



Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Initiative

Partners Meeting
December 1–2, 2015

Meeting Summary



Thanks to The Trust for Public Land for their support of this meeting.

Executive Summary

More than 60 leaders gathered on December 1–2, 2015 for the first meeting of the Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Initiative to work on developing a shared vision, learn about large landscape conservation initiatives, explore possible priorities for land conservation, and define immediate next steps.

The next steps focused on refining the vision, developing an active communications and outreach strategy, and continued work on GIS mapping.

Welcome and Framing

After a welcome from Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Landscape Conservation Director Dennis Shaffer, ATC Executive Director Ron Tipton spoke to the importance of landscape-scale protection along the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) called for in ATC's Strategic Plan and the need to develop a collective vision for this new initiative. He emphasized the increasing stress on the Trail and need for collective action to protect it in perpetuity. National Park Service (NPS) Appalachian National Scenic Trail (APPA) Superintendent Wendy Janssen noted this is a critically important time for the NPS; with virtually all the footpath now on public and protected land, we need to turn our attention to the larger landscape—protecting iconic vistas and viewsheds, irreplaceable cultural and natural resources, the continuous nature of the Trail corridor, and healthy ecosystems. She also discussed the NPS Scaling Up Initiative, launched with the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, to promote large landscape conservation through public and private partnerships.

Facilitator Bill Potapchuk led introductions and reviewed the agenda.

Appalachian Trail 2050

Where are we headed? What might a protected landscape look like in 2050? In the first exercise, participants worked at tables and then in plenary to identify possible elements of a vision.

Their work was kick-started by large landscape expert Jim Levitt (Lincoln Land Institute and the Harvard Forest) who described Benton MacKaye's vision of an Appalachian Trail as a powerful idea that would reshape civilization. The A.T. story is of the first national-scale, large landscape initiative in American history; a world-famous story of publicly protected lands. This, he said, is a moving "creation story." A creation story has ancient antecedents, with crisis and success, and listeners are then told that the story is not over, it's up to them to finish it. With that opening, participants went to work.

Possible Elements of a Vision

Numerous ideas were identified. Examples included:

- A spider web of communities and working lands connected to the A.T.
- More people using the Trail—young and old (with or without electronic devices)
- The A.T. should be thought of as an ecological corridor, part of a climate adaptation and protection strategy

- Greater national reverence for the A.T. and A.T. landscape as part of its national identity. A US icon!
- Clear views; no towers/flashing lights; healthy forests; special viewpoints; physically remote from urban areas
- A defined and protected climate corridor
- Dark void in night sky
- A ribbon of green, wider than anyone ever imagined, and a working landscape on both sides
- An old forest, not old growth yet, but 75–100 years old and on its way to being 500 years old
- People are embracing the A.T. landscape conservation effort, contributing political and financial support
- NPS/ATC leadership actively motivating and leveraging land trusts, clubs, and communities along the A.T. as partners in a massive coordinated effort; along with a
- Coordinated framework of collaboration (with leadership at every level)

A distilled compilation of the vision ideas can be found below.

Stepping up for Large Landscape Conservation

Significant large landscape conservation work started with the inauguration of the A.T. and has intensified in recent years. The purpose of this next session was to highlight current efforts along the A.T. Among the most significant is the commitment of the National Park Service to large landscape conservation.

Ray Sauvajot, National Park Service Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, discussed this commitment, talking about the NPS Scaling Up Initiative, a cornerstone of the Call to Action for the 2nd Century of the National Park Service. Ray spoke about examples of landscape-scale partnerships that are underway in other parts of the country. He highlighted the A.T. as an outstanding example where NPS is working beyond traditional park boundaries to collaborate with other public agencies and private organizations. The Scaling Up Initiative has been designed to promote and support these types of conservation efforts.

Ray was followed by a number of participants who highlighted current work of their organizations.

Highlighted Efforts

The Trust for Public Land A.T. Project Portfolio. JT Horn, The Trust for Public Land

High Peaks Initiative. Simon Rucker, Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust

Chesapeake Bay Initiative. Jonathan Doherty, National Park Service

Gulf Hagas, Pleasant River Project. Karin Tilberg, Forest Society of Maine

South Mountain Partnership. Katie Hess, South Mountain Partnership,

Maine National Park Initiative. Lucas St. Claire, Elliotsville Plantation

Rocky Fork Project. Morgan Sommerville, ATC

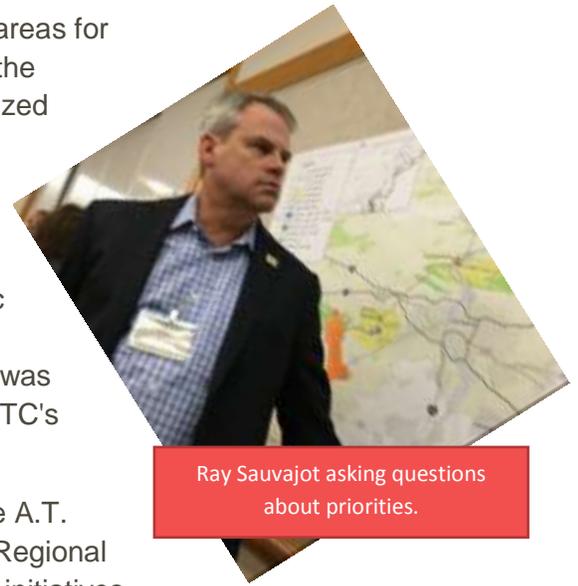
Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative/Two Countries, One Forest. Emily Bateson, Center for Large Landscape Conservation

Little Stony Headwaters Project. John Eustis, New River Land Trust

Kittatinny Ridge Initiative. Karen Lutz, ATC

Where Are We Now? Exploring Each of the Regions

One of the goals of the event was to identify possible priority areas for focused conservation efforts. This work was undertaken with the clear recognition that there are already a wide range of prioritized areas along the Trail. In order to identify both currently conserved lands and some of the already identified priorities, we used large maps of the entire Trail developed by NPS GIS specialist Matt Robinson. After lunch, the group met in a room where those maps, separated into the four geographic regions, were posted. Participants used sticky notes and markers to indicate where activity is already taking place that was not delineated on the maps. Discussions were facilitated by ATC's regional directors.



Ray Sauvajot asking questions about priorities.

On the second day, the full group regathered around the large A.T. maps. Discussions focused on possible priority target areas. Regional breakouts highlighted a number of areas with current multiple initiatives. Examples include northern Maine and multiple efforts underway on lands between Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia.

It was noted that many current projects/information were not indicated on the map. *Please send information to Matt Robinson so the maps can be updated (matt_robinson@nps.gov).*



Developing Our Shared Vision/Direction

One of the major goals of the event was to develop preliminary ideas for our shared vision and direction. Working with themes that emerged from the Appalachian Trail 2050 discussion, participants focused on this task. What emerged first were questions.

Key Questions

- Is the A.T. the primary focus of an initiative, or is it something broader (e.g., climate resiliency)?

The A.T. is the primary focus, although the whole idea of landscape conservation is to work from a multiple values framework and drive toward multi-faceted goals.

- Who are "we"? Some of us are focused on the A.T. and others have a broader interest (Chesapeake Initiative, water quality, local land trust, public agency, etc.).
A large landscape initiative engages a wide range of community, nonprofit, and advocacy organizations and diverse government entities, from municipalities to the federal agencies in a voluntary collaboration around shared goals. Every organization has a focus that extends beyond large landscape collaboration.
- Are we working from the Trail looking out, or the landscape looking in?
The most appropriate answer to this question is "yes," although there is more emphasis on the Trail looking out.
- What is the role of the co-conveners, the ATC and NPS?
One of the goals for this and future gatherings is to engage partners in conversations to decide what's important. ATC provides a project director, Dennis Shaffer, for this effort and he will work collaboratively with a wide range of partners in supporting this effort. This will definitely include reaching out much more inclusively beyond the partners in the room. The NPS role is to help facilitate communication among partners and advocate for the NPS' Scaling Up Initiative. By looking at the landscape as a whole, not segments fragmented by state boundaries or local jurisdictions, we can help understand the broader context of conservation and preserve the values, resources, and visitor experience of the A.T.

Guidance on Direction

- ATC and NPS need to decide their role and communicate to partners and the public what that means.
- We need to define our use of the term "landscape."
- Our goal is not to decide how far we reach but to decide what values we want to protect and develop the message to share and promote those values.
- Working together we can bring more partners/resources to individual land trusts that collectively work toward better protection of the A.T. corridor.
- A.T. Values: collectively conceived/implemented/codified: The ATC Strategic Plan and NPS- APPA Foundation Document and Business Plan are good starting points to articulate a vision for the A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative.
- Shared vision should be broad enough to be adapted locally.
- Collective impact is value added.
- MacKaye's original view was landscape scale conservation, with 3 levels, urban to primeval, return to that.
- Branding issue for funding—a big tent, tied together by the A.T. ("First Frontier" might be a title for the initiative).
- A.T. name gives a level of trust and assurance to public/private funders.
- Constellation of players will change in different places. Define where priorities and interests overlap.
- Relationships or projects? Both.

There was further discussion on values/roles:

- Attract funding from traditional/new sources
- Who may be inspired? (underrepresented partners)
- We are stewards of an icon
- ATC meets all IRS charitable requirements
- Two paradigms: From Trail looking out and bringing in people with different interests.
- South Mountain partnership in PA is a prime example where ATC has taken on something nontraditional, outside the corridor.

Framing the Vision

As a part of the conversation, several small groups highlighted the participatory work that led to the identification of Fundamental Resources and Values in the National Park Service's March 2015 plan, *Foundation Document: Appalachian National Scenic Trail*. Participants agreed this should be an anchor of our thinking moving forward.

Other elements are discussed below in the section entitled Action Planning and Next Steps.

A Conversation about Community Engagement

Trust for Public Land Senior Project Manager J.T. Horn led an informal presentation and discussion about different models for community engagement that have occurred along the A.T. Jon Peterson, former director of the South Mountain Partnership spoke about that program and the partnership's work to engage and educate a broad and diverse spectrum of community organizations and individuals.

Numerous stories were shared about how the A.T. was viewed unfavorably by some local communities in the early days of the NPS land-acquisition program. After years of extensive outreach and local engagement the A.T. is now commonly recognized as a local recreational, natural, and economic asset.

Advanced GIS Mapping and Other Resources

The second day began with presentations on advanced GIS mapping.

Jeff Allenby (Chesapeake Conservancy) gave a presentation on the use of GIS and technology on the John Smith Trail. High resolution, one-meter focus (where available) technology, can be used for detailed viewshed analysis. It is easily used by counties and helps with developing land-management plans. The Chesapeake Conservancy's GIS staff has incorporated 800,000 parcels in 9 counties into a database with numerous filters. It is very fast and easy to export—users can get what they need in a one-page pdf file that takes about two minutes to generate what used to take a week to produce. Current satellite data is 900 times more powerful than old satellite data, is more accurate, and shows greater topography distinctions.

Breece Robertson (Trust for Public Land) explained how data can be used to tell a story using 3D maps and multimedia presentations. Users can really get a sense of what an area would be like if it were developed in an incompatible manner. The technology is speeding up, and free applications are now available. A keypad system can be used to write into GIS and update maps automatically. These are examples of how the most recent technology can be used at

landscape-scales for strategic planning, community engagement, and partnership collaboration. There are public conservation databases that look at spending across jurisdictions and a national conservation easement database.

A follow-up discussion included questions about the amount of work needed behind the scenes, whether data is open-sourced, how to avoid duplicating efforts, and how to consolidate information. There are many data sets. We all need to figure out what is most useful for agencies and land trusts—from both public and private sources.

This was followed by another round of brief presentations.

Additional Presentations

Public Funding (LWCF, etc). Kathy DeCoster, The Trust for Public Land
Mitigation Strategies. Kris Hoellen, The Conservation Fund
Resiliency Mapping. Mari-Beth DeLucia, The Nature Conservancy
National Historic Register A.T. Nomination. Wendy Janssen, National Park Service

Working on Priorities: Criteria

Discussions continued at each table on key criteria that will help to direct our priority planning. Work should focus on developing principles, guidance, and criteria to determine what we should be doing.

Other suggestions were to look at negatives (where are the areas with no land trusts operating, where is there significant nearby development) to help determine priorities; do not feel limited by political climate at any given time or in any particular jurisdiction; and embrace existing efforts.

How do Large Landscape Initiatives Operate?

In order to anchor the next steps conversation, the group learned about how two efforts, the Crown of the Continent and the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership, organized themselves.

Crown of the Continent

Jim Levitt shared his observations about the organizing lessons that might be learned from the Crown of the Continent:

- Find shared actions that make a difference. In the Crown, one of the problems was human–grizzly bear encounters. To address that problem, a collaborative effort led to the development and implementation of a bear management plan.
- Use the 80% rule—work on things you agree on and leave the 20% you do not agree on for another day.
- Scaling up; formal agreements between government agencies. Crown of the Continent began with Glacier National Park, but now has several hundred people participating in annual meetings. They don't make decisions but have robust discussions.
- No formal governance structure, but convene regularly for learning, relationship building and priority oriented conversations.
- Federal and state agencies involved, working across the international border. The Nature Conservancy has made purchases to protect the valley.
- Working with Native Americans has been key. Trust has been developed, helping to take advantage of opportunities.

Chesapeake Conservation Partnership (CCP)

Jonathan Doherty from the National Park Service shared background and observations on the early organizing for the CCP.

- Started with a one-off meeting following a Presidential executive order.
- The partnership is a collaborative process; open but structured around a steering committee and working groups.
- They look at near-term priorities, advancing long-term conservation goals including mitigation strategies.
- Active state government participation is crucial in making progress on initiatives that benefit all.
- It's a constant effort to reach out and demonstrate how the initiative relates to "you."
- They have a strong African-American steering committee member who galvanizes people using personal connections. Someone like that helps with engaging diverse audiences.

Refining the Vision

The facilitator took the ideas from the vision conversations to create a worksheet to invite feedback on the emerging vision:

1. Start with the **Values Section of the Foundation document**
2. Affirm and amplify a focus on **Recognizing and Protecting the Traditional A.T. Hiking experience**. Include items like:
 - Natural and cultural heritage
 - Vistas and viewsheds
 - Solitude and beauty

This framing is about the view from the Trail looking out.

3. Think through what it means to **Re-imagine the A.T. as an ecological corridor** protecting healthy ecosystems today and, as the planet warms, a shared corridor for all species. Possible elements include:
 - Habitat/wildlife corridor
 - Water supply for eastern US
 - Climate change adaptation corridor
 - Healthy communities (recreation, active lifestyles, obesity prevention, etc.)

This item reflects the perspective of a conservation corridor that includes a major trail.

4. **Think about connectivity**. Connecting:
 - Communities to each other and the A.T.
 - Connecting to non-traditional partners and the next generation
 - Greenway connections to and from A.T. communities
 - Connecting communities to a larger vision, connecting a larger vision to communities

Next Steps and Closing Reflections

The workshop ended with a discussion around the collective advice of the group for moving the A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative forward—looking two years down the road. Guidance included:

Communications and Branding

- Focus on developing communications strategy, telling the story, best messages for specific audiences and how to reach them on a regular basis.
- Need a comprehensive communication strategy for partner organizations, media outreach, community engagement, political alliances, hikers and other recreational users, etc.
- Need a name and a “why” (a unifying feature), be able to explain to people not directly involved with the A.T.

Mapping

- Current conditions analysis mapping to identify all known data, include USFS and states, political mapping and a comprehensive inventory of current initiatives and organizations working within the A.T. landscape.

Continue to Work on Vision

- Define a clear desired future condition for Trail and facilities/structures (2050).

Outreach Plan

- Organize advisory group or steering committee
- Organize working groups for communications, GIS/mapping, and science.
- Identify 5–10 organizations traveling on a similar path, be more inclusive than just ATC and NPS.
- Regular communications with ATC’s Regional Partnership Committees (RPCs) and A.T. clubs—the volunteer trail-maintaining side of the Trail community.
- Need a way for people to engage immediately when the coalition goes public.
- Don't get caught up in speaking to ourselves, need outsiders to come in and talk with us.

Other Thoughts

- Create something to jump-start the initiative (proclamation etc.)
- Look at a 6-month calendar and see what we can accomplish.

Closing Thoughts

Ron and Wendy offered closing thoughts and expressed appreciation for everyone’s participation and engagement over the course of the two-day workshop. Dennis thanked everyone for participating and talked about looking forward to ongoing conversations with participants.

Appendix A: Participant List

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