



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Wilderness

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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

It is the policy of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to support Wilderness Area designation, wherever such designation enhances the protection and management of the Appalachian Trail and its side and connecting trails. This support is based upon the belief that the Appalachian Trail and its related facilities are fundamentally compatible with designated Wilderness and that the preservation of Wilderness in the vicinity of the Appalachian Trail can enhance and protect the experience of Trail users. ATC believes that the Trail and its related facilities represent a desirable existing use that is compatible with Wilderness designation.

Policy

ATC, land managers, and A.T. maintaining clubs operate within the context of Public Law 88-577, otherwise known as the Wilderness Act of 1964, which established the guiding principles of Wilderness designation and management. Wilderness Areas shall be designated by Congress to provide enduring protection for natural resources and enjoyment for the American people (Wilderness Act, Section 2.a., 1964)

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Other areas are managed as Wilderness, such as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In other instances, there may be two nearby Wilderness Areas that are connected by a segment of Trail on lands that are not designated Wilderness; the Trail in these instances may be managed as Wilderness at the agreement of the land manager and A.T. Club.

ATC believes that traditional A.T. management practices and related structures should continue within Wilderness and align to the Wilderness Act goals.

- Including Trail marking and maintenance, but that Trail maintaining clubs should acknowledge and must comply with agency constraints on types of tools, equipment, materials, and methods.
- Also [reference local Wilderness designation acts and their report language](#). If an area of the A.T. is located in area being locally evaluated as “recommended Wilderness” in a Forest Plan, the plan will include management guidelines.
- Where the A.T. passes through designated Wilderness, ATC, land managers, and the Trail-maintaining clubs should maintain the A.T. in accordance with the Wilderness Act, specific Wilderness-area designating acts, and individual Wilderness-area management plans.
- Decisions by agency partners regarding Wilderness management that could potentially affect the Appalachian Trail should be developed in consultation and coordination with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, affected Trail-maintaining clubs, and other pertinent partner organizations and individuals. ATC encourages federal agencies and Trail-maintaining clubs to deal with specific shelter and Trail-marking issues on a case-by-case basis in Wilderness-area management plans and club local management plans.
- ATC endorses the following principles for management of the Appalachian Trail within designated Wilderness and for areas encompassing the Trail that are likely to be designated as Wilderness:
 - **Tread Improvements:** A.T. should be constructed, relocated, and maintained to a minimum standard necessary for protection of the soil, water, vegetation, visual quality, user safety, and long-term maintenance. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the trail be part of the wilderness environment and not an intrusion upon it.
 - Water bars, bog bridging, and other treadway structures along the Trail should be constructed and reconstructed to minimally ensure adequate tread stabilization, erosion control, and prevention of resource damage.

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- **Trail Marking:** The Appalachian Trail should be marked in designated Wilderness by 2- inch by 6-inch white vertical paint blazes, as described in the ATC stewardship series publications and training curriculum.
- **Signs:** Signs should be used only where necessary to provide basic information essential for navigation and public safety. Signs along the Trail within Wilderness should be used to identify direction to shelters and water sources, and only such other information as is necessary to protect Wilderness values. In general, if a regulatory or educational sign is needed to inform users, it should be placed outside the Wilderness area boundary at the Trailhead or point of entry into the Wilderness area. Signs should be simple and as small as possible, be made of natural wood, and be designed to minimize their contrast with the natural environment.
- **Structures** (trail shelters, privies, overnight use facilities, footbridges): The system of Trail shelters is a traditional component of the Appalachian Trail environment, many of which predate Wilderness designation
 - Maintenance of existing shelters and footbridges should be permitted if they continue to support Appalachian Trail experience values, resource protection, and uphold Wilderness values. Such features may also be replaced in consultation with management partners.
 - When significant repairs or replacement of structures are needed, consultation with the land manager is necessary through the [Minimum Required Decision Analysis](#). Relocation of existing shelters should be considered only when adverse impacts to Wilderness values can be reduced and where Appalachian Trail values are enhanced by such action. The historic integrity and value of the shelter, if any, should be maintained during any repair, restoration, or relocation.
- **Use of Motorized Equipment.** In all circumstances, use of power tools in Wilderness areas must be specifically authorized in advance by the appropriate official of the land managing agency.
 - Many common activities typically require such authorization including:
 - Emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the Wilderness area.
 - search-and-rescue operations,
 - wildfire suppression where human life may be at risk,



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- clearing of severe blowdowns from the Trail treadway (where use of two-person saws may create an unacceptable safety hazard to the operators),
- aircraft accident investigations,
- and other emergencies as determined by the appropriate official of the land-managing agency.

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.