



## **APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY POSITION STATEMENT Regarding Land and Water Conservation Fund**

### **About the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

Congressionally established in 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides vital funding to federal, state and local agencies for the acquisition of important lands, waterways and wetlands. The Fund has two overarching purposes: to provide recreation on public lands and to protect nationally significant natural, cultural and historic resources. The Fund is divided between support for federal projects and support for state and local government projects.

LWCF does not use taxpayer dollars but, instead, invests earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing. Per the establishing legislation, Congress can appropriate up to \$900 million each year to provide grants to federal agencies including the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service, and to state and local governments. Land acquisition is only through willing sellers. Often, private land owners – farmers, ranchers and foresters – partner through voluntary conservation agreements made possible by LWCF.

The federal budget for Fiscal Year 2018 has capped LWCF at \$425 million, less than half of the congressional intent of \$900 million. Legislation that established and renewed the LWCF over several decades is set to expire September 30, 2018. Legislation that reauthorizes LWCF is currently before Congress and must be passed to continue this crucial and historically successful conservation initiative.

### **About the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST)**

In 1921 forester Benton MacKaye advocated for the creation of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) with a compelling idea that proposed an interconnected system of trails in the eastern United States, linked by a grand trail traversing the Appalachian Mountain Range. MacKaye's prescient vision imagined saving and protecting wild open space in the populous eastern United States and uniting communities in providing recreational access and associated health benefits. By 1937, a volunteer force had impressively built the Trail.

In 1968, building upon the values of solitude and scenic beauty that the A.T. provides, Congress passed the National Trails System Act "to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation." The National Trails System Act created the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST) and the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, and opened the door to the establishment of an impressive national trails system that honors scenic values, history and heritage, and diverse recreational pursuits.

Today, the A.T. is one of the world's longest continuous footpaths; remarkable for its length of 2,191 miles which passes through 14 states, and important in that it traverses the crest of one of the most significant land features in the eastern United States. More than half of America's population currently reside within a day's drive from some part of the Trail and hundreds of communities within nearby proximity of the A.T. benefit from a strong and healthy outdoor-recreation economy. In 2017, more than three million people enjoyed the A.T. as day hikers and backpackers. The A.T.'s visitor numbers continue to increase.

## About the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC)

Established in 1925 as the Appalachian Trail Conference and later renamed, the mission of the non-profit Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is to preserve and manage the A.T., ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow and for centuries to come.

## The Importance of LWCF to the Appalachian Trail

Protection of land along the A.T. has been a priority for Trail managers ever since the Trail was established. Over the years, LWCF and private contributions have resulted in one of the most significant and successful land acquisition programs in the United States. Today there is a 250,000-acre greenway around the Trail that connects significant public lands in the eastern United States and protects scenic vistas, wildlife habitats, forests, meadows, wetlands, farmlands and areas of historic significance.

In recent years, some of the successes supported by funding from LWCF include:

- The **Rocky Fork Tract**—which encompasses nearly 10,000 acres in Tennessee—is home to wildlife like peregrine falcons, bear, native brook trout, and the rare Yonahlossee salamander. Before its acquisition, Rocky Fork was the largest unprotected tract of land in the Southern Appalachians and important to the A.T. hiking experience. Now, more than 2,000 acres of Rocky Fork has been designated as a state park in Tennessee.
- The acquisition of the **Campbell Tract** in Virginia’s George Washington-Jefferson National Forest consolidated U.S. Forest Service lands and protected scenic views along the nearby A.T. The tract, owned by the family of one of the original settlements in Nelson County for more than 100 years, had been subsistence farmed by the Campbell family. Three siblings—descendants of the original owners—lived off the land, protecting the character of the landscape and the value of the area’s natural resources. Now publicly owned, the Campbell Tract is protected from the threat of incompatible development and is accessible for recreation and fishing. A cold-water stream on the property is suitable for brook trout, and this freshwater system is expected to continue to improve in future years.
- Under congressional authorization and the recent passage of the 2018 federal budget, 216 ecologically significant acres near the A.T. in Pawling, New York will be protected. The **Boniello Tract** will protect wildlife, preserve scenic views along the Trail and improve the recreation experience for urban visitors, including those who take the train from New York City to the only train stop along the A.T.
- The **Bald Mountain Pond** acquisition protects the A.T. in Maine and enables five miles of side trail, improving recreational access. The parcel contains one of Maine’s largest remaining uncut forests and encompasses the unprotected shoreline of Bald Mountain Pond, 19 small islands and a mile of spawning streams. The federally threatened Canada Lynx has been confirmed in the area, and the waters of Bald Mountain Pond is the habitat for one of only 14 populations of landlocked Arctic char and for wild eastern brook trout.

The A.T. Landscape Partnership – a coalition of public and private partners, co-convened by the ATC and the National Park Service – is actively engaged in identifying lands that may be at risk and in planning for the future.

## **The Position of ATC regarding LWCF**

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) advocates for the **permanent reauthorization** of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a proven, highly successful program that has aided communities across the country and has benefitted millions of Americans who reside in the eastern United States.

The ATC also advocates that LWCF receive **full funding annually** of, at least, \$900 million. ATC points out that the full funding, as envisioned when legislation established LWCF, has been achieved only two times during the Fund's 50-plus year history – not because of lack of oil and gas fees, but because funding intended for conservation purposes has been appropriated elsewhere.

**LWCF is an essential part in protecting the grand vision and the world-renowned identity of the Trail; in preserving the natural, cultural and historical resources along the 2,191-mile Trail; in sustaining recreation access and associated health benefits for millions of Americans; and in ensuring the Trail's characteristics are preserved for generations to come.**

(April 2018)