CHAPTER 2 (C)

Relocations

Where the Appalachian Trail is located on roads, or its location is undesirable because of resource damage or irreconcilable conflicts with incompatible uses, relocations may be made to provide a more desirable environment for the hiker or to protect the resource. Since the Trail was first completed as a continuous footpath in 1937, many relocations have been necessary to keep the Trail from being severed by subdivisions and road development. Those development threats were the main reason for the federal land-protection program. As federal and state agencies have acquired corridor land, Trail clubs have been involved in major relocations to place the Trail in the newly acquired A.T. corridor.

Care must be exercised so that Trail relocations do not diminish the primitive quality or simplicity of the footpath. Relocations also open up new areas to public use. All relocations should provide a Trail environment that is equal to or better than that of the existing location, while procedurally complying with the legal responsibilities of the landowning agency, particularly those established in the National Trails System Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) [see Chapter 5 (M)].

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—Although ATC does not have a formal policy on relocations, ATC ensures that all partners—the Trail clubs, land-managing agencies, and landowners—are involved and consulted, with proposals and plans shared and reviewed before relocations are constructed in the field. ATC also serves as guarantor that the primitive quality of the Appalachian Trail is maintained or enhanced in the relocation process. ATC cooperates with federal agencies in completing the environmental assessments required by NEPA. During the land-acquisition program particularly in the southern national forests, ATC and the Forest Service developed an “Optimal Location Review” process to ensure that the optimal A.T. route was selected before acquisition. (This process is still used on USFS lands in the Southern region of the Trail. Trail clubs should check with their ATC regional office for guidance). ATC amends the guidebook series and the annually published Appalachian Trail Data Book as necessary and posts descriptions of major relocations on its Web site.

Relocation Procedure—ATC, the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and state representatives on the former Appalachian National Scenic Trail Advisory Council (ANSTAC) approved a relocation procedure that required consultation among Trail clubs, ATC, and the landowning agencies or private landowners to ensure that a relocation benefits the Trail. Proposed “relocation approval requests” were classified as “Trivial” (less than 1,000 feet long and 75 feet laterally), “Minor” (more than 1,000 feet long and 75 feet laterally, but not affecting the verbal description or A.T. maps published in the Federal Register), or “Major,” requiring an amendment of the description of the Appalachian Trail published in the Federal Register notification. However, that relocation procedure was essentially tabled by the federal land-managing agencies’ promulgation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which evaluates environmental or cultural impacts on the human environment regardless of a proposal’s length. Compliance with NEPA is required for all relocations affecting any federal lands crossed by the Trail.

All significant relocations require written concurrence by the local maintaining club, ATC, and the land-managing agency partner. Use the general management approval form provided in Appendix A.

NPS Policy—The National Park Service retains authority for relocation of the Trail corridor.

Federal Register Route Description—In 1971, the National Park Service published a written description and maps of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail right-of-way in the Federal Register (Vol. 36, No.
197, October 9, 1971). That right-of-way defines the geographic scope of the federal government’s authority to implement relocations. Relocations outside of that right-of-way require publication of amended right-of-way descriptions in the *Federal Register*.

The NPS land-acquisition program was expanded significantly with the adoption of Public Law 95-248, a 1978 amendment to the *National Trails System Act*. The process required many minor and major relocations, as defined by the 1976 procedures, and a major effort to evaluate all relocations under NEPA. The National Park Service Appalachian Trail Park Office oversees this process and maintains the official record of the route of the Appalachian Trail, including all amendments to the *Federal Register*, all relocation-approval requests and appropriate NEPA documentation.

**U.S. Forest Service Policy**—NEPA review and approval is required in advance of all proposed relocations of the footpath of the Appalachian Trail on Forest Service lands.

**Considerations for Planning**

**Inventory**—While relocations have become fewer in number as the land-acquisition program has been nearly completed, each Trail club should have a current list of all planned relocations consistent with its Trail assessment inventory. This list can be attached and maintained in its local management plan as an appendix.

**Setting Trail Club Policy**—The Trail club should identify the process (Trail assessment, optimal location review, or informal consultation with agency partner) and the general circumstances in which the club will consider Trail relocations. The policy developed by the club should recognize coordination with agency partners and ATC through use of relocation approval requests or other appropriate means.

**Action Plan**—Using its inventory of planned relocations, the Trail club should establish relocation priorities based on need and available resources. The club also should allow lead time for the agency partner to conduct an environmental assessment or other review of the project, such as evaluation for possible cultural resources. Detailed descriptions of major relocations should be provided to ATC’s conservation department to ensure inclusion in publications and on ATC’s Web site.