



Wild East Action Fund 2021 Program Criteria

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), on behalf of the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership (ATLP), is accepting proposals for land protection and organizational capacity building grants intended to support conservation work within the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) Landscape, also known as the Wild East. The Wild East Action Fund provides funding to qualified organizations working to advance protection of the unique environmental and community benefits that the Appalachian Trail and the surrounding lands provide.

The mission of the ATC is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The generous donor support of the ATC helps fulfill the mission to protect the trail and the landscape beyond the footpath.

I. About the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership

The mission of the ATLP is to connect the wild, scenic, and cultural wonders of the Appalachian Trail and its surrounding landscape. Co-convened by the ATC and the National Park Service, the ATLP is a coalition of federal, state, and local government agencies, nonprofit conservation organizations, and academic institutions. All entities working on land conservation adjacent to the A.T. are invited to participate in ATLP efforts. One goal of the ATLP is to increase the pace and scale of land protection in the Appalachian Trail Landscape. The Wild East Action Fund is a strategic effort to do just that, conserving over 60,000 acres of land since 2018.

II. About the Wild East Action Fund

The purpose of the Wild East Action Fund is to:

- Accelerate the pace and scale of A.T. Landscape conservation;
- Enhance capacity for strategic and targeted conservation activities throughout the A.T. Landscape;
- Strengthen collaboration among diverse partners across the A.T. Landscape;
- Promote projects that demonstrate equitable and inclusive approaches to land protection and capacity building;
- Build broad community support and engagement in the urgent need to sustain the environmental and community benefits of the A.T. Landscape as it relates to the impacts due to climate change; and
- Champion an A.T. Landscape that encourages all people to feel welcome, respected, supported, and valued.

III. Organization Eligibility

To be eligible for the Wild East Action Fund, applicants must demonstrate a project focus or organizational mission that is aligned with the ATLP's mission of connecting the wild, scenic, and cultural wonders of the A.T. and its surrounding landscape. Organizations should broadly serve the needs of a geographic area within the A.T. Landscape. Previous grant awardees are eligible to apply. To qualify for funding, eligible projects must:

- Be located in or serve the A.T. Landscape
- Be led by a state or local public agency, tribal entity, or a qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization

IV. Funding Opportunities

The Wild East Action Fund offers two potential funding opportunities: capital grants for land protection projects and grants for organizational capacity building.

1. Land protection projects

Capital grants for land protection will be awarded to projects that contribute to the permanent protection and stewardship of the exceptional values of the A.T. Landscape, including (but not limited to) the natural, cultural, historic, scenic, recreational, and community values the landscape holds. Projects should advance innovative models for collaboration, outreach, constituency-building, and/or community engagement; and advance climate resiliency.

Funding may be used to acquire permanent conservation easements and/or fee land interests. Funding may also be used to cover transactional costs, including cost of appraisals, surveys, titles, environmental assessments, and legal costs. Grant funds may not be used for organizational overhead and/or administration.

2. Organizational capacity building

Grants for capacity building will be awarded to projects that build capacity for innovative partnership, collaboration, or community initiatives within the A.T. Landscape in order to catalyze local or regional open space protection. Projects can include, but are not limited to, efforts that build community support for and involvement in land conservation; advance an innovative model for collaboration, outreach, constituency-building, and/or community engagement; and advance climate resiliency where possible. It is important that organizational capacity projects clearly demonstrate how efforts will result in or catalyze future landscape conservation.

Funding may be used for staff or contract support to advance or accelerate conservation objectives and direct costs associated with convening, communications, planning, and outreach

efforts. Funding may not be used for lobbying efforts or political groups, refinancing or servicing existing debt, scholarships, marketing materials, venue costs, or food.

V. Project Evaluation

Projects for either funding opportunity should be tangible, presenting clear objectives, outcomes, and deliverables. Competitive projects will demonstrate community and environmental benefits, have a high likelihood of success and can be accomplished within one year. Projects with matching funding that is firmly secured will rank higher than projects with undetermined or unlikely funding.

Land protection projects will specifically be evaluated for their ability to meet the following criteria:

- Projects that have been identified as a high priority in a local and/or regional conservation plan;
- Demonstrate the threat and/or conservation opportunity presented;
- Permanently conserve important climate resilient areas or connections between resilient areas designated by The Nature Conservancy's [Resilient Land Mapping Tool](#);
- Show the extent of significant natural habitat, scenic attribute, public access to outdoor recreation opportunities, cultural and/or historic sites, and connections to existing conserved lands and/or community lands important to the A.T. Landscape;
- Demonstrate an approach that is inclusive of meeting equitable access needs for recreation, hunting, foraging, or other traditional land uses in land protection outcomes;
- Demonstrate broad community support and diverse collaborative partnerships,
- Evidence of a sound stewardship plan and funding;
- Can be completed in one year from the start of the grant period; and
- Attract additional revenue sources to leverage Wild East Action Fund dollars.

Organizational capacity building projects will specifically be evaluated for their ability to meet the following criteria:

- Clearly articulate how the project will result in or catalyze land conservation in one or more of the following ways:
 - Build staff or partnership capacity to implement new or existing strategic conservation plans;
 - Develop local or regional strategic conservation plans within the A.T. Landscape;
 - Build staff or partnership capacity to sustain and steward the resources that define the A.T. Landscape;
 - Build staff or partnership capacity to support justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) that advance or accelerate landscape conservation objectives;
- Demonstrate sufficient organizational capacity and a commitment to complete the proposed activities;

- Provide sound training and professional development opportunities for new and/or expanded staff (including opportunities that support justice, equity, diversity and inclusion across the A.T. Landscape) as it relates to advancing or accelerating conservation objectives;
- Can be completed in one year from the start of the grant period;
- Demonstrate the ability to match and leverage other funding sources;
- Demonstrate measurable outcomes that can assess the organization's success in achieving the project's goals and objectives; and/or
- Demonstrate how organizational capacity is sustained beyond the grant period as result of the project's implementation.

VI. Award Information

The ATC expects to grant up to \$500,000 to qualified land protection and capacity building projects in 2021.

For land protection projects, single year grant requests up to \$100,000 will be considered.

For organizational capacity building projects, single year grant requests up to \$25,000 will be considered.

Both funding opportunities require a cash or in-kind match. Matches will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may depend on the circumstances of the organization. Matches should be secured or demonstrate with confidence that they will be during the grant period, be well explained, and verifiable.

A small committee representing the ATLP will review proposals and determine awards.

VII. Grantee Expectations

Grantees will be required to sign an award agreement further detailing how funding will be used, timeframe, and other stipulations related to the grant award. Funded projects will be asked to provide a short, mid-grant (6 month) progress report and a final progress report. Grantees will be asked to document the impacts related to the funded project and any additional evaluation of outcomes.

The ATLP seeks to promote the great work of all Wild East Action Fund grantees and will work directly with each to share stories of success and impacts that continue to accelerate the pace and scale of A.T. Landscape protection.

VII. Application Materials

To apply, please complete the 2021 Wild East Action Fund application form and provide the following no later than midnight on Friday, October 29, 2021:

- Project narrative (not to exceed three pages), see application form for more detail;
- Project budget that details allowable expenses, total project costs, sources of match and requested grant amount;
- A letter of nonprofit status from the IRS, if appropriate;
- Location and project maps (highly recommended); and
- Letters of support (optional).

If you have questions or need support, please contact Katie Allen at kallen@appalachiantrail.org.

*****The application period is open. Applications should be received no later than midnight on Friday, October 29, 2021. *****