



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy

Visual Resource Policy

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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.

Background Statement

Established under the 1968 National Trails System Act, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST) authorizes managing national scenic trails “for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass.”

As a unit of the National Park System, the ANST is also managed in accordance with the 1916 National Park Service Organic Act, which charges the agency “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations”.

The 2014 Foundation Document for the ANST identified visual resources as fundamental resources, specifically in the elements of “Scenery along the Treadway” and “View beyond the Corridor.” Resources within the corridor include wildlife, rustic cultural features and the ever-changing environments such as forests, wetlands, pastoral lands and alpine areas.

Sweeping views of vast landscapes outside the protected corridor extend far beyond the lands deeded or committed by easement to the ANST and include a wide range of the landforms and the



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history of the Appalachian Mountains. In the Analysis of Fundamental Resources, the Foundation Document notes the opportunities to “work with adjacent communities to improve local planning and zoning to supplement protection of the Trail viewshed.”

Visual resources are also a priority within the 2021-2024 Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Strategic Plan.

While several other procedures for scenic resource evaluation exist, such as the United States Forest Service’s Scenery Management System (SMS) and Bureau of Land Management’s Visual Resource Management Program, ATC and partners decided that the National Park Service Visual Resource Inventory process was systematic, intuitive and implementable by those not formally educated in scenic resource management. ATC also found the NPS VRI process was compatible and complementary to the USFS SMS.

Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following definitions are provided as they relate to Visual Resources and this policy.

Scenery. General appearance of a place, general appearance of a landscape, or features of a landscape.

Scenic Quality. The essential attributes of landscape that when viewed by people, elicit psychological and physiological benefits to individuals and, therefore, to society in general.

Scenic Resource - Used interchangeably with Visual Resource.

View – Scenery entirely within or extending beyond the park unit’s boundaries, or something that is looked toward or kept in sight, especially a broad landscape or panorama, from a particular place. Act of looking toward this object or scene.

View Protection - Actions taken to improve or maintain a view or visual resources. Includes but is not limited to: land acquisition, resource management, and visitor management.

Viewpoint – A point from which a landscape is viewed. Also, a point from which a landscape view is analyzed and/or evaluated. In the NPS visual resources inventory, the viewpoint is one of the three parts of a view. The other two are the viewer and the viewed landscape (viewshed).

Viewshed - The total landscape seen or potentially seen from a point, or from all or a logical part of a travel route, use area, or water body. Total visible area from a single observer position, or the total visible area from multiple observer positions. Viewsheds are accumulated seen-areas from highways, trails, campgrounds, towns, cities, or other viewer locations. Examples are corridor, feature, or basin viewsheds.

Visual Resource - Attributes, characteristics, and features (natural and built, moving and stationary) such as a landform or water body that is visible on a landscape.

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This policy aims to move away from use of the terminology “vista”, and “Enjoy the View”. Vista is a specific term that does not encapsulate all scenic resources along the A.T. Enjoy the View is the former name of the NPS Visual Resource Inventory initiative.

Policy

This policy acknowledges that the visual landscape, scenic quality, and view importance are core values of the ANST.

1. ATC aims to comprehensively identify, document, and monitor trail scenery and to systematically complete a view inventory using the National Park Service (NPS) Visual Resource Inventory (VRI) process, formerly known as “Enjoy the View”.
2. ATC aims to inventory the views along the center line footpath, bypass alternate routes, and side trails that exist solely for the purpose of leading visitors to a view. ATC may also inventory other views that fall outside these parameters.
3. NPS VRI provides an overlay to allow the Trail’s values for scenery to be incorporated into the planning and development activities of other agencies and landowners while recognizing the underlying management authority. The process needs slight modifications to accommodate for the unique challenges of our “linear park” which crosses multiple state, federal agency, and municipal boundaries. VRI is intended to support and not replace other visual resource systems including, but not limited to, the USFS Scenery Management System.
4. All Visual Resource Inventory data shall be made publicly available via the NPS Integrated Resource Management Application (IRMA) portal, <https://irma.nps.gov/ETV/>
5. ATC will consult with A.T. maintaining clubs and the appropriate land management agency to establish scenery preservation and management plans for the ANST. Further, ATC will work with trail management partners to work on any viewpoint management action, including vegetation management to maintain view visibility.
6. ATC supports active communication with land management agencies, easement holders, and land protection coalitions in order to share view-related data and support land conservation and development best practices.
7. ATC supports landscape conservation at the large landscape scale, aims to be proactive in the protection of views, and to be consistent in responding to and mitigating threats to these landscapes.
8. The ATC supports active communication and participation in the planning phase for development across USFS, NPS, and state agency lands, including, but not limited to, energy infrastructure, timber harvests and road construction.
9. ATC will evaluate proposed development in the viewshed of the A.T. in the context of this



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10. ATC will establish and support an A.T. visual resources working group composed of cooperative trail managers, technical experts, and/or other stakeholders to promote and sustain A.T. visual resources management, will assign a visual resources program coordinator to ensure consistent advancement and support for scenery management on the A.T., and will engage with a broad diversity of A.T stakeholders on shared scenery management goals, as resources allow.

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.