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APPALACHIAN TRAIL
MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Introduction

The following principles are derived from the National Trails System Act and from traditional understandings on administration of the Appalachian Trail. They are intended to guide the comprehensive planning process for the Trail and serve as interim guidelines for its management by the various federal, state and private managers of the Trail.

The principles are the product of the recommendations of many managers and others associated with administration of the Trail, including the members of the Appalachian Trail Advisory Council. They are subject to further amendment as additional recommendations are received.

Definition

The Appalachian Trail is a way, continuous from Katahdin in Maine to Springer Mountain in Georgia, for travel on foot through the wild, scenic, wooded, pastoral, and culturally significant lands of the Appalachian Mountains. It is a means of sojourning among these lands, such that the visitors may experience them by their own unaided efforts.

In practice, the Trail is usually a simple footpath, purposeful in direction and concept, favoring the heights of land, and located for minimum reliance on construction for protecting the resource. The body of the Trail is provided by the lands it traverses, and its soul is in the living stewardship of the volunteers and workers of the Appalachian Trail community.

Partnership

Successful performance of the responsibility delegated to the Secretary of the Interior for administration of the Trail depends on the voluntary cooperation of managers, reflecting a partnership of Federal, State and Appalachian Trail Conference participants. Within broad guidelines which define the desired end result, decisions will be made on a decentralized basis to the greatest extent possible. Because actions affecting the Trail taken in one section can affect other sections or the entire system, a high level of communication within the Trail Community is necessary. All significant managerial actions should reflect a spirit of partnership with the Appalachian Trail Conference, the states and the affected federal agencies.

Relationship to Corridor Lands

The Appalachian Trail experience is heavily influenced by what the hiker perceives in the surrounding environment. While the Trail should be developed and managed to harmonize with other productive uses of the land (Sec. 7a of the Act), activities incompatible with the purposes of the Trail should be avoided (Sec. 7c). Management will permit only those uses of the land in the vicinity of the Trail which are consistent with the long-term perpetuation of Trail values. As appropriate, management will seek the cooperation of other jurisdictions to meet this objective for lands not under local management control.

Location of the Trail

The trail should be located and maintained in such a way that it allows access to, without detracting from, the outstanding scenic, historic, natural and cultural features of the areas through which it passes. Diversity of experience and changing environments from place to place along the Trail, so long as they are consistent with the basic definition of the Trail, are important to the

quality of the Trail experience. Within the bounds of an interesting Trail route, advantage will be taken of the most erosion resistant natural terrain available, so that reliance on construction and hardening of the Trail can be minimized.

Design

Resource protection and quality of the user experience should receive primary concern in the design and management of the Trail and related facilities. Simplicity of design and ease of maintenance should receive greater emphasis than user convenience. The design of the Trail should reflect a concern for safety without detracting from the opportunity for the users to experience the wild and scenic lands by their own unaided efforts, and without sacrificing aspects of the Trail which challenge their skill and stamina.

Maintenance and Trail Management

In recognition of the stewardship role of local trail clubs, federal and state land managers will encourage them in their efforts to perform the necessary maintenance, patrol and other trail management activities along the full length of the Trail. Mutual responsibilities should be defined in written cooperative agreements coordinated with the Appalachian Trail Conference.

Use

Management and operation of the Appalachian Trail should accommodate the use and enjoyment of the Trail by individuals, by family units, and by small groups. Conversely, Management should avoid uses that would degrade the Trail's natural and cultural resources or social values: such as use by groups or organizations involved in promotion, sponsorship or participation in spectator events or competitive activities, or by groups which by their size or commercial interest

generate use which is inconsistent with the purpose for having the Trail.

Other management considerations

Decisions that would alter the present character of the Trail or existing use patterns should be avoided unless there is a compelling reason for change.

Such management decisions should be based on these management principles and an adequate information base.

Management should foster an unregimented atmosphere and otherwise encourage self-reliance by Trail users. Educational techniques and other non-regulatory approaches are preferred over law enforcement activities.

In recognition of the fact that the A.T. is one of the few Trail systems that fulfills an opportunity for long-distance hiking, management should reflect a sympathetic concern for the special needs of long-distance hikers, while basically maintaining the Trail for hikers of all distances.