



NEW YORK STATE ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

for the birds and birders of New York State since 1948

James F. Hall, Executive Director
Palisades Interstate Park Commission
Bear Mountain State Park
Bear Mountain, New York 10911-0427

July 9, 2017

Dear Mr. Hall:

I am writing on behalf of the NY State Ornithological Assoc. regarding conflicts between birders and the North Face Endurance Challenge race held in the Doodletown area of Bear Mountain State Park in mid-May.

Our organization is the umbrella group for bird clubs and several Audubon chapters in New York State, including a number in and near the Hudson Valley. We have 500 individual members and 42 member organizations across the state.

As you may know, Doodletown is one of the premier birding locations in New York State, particularly during the prime spring bird migration period which also falls in mid-May. Birders from across the state and beyond travel to Doodletown specifically to see the numbers and variety of bird species that are found there, and which are difficult to view elsewhere in New York and the region.

However, the importance of Doodletown extends beyond its appeal to birders. The National Audubon Society has identified Doodletown and Iona Island as an *Important Bird Area*. IBA designation is an effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. In this regard, Doodletown is in company with such critical habitat as Jamaica Bay and Montezuma National Wildlife Refuges, the Adirondack peaks, and Long Island's Great South Bay.

Audubon notes that "Doodletown supports an unusual diversity and abundance of breeding warblers and other songbirds." Several at-risk bird species utilize the site during migration and it serves as breeding habitat for other uncommon birds.

The area is listed as a priority site in the state's Open Space Conservation Plan and has been designated as a state Bird Conservation Area.

In addition to bird life, Doodletown supports populations of rare wildlife such as the state-threatened timber rattlesnake, and unusual insects and plants. The timber rattlesnakes that often bask on roadways are at particular risk from the numerous support vehicles present for the race.

Unfortunately, the endurance race poses risks to this important habitat and its natural resources, and essentially eliminates access to the area for birders and other nature enthusiasts during one of the best weekends of the year for bird viewing. With over 300 runners coursing through the area for 10+ hours, it is obvious the quiet and low-impact activity of birding is precluded for this period.

The birding community is a significant source of visitation to state parks and support of programs in parks and other public areas. In addition, birding provides economic benefits to municipalities and businesses in the vicinity of popular locales, particularly from visitors traveling to sites such as Doodletown. To put birding in perspective, the US Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that 17.8 million Americans travel to see birds nationwide, putting millions into local economies, and that \$13 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenue results from birdwatching.

There has been considerable discussion among birders and within bird clubs over the loss of Doodletown during the endurance race. This is viewed as an issue of basic fairness, with one activity dominating a public area to the detriment of its natural resources at a time when many others wish to visit and engage in low-impact activity.

We believe that changing the date of the race to earlier in the spring would be a relatively simple solution to this situation, and significantly reduce impacts to the park. We request that we and local bird clubs be engaged when planning takes place for next year's race and beyond. We hope there can be dialogue between these two user groups and park administration to find a way to resolve this conflict without escalation to a public dispute.

Sincerely,



Andrew Mason
Conservation Chair

cc: NYS OPRHP Commissioner Rose Harvey
NYS Dep't of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Basil Seggos
NYS Dep't of Environmental Conservation Director Division of Fish and Wildlife
Anthony Wilkinson
Arne Arens, President, The North Face