



Capital Planning for Appalachian Trail Clubs

Five Steps

1. Review past year projects (2008 and earlier) and indicate which ones have been completed, which ones need to be moved to another year because they were not done, or which ones can be removed from the list altogether. *The updated plan should only contain projects for 2009 and beyond.*
2. Review current year projects (2009) to confirm scheduled work. Changes to the plan should be brought to the attention of the ATC regional director as soon as possible so adjustments may be considered. No additional funding is available. *Any new or emergency project will need to replace or be substituted for an existing project on the list.*
3. Review all other projects (2010–2014) on the list and make any necessary changes. When making changes, consider both the year planned and the scope of work.
4. Add new projects for 2015. This is the only year for which new funding is available, and new projects should be listed here.
5. **NEW:** To improve planning, for each project indicate what agency is responsible for any necessary environmental compliance. This includes both NEPA on federal lands and any state or local requirements on nonfederal lands. It is particularly important to note any project that is wholly or partially located on NPS-ATPO lands. *All projects on NPS-ATPO lands must be reviewed for the appropriate level of compliance.*

Capital Planning Timeline:

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
PAST YEAR(s) (requested in 2006)	CURRENT YEAR (requested in 2007)	OUT YEAR (requested in 2008)	Five Year Plan (requested in 2009)				NEW
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Update Project Status	Confirm Projects	Review Projects	Review and Update	Adjust Project Scopes	Re-Arrange Projects 2011–2015	Remove Completed Projects	Add new Projects

DEADLINE

In 2009, updated capital plans are due back to ATC regional offices by February 15.

Capital Planning

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Previously when I asked for help on funding Trail projects for the coming year, ATC was usually able to help. What's changed?

A: In the past, ATC received general program funding from the NPS that could be used at ATC's discretion to assist clubs in any Trail-related projects. Now, NPS funds are requested for specific projects, not general programs. For example, funds used to be requested based on an average number of crew weeks run each year—now funding is based on individual projects, such as “relocate one mile of Trail on Firescald Ridge,” rather than crew weeks. Because the NPS is subject to the federal budget process, projects now must be identified at least two years ahead of time.

Q: Doesn't the money my club receives for projects come from ATC?

A: It may appear that the funding your club receives comes from ATC, but in many cases, particularly for projects related to the Trail and Trail facilities, the dollars actually originate with the National Park Service. The NPS, through a cooperative agreement, transfers funds to ATC, which then either pays for projects directly or further distributes funds to clubs or other partners. ATC and ATPO staff work together closely to prioritize projects Trailwide. ATC optimizes NPS contributions by providing matching funds, volunteer labor (through clubs and Trail crews), and funding through private sources (such as the L.L.Bean Grants to A.T. Clubs program), and closing federal funding gaps when they occasionally arise.

Q: My club doesn't get any money from ATC—do we still have to worry about this project planning?

A: If you ever need the assistance of a Trail crew or need to construct a new parking lot, replace a shelter roof, or upgrade a privy, and want some funding help, then you'll need to work with ATC and NPS to plan and seek that funding. There's no club that can't benefit from additional funding—you just have to plan for it!

Q: Okay, my club could use some help for some projects—what does the NPS pay for?

A: In 2008, the NPS provided more than \$1.3M for specific Trail projects and an additional \$750,000 for other A.T. programs. Those funds went directly to Trail projects that were completed by the Konnarock, Rocky Top, Mid-Atlantic, Vermont Long Trail Patrol, AMC, MATC, and SCA Trail crews. It also included funding for the Bear Mountain project, boundary maintenance, and open areas mowing. Almost every section of the Trail benefited from those funds!

Q: Great! What do I have to do to get my project considered for NPS funds?

A: You need to review and update your club's Capital Plan (also known as “five-year plan”) as necessary. These plans were originally compiled in 2003 by each club and have been updated each of the past five years. Now they need to be revised to reflect current needs and any newly identified projects all the way out through 2015.

Q: When does my club have to get its updated Capital Plan back to ATC?

A: Updated Capital Plans are due back to your ATC regional office by February 15, 2009. ATC and ATPO staff will do everything feasible to make this process as painless as possible.

Q: How do I update the Capital Plan?

A: Please see the 2009 Capital Plan instruction document (pages 1–2 of this Appendix).

Q: Why do I have to plan projects in 2015—I barely know what projects will happen next year?

A: Funding is requested in conjunction with the federal budget cycle. Project funding ATPO requested in 2008 is for projects scheduled in 2010. The intent of planning for five years out is to allow the NPS to

predict funding needs in anticipation for its future budget requests. So, in 2009, the NPS is looking for projects for 2011 through 2015. Funding for 2009 projects was requested back in 2007, and funding for 2010 projects was requested in 2008. In March 2009, NPS will request funds for 2011-2015.

Q: What if we have to switch a project at the last minute?

A: Switching projects may be acceptable in some cases, however, the NPS will not be able to provide any more funding than what was originally planned. Switching projects must be on a one-to-one basis for the same amount of money and within the same funding source. Keep in mind that there is a significant ripple effect when projects are changed. Contact your regional office prior to making any last-minute changes.

Q: What happens when the next big hurricane or winter ice-storm strikes and a shelter needs to be rebuilt that wasn't included in the Capital Plan?

A: As they say, "stuff happens." Such projects can be added as emergency funding requests. There's no guarantee that the emergency project will be funded, but it is possible. Alternatively, projects can be shifted to accommodate unexpected needs, but no additional NPS money will be available. That unexpected shelter project would essentially bump something else that was already on the list. Of course, other non-NPS funding sources are often sought by ATC to help in those situations. In fact, this underscores the strength of the multilateral NPS/ATC/Club partnership.

Q: How do I know if my project needs some kind of environmental compliance?

A: *All projects on federal lands require environmental compliance.* The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that all federal actions (even small Trail projects) be evaluated for any potential impacts on the environment or on cultural and historic resources. For projects located on nonfederal lands, consult with the landowner on any necessary compliance or permits.

Q: What kind of compliance is necessary?

A: There has been a perception that projects that take place within the existing footprint of the Trail, such as rebuilding the treadway in place, don't require compliance. *That perception is incorrect.* However, those projects typically fall under a blanket "categorical exclusion." Larger projects, such as Trail relocations or new shelters, may require additional review to determine any specific impacts and measures to mitigate those impacts. This review usually results in a "categorical exclusion," and only in rare cases is a more comprehensive "environmental assessment" necessary. To help NPS better plan for compliance work, all projects located on NPS-ATPO lands that are listed on the Capital Plan should utilize the "Enviro Compliance Lead Agency" column in the Capital Plan to indicate ATPO is responsible for reviewing the project. You do not need to determine if compliance is needed—the answer is always yes. You only need to list who is responsible for making the determination as to what level of compliance is needed.

Q: That sounds like a lot of work, what if my club decides not to do it?

A: Your club will not receive any NPS funds, and ATC and its Trail crews won't be working on your section! Remember, most of the Trail-project funding that ATC receives is from the NPS. Updating the Capital Plans shouldn't be that difficult to do because you won't be starting from scratch. Most clubs already have a fairly comprehensive listing of projects and it will only be a matter of revising what is already there. ATC's regional staff can help you update your Capital Plan.

Q: How do the Trail assessments fit into this?

A: The Trail assessments should be used to assist in identifying and compiling projects into the Capital Plan. The Trail assessments can be used in two ways. In some cases, large projects are specifically identified during the assessments and can be added to the Capital Plan. In other cases, individual deficiencies are identified, which can be "lumped" into projects and added to the Capital Plan. For example, if the assessment identified the need for three waterbars, nine rock steps, 200 feet of turnpike, and a 12-foot bridge, all in the same general geographic area, each of those individual deficiencies could make up a single ATC crew project that could be added to the Capital Plan.

Q: When do I get to see the information from the Trail assessments?

A: Data collected from the 2004, 2005, and 2006 Trail assessments has been provided to each club that had Trail sections included in those assessments. 2007 and 2008 Trail assessments have been completed, and that information will be provided to clubs as it is processed. The entire Trail has now been assessed over the past five years, and the cycle will start again in 2009. We know that the current lag time is problematic and are working on a new system to provide this information more quickly. Please be patient as we work toward improvements.

Q: Who do I contact if I have more questions?

A: Your ATC regional office staff will be happy to answer any questions you have and help you in any way with your club's capital planning.

GLOSSARY

Capital Plan: Sometimes referred to as the "five-year plan," it contains a comprehensive list of planned or proposed Trail and Trail-facility maintenance and construction projects. The list is used to develop out-year funding requests of National Park Service project funding. The list should include current year projects (2009), out-year projects (2010), and future projects that make up the "five-year plan" (2011–2015). The Capital Plan is currently presented as an Excel spreadsheet and is available electronically or as a print-out. Projects identified in the Capital Plans get entered into the NPS FMSS (Facility Management Software System) to be used as the basis for funding requests.

Environmental Compliance: Sometimes simply referred to as NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), it is a suite of rules and regulations designed to: 1) make sure that the impacts of an action taken by us are known prior to undertaking the action, so that we don't inadvertently destroy an important natural or cultural resource; and 2) to ensure that the public is given an opportunity to provide public input about a project before it takes place. NEPA includes the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other environmental laws and applies to all projects on federal lands. Individual states also have their own versions of NEPA that must be considered for those projects located on state land.

Federal Budget Timeline: An important concept of the Federal budget cycle is that requests must be made two years ahead of the current year and that a five-year plan is required to estimate future funding levels. Each winter, the National Park Service puts out a call for new project funding requests. So, in March of 2009, the NPS is looking for 2011 projects all the way through 2015. 2009 and 2010 project funding was requested in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

Trail Assessment: Sometimes also referred to as a "condition assessment." Trail assessments are intended to do three things: 1) collect a comprehensive inventory of Trail features, 2) identify Trail and Trail facility deficiencies (problems) and propose potential solutions; and, 3) foster cooperation among partners by facilitating communication about Trail issues during the field-based assessments. The Trail assessment is conducted using resource-grade GPS units and a standardized data dictionary that allows for uniform collections of information Trailwide. The assessment is led by ATC regional staff and every effort is made to coordinate the field work with local partners.

Trail Assessment Maps and Tables: The data gathered during the Trail Assessment is used to generate 11" x 17" color maps showing the location of each of the identified deficiencies along with standard Trail features. Accompanying the map is a table with detailed information about each deficiency. The maps and tables can be used to assist in the development of the Capital Plan.

FMSS: Facility Management Software System. National Park Service database designed to store information about facilities (including Trails), identify necessary work, estimate the cost of that work, and provide the basis for funding requests.