



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Managing the Trail for a Primitive Experience

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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 trail-wide management.

Overview

In the context of Trail Management Policy, “Primitive” describes a hiking experience that immerses the visitor in the natural world. Human-built structures, and facilities are infrequent and provide only minimum protection from natural processes such as wind, precipitation, temperature, insects and animals. Visitors are expected to be self-reliant and travel involves a moderate degree of risk and effort.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy should take into account the effects of Trail-management programs and policies on the primitive and natural qualities of the Appalachian Trail and the primitive recreational experience the Trail is intended to provide. Although these guidelines are intended to apply primarily to the effects of actions or programs on predominantly natural, wild, and remote environments along the Trail, they may apply to certain pastoral, cultural, and rural landscapes as well. Even in sections of the Trail that do not pass through remote or primitive landscapes, care should be taken not to inadvertently overdevelop or improve the Trail tread or facilities in these environments.



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Policy

Trail improvements, including shelters, privies, bridges, and other facilities, should be constructed only when appropriate to protect the resource or provide a minimum level of public safety. Design and construction of these facilities should reflect an awareness of, and harmony with, the Trail's primitive qualities. Materials and design features should emphasize simplicity and not detract from the predominant sense of a natural, primitive environment. The Trail treadway, when constructed, reconstructed, or relocated, should wear lightly on the land and be built primarily to provide greater protection for the Trail footpath or Trail resource values. Trail- management publications should include appropriate references to the potential effects of Trail- management activities on the primitive qualities of the Trail.

In developing programs to maintain open areas, improve water sources, provide sanitation, remove structures, and construct bridges, signs, Trailheads, and other facilities, Trail managers should consider whether a proposed action or program will have an adverse effect on the primitive qualities of the Trail, and, if such effects are identified, whether the action or program is appropriate.

The following questions can be used to help evaluate the potential effect of a policy, program, or project on the primitive quality of the Trail:

1. Will this action or program protect the A.T.?
2. Is this proposed action consistent with the local desired A.T. experience analysis?
3. Can this be done in a less obtrusive manner?
4. Does this action unnecessarily sacrifice aspects of the Trail that provide solitude or that challenge hikers' skill or stamina?
5. Could this action, either by itself or in concert with other actions, result in an inappropriate diminution of the primitive quality of the Trail?
6. Will this action help to ensure that future generations of hikers will be able to enjoy a primitive recreational experience on the A.T.?
7. What are the long-term maintenance needs of this action and is it sustainable?

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.

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