ATC Policy on Wilderness

Adopted by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in April 1991

It is the policy of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to support wilderness-area designation, wherever such designation enhances the protection and management of the Appalachian Trail and its side and connecting trails. This support is based upon the belief that the Appalachian Trail and its related facilities are fundamentally compatible with designated wilderness and that the preservation of wilderness in the vicinity of the Appalachian Trail can significantly enhance the experience of Trail users.

ATC believes that the Trail and its related facilities represent a desirable existing use that is compatible with wilderness designation. ATC further believes that traditional management practices should continue, including Trail marking and maintenance, but that Trail maintainers should acknowledge and must comply with agency constraints on types of tools, equipment, materials, and methods. Maintenance of shelters and footbridges should be permitted and is desirable for the protection of wilderness values and the health and safety of persons using the Appalachian Trail within designated wilderness.

Where the A.T. passes through designated wilderness, ATC and the Trail-maintaining clubs should maintain the A.T. in accordance with the Wilderness Act, specific wilderness-area designating acts, and individual wilderness-area management plans. Decisions by agency partners regarding wilderness management that could potentially affect the Appalachian Trail should be developed in consultation and coordination with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, affected Trail-maintaining clubs, and other organizations and individuals. ATC encourages federal agencies and Trail-maintaining clubs to deal with specific shelter and Trail-marking issues on a case-by-case basis in wilderness-area management plans and club local management plans.

ATC endorses the following principles for management of the Appalachian Trail within designated wilderness and for areas encompassing the Trail that are to be designated as wilderness:

**Trail Marking.** The Appalachian Trail should be marked in designated wilderness by 2-inch by 6-inch white vertical paint blazes, as described in the ATC stewardship handbook, *[Appalachian] Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance.*

Signs should be used only where necessary to provide basic information essential for navigation and public safety. Signs along the Trail within wilderness should be used to identify direction and distance to shelters and water sources, precautions for use of water, and only such other information as is necessary to protect wilderness values. In general, if a regulatory or educational sign is needed to inform users, it should be placed outside the wilderness area boundary at the Trailhead or point of entry into the wilderness area. Signs should be simple and as small as possible, be made of natural wood, and be designed to minimize their contrast with the natural environment.
Trail Shelters, Overnight Use Facilities, and Structures. The system of Trail shelters spaced at approximate one-day hiking intervals is an integral component of the Appalachian Trail environment. In general, Trail shelters in designated wilderness areas should be rustic Adirondack-style lean-tos constructed of lumber, logs, or rocks, with a normal use capacity of six to 10 people. Existing shelters within designated wilderness should be maintained, repaired, and restored as necessary. Materials used during repair or restoration should reflect a sensitivity towards wilderness values. Relocation of existing shelters should be considered only when adverse impacts to wilderness values can be reduced and where Appalachian Trail values are enhanced by such action. The historic integrity and value of the shelter, if any, should be maintained during any repair, restoration, or relocation.

Privies should be considered as an option if necessary to address sanitation concerns, but only when necessary to prevent resource damage and provide a minimum standard of public safety. Privies cannot be constructed without express authorization from the appropriate official of the land-managing agency.

Use of Motorized Equipment. In all circumstances, use of power tools in wilderness areas must be specifically authorized in advance by the appropriate official of the land-managing agency. Certain wilderness-area designating acts may provide specific exemptions for use of power tools during certain time periods. The authorized official of the land-managing agency may also approve use of power tools under certain conditions, such as in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the wilderness area. Emergencies may include search-and-rescue operations, wildfire suppression where human life may be at risk, clearing of severe blowdowns from the Trail treadway (where use of two-man saws may create an unacceptable safety hazard to the operators), aircraft accident investigations, and other emergencies as determined by the appropriate official of the land-managing agency.

Tread Improvements. Water bars, bog bridging, and other treadway structures along the Trail should be constructed and reconstructed to ensure adequate tread stabilization, erosion control, and prevention of resource damage. In isolated areas, bridges may be necessary to provide a minimum level of safety for Trail users crossing hazardous streams and rivers along the Trail and should be constructed or reconstructed when necessary to provide an adequate level of user safety and to protect the wilderness resource. The design of any reconstructed bridge or erosion-control structure along the treadway should emphasize rustic materials and workmanship with sensitivity to wilderness values.