

Project Planning, Compliance, and Funding

The plans above offer high level guidance to ensure that the A.T. is managed effectively as a whole unit in a decentralized management structure. Cooperative management partners have worked together for years to get the Trail moved into its optimal location so that it meets or exceeds long-standing standards for the footpath and its corridor environment, providing both an outstanding hiking experience and protecting the natural resources of the lands it traverses. We also have worked to ensure that the Appalachian Trail is maintained to the highest standards of stewardship and toward its long-term sustainability under its volunteer maintainers.

Day-to-day trail work is defined as either **routine maintenance**, or more **significant trail projects** that might require volunteers and/or crews to focus on work in a specific location for a longer period of time (2–3 days or more). Generally, as outlined below, routine maintenance does not require environmental reviews, while more significant trail projects (e.g. relocations, bridges, new privies or shelters) require environmental review and often require funding to support a trail crew, supplies, and at times a professional contractor.



Managing, funding, and tracking all of the trail projects occurring under the leadership of A.T. clubs and ATC on the A.T. is complicated to say the least! The NPS uses an approach called the **Facility Management Software System (FMSS)** to track projects in a consistent way. This system breaks the A.T. the treadway into segments. There are 865 A.T. treadway sections that are used to describe locations for project planning and funding purposes.

Trail Inventory: This is the inventory of all the Appalachian Trail's "features," (road crossings, vistas, utilities, historic, hydrologic or other features, etc.) and the assessment of the condition of all constructed "assets" (treadway, shelters, privies, bridges, side trails, parking lots, etc.) The inventory establishes values for federal project funding and is an accounting of all contributing features of the Trail.

Capital Plan: This plan annually documents the capital funding needed to maintain or improve the footpath and facilities to meet ATC and federal standards to minimize impacts to scenic, natural, cultural, and primitive resource values, and to provide for safe and enjoyable visitor experiences. The plan is used to make requests to secure funds (primarily through NPS) to address identified deficiencies five to seven years into the future.

The clubs play a lead role in capital planning by analyzing which projects have been completed in their sections and which projects can be removed from the list, and adding any new projects that may be needed in the next five years. The clubs then submit their capital plan sheets with updates documented to their respective ATC regional office for review, primarily to ensure that projects that are listed are viable and supportable within the requested time frame. ATC regional staff then makes further updates. Depending on the nature of particular projects, ATC may work with non-NPS agencies and other funders to secure support for the highest priority or more unique projects.

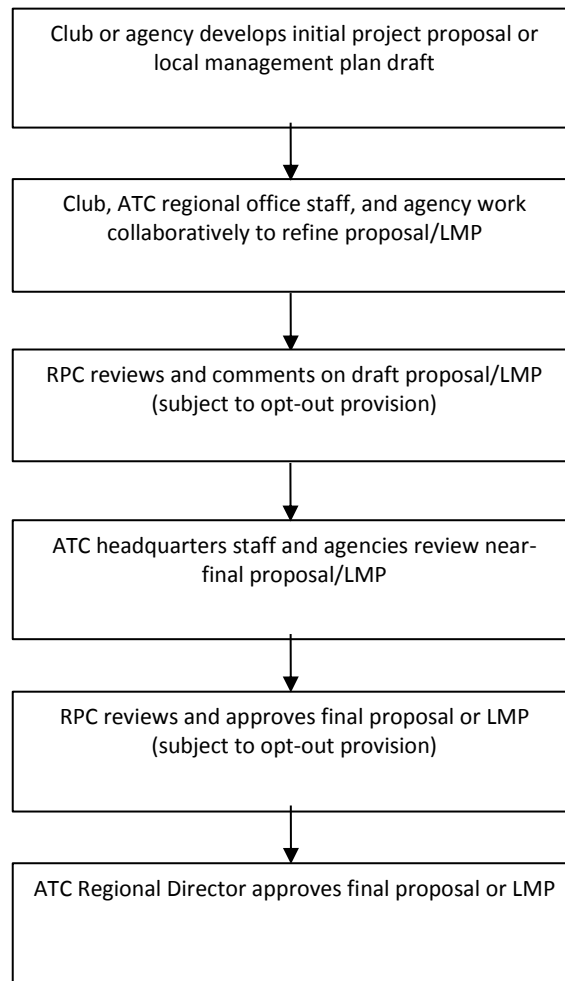
APPA staff consolidates all of the plans into a Trail-wide plan and begins the process of requesting funds. Typically, the capital plan has a greater level of detail about individual projects that are then bundled into comprehensive projects that can be listed on the Trail-wide capital plan for potential funding. Specific funding requests for future years are developed, typically at least two years and as many as five years out.

The agency works internally to secure funding for the A.T.'s highest priority capital projects. If and when they are approved, the funds are distributed back to the work projects through ATC or club-sponsored Trail crew or contracted projects. APPA also uses the capital plans to help in project planning, particularly environmental planning and compliance.

Project Proposals and Approval: All A.T. clubs should work with their ATC regional offices and land-managing agency partners from concept to proposal and then to completion for each significant trail project. The ATC regional office will help prepare and complete a Trail Project Approval Form that will guide you on needed steps.

The flow chart on the next page provides a graphic illustration of how the approval process is designed to function. It is adapted from ATC's policy for *Review and Approval of Management Plans and Project Proposals*. The process depicted is designed to include all relevant partners early in the process, review projects efficiently, have as many management decisions as possible made at the local level, and assist ATC in meeting its management agreements with land-managing agencies.

ATC Management Plans and Project Approvals Flow Chart



Once the project is fully understood, a Project Approval Form (Form A-1) should be completed. For overnight sites, complete the Checklist for New or Replacement Overnight Facilities (Form A-2). Include a detailed description with justification for the project, attach a map, photos or sketches of the project and site, and any other information that is helpful to understanding the project. Be sure all field preparations are complete and clear, with flagline(s) and the proposed routing easy for specialists to find and evaluate. Submit the project approval form and supporting materials to your ATC regional office.

Check on any state or local environmental approvals that may be necessary, and if necessary, start that application/review process about a year prior to the work. Note that local environmental/conservation regulations and/or restrictions may be more detailed, supersede any APPA requirements, and often require an application fee and review by an approved biologist. (See Planning Required by States and Municipalities, below.) At this point you've begun the process of thorough environmental planning. *Please be aware that it may take up to two years from completion of the project proposal to project groundbreaking.*

Compliance with National Environmental Policy Act

Once an A.T. club identifies a trail project, the next step is to determine the need for environmental review. Often these reviews require at least one year of lead time, preferably two years, to conduct biological and cultural resource reviews. Biological reviews take place during the time of year when plants are present and identifiable.

The **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** is a federal environmental law that promotes the enhancement of the environment and established the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Enacted on January 1, 1970, NEPA was one of the first laws ever written that establishes the broad national framework for protecting our environment. NEPA's basic policy is to assure that all branches of government give proper consideration to the environment prior to undertaking any major federal action that significantly affects the environment.

Many trail management projects require environmental review before a project can be initiated. It is critical that staff and A.T. clubs understand and comply with NEPA for all relevant trail work. The following actions require environmental review:

- Clearing in excess of 4 feet wide and 8 feet high or extensive disturbance outside the established trail prism
- Will involve significant or extraordinary reconstruction or rehabilitation of treadway. Scoping factors to consider:
 - a. Requires mobilization of a trail crew
 - b. Days of labor
 - c. Cut slope will be greater than 4 feet away from edge of trail
 - d. Project is identified in annual trail assessment / FMSS
- Takes place in a natural or cultural resource priority zone
- Construction of new shelters, privies, or other structures. (Replacing a structure on an existing footprint does not generally require review.)

Categorical Exclusion for Routine Trail Maintenance

A categorical exclusion (CE) means a category of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and for which neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required (40 CFR 1508.4). There is a categorical exclusion document that serves as a formal record for routine facility maintenance activities on the A.T. developed and held by the NPS-APPA office.

Trail and facility maintenance activities are necessary to ensure visitor safety and enjoyment, minimize resource damage, and to promote resource protection by encouraging use of the A.T. Routine trail maintenance work that is excluded from environmental review include:

- Opening the trail corridor to the proper width and height as outlined in the *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance* (2nd ed.) handbook and the associated *Appalachian Trail Fieldbook* (2nd ed.), including brushing and removing fallen trees, debris, and rocks from the trail corridor;
- Repairing/reestablishing trail tread in sections of the trail where erosion has compromised trail integrity;
- Maintaining, repairing, and replacing damaged/deteriorated trail tread, drainage, erosion controlling, and safety related structures;
- Rebuilding and repairing non-historic trail bridges (in-kind) including decking, railings, approaches, abutments, and stringers with on-site native materials (typically smaller than 12 diameter at breast height);
- Creating and/or replacing barriers to discourage trail shortcutting, trail widening, and use of social trails in order to allow vegetation outside the 4 x 8 foot trail prism to recover;
- Annually checking for and removing hazard trees near trail shelters, privies, parking lots, overnight facilities, viewpoints and other public gathering locations in coordination with land management partners and natural resource staff;

- Maintaining and replacing trail and campground structural elements in the same exact location such as tent pads, toilets, and fire-pits;
- Maintaining, repairing and/or replacing wayfinding, regulatory, informational, etc. signs and blazes that contribute to the A.T.
- The in-kind maintenance, repair, or replacement of *features* associated with non-historic AT buildings, privies, and shelters such as windows, doors, painting, roofs, etc.
- Minor road and parking lot repairs such as crack sealing, pothole maintenance, restriping, drainage-ditch cleaning, minor resurfacing, etc.

This CE is only for routine trail maintenance. It is not intended to cover trail reroutes, major off-trail drainage redirection, bridge abutment relocation, or activities occurring at a great distance from the trail footpath. Any significant changes would not be covered by the CE. APPA reviews the CE annually.

Planning Required by States and Municipalities

Regulations administered by states and municipalities may include floodplain, health, zoning, or sanitation-related issues. In some cases, federal regulations are administered by local governments, and in others, localities have their own requirements. Trail projects must be approved by the land-managing agency that will coordinate with you and the state or municipal authority before any work is done. Your ATC regional staff is knowledgeable and can assist with these requirements.