



## ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Standards of Care: Conduct and Reporting

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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.

### Statement of Purpose

Appalachian Trail (A.T. or Trail) volunteers — enabled through volunteer service agreements and supported through a network of shared stewardship known as the Cooperative Management System — are part of a whole system of volunteers. The collective ecosystem of partners and people, working together, complete the function of keeping the Trail alive.

The purpose of this policy is to deliver an approach for a shared culture of care in order to provide an environment for volunteers that is safe, inclusive, just, fair, and consistent, and sets an expectation for professional behavior among all volunteers.

Because roles of volunteers may overlap between organizations—a volunteer that serves a club and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), for example—will also work under a Volunteer Service Agreement enabled by a federal agency partner, we all – *A.T. Clubs, ATC, and agency partners* – hold a stake in what it means to share the culture of care in addressing unprofessional behavior or harmful incidents by responding to grievances through a shared understanding of standards for conduct and reporting.

The purpose is of this policy framework is to:

- identify when incidents occur that are unprofessional or cause harm in the A.T. Cooperative Management System;

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- rely on each organization to apply its code of conduct for resolution based on best-practices in grievance investigation, addressing harms, and whistleblower protection.
- track resolutions. Just as with physical accidents and injuries, record-keeping allows A.T. network to identify and respond to trends and patterns.

This approach augments each organization's Code of Conduct. Appalachian Trail Partners who coordinate A.T. volunteers should ensure their code meets the standards herein, as well as their stated process for grievances and resolutions. If a club does not have their own code of conduct, ATC has a [Guidance for Creating an Organizational Code of Conduct](#) that can serve as a reference to establish or update organizational processes.

The expectation is that all A.T. network partners that coordinate volunteers will commit to sharing general information about A.T.-related grievances with ATC and associated partners and agree that people within the network may use the process defined herein to submit grievances.

The framework for setting standards of care outlined in this document are in place to guide behavior on and off the Trail and inspire a shared responsibility not just to the land but also to each other.

*For the purpose of this document A.T. Network includes all A.T. Clubs and other entities who coordinate volunteers in support of the A.T.*

#### Alignment with Laws

The ATC and A.T. network partners believe in, uphold, and ethically value Federal Human Rights Laws.<sup>1</sup> According to the law, protected status includes race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), sexual orientation, national origin, age (any), disability, genetic information (including family medical history), status as a parent, marital status, or political affiliation. Under the law, protected activities include reporting harassing, discriminatory, or retaliatory conduct; filing a claim of harassment; supplying evidence in any investigation; or intervening to protect others who have suffered harassing misconduct, discrimination, or retaliation. Human rights laws of various states and the District of Columbia may apply as well.

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<sup>1</sup> [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.](#)

- [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#)
- [Age Discrimination in Employment Act](#)
- [Equal Pay Act](#)
- [Pregnancy Discrimination Act](#)

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We encourage people of all identities to feel a connection to the A.T., to recreate on it, and to steward it safely and responsibly. While many maintenance and natural resource activities require little to no previous experience, for safety reasons, some tasks require participants to meet certain physical and cognitive criteria. A.T. Network partners hold their own eligibility requirements.

#### Policy

This policy applies a standard of conduct and reporting across the A.T. Network of formalized organizational partners, including the ATC and A.T. Clubs. Our community includes, but is not limited to: ATC employees, ATC volunteers, ATC members, volunteers of Trail-maintaining clubs, defined A.T. affinity groups, and ***anyone who partners or interacts with the A.T. by joining us as a volunteer, including other partner groups organizing A.T. volunteers.*** The Standards of Conduct applies to interactions that occur across the Appalachian Trail’s operations, including in offices and visitor centers; on trips, at events, programs and trainings; at ATC-owned or -operated facilities of all types; in meetings; on the Trail; at social events; in written communication, including online and social media; and at all other events, activities, and places when we are ambassadors for the A.T. Therefore, this policy applies to every arena where ATC and its network of partners operate.

#### Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities

A.T. volunteers and others working with or through A.T. network partners signed on to the Code recognize the rights and responsibilities of volunteers working for the benefit of the Appalachian Trail.

<p>Volunteers have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>be treated with respect,</i></li> <li>• <i>have a workplace free of harassment, discrimination, or hostile conditions,</i></li> <li>• <i>receive a suitable assignment,</i></li> <li>• <i>receive training and necessary support,</i></li> <li>• <i>have qualified supervision,</i></li> <li>• <i>have safe working conditions, and</i></li> <li>• <i>have their time used effectively.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Volunteers have the responsibility to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>make safety the highest priority,</i></li> <li>• <i>act in a professional manner,</i></li> <li>• <i>treat others with respect,</i></li> <li>• <i>follow Trail policies and guidelines,</i></li> <li>• <i>participate in and learn from training sessions and meetings,</i></li> <li>• <i>perform high quality work,</i></li> <li>• <i>care for Trail resources, as well as</i></li> <li>• <i>seek and accept guidance and support.</i></li> </ul>
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#### Standards of Conduct

In every situation, those in the scope of this policy framework will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with volunteer rights and responsibilities. Safety as a high priority focus

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of A.T. network partners is both physical safety and emotional safety. To that end, all entities working on behalf of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and individuals within them commit to inclusive and equitable practices in action, word, and deeds.

Actions that may be detrimental to the A.T. network of cooperative management partners, the public, and natural resources or are in violation of the A.T. network's shared values are considered misconduct.

The goal of a shared standard of conduct is to educate, inspire, and empower those we interact with, and to further expand civic engagement and the perpetual protection of the A.T.

Please see [Guidelines for Creating an Organizational Code of Conduct](#) which includes examples of conduct and misconduct.

#### Reporting Misconduct

Volunteers are encouraged to discuss issues that arise with others in an open way to help lead to improved communication and stronger working relationships. If those efforts are unsuccessful, or if volunteers do not feel comfortable discussing issues with the person responsible, the steps outlined below offer available processes for reporting misconduct.

Methods for reporting misconduct should be obvious to A.T. volunteers and the process the organization will take to respond should be clearly understood.

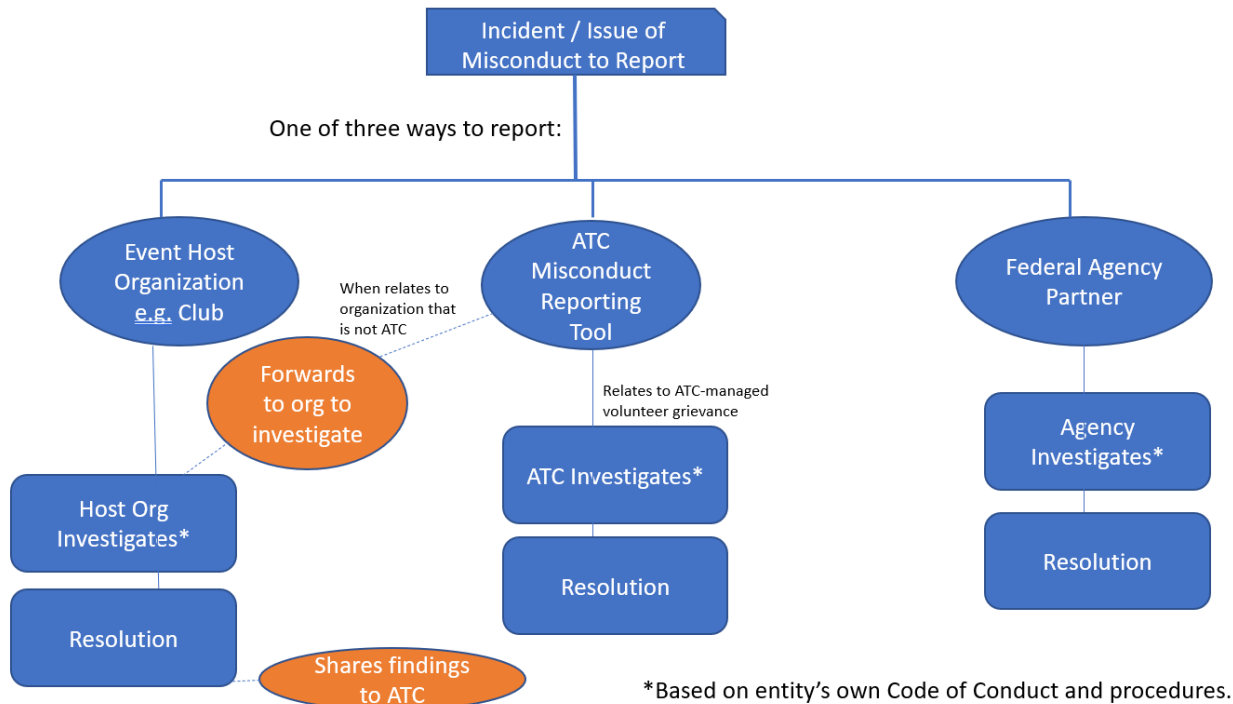
Note that for immediate threats to safety, dial 911. For suspicious activities or to report trail resource damage, use the Incident Report Form on [ATC's website](#).

#### Reporting

Because the process of reporting misconduct is offered across organizations working to support the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, reporting may take place through one of several ways (see visual representation on next page):

- Through the host organization based on its Code of Conduct
- Through ATC, via the [Misconduct Reporting Tool](#)
- Through a federal agency partner's reporting process (see appendix for more information)

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### Reported Grievance Information Sharing

If ATC receives a complaint through the Misconduct Reporting Tool or other methods, it will:

- Investigate issues arising within ATC by following its Code of Conduct for ATC-managed volunteers, or
- Send to the A.T. Club where the reported grievance occurred for investigation and follow-up. Notification will also be shared to the federal agency extending volunteer protections for the grieved and accused volunteers.

If an A.T. Club or organization coordinating A.T. volunteers receives a complaint, they are not obliged to share with ATC in advance of investigation. The organization will need to involve the land manager in the process early if the reported behavior occurred while work was being performed under a volunteer service agreement. Once a resolution is reached, the organization commits to report to ATC and land manager since sharing this information helps establish a comprehensive understanding of safety across the Trail:

- The nature of the complaint
- Resolution of issue(s)
  - For issues of significance, the name of any individual prohibited from volunteering in the future with that organization.

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When an agency partner receives a complaint about inappropriate or unprofessional behavior, it will pursue its investigations and to the best of their ability share relevant resolution and outcomes with ATC and any relevant club. If grievances are with volunteers coordinated by ATC or A.T. Clubs, the respective organizational entity will be involved in investigating and navigating the issue toward resolution.

#### Issues Investigation, Resolution, Reporting

Investigation, determination, and resolution are the essential steps to being accountable to grievances and closing the loop on issues of misconduct.

**Investigation:** Each organization that manages A.T. Volunteers must have Code of Conduct that provides an objective and fair process of investigation. The aim will be made to provide anonymity to the greatest extent possible of all involved parties, except to the extent necessary to conduct an appropriate investigation into alleged violations. The organization will need to involve the land manager in the discussion if the reported behavior occurred while work was being performed under a volunteer service agreement.

**Resolution:** Outcomes from investigations will determine recommended resolution and closure. A decision will be made by the host organization as to the need for any discipline, including but not limited to education, warning, mediation or counseling, loss of membership, exclusion from activities, revocation of leader or volunteer status, termination of employment, or legal prosecution.

The land management partner holding the volunteer service agreement is responsible for making decisions for any action related to the standards and principles they follow for volunteers managed under their agreement(s).

**Reporting to Parties:** As guided by the host organization's code of conduct, that organization will inform the complainant(s) and the respondent(s) of the investigation's outcome. The appeals process is defined within organizations' Code of Conduct and described when parties are informed of the investigation's conclusions.

**Reporting to ATC:** Resolution or action taken as a result of the findings by any A.T. Partners will be documented and shared with ATC's Volunteer Program Director for metrics and program management.

#### Metrics and Program Management

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is committed to tracking metrics, without identifying



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personal information, for the purpose of knowing when incidents occur that cause harm in the A.T. network and tracking resolution. Through tracking and analysis, management tools, educational opportunities, and support for building inclusive spaces can be formed or adapted.

----- End of Policy -----

Approved by ATC's Board of Directors on July 16, 2023.

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.





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### Appendix

#### USDA Forest Service Anti-Harassment Information

The Forest Service Harassment Reporting Center is available to all employees, supervisors, contractors, and anyone who does business with the Forest Service to report harassment against FS employees or its contractors. The Harassment Reporting Center supports the enhanced Anti-Harassment Policy and Program by providing a single, dedicated channel to report harassment or bullying allegations.

The Harassment Reporting Center is designed to obtain a thorough intake of the harassment report. A complete report allows the agency to more efficiently understand the harassment claims and those involved, resulting in prompt investigation into the matter.

The Harassment Reporting Center is available 7 days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Eastern. If you have experienced, witnessed, or received a report of harassment as a supervisor, you should call the toll-free number (844) 815-8943 to report the allegation. The Harassment Reporting Center is operated by an external contractor. Reporting Center Representatives are skilled, highly-trained non-Forest Service employees. They understand the processing and routing of all harassment reports.

#### [Forest Service Manual Chapter 8100: Anti-Harassment](#)

811.4f- "Contractors, partners, volunteers, and others performing work on behalf of the Forest Service are expected to avoid behaviors prohibited by this policy. The Agency will take action to address reported incidents in order to provide a safe and harassment-free environment for employees. Forest Service Supervisors and Managers responsible for administering these contracts, partnerships, grants and agreements, volunteers, and others performing work on behalf of the Agency will disseminate the anti-harassment policy and take appropriate steps to identify and correct behaviors that are not consistent with Forest Service policy. Agency Supervisors and Managers will ensure their staffs notify their respective Agency contractors and partners about the anti-harassment policy whenever such contractors or partners sign, extend, or otherwise renew a contract or agreement."

#### National Park Service Anti-Harassment Information

[NPS Director's Order 16E: Anti-Harassment Policy.](#)

[NPS Reference Manual 7](#)