



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Impacts of Development in the Vicinity of the A.T.

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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

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) seeks to preserve and protect the scenic, cultural, historical, and natural resources of the Appalachian Trail and features in the surrounding environment that contribute to the Appalachian Trail experience, as defined by the National Trails System Act, the Comprehensive Plan for the Protection, Management, Development, and Use of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and ATC policy. To that end, ATC seeks to avoid, minimize, or eliminate the visual and aural impacts upon those resources caused by development within the A.T. corridor and on adjacent lands in the vicinity of the corridor and will support any and all measures that do so. Developments that are considered incompatible with the purposes and scenic values of the Appalachian Trail and covered by this policy include ski lifts and trails, all buildings, observation towers, golf courses, subdivisions, and mineral or gravel extraction operations, etc. ATC’s Policy on Roads and Utility Developments separately addresses public and administrative roads; powerlines; pipelines; communications lines, towers, and related utility buildings; wind-energy facilities; aircraft beacons; and roads and utilities serving these facilities. Those developments also are considered incompatible with the Appalachian Trail.

The goal of this policy is to ensure that there is no net loss to the recreational and conservation values or the quality of the recreation experience provided by the Appalachian Trail as a result of development. ATC recognizes that its ability to influence specific development proposals may be limited, making this goal difficult to achieve.



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Policy

The Conservancy opposes development on mountaintops, ridgelines, and other visible areas in the fore-ground and middle-ground distance zones as seen from the Appalachian Trail, unless the visual impacts to the Appalachian Trail can be satisfactorily prevented or mitigated. Potential visual impacts will be assessed using the USDA Forest Service's scenery management system, as described in *Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management*, Agriculture Handbook Number 701, 1995.

The Conservancy may also use the ATC Land Trust's Land Protection Criteria (LPC) as an objective means of weighing the relative merits of protecting areas or specific properties near the Trail through easements, purchase, community outreach and planning, or other means. The LPC can be used to proactively identify high-priority areas that are threatened by incompatible development, to reactively become engaged in new projects that arise due to external threats, and to work toward the protection of areas to prevent or avoid adverse development.

Further, the Conservancy opposes development that will result in aural impacts to the Appalachian Trail that cannot be prevented or mitigated. ATC will use NPS Management Policies 2001, 4.9, *Soundscape Management*, as guidance when addressing potential aural impacts.

Any developments covered by this policy within the viewshed and soundscape of the Trail should meet all of the following criteria:

1. Any new impacts associated with the proposed development should coincide with existing major impacts to the Trail experience.
2. No linear facilities associated with development subject to this policy should be permitted to physically cross the Appalachian Trail or be located within the Appalachian Trail corridor or management area unless a reserved right for such a crossing already exists.
3. Visual impacts in the foreground should meet or exceed a scenic integrity objective of "very high integrity," and those in the middle-ground should meet or exceed a scenic integrity objective of "high scenic integrity." In terms of aural impacts, ATC will seek to preserve, to the maximum extent possible, the existing natural soundscape of the ANST.
4. At a minimum, any proposed development should avoid impacts to the following elements of the Appalachian Trail experience: (a) wilderness or wilderness study areas; (b) National Park Service natural areas; (c) Forest Service scenic areas, semiprimitive nonmotorized areas, or designated backcountry areas; (d) natural-heritage sites; (e) cultural-resource sites; (f) Trail-related facilities, such as shelters and campsites; and (g) alpine zones, balds, wetlands, and riparian zones.



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ATC will encourage agency partners and local and regional planning jurisdictions to incorporate those criteria into agency, local, and regional plans and regulations and work with its member clubs to do likewise.

ATC will participate, and encourage Trail-maintaining clubs and agency partners to participate, as early as possible in public review processes for all development proposals with the potential to result insignificant visual or aural impacts on the viewshed or soundscape of the Appalachian Trail. In cases where development proposed in the vicinity of the A.T. will take place, any adverse impacts should be sufficiently mitigated to meet the goal of this policy. Mitigation should occur on site.

For development proposed in the vicinity of the Trail, ATC will request local, state, or federal regulatory bodies to include in any authorization necessary mitigation to reduce or eliminate the impacts of such facilities on the Appalachian Trail, including a stipulation prohibiting development of new facilities, or any changes to existing facilities, without prior notification of, and consultation with, the organizations and agencies responsible for management of the Appalachian Trail. Furthermore, such stipulations should include requirements for removal of development intrusions when their useful lives have passed and define the methods and required reimbursement of costs for this removal and related rehabilitation of affected lands.

ATC recognizes that certain existing developments along the Trail have important cultural value and should be preserved. In general, those developments would be recognized by inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Examples include fire towers and structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Citation: Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management, Agriculture Handbook Number 701, December 1995. This handbook supersedes AH-462, National Forest Landscape Management, Volume 2, Chapter 1, The Visual Management System, issued April 1974. Attachment: NPS Management Policies 2001, 4.9, Soundscape Management

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.