



## ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Motorized Use

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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

Motorized recreation has become increasingly popular on private and public lands over the past several decades. Unfortunately, despite clear prohibitions in federal and state regulations, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), four-wheel drive trucks and jeeps, snowmobiles, and other off-road vehicles (ORVs) are used on and damage A.T. corridor lands with some frequency. Easily accessible areas are particularly vulnerable.

The impacts on the Trail environment by motorized vehicles include damage to vegetation, increased erosion and siltation, noise and air pollution, disruptions in wildlife movement and destruction of wildlife habitat, and dramatic and direct impacts to the remote recreational experience and relative solitude available on the A.T.

Motorized recreation on the A.T. has been addressed in several ways. The most effective methods involve some combination of user education, regulatory signage, creative Trail-network design, physical closures, and cooperation with Trail neighbors to achieve solutions that provide alternative locations for motorized recreation. Trail club volunteers have proved invaluable in gathering information and discouraging further violations and by having conversations with Trail neighbors. When these methods fail, however, ATC and Trail clubs have asked agency partners to enforce prohibitions against motorized use.

Snowmobiling is a popular recreational activity, especially in New England and in New York. Early in

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the land-acquisition process, NPS and ATC representatives made assurances to state park agencies and snowmobile clubs, particularly in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, that the Appalachian Trail was not meant to be an arbitrary barrier to snowmobile routes. Although current NPS regulations prohibit snowmobile use on A.T. corridor lands, the NPS is considering a special regulation that authorizes several major snowmobile crossings of the corridor. A number of snowmobile crossings exist on U.S. Forest Service lands. Snowmobile routes and crossings may be approved under USFS guidelines, but many of these crossings are not authorized in the current forest plans.

Trail clubs and managing-agencies maintain good communications with snowmobile organizations, especially in New England. Several statewide snowmobile organizations maintain trails, publish maps, and encourage responsible, self-policing group conduct.

#### **Policy**

**ATC Policy**—ATC fully endorses federal and state prohibitions against motorized vehicles on the Appalachian Trail. Constructive efforts to post the A.T. with regulatory signs and to communicate with Trail neighbors, landowners, and ORV clubs are preferred directions for ATC and local A.T. managers. Regulatory signs are available from ATC.

**NPS Policy**—Federal laws and regulations prohibit motor-vehicle use on Appalachian Trail lands, except for (1) administrative access by the landowning agency partner; and, (2) access by adjoining landowners when access rights have been reserved in the conveyance of the land. The National Trails System Act, which is the principal law governing administration of the Appalachian Trail, states:

The use of motorized vehicles by the general public along any national scenic trail shall be prohibited and nothing in this act shall be construed as authorizing the use of motorized vehicles within the natural and historical areas of the national park system, the national wildlife system, the national wilderness preservation system where they are presently prohibited, or on other federal lands where trails are designated as being closed to such use by the Secretary.

The *A.T. Comprehensive Plan* states:

Motorized vehicles are specifically prohibited from the footpath by the National Trails System Act, except in emergencies or where specific crossings for land-owners have been arranged. Management plans and actions, using educational efforts or trail-design modifications and working with ORV user groups, will aim for the elimination of illegal motorized vehicle use.

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Motorized vehicles are generally prohibited off of roads on National Park Service lands. Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which contains service-wide regulations regarding resource protection, use, and public recreation on all NPS-administered lands, states:

The use of motor vehicles off established roads and parking areas is prohibited, except on routes designated as open for that use (CFR, Title 36, Section 4.19).

**Appalachian National Scenic Trail**—The use of bicycles, motorcycles or other motor vehicles is prohibited. The operation of snowmobiles is addressed in paragraph (b). The special regulation spells out where snowmobiles may cross the Trail corridor on state-approved snowmobile routes and at three additional locations in New England. (CFR, Title 36, Section 7.100).

In short, all lands administered by the NPS A.T. Park Office and other national parks crossed by the Trail are closed to motor vehicles, including snowmobiles, except where public or private roads or rights-of-way exist or where the park manager or superintendent has designated an area as open to vehicular use. No areas on the Appalachian Trail currently have been designated as open to off-road vehicle use.

Recognizing the need to authorize certain snowmobile locations in specific areas, the NPS A.T. Park Office proposed a special regulation for the A.T., following endorsement by the ATC Board and adopted in the Code of Federal Regulations (see February 25, 2002, 67 FR 8481).

#### **Considerations for Planning**

**Inventory**—The first step in controlling motorized-vehicle use is identifying where the use exists. Corridor-monitoring programs and Trail assessments are the most effective means for identifying motorized-vehicle use. The inventory should identify where the use is taking place, where the access points for ORVs are, and, if known, who the users are. A short inventory of existing snowmobile crossings of the Trail also should be compiled, if the Trail club plans to develop a policy on snowmobiles.

**Setting Trail Club Policy**—A Trail club's policy statement on motorized use should be worded as strongly as possible. The policy should identify: (1) general directions and actions the club will take to discourage ORV use on the A.T.; (2) coordination with agency partners who have the authority to enforce vehicle prohibitions and closures; and (3) exceptions, if any, under which ORV use would be permitted (such as in emergencies or snowmobile use on identified, approved crossings).

**Action Plan**—For each site identified in the inventory where ORV use exists, the Trail club, in cooperation with the appropriate land-managing agency partner, should determine what is needed to solve the problem. Low-profile methods (signing, information and education campaigns, and



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discussions with ORV organizations) should be explored first, but, if necessary, stronger actions (physical barriers, law enforcement) should be implemented. The Trail club's work plan should recognize that many ORV-use areas are long-term problems that cannot be resolved quickly. ATC may be able to provide assistance for significant capital improvements, such as local publicity initiatives, gates and boulder closures, or cooperative law-enforcement efforts.

For questions related to this policy please contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://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.