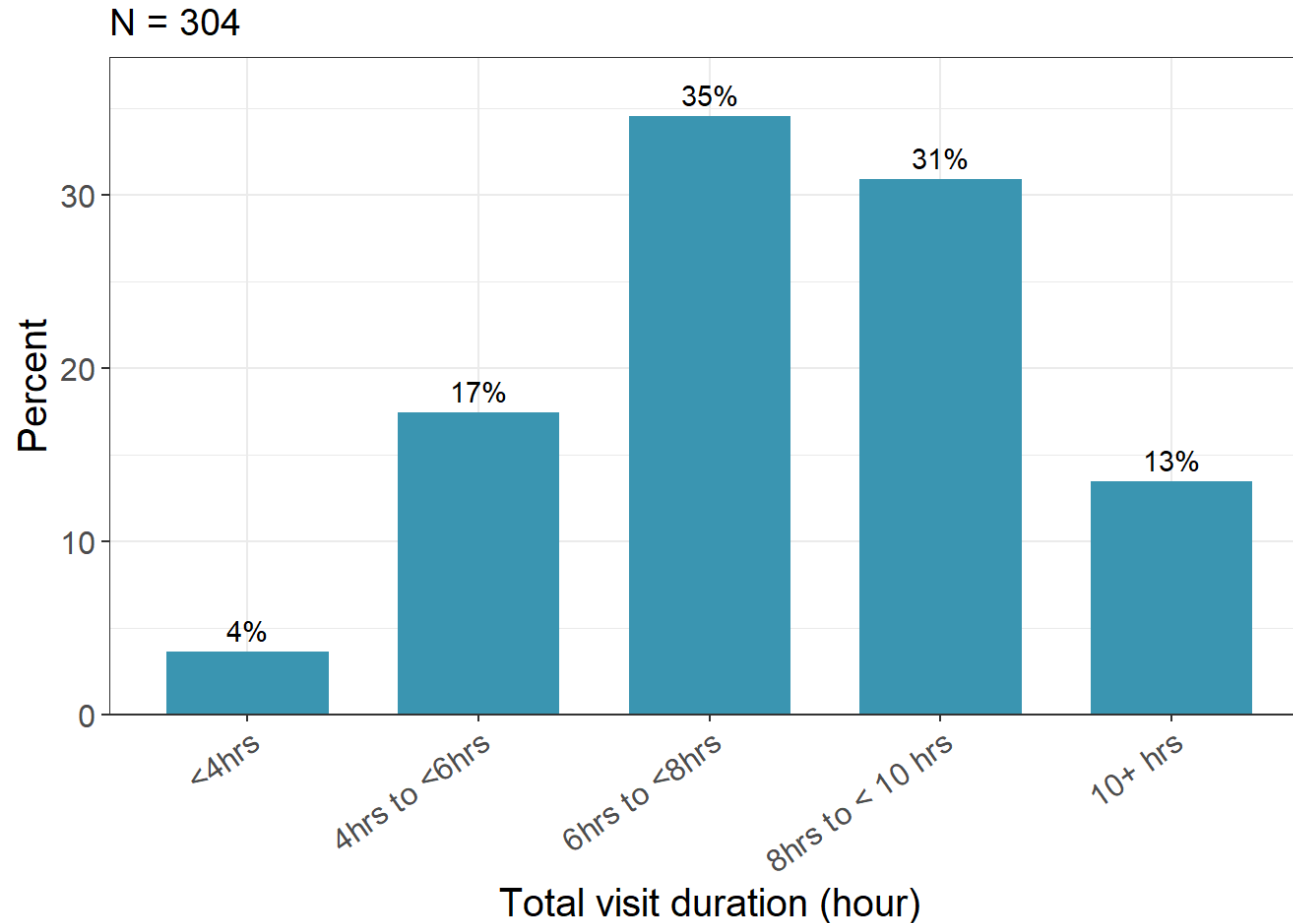
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Mean hourly inbound vehicle traffic, Adirondack Loj Road



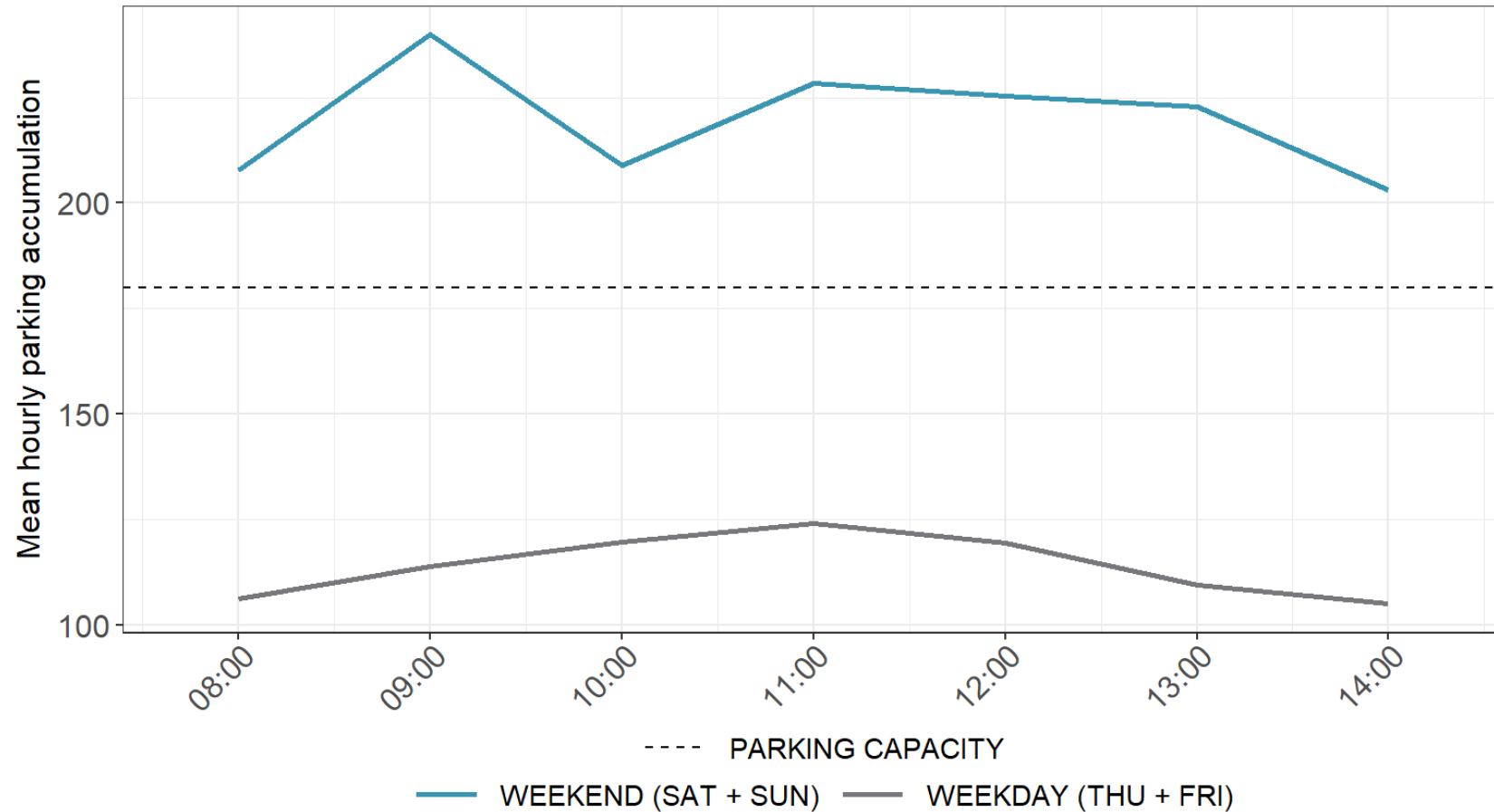
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Duration of Stay for Visitors Contacted at Adirondack Trailhead



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Mean hourly parking accumulation, Loj lot and roadside



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Visitors' perceptions of parking conditions at the Loj

Of those visitors sampled at the Loj trailhead...

- 19% reported feeling crowded in the parking lot
- 19% reported having difficulty finding a convenient place to park
- 14% reported having to walk on or along a road with moving traffic to get from their car to the trailhead



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

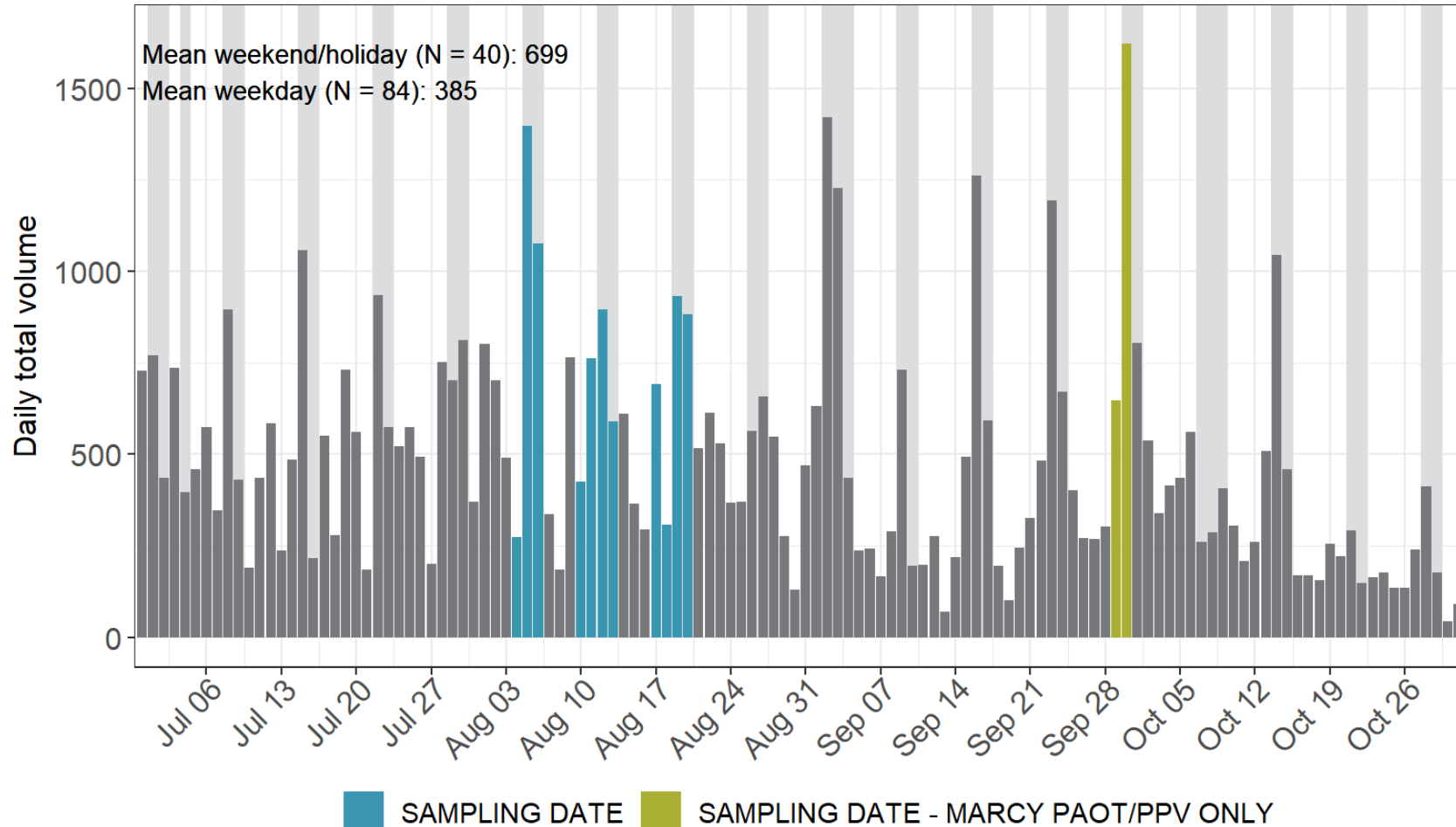
Visitors' attitudes about parking management strategies

- The majority of visitors sampled at the Loj support the following strategies...
 - Expanding parking near trailheads
 - Requiring visitors to park offsite and ride a free shuttle
- **Nearly half of visitors (46%) support advanced parking reservation system**
- **The least popular option is requiring people to solve the problem on their own**

For each of the following potential actions, would you support or oppose it to help address parking issues?	Overall (N=217)		Had Difficulty Finding Parking (N=32)	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Expand or create new parking lots near trailheads to increase parking capacity in the area.	67%	17%	72%	19%
Temporarily stop vehicles from entering parking lots when they are full and hold them in line at the entry until other vehicles leave.	42%	28%	38%	31%
Require people to park at an offsite parking lot and ride a free shuttle bus to trailheads when parking lots are full.	70%	13%	78%	9%
Require people to make an advanced parking reservation for a day and time when parking will be available.	46%	32%	47%	38%
Require people to solve the problem on their own when trailhead parking lots are full.	35%	39%	32%	36%

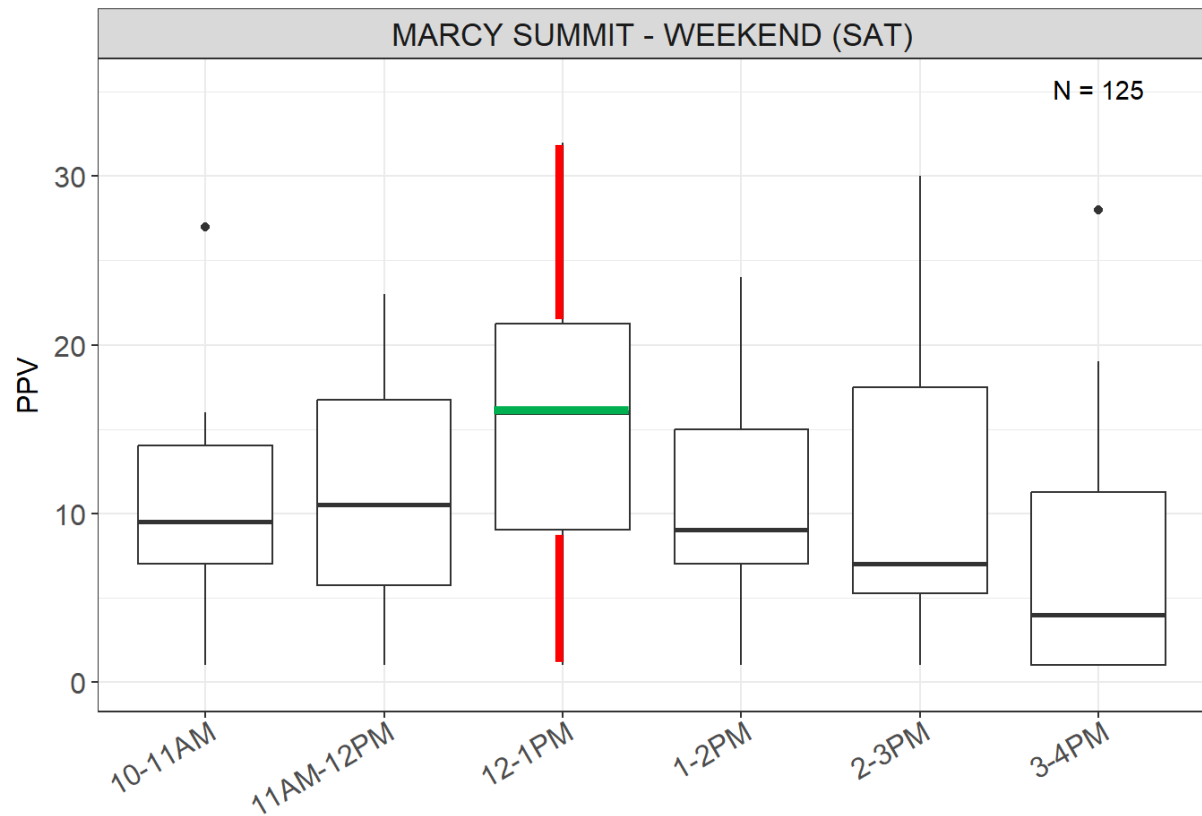
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Total daily visitor use, Adirondack Loj trailhead



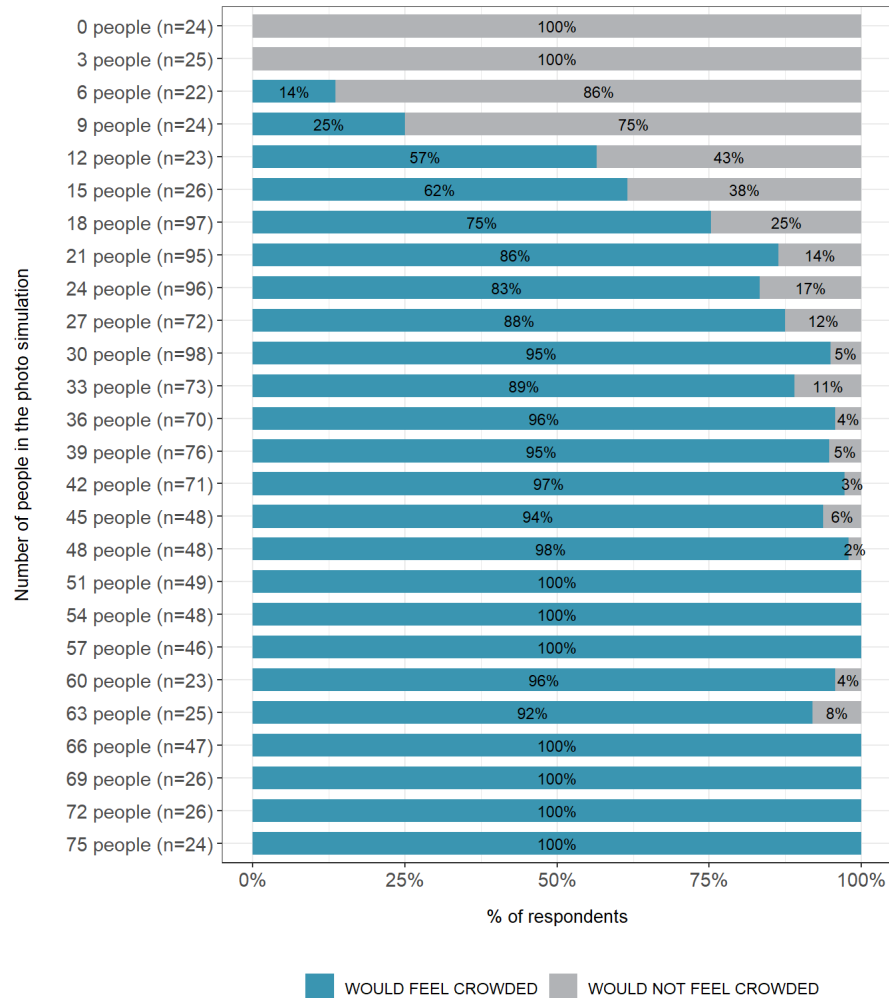
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

People per viewscape (PPV) on Marcy Summit



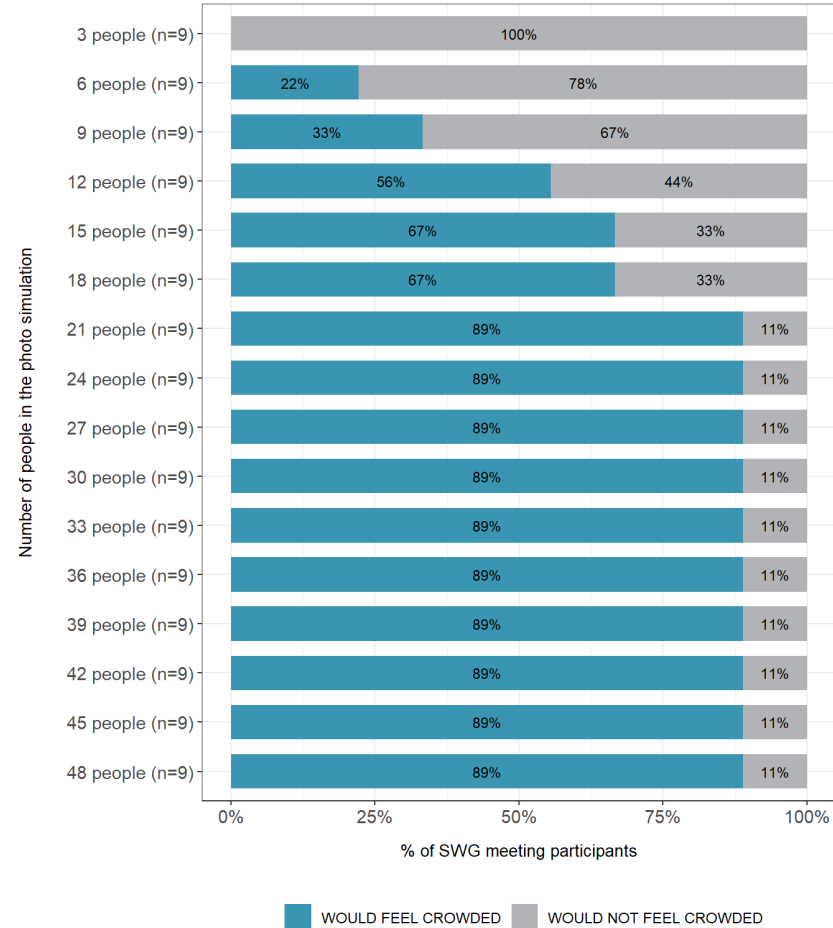
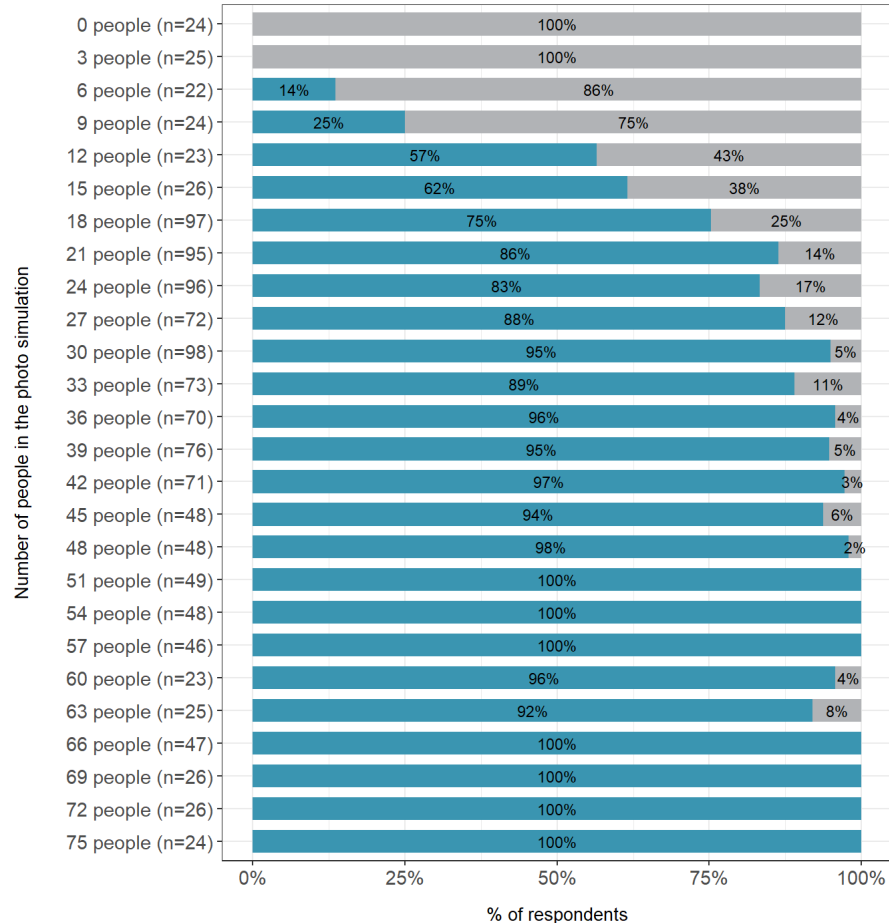
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Visitors' crowding tolerances for (PPV) on Marcy Summit



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Visitors' crowding tolerances for (PPV) on Marcy Summit



WOULD FEEL CROWDED WOULD NOT FEEL CROWDED

WOULD FEEL CROWDED WOULD NOT FEEL CROWDED

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Visitors' crowding tolerances for (PPV) on Marcy Summit

Hypothetical Threshold	% Exceeded on Weekdays (N=109)	% Exceeded on Weekends (N=125)	
9	6%	50%	→ 25% feel crowded...
12	3%	38%	→ 57% feel crowded...
18	0%	21%	→ 75% feel crowded...

Management Guidance for Visitor-use Management and Wildlands Monitoring recommends a standard of 10% or less visitors reporting feeling crowded or very crowded per day in Wilderness.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Visitors' attitudes and perceptions about crowding

The majority of visitors sampled...

- Think it is important to have at least “episodes of solitude” while hiking, but don't mind seeing other people during their hike
- Find “passing encounters” to make their hike less enjoyable
- Think it is important to find a private spot to enjoy when they reach a mountain summit, but enjoy the social atmosphere when they encounter others on the summit
- Feel safer when there are other people present while doing hikes like those in the High Peaks

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Visitors' attitudes about managing the number of people on Marcy summit

The majority of visitors sampled believe the number of people per day who hike to the Mt. Marcy summit should be managed if needed to...

- Protect wilderness values
- Reduce environmental impacts

About half (47%) believe the number of people per day should be managed if needed to protect visitors' safety from crowding-related incidents

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

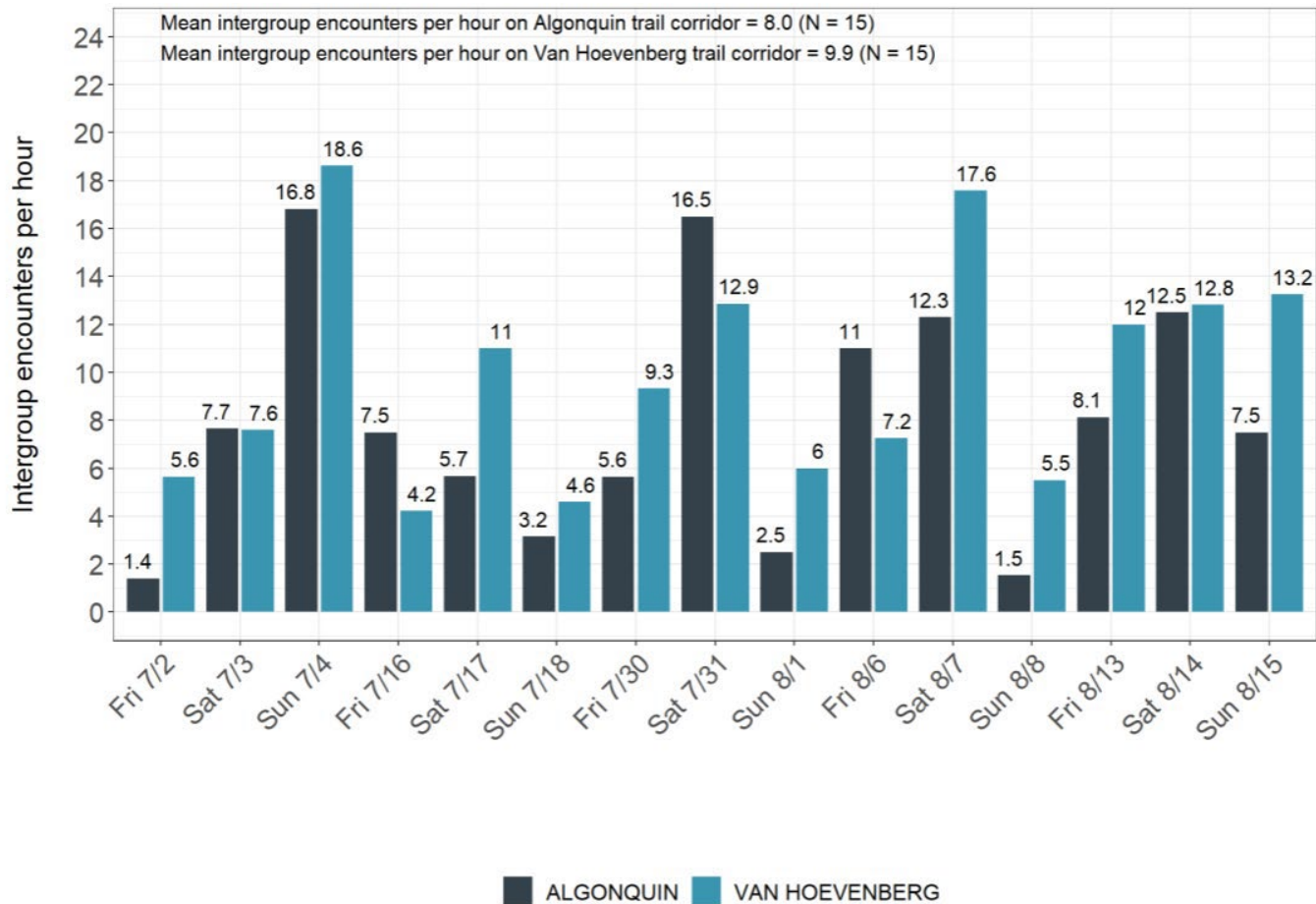
Visitors' attitudes about crowding management strategies

Nearly 40% support advanced reservations for weekends and holidays and for popular mountain summits to manage crowding issues

Nearly half (44%) of all visitors support requiring people to expect and adapt to crowded conditions

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

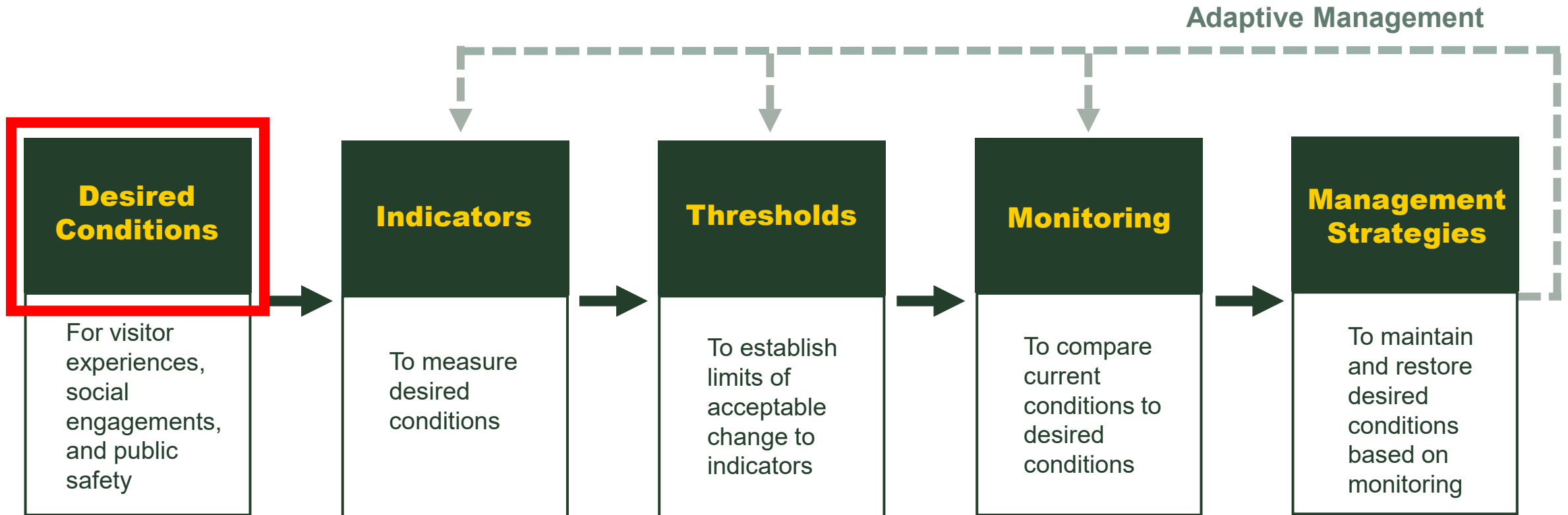
Intergroup encounter rates while hiking



*Management Guidance for Visitor-use Management and Wildlands Monitoring recommends a standard of 90% or more visitors reporting less than 10 other groups encountered **per day** while hiking on trails in a Wilderness setting.*

WHAT IS VUM?

VUM Core Components



DESIRED CONDITIONS

Focus: They describe what resource conditions and visitor experiences *should* look like, rather than just identifying problems or the actions that might be taken.

Purpose: They provide long-term direction, preventing haphazard management and ensuring continuity.

Development: They are developed through staff and stakeholder engagement, reflecting shared values for a specific area.

DESIRED CONDITIONS

- Look to the future
- Allow for comparison with original and current conditions
- Create a forum for dialogue
- Clarify relationships between purpose, resources, and experiences
- Guide management action
- Help focus monitoring
- Provide accountability, defensibility, and transparency

CURRENT CONDITIONS vs. DESIRED CONDITIONS

Study results suggest...

- **Visitors' attitudes and preferences are somewhat inconsistent in relation to Wilderness values**
 - A majority support managing the number of people per day to protect Wilderness values, yet nearly half support requiring visitors to expect and adapt to crowded conditions
 - For a majority, episodes of solitude and privacy are important, but the social atmosphere of encountering others is enjoyable



CURRENT CONDITIONS vs. DESIRED CONDITIONS

Study results suggest...

- **Traditional Wilderness values are degraded on weekend days**
 - One-fifth or more visitors report feeling crowded during their visit
 - The number of people on the Mt. Marcy summit frequently exceeds measured crowding tolerances from mid-morning to late afternoon.



CURRENT CONDITIONS vs. DESIRED CONDITIONS

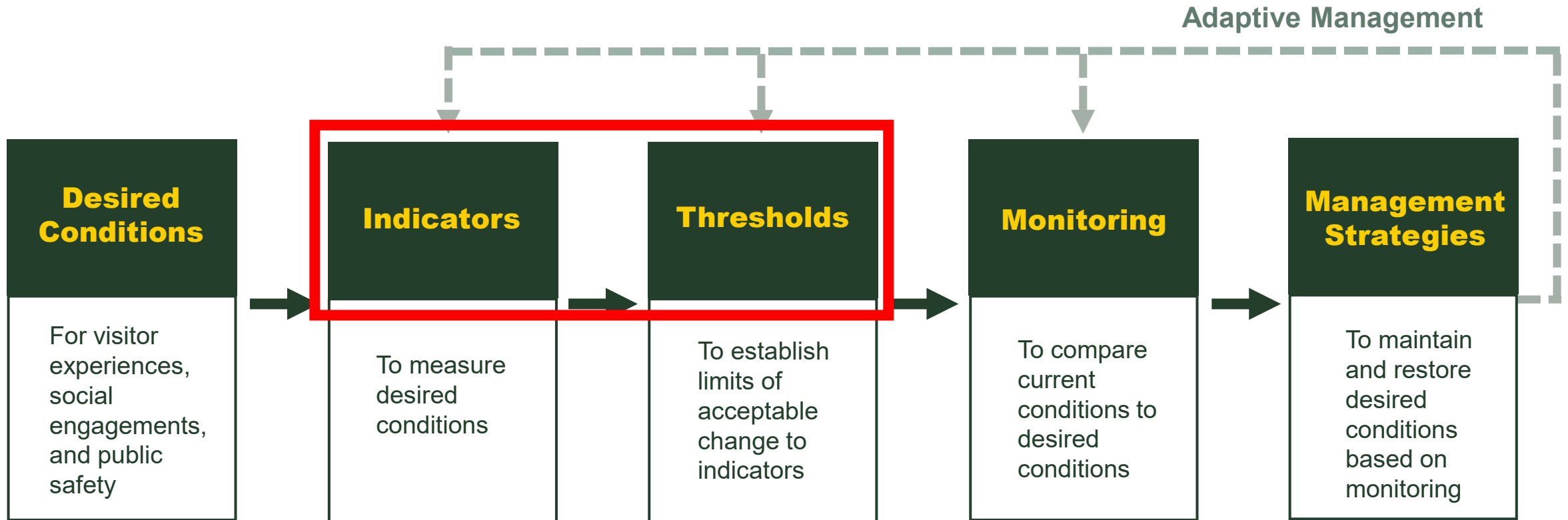
Study results suggest...

- Conditions on weekdays better reflect traditional Wilderness Values and related desired conditions
- Decisions about how to manage visitation pressure on weekend days could cause unintended consequences to conditions on weekdays.



WHAT IS VUM?

VUM Core Components



INDICATORS and THRESHOLDS

Indicator #1:

People-per-viewscape (PPV) on select summits



Threshold:

There will be fewer than 10 PPV in the summit viewscape 90% of the sampled time.

INDICATORS and THRESHOLDS

Indicator #2:

Vehicles-at-one-time (VAOT) in select parking lots



Threshold:

Location	Threshold
Parking lots and adjacent overflow areas	No greater than the design capacity of the parking lot in the location 99% of sampled days.
Roadsides*	No vehicles will be parked on roadsides 99% of sampled times.

* Loj Road, South Meadows, Route 73, Johns Brook Lane

INDICATORS and THRESHOLDS

Indicator #3:

Intergroup encounters per hour on select trails



Threshold:

Location	Threshold
Destination-oriented trails	Visitors will have fewer than 6 to 9 intergroup encounters per hour while hiking on these trails on 90% of sampled hikes.
Other trails	Visitors will have fewer than 2 intergroup encounters per hour while hiking on these trails on 90% of sampled hikes.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Indicator #1:

People-per-viewscape (PPV) on select summits

- PPV on Marcy and Cascade exceed 10 PPV nearly half of the sample times, sometimes exceeding 30.
- Over half of surveyed hikers reported feeling crowded when more than 12 people were present in a viewscape.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Indicator #2:

Vehicles-at-one-time (VAOT) in parking areas

- Parking lots frequently fill up early in the mornings...

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Indicator #2:

Vehicles-at-one-time (VAOT) along roadways

- Vehicles consistently observed along Route 73 near Cascade trailhead.
- Vehicles consistently observed along Loj Road and Meadows Lane.
- No vehicles observed along roadway leading up to Garden parking area.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

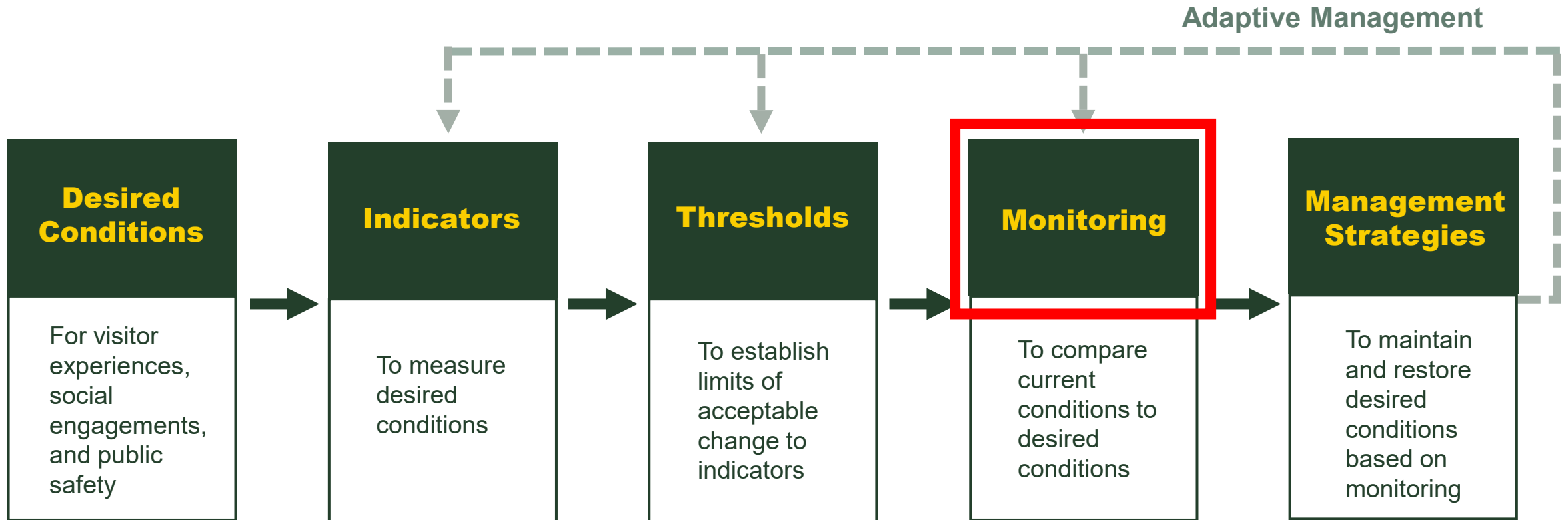
Indicator #3:

Intergroup encounters on select trails

- Number of intergroup encounters exceeded threshold 33-53% of the time

WHAT IS VUM?

VUM Core Components

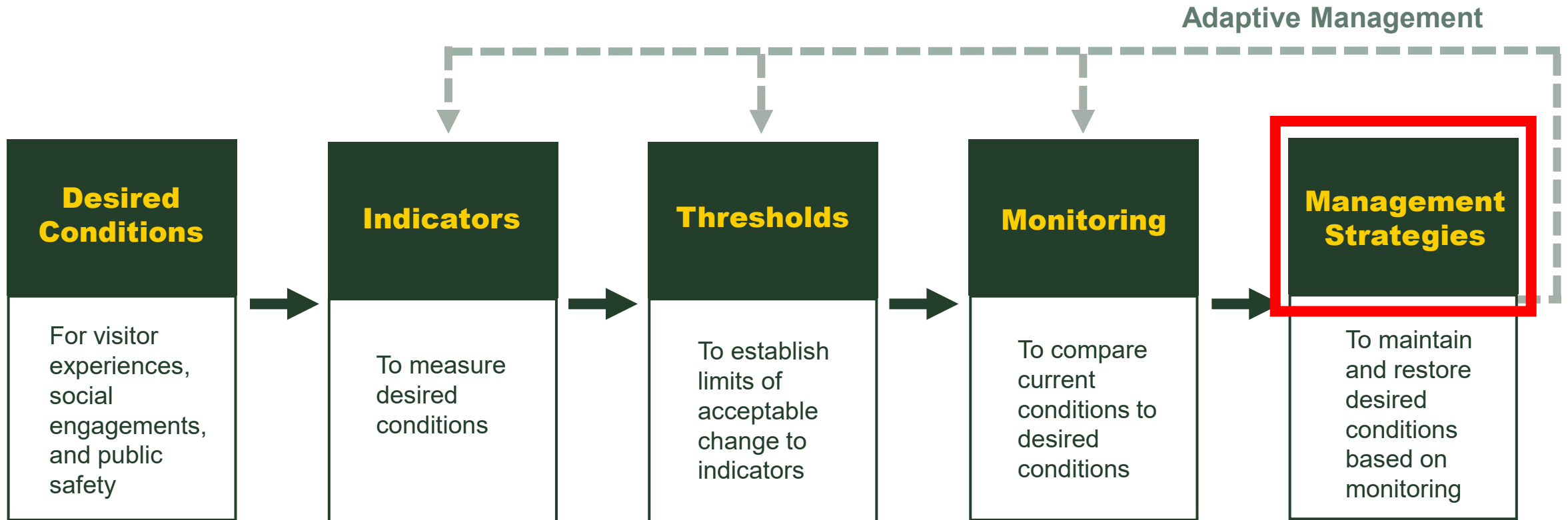


MONITORING PLAN

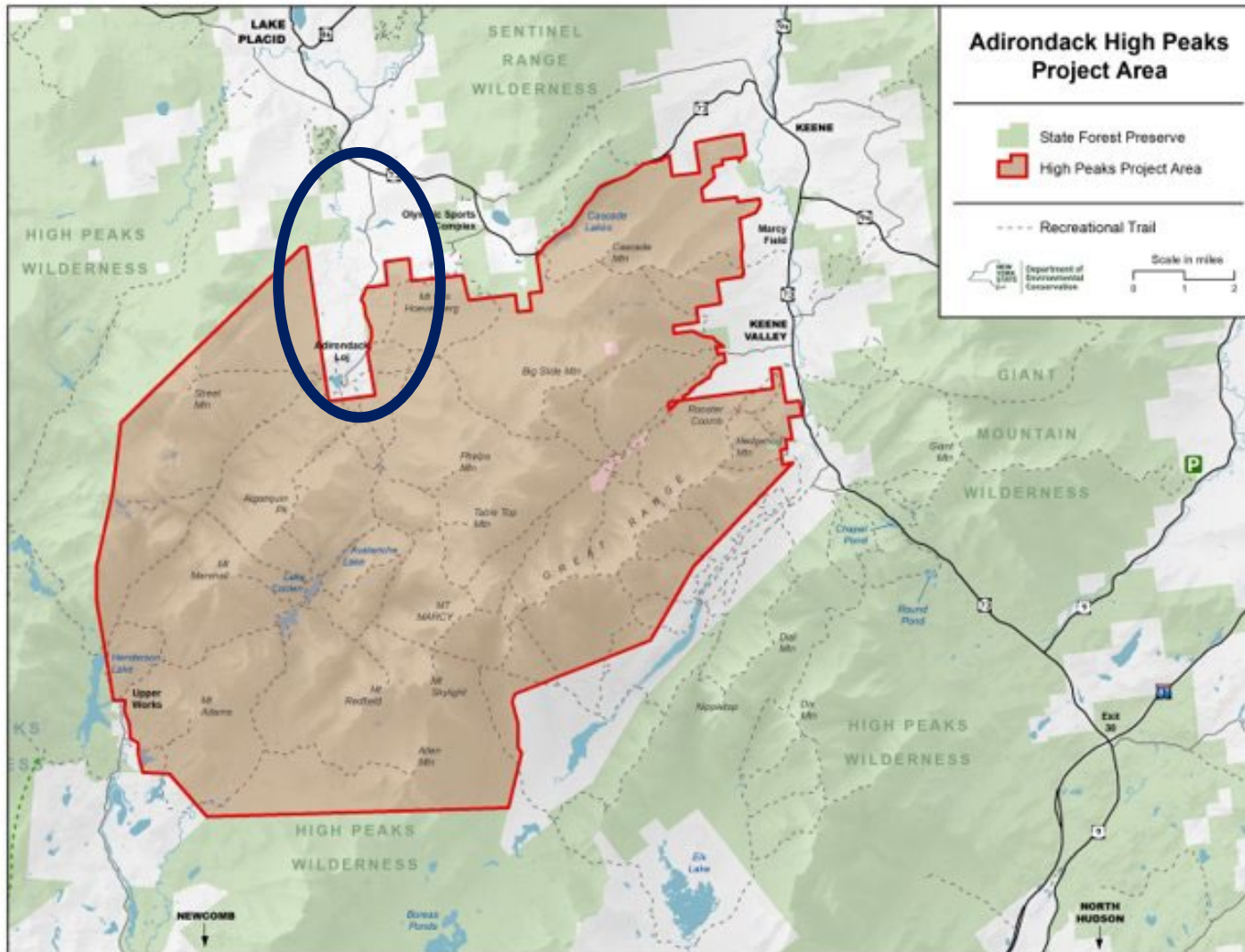
- Recommendations for monitoring key indicators
- Includes schedule, protocols and staffing needs

WHAT IS VUM?

VUM Core Components



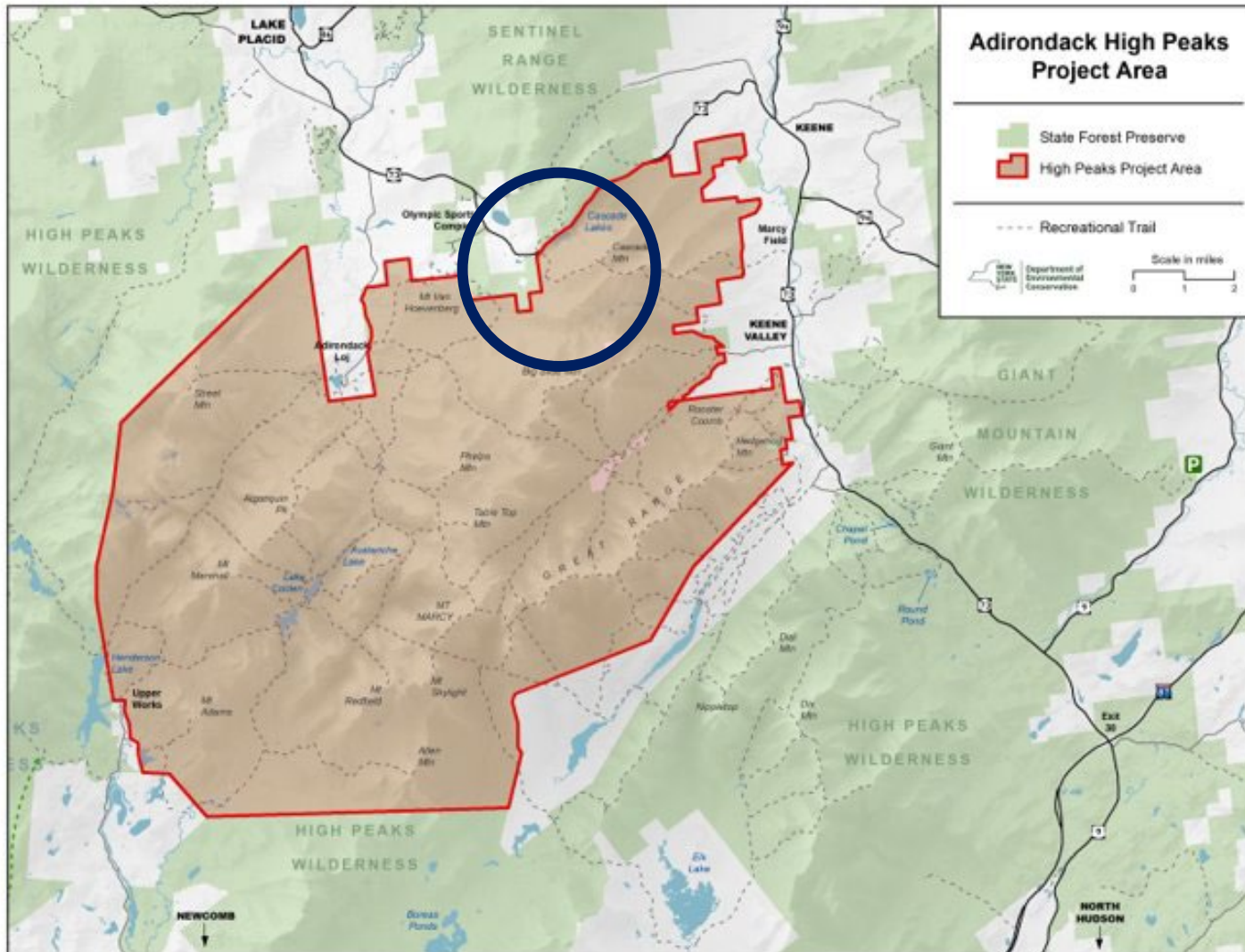
MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS



Adirondack Loj sub-region

- Manage daily visitor use to a maximum of 400 people, or approximately 180 vehicles, per day:
 - *Parking management and enforcement (preferred)*
 - OR
 - *Hiking reservation system*

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

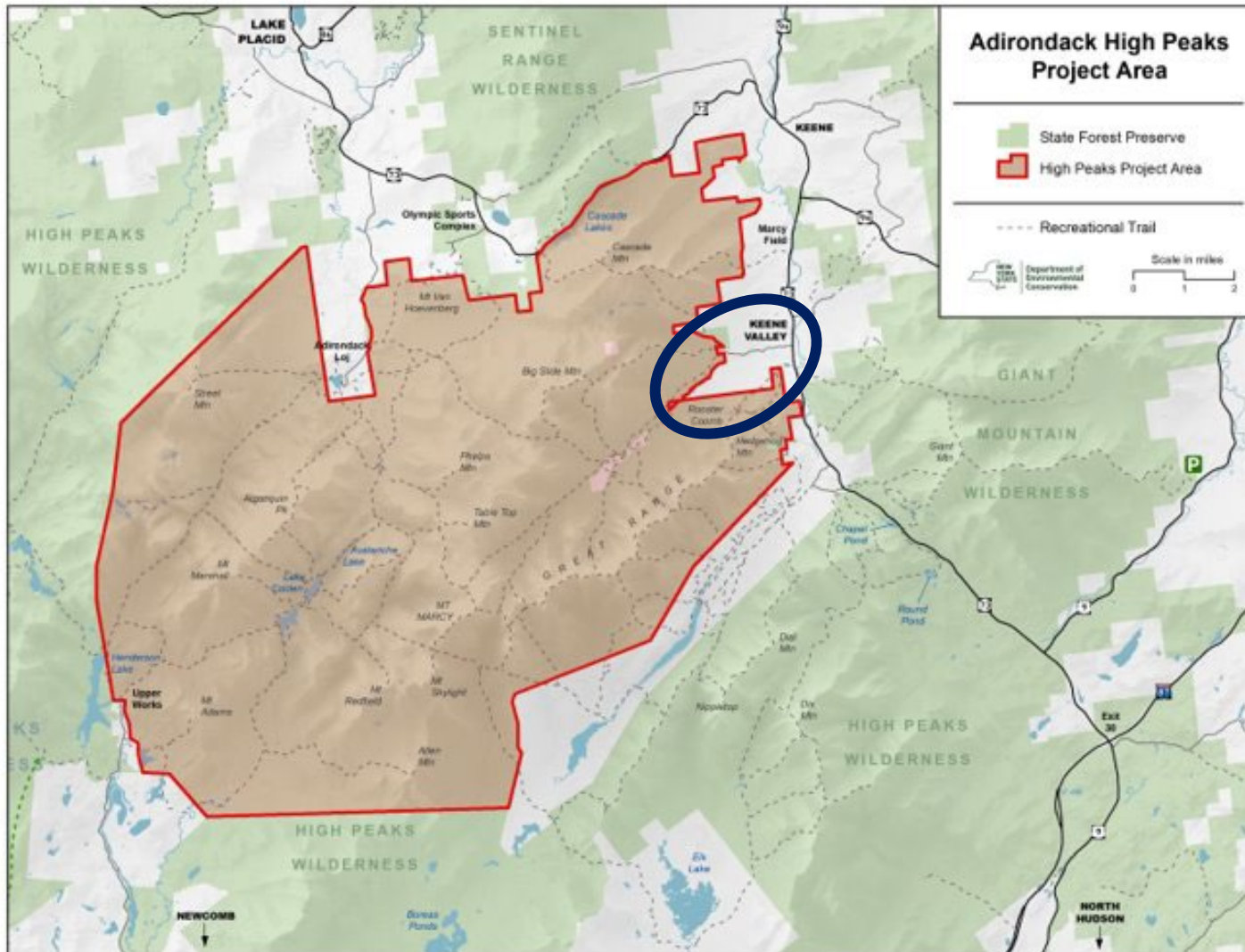


Cascade sub-region

- Manage daily visitor use to a maximum of 240 people, or 80-100 vehicles, per day:

- *Parking management and enforcement at Mt. Van Hoevenberg Mountain Pass Lodge*

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS



John's Brook sub-region

- Maintain current parking capacity, as well as:
 - *Study impacts in Keene Valley related to Garden overflow, and study demand for access to High Peaks via the Garden.*
 - *Develop visitor access management plan that includes the Garden, Keene Valley parking, and shuttle access.*

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Please submit feedback by **June 1, 2026**, to:

ForestPreserve@dec.ny.gov

Josh Clague

NYS DEC

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**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**