

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Climate Change

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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail volunteer maintaining clubs (“Clubs”) and other public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the USDI National Park Service and its close working partnership with the USDA Forest Service and other agencies.

ATC's Trail management and conservation policies are meant to provide guidance for (a) dissemination to the public; (b) use and implementation by the ATC and the Clubs; and (c) recommendations for land-managing and other agencies. It is the agencies who work within their defined procedures to propose, administer, and enforce public policy. ATC policies are recommendations developed to support appropriate, coordinated Trailwide management.

Overview

Whereas there is widespread international scientific consensus that the continued increase of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide (CO₂), in the atmosphere due to human activities, has negatively impacted the stability of the global climate system;

Whereas CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere is currently significantly higher than the historic background level due primarily to the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation;

Whereas atmospheric concentration of CO₂ is expected to continue to rise but there is great potential to reduce human impacts through constructive changes in technology, behavior, and energy and land-use policies;

Whereas the potential impacts of global climate change, including long-term drought, extreme weather events, increased forest fires, increases in vector-borne diseases such as Lyme disease, and changes in the timing of the seasons may cause major disruption to the Appalachian Mountain ecosystem and threaten the health, sustainability, and composition of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail’s (ANST’s) flora and fauna communities;

Whereas these impacts likely are directly affecting and almost certainly will continue to affect the Appalachian Trail footpath itself due to increased treadway erosion and blowdown obstruction from severe storms, increased invasion of exotic species, desiccation of water sources due to

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drought, and altering and compromising the “Walking With Spring” trail experience due to climatic shifts and timing of the seasons;

Whereas the ATC has, since its inception, advocated for the protection and preservation of forest, bog and other important and diverse ecosystems along the nearly 2200mile length of the A.T., fought to protect thousands of acres of forest lands, and supports the protection of national and state forests and parks and designated wilderness areas;

Whereas ATC’s mission is “to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail—ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come” and, through its agreements with the National Park Service, Department of Interior and other agencies, ATC is obligated to the highest standards of protection of the ANST;

Policy

Therefore be it resolved that the Appalachian Trail Conservancy will:

- Take action to mitigate the causes of climate change by, for example:
 - Continuing to reduce carbon emissions associated with ATC operations and visitor use.
 - Supporting appropriate state and federal carbon-reducing policies and regulations;
 - Advocating the management of Appalachian forest lands for the increasingly important purpose of carbon sequestration and climate resiliency;
- Facilitate adaptation to climate change by, for example:
 - Embracing the unique opportunity that the ANST offers in its relatively continuous, connected, high elevation, high quality habitats;
 - Exploring partnership opportunities to enhance land protection and management for improved landscape resilience;
 - Safeguarding biodiverse landscapes that provide climate refugia for plants and animals as they naturally adapt to climate change;
 - Protecting key ecological services
- Document and communicate the impacts of climate change by, for example:
 - Tracking climate change indicators using ATC’s environmental monitoring programs and other data sources; and
 - Communicating predicted and observed climate change impacts to ATC members and ANST users.

For questions related to this policy please contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org, or P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV, 25425-807.



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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.