ATC Policy on Managing the Trail for a Primitive Experience

Adopted by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in April 1995

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy should take into account the effects of Trail-management programs and policies on the primitive and natural qualities of the Appalachian Trail and the primitive recreational experience the Trail is intended to provide. Although these guidelines are intended to apply primarily to the effects of actions or programs on predominantly natural, wild, and remote environments along the Trail, they may apply to certain pastoral, cultural, and rural landscapes as well. Even in sections of the Trail that do not pass through remote or primitive landscapes, care should be taken not to inadvertently overdevelop or improve the Trail tread or facilities in these environments.

Trail improvements, including shelters, privies, bridges, and other facilities, should be constructed only when appropriate to protect the resource or provide a minimum level of public safety. Design and construction of these facilities should reflect an awareness of, and harmony with, the Trail’s primitive qualities. Materials and design features should emphasize simplicity and not detract from the predominant sense of a natural, primitive environment. The Trail treadway, when constructed, reconstructed, or relocated, should wear lightly on the land and be built primarily to provide greater protection for the Trail footpath or Trail resource values. Trail-management publications should include appropriate references to the potential effects of Trail-management activities on the primitive qualities of the Trail.

In developing programs to maintain open areas, improve water sources, provide sanitation, remove structures, and construct bridges, signs, Trailheads, and other facilities, Trail managers should consider whether a proposed action or program will have an adverse effect on the primitive qualities of the Trail, and, if such effects are identified, whether the action or program is appropriate.

The following questions can be used to help evaluate the potential effect of a policy, program, or project on the primitive quality of the Trail:

1. Will this action or program protect the A.T.?
2. Can this be done in a less obtrusive manner?
3. Does this action unnecessarily sacrifice aspects of the Trail that provide solitude or that challenge hikers’ skill or stamina?
4. Could this action, either by itself or in concert with other actions, result in an inappropriate diminution of the primitive quality of the Trail?
5. Will this action help to ensure that future generations of hikers will be able to enjoy a primitive recreational experience on the A.T.?