



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Appalachian National Scenic Trail
P.O. Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

IN REPLY REFER TO

May 4, 2020

Dear Volunteer Partners:

As our nation confronts an unprecedented public health challenge, the safety and health of our visitors, employees, volunteers, and partners is paramount. The National Park Service (NPS) is working with federal, state, and local authorities to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is taking the risks presented by COVID-19 seriously and is following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and monitoring federal, state, and local actions to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. Social distancing measures, closures, and the suspension of some programs are necessary to safeguard the health and welfare of visitors, employees, volunteers, partners, our families, and local communities.

Given the current situation, the continuation of precautionary steps are essential to ensure the safety of all. Decisions are based upon comprehensive and continual risk assessments. This includes following public health recommendations concerning social distancing, as well as having proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and adequate sanitation supplies to reduce COVID-19 exposure to employees, volunteers, and the public.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail has experienced historical heavy use, resulting in crowded and overflowing parking lots, trailheads, and lack of social distancing on the AT. The National Park Service understands the importance of spending time outside for everyone's mental and physical health, but the overcrowding that sites are experiencing undermines state and local efforts to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus and violates CDC guidelines.


While we greatly value and appreciate the work of volunteers to preserve and protect the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, all volunteer work will continue to be suspended until conditions allow for a safe return to operations. Please note that this is for all volunteer activities, including but not limited to: trail maintenance, inventorying and monitoring, boundary maintenance, vegetation management, special events, education and outreach, and the maintenance and management of privies, shelters, and day use sites. We are making continuous assessments as the situation unfolds and are actively engaged with all cooperative management partners in the newly established Adaptive Recovery Task Force, which includes volunteer representatives, to plan and discuss how our work together may resume for the safety of all.

Fulfilling our shared mission during the pandemic entails challenges, but also opportunities to help us envision new ways of preserving and protecting irreplaceable cultural and natural resources, maintaining the trail, educating the public, nurturing a lifelong connection to the outdoors and welcoming all to the AT. Looking ahead can be empowering and the AT will continue to be there for all of us.

Thank you for your continued patience and partnership as we work together to ensure the health and wellness of all. The AT would not be what it is today without your hard work, expertise, passion, and commitment. I've said this before when I've had an opportunity to meet with you at meetings, events, or out in the field – I'm truly in awe of all that you do.

If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With gratitude,


Wendy K. Janssen
Superintendent