



Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Initiative

Partners Meeting
October 4–5, 2016

Summary Report



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

Executive Summary

More than 60 conservation leaders gathered on October 4–5, 2016 at the National Conservation Training Center for the second annual meeting of the Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Initiative to advance discussions on a shared vision and mission, an organizational framework for the initiative, identifying priority landscape target areas, implementing a communications strategy, and developing a next-steps list for the coming year.

The next steps include:

- Finalization of vision and mission (Steering Committee)
- Refine the organizational framework (Workgroup and Steering Committee)
- Designing and implement communication tools and outreach strategies (Staff and Steering Committee)
- Create a conservation criteria matrix for the priority landscapes (Workgroup and Steering Committee)
- Develop a coalition fundraising strategy (staff and Steering Committee)

Welcome and Framing

After a welcome from Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Landscape Conservation Director Dennis Shaffer, ATC Executive Director Ron Tipton shared a progress update on the A.T. Landscape Initiative efforts since last December's meeting including the formation of an outstanding steering committee that convened for an in-person meeting early this summer in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Ron reported that people involved with the Trail and in surrounding communities have reacted enthusiastically.

Appalachian National Scenic Trail (APPA) Superintendent Wendy Janssen thanked those involved in organizing the meeting, introduced her staff, and welcomed several National Park superintendents here for the first time. She said this initiative is connected to the NPS's Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement, and specifically the Scaling Up Initiative. The goal of the Scaling Up Initiative is to promote large landscape conservation to support healthy ecosystems and cultural resources. She referenced the article by NPS Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Ray Sauvajot that was included in the meeting packet, which specifically mentions the importance of large landscape conservation and identifies the A.T. She gave an overview of

Highlighted Efforts

J.T. Horn (Trust for Public Lands) shared TPL's work on Bald Mountain Pond—1,200-acre lake between the Kennebec River and Monson, Maine.

Fred Dieffenbach (NPS Northeastern Temperate Network) described providing technical services to monitor, collect, and synthesize science data to understand trends and to inform and engage partners.

Karen Lutz (ATC) spoke about a William Penn Foundation funded project for watershed and water quality interpretation/education.

Mike Kane (Piedmont Environmental Council) reported on the Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance's work to bring a variety of groups to focus on natural, scenic, and recreational aspects of a corridor from the Potomac River to the northern end of Shenandoah National Park.

Charlie Chester (ALPINE) provided a brief summary of the efforts of Academics for Land Protection in New England to engage colleges and universities in land conservation.

other recent NPS efforts, including an Enjoy the View workshop, progress on the National Register of Historic Places designation for the Trail, and recently completed and ongoing land acquisition projects.

Facilitator Bill Potapchuk led introductions and reviewed the agenda. Bill said the focus will be on action—planning is needed, but let’s do it! Starting with building a shared sense of “Coopetition”—we need to have small egos and figure out how to raise money in a way that makes sense for all of our partners and others not in the room. We will use maps to work through a list of 30 potential priority landscapes, ranking what’s most important. We want to discuss “governance”—really shared rules of the road—and a communication strategy. Big Hairy Audacious Goals are on the agenda—do we want an acreage goal, or another way to measure our efforts? Bill challenged the conference participants to think about the Benton MacKaye quote of what a giant walking on the skyline of the Trail sees—what do we want to protect?

Vision and Mission Statement

The A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative has multiple components (people and natural). A draft vision and mission statement was presented to the conference participants for discussion (see Appendix B).

Key vision ideas:

- The word “Tapestry” indicates diversity and depth.
- Geographic scale important.
- “Green” is used in multiple ways.
- Permanent, safeguarding forever is a concept that needs to be lifted up.
- Benefits such as health; healthy and resilient landscape (we can’t forever safeguard it).
- Focuses on both north and south; connected landscape.
- “Tapestry of green” could limit our focus to buying undeveloped land. Maybe “connected landscape tapestry.”
- “Tapestry of healthy forests, protected landscapes, and communities.”
- “Green” might be too narrow for other audiences. Start with Appalachian Mountain range, but also may be too narrow.
- Fabled Trail, but it needs to be real.
- Need to speak to those outside the choir.
- We need poetry.

Key mission ideas:

- Use action/result words: secure, engage, connect, conserve.
- Public and private partners, but need a buzzword—community?
- Need consistent terminology: Appalachian mountains, Appalachian Trail, Appalachian skyline.
- One of the most exceptional landscapes of eastern U.S. (has global scope), broaden concept from trail to region, from footpath to landscape.
- Sanctity of the experience.
- “Conserve a great American landscape.”
- “Advocate for and secure a great American landscape.”
- “Protecting the A.T. and strengthening the communities along it.”
- Not just looking down from the Trail, think of communities looking up.
- Start with actions or threats, not history, in value and mission statements—why protection is needed.

- Want future generations to have the experience of enjoying the A.T.
- Truth-test with other audiences; something that resonates with others—we need them on our side.
- We don't want it to sound like a land grab.
- Reconceive relationship of the Trail to landscape: "A trail runs through it."
- Frame by drawing out how much has been invested in the Trail (CCC story, for example).
- Delivering the vision and building on that foundation. Delivered a national treasure, this is an opportunity to build on that.
- Frame around communities. Develop language people can put on websites, like clean water, why the Trail so important today.
- Have examples of somebody who donated land to protect it recently (e.g., Overmountain Victory Trail); people need to see themselves.
- Original goal, a walking trail to get away from cities, now we realize economic/health/cultural benefits. It's under threat, here's what you can do.
- Include business/commerce/working landscapes or we lose a lot of people.
- Highlight ability to work with other partners (like forest legacy programs); all inclusive, federally protected but other partners.

Bill Potapchuk described the vision/mission paper as a source document that can be pulled from for multiple purposes and will have more context when it's used. He encouraged participants to wordsmith on their own, input is welcome.

Prioritizing the Landscapes of the Appalachian Trail

Starting with a list of thirty previously identified priority areas in all four regions of the Trail, participants worked through a two-step process, over both days with a goal of developing interim priorities. Participants reviewed maps developed by GIS staff depicting the initial thirty priority areas, existing protected lands, and other information portrayed geographically.

The conversation focused on a goal of identifying a small number of initial priorities based on a set of basic high-level criteria:

- Known value
- Where there is threat
- Opportunity
- Set of partners in place

This work was an interim step toward a complete mapping prioritization using all available data and the best science, but this will take 2–3 years.

Following map reviews and ranking exercises, these **10 Priority Landscapes of the A.T. were identified as initial targets:**

- 100-Mile Wilderness of Maine
- Maine's High Peaks
- Lyme/Hanover Area of New Hampshire
- New York-Connecticut Line to Bear Mountain-Harriman State Park, New York
- Landscapes along the NY–NJ State Lines

- Kittatinny Ridge, Pennsylvania
- South Mountain, Pennsylvania
- Harpers Ferry, West Virginia to Snickers Gap, Virginia
- Catawba Valley/Triple Crown, Virginia
- Roan Highlands, North Carolina and Tennessee

Moving forward, a small group will develop a criteria matrix and then regional working groups will convene and review the projects in their region using the matrix.



Participants offered the following comments during the discussion:

- The list of 30 potential high priority landscapes is a good start to thinking about priorities.
- Need consistency in how to evaluate; comparing apples and oranges.
- We can map science, but politics/community engagement harder to map.
- We need to be able to identify criteria and articulate reason for priorities.
- Identifying priorities gives us areas of focus, but does not exclude other actions. This is a tremendous opportunity to build public support.
- Some areas are already in play via NPS, LWCF, Forest Legacy programs, such as South Mountain/Kittatinny Ridge.
- Scale of priority landscapes relates to what is feasible. For example, landscapes indicated in Maine could be combined, considered one priority.
- Look at ecological contexts/partnerships. Trail south of Roan Mountain a good example.
- Could there be 2 tiers? Sequential projects? Projects need to meet strategic priority or goal.
- Agrees with what is being said, but it doesn't do justice to all of the Trail. We need more information on the priority projects.
- Most of the places that rose to the top have local identity, watershed groups, A.T. communities.
- Look at what is important for the Trail and to local communities/partners in discrete places.
- Why were the sites originally selected? We need that information to make an informed choice.
- The initial list has been vetted with partners/conservation groups and is representative geographically. It is ATC's initial assessment coupled with communities/threats and includes large and small landscapes.
- We need working groups for each region to focus on what can be done in a very short term based on readiness assessment. Geographic diversity is consideration.
- Federal grant programs all require criteria; we need to be rigorous or funders/agencies won't go along.

- Our challenge is to keep in mind that we're here together for the power of partnership, not selecting local priorities. We want to push the collaborative forward.
- We need to be able to tell story and link to the landscape as a whole, why it makes sense

Governance—Collaboration, Coordination, Networking

Emily Bateson with the Practitioners Network for Large Landscape Conservation shared some observations and thoughts on governance. She noted that different initiatives ranged from very formal, codified arrangements, such as some of the river basin commissions, to more informal arrangements. The A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative is oriented toward the informal, more focused on collaboration and coordination, and is not a formal organization. Examples ranging from the Yukon to Yellowstone and the Chesapeake Bay Partnership were shared. Our goal is to create a structure with shared understandings for an informal network of partners.

Emily described five elements for a collaborative framework (sourced from *Enhancing The Partnership, Chesapeake Large Landscape Conservation Partnership Report*):

- Partnership building
- Institutional framework
- Communications, external and internal
- Implementation of shared activities
- Financial management

Group reflections/observations:

- We need to be informal because we won't have a structure with a board or voting members. We want strong collaboration and strong partnerships.
- This is only our second meeting, and we are still gathering partners, determining where interests overlap. We may be more codified down the road.
- Who has control of messaging? Someone needs to be in charge, have responsibility.
- That is the steering committee's role. Dennis is the point person and coordinator.
- The steering committee is 12–14 person group that will help define priorities/possibilities, represent the collective voice over time.
- Discussing capacity and sustainability will be critical. ATC and NPS are leading, but roles may shift depending on priorities/projects.
- Advocacy by federal agencies is limited (Byrd rule). Needs to be a "walled off" area for federal partners so we can have advocacy without putting NPS in jeopardy.
- The National Trails Act gives NPS a role, via the cooperative management agreement.
- In PA, agencies can fund conservation landscapes with grant money but can't do advocacy. Fundraising has not been an issue. It is powerful and critical to have government and nonprofit partnerships.
- It may be fluid, but is there a core group with the understanding that we will partner with others at certain times? Do those partners become part of the "organization?"
- Collective leadership, collective impact, but cooperative. Need a hub organization that grows and shrinks, but acts as facilitator, responsibilities may be distributed.
- It works well with the South Mountain Partnership. Groups act in their "wheelhouse," then step back.

- Internal communication is critical. Exciting possibilities, but we need to bring our base with us. Partners who aren't in the room need to know what is happening.
- ATC and NPS are the convenors, can distribute information, but the group needs to have collective responsibility
- Easier when funds are available, but need to have a plan for out years.
- Joint fundraising can be torturous. Once money is involved, there can be less trust and more tension.
- Organizations would fund-raise, but there may be a sense of competition. You need neutral convenors (ATC/NPS).
- What is metric for success? Benchmarks showing forward momentum are needed for funders.

External Communications Strategy

The partnership engaged Jon Haber to provide guidance on a communications. Haber works on conservation legislation and teaches graduate seminars in public affairs at Georgetown University. Jon's recommended communication plan for the A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative was shared with participants. (See copy in Appendix C.)

Communication:

1. Common language is needed—what is heard, not what is said.
2. Goal is to build support for A.T landscape among key audience—who is our audience?
3. Communicate clearly. Everything provides information, even subconsciously, and we make up our minds in a few seconds.

Strategies:

1. Messaging (mission and vision) is created for ourselves, foundations, like-minded organizations. Need to make sure it is persuasive with local political and business leaders.
2. Need something that resonates with people outside our community. Environmental community makes a mistake by not communicating in a way that persuades and resonates with others.
3. Story Telling—Not facts/figures/numbers, we want powerful stories that inspire people—there's a protagonist who confronts a barrier or conflict and there is a resolution. People respond emotionally. We need to focus on audience emotions/desires (not ours) and align language and images.

ATC will have a microsite for storytelling and will reach out to key communities with a soft launch, not a big announcement. ATC is working with NatureServe to develop and launch a web platform and is also working on social media. We want to share information, and hear about opportunities and accomplishments.

We will likely focus on specific communities with different messages/approaches. We need to determine where to focus first, be smart on how to make those approaches. We also want to make sure people receive the same information from multiple sources.

Naming the Landscape Initiative

Participants were asked to consider some proposed names to use in external communications for the initiative (not the group or a slogan). An effective name will be instantly understandable and self-

explanatory. Short is better, but think about what people will actually call it. The Trust for Public Land does a lot of polling and has found that “landscape” and “watershed” don’t mean a lot to people outside the conservation community. The challenge is that it’s more than heritage, more than landscape, more than history. Many new suggestions were made, but consensus on a name was not reached (see Next Steps at the end of this report).

Transition Planning for New Administration

The Steering Committee has an opportunity to approach the next president’s transition team as a vehicle for furthering land conservation around the A.T. In addition to the next president’s transition team, all federal agencies are required to have transition teams in place. Deputy Director Mike Reynolds is on the NPS transition team. It was noted that accelerated activity focus on the Chesapeake Bay Partnership emerged out of a transition strategy that led to a 2009 Executive Order by President Obama.

Ron Tipton is leading a workgroup drafting a memo from us to the transition team highlighting protection the A.T. landscape as a top conservation priority and providing an idea of what that means in terms of money, programs, legislation, and executive orders.

Discussion/observations:

- Transition team makes report, helps select candidates for department secretaries, and shepherds nominees through the confirmation process. Initiative can be raised with courtesy visits, going to both parties for support—many on both sides already are supporters.
- 50th anniversary of the National Trails System Act is an opportunity, also LWCF. May be other opportunities on state side.
- Other National Scenic and Historic trails look to A.T. as exemplar but already see us as getting all the money—may be some resentment. Emphasis on large landscape is more useful than on the Trail itself. There tends to be a western focus, but large landscape in proximity to bulk of population on the eastern seaboard would resonate.
- We have a lot of support in the Midwest, don’t just focus our efforts in the East.
- Other comments stressed the need to show importance to larger population/communities, not just hiking or recreation services.

Ron Tipton asked participants for help with connections (officials/transition teams) that we can approach after the election.

Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG)

Bill Potapchuk shared some background on the origin and use of the term BHAG. People like to rally round a big, audacious goal. It is a strategic statement that helps focus an organization on a single, medium- to long-term, organization-wide, very ambitious goal. It may be seen as externally questionable but not internally regarded as impossible.

Bill offered some questions to determine if an idea rises to the level of a BHAG:

1. 10+ years out?
2. Measurable?
3. 80% impossible, 20% possible?

4. Leverage what you love to do?
5. Push to greatness and stretch the people and processes?
6. Do any of the possibilities brought up meet those criteria?

Discussion:

- What about a goal affecting funding? The National Trails System Act talks about the tax code. Donating land along the trails system is deductible for income tax purposes. Legislation has been proposed previously that would make it a tax credit—much better for donors.
- Other funding can come from tax credits within area (investors sell tax credits). For NGOs, carbon offset funds and other mitigation funds may provide influx of new money.
- Don't look at what government should do—what should ATC and its partners do? 21st century, new-model parks, focus on NGO management of the initiative—e.g., Shenandoah Valley battlefields historic district has acquisition ability and nonprofit management.
- Collaborative, not predominantly reliant on government, nonprofit has a visible face. But, there will be controversy over management of public land by nonprofit.
- What is amount of protected acreage for A.T.? (Matt Robinson estimated about 265,000.) There are also state/local lands, agricultural easements.
- We need data to support our story: protected land, water supply for how many millions? How many RTE? How much economic activity (recreation) and money generated in working landscapes? What is general population and visitation in local areas?
- Databases for at-risk species already exist. Communicating a preemptive benefit for those species is a good selling point.

Fundraising Partnerships

Ron Tipton led a discussion about funding from foundations and individuals. He highlighted the importance of partnership efforts and used the example of efforts currently underway between ATC and the Trust for Public Land. TPL has a pipeline of an estimated \$30 million worth of projects throughout the A.T. landscape. TPL provides real-estate expertise, works on tracts of land, but needs grassroots support. ATC helps with local contacts, legislatures, and also has stepped in to help when a project is out of synch with funding cycles.

Observations/comments:

- Example: Hanover Hudson project—TPL had a fundraising goal of \$200,000 in addition to funding from NPS LWCF, and they needed to set up a stewardship fund. Went to neighbors for donations. Successful community-based projects result in open, public, protected land with funds to maintain it. This is a project-by-project approach—how can we move to something more programmatic?
- This will require fundraising beyond anything that we have done before. How do we make it successful?
- We are not going to do a PR blitz on high priorities, but will continue to have discussions with stakeholders, bring them into the conversation.
- Pick pilot projects for a few years, will give opportunities to demonstrate to future funders how it is successful. Keep other regions informed, have comments/questions.
- Need a story with each project, how it fits into larger framework of the A.T. landscape. Who loves a particular story helps determine fundraising.

- What is the organization going to be? Who figures out players, where money comes from—we need some centralized control. For ATC’s board, this needs to be in context of other strategic goals.
- Look toward checking some priorities off the list, and that will inform how we approach and build capacity in other areas.
- How do we check things off the list; how do we know when is it finished?
- If we are looking for an LWCF Collaborative Landscape Proposal for next year, we would need to start in May for September. Some suggested an earlier start is needed. Also need a working group to get a proposal started in spring.
- ATC has development resources and fundraising is already underway. We have corporate partners. How can we help raise money collaboratively, working with development program staff from other organizations?

Next Steps and Closing Reflections

In the near term, the steering committee will work on finalizing vision/mission statements, BHAG, and naming of the initiative.

In the medium term, the focus will be on:

- Priority analysis—working groups on matrix and regional priorities
- Governance framework
 - Need to have ATC and NPS co-convenors for present time.
 - Don’t have more governance than we need
 - Need criteria goals/objectives for groups to participate
 - Network—a loose structure with regional groups
 - Collaborative structure, figure out NGO and agency piece
 - May need two tracks, agencies and others.

Closing thoughts included:

- A lot of great energy and enthusiasm here at the conference again this year. We don’t want steering committee to make all decisions, please come back to us.
- Last year there was some discussion about stretching into Canada, a sister effort? New England states and Canada have signed an agreement to cooperate in forest management/protection—two countries/one forest. The A.T. landscape is part of that effort. US/Canada would be timely given NPS relationship w/Canadian parks.
- Yukon to Yellowstone has support of Western Governors Association; would eastern governors associations champion our effort?

Sandi Marra, Chair of the ATC Board of Directors thanked everyone for being so engaged and bringing us to this point in the development of the A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative.

Ron Tipton offered that it was a great conference among organizations “we have tremendous respect for.” There is a strong commonality of purpose, and the progress we’ve made to set priorities is a big step forward. He asked for honest feedback when completing the evaluation form.

Wendy Janssen also thanked everyone. “You are all doing incredible work individually and we need your energy, ideas, expertise. This will be an annual meeting—please come back!”

Participant List - A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative Annual Meeting, October 4-5, 2016

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Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Initiative

A Vision for the Next 100 Years

Vision: A healthy, connected tapestry of green along the entire spine of the fabled Appalachian Mountain range, connecting us north to south and forever safeguarding our priceless natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of people and nature.

Mission: Bring together public and private partners to connect and conserve the natural, ecological, cultural, historic, scenic, recreational, and community values of the exceptional landscapes associated with the Appalachian Trail and the spine of the Appalachian Mountain Range of the Eastern United States.

A Wondrous Vision for the East

A singular vision drove the creation of the Appalachian Trail, one of America's most beloved landmarks and hiking experiences. Almost 100 years ago, Benton MacKaye believed that people from all walks of life should have the opportunity to experience a world apart from their noisy, mechanized city lives, see wild nature in all its beauty, breathe in the quiet, and thus replenish their spirits. He felt that these opportunities should exist not only in the west, but also in the east where more people could reach them, and advocated for a long-distance footpath along the entire spine of the Appalachian Mountains—what he termed the “Appalachian Skyline.”

Today that footpath is a reality. Affectionately known as the A.T., the footpath wends its way down from Maine's Mt. Katahdin through 14 states and the most spectacular scenery and nature the east coast has to offer, to Springer Mountain in Georgia. Benton MacKaye's focus on eastern recreation was prescient: more than three million people hike the A.T. each year and that number continues to climb.

The creation and completion of the Appalachian Trail was a major conservation victory. Yet for many sections, only a thin corridor along the footpath has been fully protected. Many lands and waters along the A.T. of ecological, scenic, and cultural significance remain vulnerable. Threats abound including poorly planned commercial, energy, and transportation development; suburban sprawl; noise pollution; climate change impacts; and habitat fragmentation and destruction. Collectively these factors threaten clean water, wildlife habitat, ecological resilience, local sense of place, and the experience of A.T. visitors.

Almost 100 years after the original vision, it is now time to fully protect the A.T. experience and all that it encompasses. It is time to work toward a bold vision that not only serves millions of hikers and visitors, but also protects the land's ecology, the vitality of the 168 local communities that the trail traverses, and the integrity of the East's famed Appalachian Mountains as a whole.

A parcel here and a parcel there is not enough. Our natural and cultural landscapes are invaluable and intertwined and they are at risk. We know now that the great swath of green that wends its way along the Appalachian Skyline provides millions of people with clean and abundant water; controls flooding; cleans our air and absorbs the carbon warming our planet; safeguards our eastern wildlife and biodiversity; and provides food and fuel and countless jobs in farming, forestry, recreation, tourism, and more. Benton MacKaye was far ahead of his time.

Launching the A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative (insert new name here)

Volunteers and partners have been central to the A.T. since its beginning. It took the commitment of countless people to step forward and make this remarkable trail a reality. Today, over 7,000 volunteers from local trail clubs up and down the trail step forward each year to help maintain the 2,200-mile footpath. The A.T. is managed through a unique private-public partnership that includes the National Park Service, the non-profit Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the local trail clubs, and an array of other agencies and organizations.

We are continuing that tradition with a new 100-year imperative.

In 2015, 70 leaders from public agencies, conservation organizations, and community groups gathered for two days to launch the A.T. Landscape Conservation Initiative (insert new name here) and develop initial steps to conserve its broader natural, historic, and cultural landscapes. We are bringing together private and public entities in a new way to harness the collective impact of all who care about the A.T. – those who manage or hike the trail, conserve lands along it, live or have businesses nearby, and/or more broadly embrace the Appalachian Skyline as part of our nation’s priceless nature and culture.

This emerging initiative supports and builds on the ongoing work of myriad individual communities, conservation groups, and agencies to safeguard the valuable but vulnerable lands associated with the Appalachian Trail and Mountains.

Our Shared Mountain Heritage

Eastern North America is defined and connected by the rugged Appalachian Mountain range. This vast Highland system rose up as the plates shifted and collided more than 480 million years ago, making it the oldest mountain range in the United States. The Appalachian Mountain range is our eastern counterpart to the Rockies, and together they have been called the “shoulders of the continent.”

A natural barrier between the eastern Coastal Plain and the Interior Lowlands, the Appalachians have played a vital role in the settlement and development of the East and the entire country.

Their role in American history, culture, and identity is so profound that the 19th century American author, Washington Irving, recommended renaming America, “Appalachia.” Today, these iconic eastern mountains continue to combine a heritage of natural beauty; a treasure trove of biodiversity; and distinctive local communities and cultures.

The Initiative will focus on:

- **Conserving sensitive and threatened areas that represent the shared conservation values of our partners.** We will support the many important conservation efforts in play and work toward accelerating the conservation of priority landscapes.
- **Catalyzing an increase in funding available for land conservation.** Public resources have been constrained in recent years; we need to expand resources to achieve our goals.
- **Connecting people along the Appalachian Trail and across the broader Appalachian Skyline** to foster information exchange and to discuss challenges, objectives, and key conservation strategies.
- **Communicating across geographies and sectors** the importance of conserving the broader natural and cultural landscapes associated with the Appalachian Trail and the East's great Appalachian Mountains.

The Appalachian Trail is a groundbreaking American and global conservation model with a proud 100-year history. It is a foundation of the current landscape scale conservation movement. It is now time to work together to achieve the broader Appalachian vision—for the benefit of all natural and human communities in the years, decades, and next 100 years to follow.

For Further Information:

Who Was Benton MacKaye?

Benton MacKaye was a planner and forester (1879-1975) who helped pioneer the idea of land preservation for recreation and conservation purposes. Most famously, he is known as the father of the Appalachian Trail, a vision he presented in a 1921 article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*: "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning." He believed strongly in the recuperative powers of nature, and the need to set aside wild lands in the populous Eastern United States like the ones being created in the West: "These (Appalachian) Mountains, in several ways rivaling the western scenery, are within a day's ride from centers containing more than half the population of the United States." He wrote evocatively about the rich and varied eastern landscapes that should be embraced and experienced: "Let us assume the existence of a giant standing high on the skyline along these mountain ridges, his head just scraping the floating clouds. What would he see from this skyline as he strode along its length from north to south?" And he felt passionately that a trail along this Appalachian Skyline would connect people to that wondrous landscape: "If these people were on the skyline, and kept their eyes open, they would see the things that the giant could see." Benton MacKaye worked tirelessly to build broad-based support for this singular vision, and in 1937 the Appalachian Trail, his enduring legacy, was completed. What we do with that legacy is now up to us.

Protecting the Appalachian Trail Landscape Communications Strategy 9/27/16

Going Forward

This is a draft communications plan for the landscape initiative. It will be refined following the October 4-5 workshop in Shepherdstown, WV.

At the end of this memo is a discussion about “naming” the campaign and how we refer to it in public. Currently, the working title for the campaign is “Protecting the Appalachian Trail Landscape.” That however is a placeholder as the intention is to select a permanent name which better reflects the purpose and value of this effort.

There will be an opportunity to those attending the October 4-5 Shepherdstown workshop to make suggestions about the permanent name of the campaign (see page 9 below for a detailed discussion of naming options.)

Overview

Following the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from Georgia to Maine, the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) is America’s premier long distance hiking trail — one of the longest, continuously marked footpaths in the world. Completed nearly 80 years ago, it spans 14 states, a myriad of towns and communities, and a collection of federal, state, local and privately-owned lands. It crosses a variety of terrain, including rolling hills and mountains, deep valleys, forests, rivers and streams, open pastures and much more.

But the A.T. is not just a footpath. To the thousands who traverse it every year — whether they do so for the day or its entire length — the Trail is a special place. Some hike to reconnect with nature or to escape the stress of city life. Others visit for the physical and mental benefits, to meet new people and deepen friendships, or to experience a simpler life. From thru-hikers to weekend walkers, it is a place of solitude, reflection and reconnection with America’s beauty, history and culture.

While federal law protects the footpath and its surrounding narrow corridor, the A.T. experience — with its pristine viewsheds, watersheds and diversity of natural resources — is vulnerable to many external threats that over time permanently impact the hiking experience and undermine the sense of place so important to neighboring communities. These threats include:

- Incompatible commercial and residential development.
- Energy and communication development, including large-scale natural-gas pipelines, high-voltage powerlines, inappropriately-sited wind farms across pristine peaks and communications towers rising above popular high elevation hiking destinations.
- Destruction of diverse wildlife and plant habitats.
- Degradation of historic sites and cultural landscapes, including farms, battlefields and rural communities.
- Long-term impacts of our changing climate.

This Protecting the A.T. Landscape Initiative is designed to expand protection to the A.T. hiking experience for generations to come.

Situation Analysis

As this initiative is in the planning phase, we recognize the importance of properly communicating it to a variety of audiences.

While this will be an important national initiative, it will also be a collaborative, bottom-up effort where decisions about various parts of the Trail are made locally — in partnership with nearby local communities, willing landowners and other interested parties. Moreover, participation will be voluntary and not compelled by federal or state agencies. Success will depend on uniting surrounding communities, people who use and enjoy the Trail and private partners who manage the Trail.

Finally, while many share the same goal — preserving the A.T. — not all participants will share the same motivation for doing so. For some, the Trail is an important economic engine for their town as it supports local tourism and local jobs. For others, the protected land near the A.T. supports hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities unrelated to walking the Trail. For still others, it's the journey itself, whether for the day or the Trail's entire length, that is most important. Acknowledging these varied motivations will be an important key to the success of this initiative.

Goal

The goal of this communications strategy is to build support for Protecting the A.T. Landscape Initiative among key audiences."

Key Audiences

There are two categories of key audiences, the first being most important:

- **Primary audiences (most important):** These are individuals and groups who will play the greatest role in setting overall policy and making local decisions about various projects.
 - Conservation community:
 - Federal managers:
 - National Park Service
 - US Forest Service (USDA)
 - Other federal officials who can/will play a role in this effort
 - State managing partners:
 - State park, forest, wildlife managers and other officials who can/will play a role in this effort
 - Volunteers, conservation and other partners:
 - Trail clubs and other A.T. volunteer leaders and organizations with a primary purpose of supporting the Trail and protecting the A.T. hiking experience
 - Conservation organizations, including land trusts, advocacy groups and other organizations that support protection of the A.T.
 - Colleges and universities which utilize the A.T. in a variety of ways and support its protection
 - Local communities (the specific community will vary depending on the location of various conservation efforts):

- Local elected officials
- Local landowners
- Local business community
- Local A.T. communities
- Other local influencers
- Local trail club members, supporters and volunteers
- Policy-making audiences (individuals and groups who will be less involved in the planning and decision-making but will have involvement with and/or influence over the policy or specific decisions)
 - Federal officials from the executive branch (White House, relevant federal agencies)
 - This will include the transition teams for the incoming President
 - Senators and members of Congress representing the 14 states through which the A.T. runs
 - State officials such as Governors, state legislatures and regulators
- **Influencer audiences (secondary importance):** These audiences influence and shape the opinions of the primary audience.
 - News media (print, digital, electronic media)
 - Other influencers such as think tanks, social media influencers, academics and others who may play a role in shaping public opinion about this initiative.

Strategies

These are our communications strategies:

- Create an educational campaign – that uses face-to-face and digital communications, social media and media relations – to reach primary, secondary and influencer audiences. Ensure that these audiences hear our messages first.
- Use a “big tent” approach, stressing the voluntary nature of the project and the important role of local and state leaders, landowners and other parties.
- Stress two categories of benefits:
 - Varied benefits for those who use the Trail and its surrounding lands: reconnecting with nature, solitude, physical, mental and emotional well-being, local jobs, etc.
 - General benefits of land conservation, watershed protection, rare/endangered species protection, cultural preservation, etc.
- Recognize that protecting the A.T. landscape provides additional benefits which are important to many who live near the Trail or visit the area. These include hunting and fishing, other recreational uses (e.g., mountain biking) and working landscape management (e.g., forest management and active farming). Acknowledging the importance of these benefits to others could help solidify the support of a broader community and unusual allies for this campaign.

- Develop and implement communication systems for our coalition of partners working in collaboration that will provide for and enhance the sharing of data and information that fuels our work, fosters project sharing and coordination, and our collective and individual successes that benefit the A.T. Landscape.
- Develop branding — e.g., a more descriptive name of the initiative, iconic imagery, evocative language — to support the communications efforts.

Key messages

The message frame has three parts to it:

- **America's unique national treasure.** America's most famous long-distance hiking trail, the A.T. stretches from Maine to Georgia, connecting small communities in 14 states. An estimated three million people hike on the 2,190-mile-long A.T. yearly, and more than 3,000 will attempt to thru-hike the entire Trail this year. A unit of the National Park System, the Trail is one of the longest and most popular hiking-only footpaths in the world.

To the thousands who walk on the A.T. — either for a single day or its entire length — the Trail is a special place. It allows hikers to reconnect with nature and American history, escape the stress of city life, experience the benefits of solitude or enjoy a physical workout. It is an important economic engine for the 168 towns and municipalities located nearby as it supports local tourism and local jobs.

Moreover, this initiative was launched during the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service and leads up to the 50th anniversary of the designation of the A.T. as a national trail in 2018.

- **A threat to our national heritage and economy.** Although federal law protects the footpath and the surrounding narrow corridor, the A.T. is threatened in some areas by incompatible commercial and residential development, major industrial projects and the destruction of diverse wildlife, forests and fragile habitat. Over time, this could impact local economies and the Trail experience that so many Americans enjoy and benefit from each and every year.
- **Safeguarding the A.T. for future generations.** A new initiative is underway to protect the Trail for generations to come – and to make the trail experience provided today even better. Areas in need of protection will be identified with teams of willing and interested local community leaders and landowners, state and federal experts, the National Park Service, conservation nonprofits and the public to identify and develop the right approach to protect that part of the Trail. This will be a collaborative, bottom-up effort where solutions are reached by a broad consensus of key stakeholders.

Tactics

This is a two-phase campaign, with Phase One focused on creating the foundation and Phase Two instituting the launch of the campaign.

▪ Phase One: Create the Foundation

○ Prepare materials

- Draft background materials for internal use.
 - We want to make sure we have the tone and messaging right. These background materials will serve as the template for the campaign. All other materials will be drafted based on the tone and language in these sources.
 - Build out the messages with proof points and facts.
 - 1-2 page background document
 - FAQs — key questions and answers
- Create a packet of information for allies
 - Using the background documents above, create documents that can be shared (in print and electronically) with our partners.

○ Create a micro-site

- A micro-site would be a website (with its own URL or web address) that allies, interested parties, the media, etc. would access to learn more about the Initiative. It would serve as the hub for all information regarding this campaign.
 - It could be housed on the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) server and managed by the ATC but should not look nor feel like an ATC site. It will be more valuable to others if it is about the A.T., not the ATC.
- Possible name: My A.T. (or a name that better reflects the branding we develop).
 - Everyone's experience with the Appalachian Trail and its value is different. This allows people to see/understand their personal connection.
 - Utilize and promote the hashtag #myAT on social posts.
- Content on the microsite would include:
 - Educational information.
 - Benefits of the A.T. experience and the A.T. landscape
 - Community partners.
 - Trail map and key areas of importance.
 - Ways to get involved.
 - Integration with social profiles/hashtags supporting this campaign
 - Collection of email addresses for interested individuals to stay informed.

- Links to news articles highlighting the goals/effect of the initiative (to be instituted as campaign proceeds).
 - Links to partner organizations and agencies working within the A.T. landscape.
 - The opportunity for partners to post news and stories about new or ongoing protects and/or success stories.
- **Reach out to key communities**
 - Before we launch the campaign in the media, we'll want to reach out to key audiences to brief them by phone or preferably face-to-face. We will want to create a detailed matrix of specific individuals and groups who should be briefed beforehand – as well as identify the individual(s) and/or group(s) who will do the briefings.
 - Some of these audiences will be natural allies (e.g., volunteers and conservation partners) or others in the conservation community (e.g., federal and state managers).
 - We will also want to reach out to trail clubs and regional partnership communities about this initiative.
 - Others will be influential individuals in local communities (state and local elected officials, influential local landowners, local business community members, etc.) as well as “hook and bullet” and other groups that may not be instinctively natural allies.
 - We do not need to brief all these individuals before the launch, but we will want a solid base of support from outside the conservation community that will say positive things about the Initiative when it is launched. Ideally, we can include the names and comments from some of these individuals who support the Initiative.
 - For our efforts, we'll want a tangible show of support (e.g. 20 mayors, local elected officials, local business, various community organization) before we go live about specific landscapes.
 - From the start, we want this Initiative to be seen as having broad-based support.
 - Please note that this will take time, but laying this foundation will be critical to our long-term success.

Phase Two: Launch the campaign

- There are two basic ways to launch a campaign:
 - Hard-launch: This is where the launch is done on a single day or over a few days. Hard launches are most appropriate where the organizers want to make as big a splash as possible (e.g., candidate announces her campaign for office; company launches a new product).
 - Soft-launch: This is where there is not a big announcement but rather a series of activities that build support for an action taking place. Rather than

focusing on the launch event, the campaign builds momentum over time with a series of coordinated activities.

For our effort, a soft-launch makes most sense, as we want to slowly build support for our effort.

- Soft-launch activities:
 - Microsite goes live.
 - For microsites, the best strategy is to build it, amplify it, and leave it. Put what is needed initially; we may not need regular updates (although some updates will be helpful).
 - However, we will want to ask partners to link to it and promote it with social hashtags.
 - Generate news coverage.
 - Focus first on local and regional digital and traditional outlets (print, radio and television) emphasizing the local angle.
 - Our strategy should be adaptive. After there is coverage in local outlets, consider focusing on more national outlets.
 - Seek to generate news stories, op-eds and editorial board mailings that drive our messages. Positive news stories would be posted on the microsite.
 - Speaking before local venues.
 - Identify appropriate people to speak before local venues (chambers of commerce, tourism councils, local conservation forums, key community groups, etc.).
 - This is continuation and deeper outreach of what we would do before the launch.
 - A matrix and timetable for this would be developed.
 - Develop a presentation and speech for speakers to use.

Name of Campaign

The name “Protecting the Appalachian Trail Landscape” is the working title for the campaign. It is a placeholder as our intention is to select a permanent name which reflects the purpose and value of this effort.

These are several names under consideration although others can be added to this list:

1. My Appalachian Trail
2. My A.T.
3. Our Appalachian Trail
4. Our A.T.
5. Appalachian Trail Connections
6. Protecting A.T. Heritage
7. Our A.T. Heritage
8. Appalachian Trail Heritage Partnership

- 9. Appalachian Trail Heritage Countryside
- 10. Appalachian Trail Heritage Connection
- 11. A.T. Heritage Corridor

The permanent name of this effort is but one, important communications element. It should have words and meaning that are instantly understood and self-explanatory – and ideally focused on the *impact* of this initiative, as opposed to the *process* of how we are going about. Ideally it would be a stand-alone name, meaning that it would not need a tagline to help define it – or be too long that people feel more comfortable using a nickname or initials instead of its full name. Most important, it should be meaningful to at least these two audiences:¹

- The conservation community which has been most active in developing this initiative.
- A larger community whose support is essential to the success of this effort. This includes local business people, state and local political leaders, etc. who may have never hiked the Trail. Frankly the name is for them. The name should help them understand the vision and value of this initiative. The name should interest and not scare them. They have to instantly understand what the name means.

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¹ See page 3 for a more detailed discussion of audiences.