



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails

Published: 1988	Reviewed: April 2020
Category: Trail Management	Updated: July 2022

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 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.”

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

In 1988, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy adopted a policy on side and connecting trails to provide ATC, Trail clubs, and agency partners with procedures for (1) evaluating and recommending approval of proposals for the development of new foot trails intersecting the A.T.; and (2) recommending action by the Secretary of the Interior or Agriculture for formal designation of A.T.-intersecting side or connecting trails into the National Trails System.

In November 1995, the Board adopted several minor wording changes to clarify the original policy. The policy was updated in 2005 to reflect changes in ATC’s governance structure, amended by the ATC Board of Directors in 2008. In 2009 an update to the Local Management Planning Guide (LMPG) further defined types of trails that connect to or cross the A.T. The current document has been further amended by the Stewardship Council for clarification and to make it compatible with the LMPG in Fall 2017.

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails

ATC will participate, and encourage A.T.-maintaining clubs, individual members, agency partners, and natural resource conservation organizations to participate, in public-review procedures for all pipelines proposed to cross the A.T. landscape.

Policy

The National Trails System Act makes specific reference to the formal designation of side and connecting trails as components of the National Trail System. Formal designation is the responsibility of the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture (if that trail is located within national forest proclamation boundaries) or the USDI Secretary of the Interior (on all other lands). The following definitions of designated side and connecting trails are consistent with the legislation:

- Designated side trail—Any trail formally designated as such by action of the Secretary of Agriculture or Secretary of the Interior that intersects the Appalachian Trail and provides additional access to the Appalachian Trail from outside the Appalachian Trail corridor.
- Designated connecting trail—Any trail formally designated as such by action of the Secretary of Agriculture or Secretary of the Interior that connects the Appalachian Trail and another National Scenic, Historic, or Recreation Trail.

Designation of a side or connecting trail does not provide the Secretary of Agriculture or Interior with any authority to acquire lands or interests in lands.

Proposals for new Designated Access Trails and Designated Connecting Trails must follow the procedures below, as described in Section B, and meet the criteria listed in Section C.

Other trails intersecting the A.T. *do not* require formal designation at the Secretarial level. They may include:

- Spur Trails--Provide passage to points of interest or Trail facilities.
- Access Trails-- Access Trails are typically local trails that intersect the A.T. and are formally recognized and maintained by a local Trail club or another Trail management partner. These trails may originate and travel on public land, private land, or cross both before they connect to the A.T. Often informally referred to as “side trails”.
- Coaligned Trails--Other trails that share the same treadway and protected corridor as the A.T. Spur and Access Trails as described above are often referred to informally as “side trails” and are *not* intended to be an extension of the National Trails System—that is, are



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails

not intended as *Designated* Side Trails or *Designated* Connecting Trails, and therefore do not require action by the relevant Secretary. Proposals for new non-Designated Access Trails and Spur Trails must follow the procedures below, as described in Section A, and meet the criteria listed in Section C.

The ATC approval process applies only for sections of *new* proposed Access Trails, Spur Trails, Coaligned Trails, Designated Side Trails and Designated Connecting Trails that are on public land within the Appalachian Trail corridor or Management Area.

Spur and Access Trails maintained by Trail Clubs or other management partners should be shown on ATC maps, mentioned in A.T. guidebooks and inventoried and entered into National Park Service Appalachian Trail's (APPA) Facility Management Software System (FMSS) portfolio. Unofficial or unmaintained Spur and Access trails should be removed from maps, guidebooks and inventories.

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails

New proposed Coaligned Trails must also meet the procedures and criteria of this policy.

A. Procedure for Recommending Approval of new Access Trails or Spur Trails Entering or within The Appalachian Trail Corridor or Management Area (See diagram on last page).

All new trails entering or within the Appalachian Trail corridor or Management Area must be:

- Recommended by the local Trail club.
- Reviewed and accepted by the appropriate ATC Regional Partnership Committee (RPC) and the ATC Regional Director (RD) in accordance with the 2011 *ATC Policy for Review and Approval of Management Plans and Project Proposals*.
- In consultation with APPA.
- Approved by the land-managing agency.

Acceptance by the RPC and RD will be based in part on the criteria set forth below in Section C and *any additional criteria provided in the Local Management Plan(s) for the area*.

B. Procedure for Recommending Action by the Secretary of the Interior or Agriculture for Formal Federal Adoption of a Designated Side Trail, Designated Connecting Trail, or Coaligned Trail into the National Trail System (see diagram on last page)

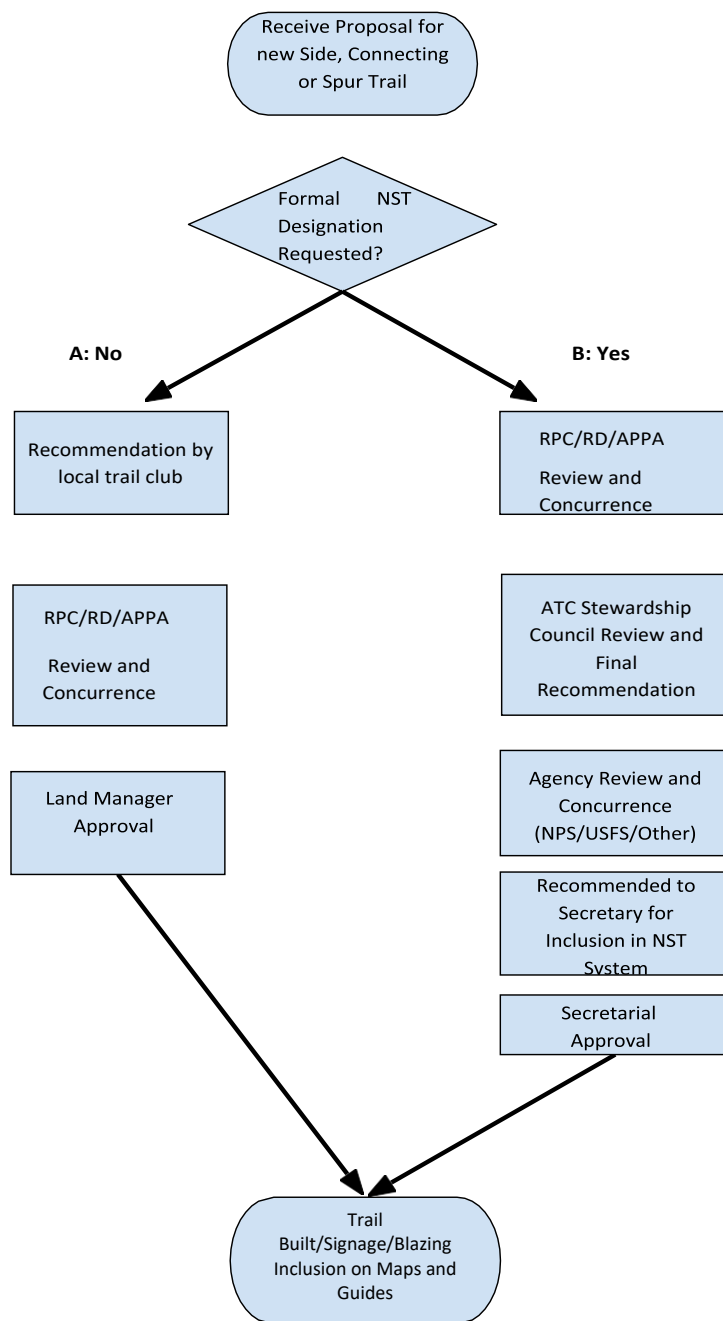
Formal adoption of Designated Side, Connecting and/or Coaligned trails into the National Trails System requires action by the Secretary of the Interior or Agriculture or their designee(s). Trail management partners shall initially review formal proposals explained in Part A above. The appropriate RPC will then forward its recommendation to the Stewardship Council. The Council will review the recommendation and, with input from the ATC RD, develop a final recommendation for the appropriate Secretary. Additional review and recommendation processes may occur within the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and/or state agencies as appropriate. ATC's review and recommendations shall be based on the considerations and criteria set forth below in part C and *any additional criteria identified in the Local Management Plan(s) for the area*.

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails

C. Considerations and Criteria for (1) Recommending Approval of new Access or Spur Trails Entering or Within The Appalachian Trail Corridor or Management Area, or (2) Recommending Action by the Secretary of the Interior or Agriculture for Formal approval of new Designated Side, Connecting or Coaligned Trails.

1. The trail will not degrade or diminish Appalachian Trail resources or experience, and preferably will enhance or improve it.
2. The Appalachian Trail is preeminent over the new trail, and takes precedence on trail signing and marking.
3. The trail will allow only foot travel within the A.T. corridor or designated Management Area. However, some land-managing partners may have existing policies regarding approved types of use within the A.T. Management Corridor.
4. The trail's primary purpose is to provide specific access to the A.T. or between the Trail and critical A.T. associated scenic, natural, and cultural resources, and trail facilities or to provide for visitor safety.
5. The proposed trail may not be created solely for private or commercial use.
6. Proposals for dual marking of any new coaligned trail must be reviewed and approved by Trail management partners; however, other trails may be identified on A.T. signs. ATC will also work to establish standards for existing coaligned trails.
7. Managers should consider factors such as the total number of side trails in a given trail segment (including existing, but unapproved crossings of the A.T.), access to other trail networks, impacts of increased visitor use an additional trail may create, and protection of natural or culturally sensitive areas and/or sites in the vicinity of the proposed trail.
8. A facility condition assessment and inventory has been conducted that meets the APPA and local land managing agency's standards.
9. The Trail has/or will have an easement or other binding and recognized agreement permitting public access if routed on publicly or privately owned or managed lands outside of the A.T. Corridor or Management Area.
10. A long-term management plan has been developed for the proposed trail.
11. A.T. managers will cooperate in developing standards for construction, design, and maintenance of any trails that intersect the Appalachian Trail. ATC will encourage adoption of standards that protect resource values and prevent environmental damage in a manner consistent with resource protection on the Appalachian Trail.

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails



NST: National Scenic Trail. NPS: National Park Service. USFS: United States Forest Service. RPC: Appalachian Trail Conservancy Regional Partnership Committee. RD: Appalachian Trail Conservancy Regional Director



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Connecting Spur, Side, Access, and Coaligned Trails

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.

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