

High Peaks Visitor Use Management Project Stakeholder and Public Participation Plan

Project Description

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) is undertaking a planning process to address visitor use management and visitor capacities. The VUM planning process will focus on the experiential, social, and public safety elements of visitor use management and visitor capacities, to promote sustainable visitor use. Over the next several months, the project team will engage State officials, stakeholders, and the public in outlining desired conditions and management strategies for the project area.

During the latter half of 2023, the process will focus on measuring and analyzing visitor use levels and patterns to determine how closely current conditions in the project area align with desired conditions for visitors' experiences and public safety. The second year of the contract will focus on developing management strategies aimed at helping DEC achieve and maintain desired conditions. The final project report will be provided to DEC that includes recommendations for monitoring and maintaining the effectiveness of the strategies over time.

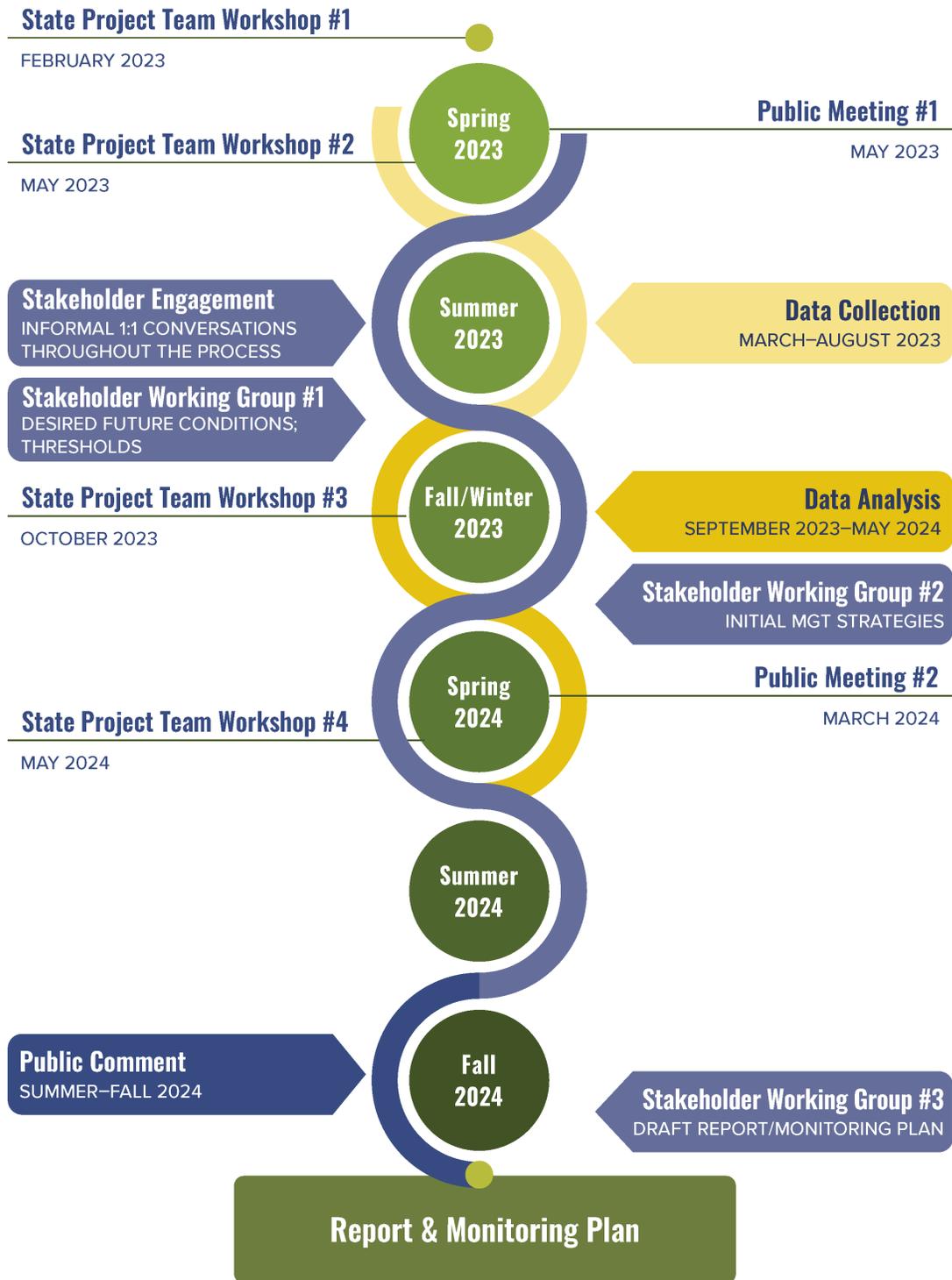
The Stakeholder and Public Participation Plan (Participation Plan) supports the ongoing project data collection and analysis and describes the objectives and tools for stakeholder and broader public engagement throughout the process. It is based in part on recommendations generated from independent stakeholder conversations convened by the Otak consultant team prior to and following the first High Peaks VUM public meeting on May 9, 2023.

Overview of the Process Map

The project is organized by data collection and analysis milestones projected to occur at seasonal intervals. Corresponding communication and stakeholder and public participation opportunities are identified for the projected milestones. This information is summarized below, and visually depicted in [Figure 1](#).

- Spring 2023: Stakeholder Engagement
- Spring 2023: Public Meeting #1
- Summer 2023: Onsite Data Collection
- Fall 2023: Stakeholder Working Group—Meeting #1
- Fall/Winter 2023: Data Analysis
- Spring 2024: Stakeholder Working Group—Meeting #2
- Spring 2024: Public Meeting #2
- Summer 2024: Stakeholder and Public Comment on Draft Report
- Fall 2024: Stakeholder Working Group—Meeting #3
- Fall 2024: Final Report and Monitoring Plan

Figure 1. Process Map



Communication Goals

This plan details the communication goals, audiences, communication and engagement tools, and materials for the High Peaks VUM Project. Communications and engagement activities are intended to help achieve the following goals:

- Project roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated to stakeholders and the public.
- Stakeholders and the public understand the project recommendations and decisions they can inform and influence.
 - Provide meaningful, accessible, and equitable opportunities for stakeholders and the public to engage during the study period.
 - Demonstrate how stakeholder and public input informed analysis and recommendations.
- Project milestones and progress are clearly communicated to stakeholders and the public with opportunities for questions and timely follow up responses.
- NYSDEC and the Otak Consultant Team are trusted sources of project information.
 - Keep stakeholders and the public informed about the project to minimize concerns resulting from speculation and misinformation.
 - Communicate information in the clearest, least technical way possible.

Key Audiences

Key audiences are defined as **public, stakeholders, interagency, and Tribes**. The **public** includes those potentially affected by or interested in the project. **Stakeholders** are defined as those with a technical, jurisdictional, and/or representative role who are potentially affected by or interested in the project. **Interagency** is defined as those with jurisdictional authority in the study area, and with whom close coordination is critical to the project's success.

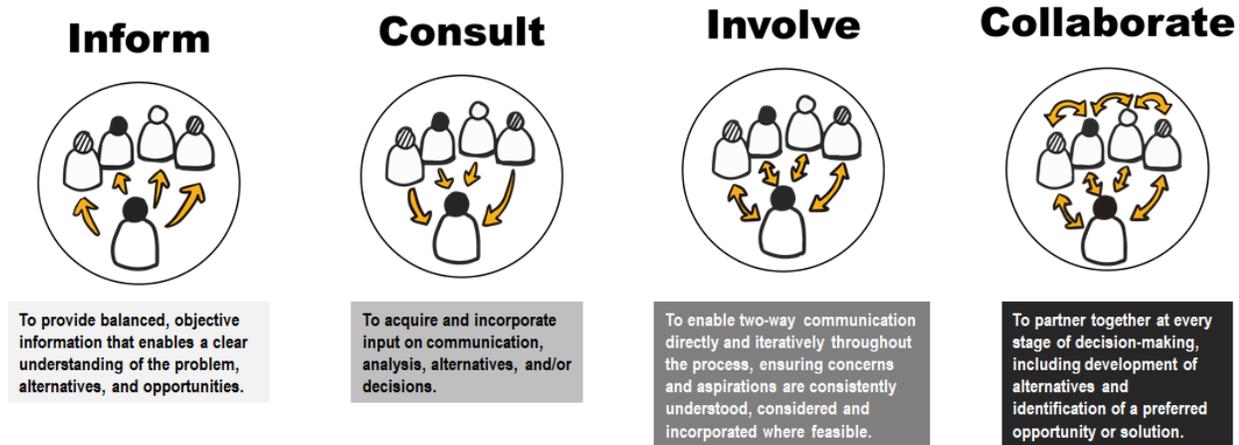
As sovereign governments, **Tribes** bring a valuable, indigenous perspective to this project. NYSDEC will serve as the primary contact with Tribes, and will consult with them in-person, in the field, and/or virtually based on the Tribe's preferences.

[Appendix 1](#) contains a list of key audiences by category.

Engagement Methods

The engagement methods identified for this project are consistent with best practices adapted from the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum, including engagement goals along a spectrum of "Inform" to "Collaborate" ([Figure 2](#)). These goals may be applied to any of the key audiences identified for this project. Goals are "cumulative"—for example, if you are 'involving' you are, by definition, 'informing' and 'consulting'.

Figure 2. Engagement Spectrum



The approach for each phase of the spectrum is described with appropriate tools in the table below. Communication materials for each tool are detailed in [Appendix 3](#).

Table 1: Engagement Methods by Engagement Goal

| Engagement Goal: INFORM | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Audience Category | Engagement tool | Approach |
| All | Project webpage | The High Peaks VUM project website will be a place to learn about the project, including its goals, schedule, current work, updates, and other information. The webpage will be updated at key project technical milestones and as needed. |
| | E-distribution | Project updates, announcements of public meetings, and other project news will be periodically distributed through an email distribution list, maintained by the Otak Team, of those who voluntarily provide their email information at public meetings, through communication with the project inbox (vum-facilitators@rossstrategic.com) and through the project website. |
| | Leveraged outreach opportunities | Capitalize on opportunities to share project information at events convened by others (Appendix C) |
| Stakeholders | Partner links | The Otak Team will coordinate with stakeholders and encourage them to provide links on their respective social media accounts to the High Peaks VUM project website, and to other project-related social media postings as information becomes available. |

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Tribes | Partner links | NYSDEC will coordinate with Tribes and encourage them to provide links on their respective social media accounts to the High Peaks VUM project website, and to other project-related social media postings as information becomes available. |
| Engagement Goal: Consult¹ | | |
| Audience | Engagement tool | Approach |
| All | Project webpage | The High Peaks VUM project website will provide an opportunity to provide comments/feedback at any time. |
| Public | 1:1 Conversations | NYSDEC and Otak Team members will engage in informal 1:1 conversations with local community members and the visiting public as opportunities arise to develop relationships, build authentic and mutual trust, share project information, and receive feedback. |
| Stakeholders | 1:1 Conversations | NYSDEC and Otak technical team members will engage in informal 1:1 conversations with members of the stakeholders working group as opportunities arise to develop relationships, build authentic and mutual trust, share project information, and receive feedback. The VUM Facilitation Team will reach out to stakeholder group members in-between meetings and share input and feedback with the technical team. |
| Tribes | Informational conversations | NYSDEC will engage in informational conversations with Tribes as opportunities arise to develop relationships, build authentic and mutual trust, share project information, and receive feedback. <i>Formal, government-to-government consultation will occur as needed and requested, outside of this process.</i> |

¹ Engagement goal of “consult” not to be confused with Tribal/NYSDEC formal government-to-government “consultation.”

| Engagement Goal: Involve | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Audience | Engagement tool | Approach |
| Public | Public Meetings | Conduct public meetings to provide updates on the project, respond to questions, and collect feedback. ² |
| Stakeholders | High Peaks VUM Stakeholder Working Group | <p>The Stakeholder Working Group (SWG), convened by the Otak Team, includes up to 20 people with a technical, jurisdictional, and/or representative role who are potentially affected by or interested in the project. See Appendix 2 for participants).</p> <p>The purpose of the SWG is to inform project recommendations by engaging a diverse group of organizational representatives in focused project-specific discussions, and individually and collectively provide insight, input, values, and feedback.</p> <p>SWG members also serve as a conduit for information to and from affiliated organization members.</p> |
| Tribes | Government-to-government consultation | NYSDEC will formally meet as needed and requested by Tribes to develop relationships, build authentic and mutual trust, and share project information. |
| Engagement Goal: Collaborate | | |
| Audience | Engagement tool | Approach |
| Interagency | State Project Team (Core Team) | NYSDEC, with its state partner the Adirondack Park Agency, will work with the Otak Team to collaborate on all process decisions throughout the study period. |

Communication Mechanisms and Materials

Notifications and other distributions of information will occur through a variety of mediums to keep stakeholders and the public informed of upcoming project milestones and events. The **Otak Team** will also maintain an email distribution list of those who voluntarily provide their email information at public meetings, through communication with the project inbox (vum-facilitators@rossstrategic.com) and through the project website.

² The first public meeting on May 9, 2023, was held in Saranac, NY as an in-person meeting only. Public feedback made a strong case to provide virtual opportunities for visitors living outside the area and without reasonable access to in-person meetings held near the study site. A virtual option will be considered for the Spring 2024 public meeting.

The project website, www.highpeaksvum.com, maintained by the **Otak Team** will serve as the primary source of project information, milestones, and notifications of related events. It will also be used as a platform to receive public comment and questions throughout the process.

NYSDEC will use its networks, distribution lists, and social media platforms to help ensure stakeholders and the public receive project information through outlets such as its webpage, periodic e-news, personal contacts, local news outlets, and state and local government updates.

The **High Peaks VUM Stakeholder Working Group** members will be equipped with information to share with their members and networks about the project.

Informational and analytical materials developed in association with the project will be used to help meet communication goals. A list of communication materials is included in [Appendix 3](#), and will be periodically updated as the project progresses and based on communication needs.

Appendix 1: Key Audiences³

| Audience | Organization / Affiliation |
|---------------------------|---|
| Public | Project distribution list (maintained by the Otak Team) Media/social media outlets Communities within/adjacent to the study area |
| Stakeholders | Adirondack 46ers Adirondack Climbers' Coalition Adirondack Council Adirondack Diversity Initiative Adirondack Mountain Club Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve Adirondack Wilderness Advocates Ausable Club Barkeater Trail Alliance Olympic Regional Development Authority Protect the Adirondacks Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry Town of Keene Town of Newcomb Town of North Elba Town of Keene |
| Partner agencies/entities | Adirondack Park Agency |
| Tribes | As determined by NYSDEC's consultation with Tribes |

³ This list will be updated as additional interests emerge.

Appendix 2: High Peaks Stakeholder Working Group

| Organization | Representative |
|--|--------------------|
| Adirondack 46ers | Laurie Rankin |
| Adirondack Climbers' Coalition | Will Roth |
| Adirondack Council | Jackie Bowen |
| Adirondack Diversity Initiative | Tiffany Rea-Fisher |
| Adirondack Mountain Club | Julia Goren |
| Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve | David Gibson |
| Adirondack Wilderness Advocates | Pete Nelson |
| Ausable Club | John Schuler |
| Olympic Regional Development Authority | Emma Lamy |
| Protect the Adirondacks | Peter Bauer |
| Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism | Mary Jane Lawrence |
| SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry | (To be determined) |
| Town of Keene | Joe Pete Wilson |
| Town of Newcomb | David Hughes |
| Town of North Elba | Derek Doty |

Appendix 3: Communication materials

| Materials | Timing | Location |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| 1. News releases | Posted same day they are released by NYSDEC | Website |
| 2. Frequently asked questions | Posted as they emerge | Website |
| 3. Process road map | Updated periodically as needed | Website |
| 4. Meeting materials a. Summaries b. Presentations c. Other | As meetings occur. Presentation materials posted the day following each public/stakeholder meeting. | Website |
| 5. Data / analytical reports | Posted as they become publicly available | Website |
| 6. Foundational VUM information | Referenced throughout the duration of project | Interagency VUM Website |

Appendix 4: “Leveraged” Outreach Opportunities

(potential opportunities to share project information at events convened by others)

| Event Name | Host | Date/Time/Location | Key Audience |
|---|------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Adirondack Park Agency meetings | APA | 3 or 4 times annually | Public |
| <i>Others to be determined as opportunities arise</i> | | | |