



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Horses and Pack Animals

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Introduction

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail volunteer maintaining clubs (“Clubs”) and other public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the USDI National Park Service and its close working partnership with the USDA Forest Service and other agencies.

ATC's Trail management and conservation policies are meant to provide guidance for (a) dissemination to the public; (b) use and implementation by the ATC and the Clubs; and (c) recommendations for land-managing and other agencies. It is the agencies who work within their defined procedures to propose, administer, and enforce public policy. ATC policies are recommendations developed to support appropriate, coordinated trailwide management.

Overview

In April 1985, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy passed a resolution reaffirming its support of the prohibition of horses and pack animals on the Appalachian Trail.



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Policy

The exception to this rule is a 37-mile section of the Trail in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park where horse use existed prior to designation of the A.T. as a national scenic trail and was specifically referenced in the legislative history of the National Trails System Act. Since 1995, this section has been subject to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club and the three main equestrian clubs of the area (Backcountry Horsemen of N.C., Haywood Trail Riders and Smoky Mountains Trail Riders).

- Through the framework of the MOU, riders have agreed to clear blowdowns, cut annual growth, pack in tools and equipment necessary for trail-construction projects and crews, and work on tread-maintenance projects in cooperation with hikers on the A.T. section open to their use.
- Standards for treadway and shelter maintenance and usage also have been agreed upon.

Horses also are permitted on a three-mile section in Maryland where the Appalachian Trail coincides with the C&O Canal National Historical Park towpath.

Horse trails may *cross* the A.T. as long as signs and management efforts by the Trail club and agency partner deter trespass by saddle and pack stock and the agency has expressly authorized that crossing.

Contact Us

For questions related to this policy please contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org, or P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV, 25425-807.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.