



LAURIE POTTEIGER

Appalachian National Scenic Trail

A Special Report: Summary | March 2010



www.npca.org

1300 19th Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036

P: 202.223.6722
F: 202.659.0650

Snapshot

Meandering some 2,178 miles between Springer Mountain in Georgia and Mount Katahdin in Maine, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) is the United States' most beloved recreational footpath. The A.T.'s protected corridor (a swath of land averaging about 1,000 feet in width) encompasses more than 250,000 acres, making it one of the largest units of the National Park System in the eastern United States. The trail passes through some of the most significant and rare ecosystems remaining along the East Coast. The Appalachian Trail provides solitude, quiet, and a wilderness-like experience that is accessible to millions of residents on the Eastern Seaboard. Each year, approximately two million hikers walk some portion of the trail, whether it be a mile, the entire length, or something in between.

An incredible array of natural resources is located within the swath of land encompassed by the A.T. corridor. These resources not only comprise the hiking experience, but also provide valuable ecosystem services. In addition to providing recreational opportunities and enjoyment of the outdoors, the trail offers visitors a wealth of cultural resources. America's heritage, in the form of historic structures, cultural landscapes, and archaeological sites, is located along the Appalachian Trail. The history of the lands along the A.T. and the history of the trail itself are rich and include the stories of American Indians, pioneers, settlers, and farmers; wars; resource industries; and outdoor recreation that preceded the establishment of the Appalachian Trail.

Today, two entities work together to oversee the entire length of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail: the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (a private nonprofit established in 1925) and the National Park Service.

Key Findings

- **Incompatible development threatens trail resources and integrity.** The narrow, linear nature of the trail corridor, coupled with its prime location along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains, leaves it susceptible to an array of development threats, such as pipelines, power lines, racetracks, quarries, residences, energy-producing wind turbines, and motorized off-road vehicle and mountain bike use.
- **Increased recognition of the Appalachian Trail as a valued part of our national heritage would enhance protection.** The Appalachian Trail is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or even designation as a national historic landmark. Such listing or designation would help to increase the trail's visibility, allow A.T. managers to apply for additional funding, and ensure that an appropriate level of review and adequate mitigation is achieved for projects with the potential to harm the trail. Managers are pursuing National Register designation. Perhaps more significantly, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the National Park Service are advancing programs such as A Trail to Every Classroom and the Community Partners Program. These programs raise awareness of and appreciation for the A.T. as a resource that is a part of community history and contributes to the quality of life of the people and communities through which it passes.
- **Appalachian Trail resource managers need more and better information.** While the Appalachian Trail is well known as a continuous footpath spanning the Appalachian Mountains between Georgia and Maine, it is less well known for the wealth of natural and cultural resources harbored within its protected corridor. These resources would benefit from further study. The A.T. MEGA-Transect project, which engages citizen scientists, will monitor a variety of critical indicators of environmental health.

Recommendations

- **Increase funding:** Additional federal funding is needed to support necessary natural and cultural resource inventories and associated resource interpretation, as well as to pursue National Register designation.
- **Fully protect trail:** Today the goal of a permanently protected Appalachian Trail footpath owned entirely by the public is within reach. Just over 10 miles of the trail are not publicly owned—only about 150 properties remain to be protected in order to reach this goal.
- **Continue adding high-priority lands to protected trail corridor:** Some privately owned lands bordering the Appalachian Trail have special natural or cultural resource significance, or are otherwise important to the trail experience. Including these lands within the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is important so that their resources can be protected by A.T. managers and enjoyed by trail visitors. A primary way that A.T. managers protect additional lands is through support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a federal program that provides funds for land acquisition and easements, among other resource projects. The A.T. has significantly benefitted from LWCF-supported appropriations, and funding should be accessed in the future for selected properties possessing important natural or cultural resources. Continued congressional support for the LWCF with funds directed toward protecting the Appalachian Trail corridor will allow managers to improve protection of the A.T.'s resources.
- **Continue to vigorously defend the A.T. from impacts of external projects and identify appropriate mitigation to offset unavoidable impacts:** Decisions affecting the placement and design of roads, electric-transmission corridors, wind-energy projects, wireless-communications facilities, and other development should reflect recognition of the special and fragile character of the A.T., its resources, and adjacent landscapes. Potentially acceptable crossing locations for road and energy projects should be identified, and so should treasured trail landscapes where such proposals will not be entertained. As society strives to create a sustainable energy future and balance competing needs, substantial and meaningful mitigation must be identified to compensate for unavoidable impacts.
- **Celebrate the Appalachian Trail's remarkable private support:** Federal funds support less than half of the annual cost of managing the Appalachian Trail. The balance comes from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, its members and supporters, and from its affiliated clubs and their volunteers. Decades ago, the ATC formally accepted delegated management responsibility for the NPS-acquired public trail corridor lands, and must raise funds to carry out those responsibilities. The ATC needs ongoing support to continue to provide longstanding, large-scale programs such as its seasonal trail crew and Ridge Runner programs, as well as to expand its community-outreach programs.

JEFF ZIMMERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY



About NPCA and Center for State of the Parks

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policymakers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

Contact Us

For a copy of NPCA's full report on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, contact NPCA's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office at 202.454.3386 or the Southeast Regional Office at 865.329.2424. You can visit the park online at www.nps.gov/appa or the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org. For media inquiries, please contact Shannon Andrea, NPCA media relations director, at 202.454.3371 or sandrea@npca.org. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park and other parks, visit www.npca.org/take_action.

GARY SZELC

