

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

April 26, 2022

Chairwoman Chellie Pingree  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member David Joyce  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce:

As members of the Congressional Appalachian National Scenic Trail Caucus, we write to express support for robust funding for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST, A.T. or Trail) and its Operations of the National Parks Service (ONPS) allocation. The ONPS appropriation is the most reliable source for the National Park Service (NPS) office that administers the Trail (officially known as "APPA" in NPS). We request the Committee appropriate ample funding for ONPS that will allow the APPA its cooperative managers to effectively address challenges facing the A.T. In the report for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Omnibus Appropriations Act, the Committee "encouraged" the NPS to "include sufficient resources in future budget requests to meet [the ANST's] expanded visitor services, law enforcement, compliance, and land acquisition requirements." Similar language was included in the FY21 Consolidated Appropriations Act. We echo this encouragement as the Committee prepares the FY 2023 appropriations legislation.

Congressionally designated under the National Trails System Act of 1968 (NTSA), the A.T. is one of the world's longest continuous footpaths, and one of the best-known trails throughout the world. Remarkable for its length of 2,194 miles, the A.T. passes through 14 states along the eastern seaboard. Dozens of trail towns within close proximity of the A.T. benefit from a strong and healthy outdoor recreation economy, and more than half of America's population resides within a day's drive from the Trail. The A.T. currently faces challenges to meet increasing safety and resource management responsibilities and to ensure the proper stewardship of the Trail. According to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) – the non-profit manager responsible for the daily management and maintenance of the Trail – the \$1.7 million requested for the ANST in FY 2022 is unfortunately insufficient to fulfill the NPS obligations under the NTSA and the cooperative agreement with the ATC.

Currently, the ANST has 10 full-time equivalent NPS employees. Current funding levels cover the NPS staff salaries but are insufficient to address substantial operational responsibilities. In 2021, the A.T. enjoyed an estimated four to four-and-a-half million visitors. The 30 NPS units with visitation in the two to five million range in 2021 average \$2.44 in base allocation per visitor, while the ANST currently receives \$0.39 per visitor. Big units with small staff

components like the ANST are experiencing difficulty in maintaining the standards of operation necessary and are nearing their breaking point.

The ATC determined that additional ONPS funding for the ANST in FY22 is needed to fulfill the NPS' compliance, law enforcement and natural resources management responsibilities, as described below:

### **Compliance**

One of the three responsibilities NPS is unable to delegate via its cooperative agreement with ATC is "compliance." This broad term encompasses everything from performing reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act and issuing special use permits for projects that may potentially impact the Trail, to relocating sections of the Trail following the acquisition or conservation of land tracts adjacent to its current route. Currently, the ANST employs two full-time NPS employees to review all compliance requests before the unit. ATC recommends that a third staff member is necessary to meet current needs.

### **Law Enforcement**

The ANST is currently staffed by a single, full-time law enforcement officer, an acting chief ranger, detailed from the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia and shared positions in Virginia and Pennsylvania. The acting chief ranger spends a great deal of time coordinating with state and local law enforcement agencies across multiple jurisdictions, as well as with the U.S. Forest Service along the length of the Trail. ATC believes designating three additional law enforcement full-time equivalent positions distributed along the Trail (particularly in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast, shared with other NPS units) would enhance capacity and coordination with other state and local law enforcement agencies across the entirety of the Trail.

### **Natural Resources Management**

In units of the National Park System, natural resource management is typically performed by NPS. However, on the A.T., almost all this work is performed by ATC staff, Club members and ATC-overseen trail crews. The ATC relies on project funding passed through APPA and private funds raised by ATC to meet the critical infrastructure and resource management needs of the Trail. Among the A.T.'s most pressing natural resource management needs are combating invasive species and protecting habitat. Invasive species contribute to "hazard trees," which are dead or dying trees located near places where Trail users congregate. In recent years, the Trail has seen one fatality and one near fatality from hazard trees. A more robust ONPS allocation would allow funding for project work to address critical natural resource management issues.

The report language that has been included in the previous two appropriations reports is very much appreciated. We request the report language continue to be included, with the following update:

*“The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a 2,194-mile linear park stretching through 14 states and 88 counties-more than any other unit of the National Park System. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail, co-managed by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and A.T. Clubs, draws visitors from all over the United States and the world, bolstering the economy of the communities around the trail. The Committees are aware that the*

*Trail is experiencing increased visitor use and asset management challenges and encourages the Service to include sufficient resources in future budget requests to meet its expanded visitor services, law enforcement, compliance, and land acquisition requirements.”*

We request strong and robust funding in line with what the ATC believes is needed to address the challenges facing the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



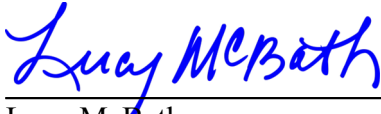
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Tim Burchett  
Member of Congress



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress



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Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress



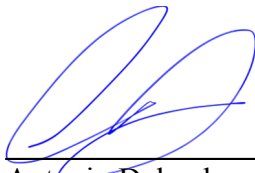
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Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress



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Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



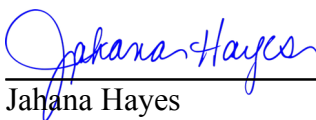
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Antonio Delgado  
Member of Congress



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Chris Pappas  
Member of Congress



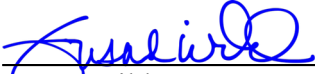
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Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress



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André Carson  
Member of Congress



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Susan Wild  
Member of Congress



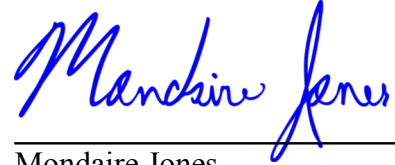
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Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress



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Peter Welch  
Member of Congress



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Mondaire Jones  
Member of Congress



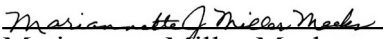
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Richard E. Neal  
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