



Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership 2023 Annual Meeting Report

November 1-2 | National Conservation Training Center, Shepherdstown,
WV



NPS & Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership
November 1 - 2, 2023



Table of Contents

Click on a heading below to go directly to that section of the report.

- **ATLP 2022-2024 Strategic Plan Snapshot**
- **Executive Summary**
- **Partner Updates: Connectivity Projects in the Appalachian Trail Landscape**
- **The Intersection of Trails & Ecological Connectivity**
- **Agency Responses and Actions to Implement Federal Connectivity Guidance**
- **Field Trip to Antietam National Battlefield**
- **ATLP Logo Reveal**
- **Action Planning for an Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Framework**
- **Co-creating a Roadmap for Connectivity – Geographic Focus**
- **Co-creating a Roadmap for Connectivity – Building Coherence**
- **Closing Remarks & Reflections**
- **Notes from Action Planning for an Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Framework Breakout Groups**

ATLP 2022-2024 Strategic Plan Snapshot

Goal	Strategy	Tactics				
ACCELERATE STRATEGIC CONSERVATION 	Protect 100,000 acres of priority lands over the next 3 years	ATLP forms a conservation working group	A fundraising goal and strategy is developed for WEAFF	A database is created to catalog data & resources to inform land protection priorities & identify data needs	A strategic conservation framework is developed to inform land protection priorities	ATLP protects 100,000 acres of targeted parcels in 3 years
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION 	Lead efforts to elevate the AT Landscape as an East Coast Climate Corridor	The Climate Advisory Group completes recommendations report by end of 2021	Communication data and messaging products are identified for ATLP			
EQUITABLE LANDSCAPE 	Work with communities to understand their values & needs	A synthesis report is developed on the needs of regional partnerships and local communities	Catalog existing local, state and federal policies that align with ATLP vision & goals			
DIVERSE PARTNERSHIP 	Assess current governance & functions to build a more diverse partnership	Initiate a needs assessment of ATLP's governance structure to sustain function & capacity	Identify JEDI specialists among partners & from external advisors	Develop a strategic engagement strategy to diversify representation & promote equitable and inclusive Partnership functions		

Executive Summary

Over 50 conservation leaders gathered at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia on November 1 and 2 for the Annual Meeting of the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership (ATLP). The ATLP includes representatives from federal and state agencies, nonprofit conservation organizations, and local land trusts who are dedicated to ensuring an intact and enduring Appalachian Trail Landscape. This was the eighth Annual Meeting hosted by ATLP.

7 Things You Can Do To Support ATLP

1. Nominate yourself, a coworker, or a colleague from another organization to serve on an ATLP committee. Nomination forms close at 11:59pm on January 8, 2024.
 - a. [Steering Committee Nomination Form](#)
 - b. [Strategic Conservation Committee Nomination Form](#)
 - c. [Communications Committee Nomination Form](#)
2. Sign up for *Beyond the Boundary*, ATLP's eNews.
 - a. Visit [ATLP's webpage](#), navigate halfway down the page and fill out the form titled, "Sign up to receive ATLP email updates."
3. Share this Meeting Report with your colleagues.
4. Write a blog post, newsletter blurb or social media post about your participation at the meeting.
5. Fill out [this form](#) to share case stories, projects, etc. that you are working on in the A.T. Landscape to be showcased in the ATLP End of Year Review and Story Map.
6. Have a coffee or a call with 2 partners that you think would be a great fit to join the ATLP.
7. Discuss with your communication staff how you can amplify your organization's participation with ATLP.

ATLP's Vision & Mission

Our Vision

- The vision of the ATLP is of an Appalachian Trail and surrounding landscape that connect people of diverse communities and nature, forever safeguarding the backbone and heart of the Wild East.

Our Mission

- The mission of the ATLP is to connect the wild, scenic, and cultural wonders of the Appalachian Trail and its surrounding landscape.

Annual Meeting Theme, Purpose & Goals

The theme of this year's Annual Meeting was Ecological Connectivity in the Appalachian Trail Landscape. This theme was chosen to reflect the direction the ATLP is taking in regards to our conservation vision and strategy. The decision to elevate ecological connectivity within the ATLP was informed and motivated by the ongoing biodiversity crisis and landcover change trends across the Landscape, recent federal guidance amplifying the importance of connectivity, and the 2022 Climate Advisory Group's report highlighting the need for effective planning and implementation of climate smart strategies to ensure a connected and protected Appalachian Trail Landscape.

Additionally, the A.T. and ATLP are models for other National Scenic and National Historic Trails. We see a role for the ATLP in the greater outdoor recreation and land conservation fields to unite trail management and science-driven conservation for a more climate resilient future that's protective of wildlife habitat and the natural resources we're reliant on for healthy, economically-stable communities. By approaching our conservation work through an ecological connectivity lens that centers on habitat connectivity (wildlife permeability) and functional connectivity (ecosystem services production), we can maximize benefits for both humans and wildlife.

The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Frame the conversation around the Appalachian Trail Landscape as a corridor for ecological connectivity.
- Gain a better understanding of federal guidance on connectivity and the impacts and opportunities in the A.T. Landscape.
- Learn from federal agencies about their priorities for connectivity and protecting habitat.
- Deepen state and federal engagement.

The goals of the meeting were to:

- Build the framework for an ATLP conservation strategy that's centered on ecological connectivity.
- Conduct the groundwork necessary to provide context and direction to the Strategic Conservation Committee.

Getting to Know ATLP

- Video: [Landmarks of the Appalachian Trail](#)
- Video: [Protecting our Large Landscape](#)

Partnership Updates

Call for Committee Members

- ATLP is seeking individuals from partner organizations to serve on the Steering Committee, Communications Committee and Strategic Conservation Committee. Please follow the links below to nominate yourself, a co-worker, or a colleague from another organization. The forms are open until 11:59pm on January 8, 2024.
 - [Steering Committee Nomination Form](#)
 - [Strategic Conservation Committee Nomination Form](#)
 - [Communications Committee Nomination Form](#)

Communications Strategy

- The ATLP Communications Committee has been working with Momentum Communications on brand development and a Communications Strategy. This work was initiated at an in-person Steering Committee meeting in Asheville, NC this past April.
- During the summer and fall of 2023, the ATLP Communications Committee worked with Momentum Communications and Laughing Bear Associates to develop a communications strategy, messaging, and a logo and brand identity for the Partnership. Through this effort, we sought to develop communications tools and resources to unite conservation partners, inform a diverse group of stakeholders, and bolster land conservation efforts across the range of landscapes within the A.T. Landscape.

Partnership Charter

- The ATLP Steering Committee approved a [Partnership Charter](#) in September of 2022. This charter codifies the ATLP's governance structure and outlines roles and responsibilities of the Partnership's committees. As a living document, the Charter will adapt with the Partnership as it grows and evolves. This was an important foundation-building step that necessarily preceded the formation of the Coordinating Committee, Communications Committee, and Strategic Conservation Committee.

Coordinating Committee

- The ATLP formally convened a Coordinating Committee in July of 2023. The Committee was established to add more voices to the leadership and day-to-day management of the Partnership. The Committee serves as a filter to ensure that the Steering Committee is tasked with the most pertinent and relevant decisions to maximize the participation of its members.

[Partner Updates: Connectivity Projects in the Appalachian Trail Landscape](#)

The Wildlands Network

- The Wildlands Network has been working on cross-jurisdictional connectivity projects in the Appalachian Trail Landscape to build wildlife crossings for large mammals to cross major East-West highways. Notably, the network has brought the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Tennessee Department of Transportation together to collaborate on the Safe Passage project on I-40 in the Pigeon River Gorge to improve safety for wildlife and drivers.

Appalachian Mountain Club

- For the first time in over 100 years, Atlantic Salmon are in their historic headwaters range thanks to the work of AMC and their partners. This is an incredible accomplishment and

underscores the importance of aquatic connectivity in the Appalachian Trail Landscape. Additionally, AMC is growing its conserved lands portfolio with over 170,000 acres in conservation.

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

- ATC is also working on aquatic connectivity to benefit Atlantic Salmon on Henderson Brook in Maine by removing a culvert and replacing a bridge to improve fish passage.

Maine Mountain Collaborative

- The MMC and its' partners are collaborating for conservation in an area that is 85% privately owned land, highlighting the mosaic of landowners that exist across the A.T. Landscape and the need to effectively work with a diverse group of land owners.

Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture

- The AMJV has been working to protect and restore early successional habitats in key areas of the Appalachian Trail Landscape through active forest management and restoration to benefit priority avian species such as the Golden Winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler and Eastern Whip-poor-will.

Staying Connected Initiative

- SCI is an international public-private partnership that works to maintain landscape connectivity across the Northern Appalachian–Acadian Region of the U.S. and Canada. By supporting a collaborative community of practice, SCI and its 70 partners are improving the practice of connectivity conservation by mapping ecological corridors around core forests. SCI serves as an important example of transboundary collaboration to achieve multiple conservation goals related to connecting protected places.

Open Space Institute

- The Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund is an \$18 million effort of OSI's that provides capital grants to protect 50,000 acres in key focus areas along the Appalachian Range. To complement land protection efforts, OSI's Climate Catalyst Program works in partnership with states, local communities, Tribes, land trusts, and other not-for-profit organizations to reduce climate risks for communities disproportionately affected by flooding and other climate-induced threats. The Fund awards capital grants for land protection in portions of the Cradle of Southern Appalachia (Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama), the Kittatinny region (New Jersey and Pennsylvania), Western/Central Pennsylvania and, the Northern Appalachians (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont).

Forest Legacy Program

- The Forest Legacy Program recently received a \$700 million investment from the Inflation Reduction Act. FLP is an important funding program that protects environmentally important forest land threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. There are 50 FLP funded projects in proximity to protected public lands in the Appalachian Trail Landscape.

Trust for Public Land

- The mission of TPL is to connect everyone with the outdoors. Their work has focused on communities over corridors, but recent projects have amplified the importance of community forests at the intersection of communities and corridors.

The Wilderness Society

- Working at a smaller scale, 2 years of research has revealed the presence of 6 new bird species in habitats they're not typically found in. This is an important finding that amplifies the current impacts of climate change on wildlife migration.

The Intersection of Trails & Ecological Connectivity

To begin the meeting, we grounded the conversation around the Appalachian Trail as a climate resilient corridor that provides ecosystem services through functional connectivity and facilitates wildlife movement through habitat connectivity. We heard from Travis Belote with The Wilderness Society about his research on trails as corridors for conservation planning and identifying corridors to build a more resilient system of protected areas. Christine Drake with Parks Canada discussed the National Program for Ecological Corridors and how the Canadian government is supporting a network of conserved areas for preserving biodiversity and addressing impacts of climate change.

Travis Belote, The Wilderness Society – Wild, Diverse & Connected: The Appalachian Trail as a Conservation Corridor

The Appalachian Trail is a flagship for conservation. Although the original intention of the Trail was for recreation, its evolution has refocused attention onto the ecosystems and wildlife of the A.T. Landscape. This represents a shift in focus from people to ecosystems, acknowledging the importance of sustaining wild ecosystems for people's connection to place.

To align 30X30 with global conservation priorities, we must ensure we're retaining ecosystems of high ecological integrity, not just conserving land to conserve land. We must secure well-connected systems of protected areas to ensure adequate wildlife permeability to support biodiversity. And our connectivity work must be inclusive of aquatic, terrestrial and avian species.

Much of Travis' research focuses on trails as a means of connecting protected places. In researching the most natural linkage in the A.T. Landscape, we can see alignment between an optimal corridor and the treadway in the southern region of the Trail. Moving northwards, the optimal corridor deviates to the west, away from the A.T.

Travis also highlighted the need to bring people into this discuss by incorporating social vulnerability into connectivity analyses. We can optimize benefits for humans and wildlife by identifying the overlap between connected places and areas where people have traditionally been left out of conservation.

Speaker Resources:

- [An Assessment of Ecological Values and Conservation Gaps in the Protection Beyond the Corridor of the Appalachian Trail](#)
- [The Value of Trail Corridors for Bold Conservation Planning](#)
- [Wild, Connected, and Diverse: Building a More Resilient System of Protected Areas](#)
- [Identifying Corridors Among Large Protected Areas in the US](#)

Christine Drake, Parks Canada – National Program for Ecological Corridors in Canada

Ninety percent of Canada's population lives within 150 miles of the U.S. border, concentrating impacts and access in the southern portion of Canada. This has led Parks Canada to ask how we create meaningful connection for people when there is a lack of access to areas of high conservation value.

On the heels of the recent global biodiversity summit and COP 15, the Canadian government has invested \$3.2B in [Canada's Nature Legacy](#) which includes funding for the [National Program for Ecological Corridors](#) to fight climate change and halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

The Program for Ecological Corridors is adopting IUCN's nomenclature, providing a common vocabulary to discuss ecological connectivity. Ecological connectivity is a relative measure of the probability of movement through a region. An ecological corridor is an area-based conservation approach that has ecological connectivity as its goal and outcome. These outcomes are achieved through management actions such as wildlife crossings.

The Program is inclusive of indigenous perspectives and weaves in traditional ecological knowledge by recognizing indigenous stewardship values as a priority goal for corridor recognition. Parks Canada will not own or administer corridors but will collaborate with partners to advance shared objectives.

Speaker Resources:

- [Ecological Corridors Infographic](#)
- [Enabling a National Program for Ecological Corridors in Canada in Support of Biodiversity, Conservation, Climate Change Adaptation, and Indigenous Leadership](#)

Speaker Biographies



Travis Belote, Senior Science Director, The Wilderness Society

Travis' research program covers diverse topics including forest and rangeland ecology and spatial conservation planning focusing on mapping ecological integrity, biodiversity, and connectivity priorities. He received his BA and MS from the University of Tennessee, PhD from Virginia Tech, and conducted postdoctoral research with the U.S. Geological Survey. He has been with TWS since 2009 and lives in Bozeman, Montana with his wife and two sons. He grew up in East Tennessee, and his first backpacking trip was along the Appalachian Trail in Grayson Highlands State Park in southwest Virginia.



Christine Drake, Manager of Ecological Corridors and Heritage Rivers, Parks Canada

Christine began her career as a Field Biologist in 2002 after pursuing a Bachelor's of Science (Trent University), and a Master's of Science in Forestry (University of Toronto). In those early days, Christine worked largely on species at risk research and monitoring projects, as well as migratory bird research with Ontario Parks, the Ontario government and Environment, and Climate Change Canada. In 2007 she joined Parks Canada as a Monitoring Ecologist for Pukaskwa National Park, which lies on the north shore of Lake Superior, in Ontario. Christine stayed at Pukaskwa for the next 15 years, transitioning from her Ecologist role into park management, and then finally to the Park Superintendent role. Since 2022 Christine has been leading a team to implement a National program for Ecological Corridors, an exciting initiative launched by Parks Canada, as one of the Government of Canada's nature-based solutions to halting and reversing biodiversity loss and helping species adapt to climate change. For the past year, Christine and her husband have enjoyed exploring their new surroundings by canoe, by foot and by bike, having moved from the north shore of Lake Superior to where they now live, next to Gatineau Park in southwestern Quebec.

Agency Responses and Actions to Implement Federal Connectivity Guidance

In August 2022, the [USDA Forest Service \(USFS\) released guidance](#) to enhance and integrate habitat connectivity and migration corridors in National Forest System planning and decisions through, among other things, increased and improved partnership building. In March 2023, the [White House Council on Environmental Quality released guidance](#) requiring federal agencies under the Department of the Interior to promote greater connectivity across terrestrial, marine, and freshwater habitats to sustain biodiversity and enable wildlife to adapt to fluctuating environmental conditions, including those caused by climate change.

Throughout the summer, the ATLP coordinators, several ATLP Steering Committee members, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail met with federal agencies to better understand their perspectives on ecological connectivity and amplify the opportunity to work with the ATLP to co-create a roadmap for connectivity that benefits both the agencies and the Partnership. To learn more about how ATLP and its' partners can assist agencies in implementing this guidance, we heard from several federal agency representatives about specific actions their department will implement.

National Park Service - Ray Sauvajot, Associate Director of Natural Resource Stewardship

Ray's role with the National Park Service (NPS) is to determine how science and the use of science can inform the work of NPS. To optimize management decisions, NPS must understand the importance of connectivity and the constraints it puts on the agency's decisions. NPS and the Natural Resource Stewardship Directorate understand that protecting resources depends on the context in which they exist, i.e., the inextricable link between natural resources in individual park units and the greater landscapes and systems they're a part of. These connections are increasingly apparent and important in the face of a changing climate.

NPS has traditionally operated under a unit-based approach but are evolving to meet the challenge of managing natural resources at the landscape-scale. This will require adapting tools that were developed for a unit-based approach to be more integrated with natural resources and ecosystems existing beyond the park unit boundaries. This paradigm shift in conservation at NPS will allow the agency to better meet its federally designated purpose.

U.S. Forest Service – Michelle Mitchell, Director of Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage & Volunteer Resources

At U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Washington Office provides intention for forests and districts through memos and official correspondence. These communications set the direction for where the agency is going. The intended direction is implemented through regional offices. Recent guidance pertaining to climate resilience, carbon stewardship, and habitat connectivity empower individual forests to look beyond boundaries and consider their work through a landscape-scale lens.

Specific steps that USFS is undertaking include:

- Spatially identify climate change vulnerabilities and risks to key National Forest System resources, including habitat and ecological connectivity to assist in identifying changes or additions to policy/direction to enable more effective adaptation or migration actions.
- Increased cross-jurisdictional and cross-USDA collaborations for improved coordination, planning and investments in conservation and restoration at a landscape scale across public and private lands.

- Develop the [Forest Service Climate Risk Viewer](#) which uses human modification information and forest cover data to identify key areas of importance for forest landscape connectivity across North America.
- Increased public engagement through an Advance Notice of Rulemaking to seek input on how USFS can develop new policies or build on current policies to improve their ability to foster climate resilience and to gain insights into public perceptions of climate risks to forests and acceptable ways to address those risks.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – Tim Purinton, Special Assistant to the Deputy Director

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) is leaning into the ideas of innovation, opportunity, and equity in consideration of recent federal guidance on connectivity. Working to improve connectivity around wildlife refuges, the agency is engaging marginalized communities, increasing partnerships, and undertaking a watershed-based approach to remove aquatic barriers.

Working with the Department of the Interior (DOI), Tim serves on the committee supporting the Appalachia Keystone Initiative. The Initiative is working at the scale of the Appalachian Regional Commission’s boundaries with inclusion of National Park Service boundaries that are outside of ARC’s boundary. These initiatives are being implemented to develop collaborations that transcend bureaus and to identify landscape scale actions and geographies to deploy across DOI to maximize the impact of BIL and IRA dollars. Their aim is to initiate concentrated and impactful conservation actions instead of “random acts of conservation.”

DOI and USFWS acknowledge that we need to take advantage of these funding opportunities now because they might not be here with the next administration. They are also looking at opportunities to combine funding sources to increase the impact and efficacy of conservation investments.

Speaker Biographies



Ray Sauvajot, Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship Science, National Park System

Ray provides leadership and direction for natural resource management and science programs of the NPS. As Associate Director, he oversees national programs in biology, air and water resources, climate change response, geology, natural sounds and night skies, environmental quality, and compliance (including NEPA), ecological inventory and monitoring, and science communication. He’s especially honored to work with an amazing team of

scientists, policy experts, planners, program managers, administrators, and technicians at offices in Washington, D.C., Colorado, and other locations to help advance the incredible mission of the NPS. He has served in positions with the NPS for nearly 30 years (including positions at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the NPS Pacific West Regional Office in San Francisco) and has also held adjunct faculty appointments in biology, ecology, and environmental science at UC Berkeley, UC Los Angeles, and California State University Northridge. His specific areas of expertise have included the effects of development encroachment and habitat fragmentation on wildlife, landscape-scale conservation, habitat connectivity, and wildlife corridors. Ray also has professional and personal interests in science communication, the interface between science, policy, and public service, and how science can inform on-the-ground conservation and management decision-making. He received a B.A. degree in biology from UC San Diego (1987) and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees (1993, 1997) in ecology from UC Davis.



Michelle Mitchell, Director of Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources, Region 8, USDA Forest Service

Michelle Mitchell serves as the Director of Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources for the Southern Region of the Forest Service. Her previous roles include Assistant Director of Recreation, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Heritage, and Trails in the Pacific Northwest Region as well as Partnership, Volunteer, and Service Program Manager and Florida National Scenic Trail Program Manager in the Southern Region. She holds a BS in Botany from the University of Georgia, and a Graduate Certificate in Natural Resource Management from Virginia Tech. Michelle is particularly interested in engaging people and communities in the management of public lands through partnership. She lives in Lakemont, GA with her partner, Mike. Together they enjoy hiking with their dog, Riley, sailing on Lake Lanier, and trying out all things related to the wonderful outdoors.



Tim Purinton, Special Assistant to the Deputy Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Tim is on federal assignment from The Nature Conservancy serving as a Special Assistant to the Deputy Director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In this 21-month post, Tim is assisting The Department of the Interior (DOI) implement the Restoration and Resilience Framework by coordinating DOI's Keystone Initiatives. The Keystone Initiatives are nine landscape-scale conservation strategies where funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act are being directed to promote scalable ecological restoration and demonstrate durable conservation solutions. Prior to this federal post, Tim was the Executive Director of the Maryland/DC chapter of the Nature Conservancy and the founding Director and co-creator of the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration in the Department of Fish and Game.

[Field Trip to Antietam National Battlefield](#)

For the latter part of our first day, we took a field trip to the Antietam National Battlefield to learn about traditional conservation projects on a site that may be considered non-traditional for conservation in the A.T. Landscape. The Antietam National Battlefield was established in 1890 to commemorate the bloodiest single-day battle in American history. The purpose of Antietam National Battlefield is to preserve, protect, restore, and interpret for the benefit of the public the resources associated with the Battle of Antietam and its legacy.

In 2022, an updated Landscape Management Plan was developed for the site. The purpose of the Landscape Management Plan is to develop comprehensive, sustainable land use strategies that will preserve significant landscape elements and integrate natural and cultural resource values. The Plan analyzes the impact of projects in six areas of the landscape: cultural landscapes, archeological resources, water resources, vegetation, wildlife and wildlife habitat, and visitor use and experience. The proposed projects include reforestation approximately 140 acres; enhancing riparian buffers and mitigating erosion; establishing approximately 287 acres of additional native grasslands and meadows; maintaining agricultural areas; re-planting and maintaining orchards; maintaining mown lawn; improving the Mumma Farmstead and location-specific designed landscapes; re-establishing important viewsheds; and maintaining fencing and other landscape elements.



ATLP Logo Reveal

During the summer and fall of 2023, the ATLP Communications Committee worked with Momentum Communications and Laughing Bear Associates to develop a communications strategy, partnership messaging, and a logo and brand identity for the Partnership. Through cultivating a network of nearly 200 conservation partners dedicated to the protection of the greater A.T. Landscape, ATLP has realized the importance of a unified, audience-driven communications strategy and ATLP brand identity.

Through this effort, we sought to develop communications tools and resources to unite conservation partners, inform a diverse group of stakeholders, and bolster land conservation efforts across the range of landscapes within the A.T. Landscape. The focus of our communications is on the Landscape, not the Partnership. To communicate the importance of the Landscape and the A.T. as the backbone that links the different regions along the trail, our partners and their audiences need to understand what the A.T. Landscape is and why it is important to their work. Our partners have identified the need for tools to talk about the Landscape in the context of their regional priorities and their work as part of a broader, larger A.T. Landscape.

The ATLP Steering Committee was excited to share the new logo during the Annual Meeting. The Communications Strategy and Partnership Messaging will be shared through ATLP's newsletter and posted on ATLP's webpage upon completion.



Action Planning for an Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Framework

With the goal of a conserved and connected Appalachian Trail Landscape, partners broke out into small groups to discuss actions the ATLP, partner organizations, and state and federal agencies can take to move the Partnership towards a connectivity centered conservation strategy that is inclusive of Appalachian communities, protective of wildlife corridors, and ensures ecological connectivity for the sustainable production of ecosystem services.

There were three geographically focused groups.

- The geographic regions were:
 - Springer Mtn. to VA-MD State Line
 - VA-MD State Line to CT-MA State Line
 - CT-MA State Line to Katahdin
- Each group was asked:
 - How can we come together in this region to focus on important lands for biodiversity that are not conserved?
 - Which areas would you nominate for intensive focus? What opportunities and challenges exist in this region?

There were two special topic groups. The topics were:

- Are conserved lands meeting the needs for a climate resilient landscape?
 - Resource: Synopsis of "[Protected Areas Not Likely to Serve as Stepping Stones for Species Undergoing Climate-Induced Range Shifts](#)"
- What kind of mapping do we need across the Landscape to support intensive connectivity work?
 - Resource: [Synopsis of 2022 Annual Meeting Discussions on Mapping](#)

Co-creating a Roadmap for Connectivity – Geographic Focus

A table containing each group's notes from the Co-creating a Roadmap for Connectivity discussions is included at the end of this meeting report.

Springer Mtn. to VA-MD State Line

There are regional differences that make this work difficult to implement across the Trail using only one strategy. In the South, much of the land that the Trail traverses is managed by USFS. There is also a substantial migration of humans into the A.T. Landscape in the southern portion of the Trail (See the [Southern Forest Futures Report](#)'s predictions on population growth in the Piedmont ecoregion).

We need to empower conservationists on the ground in each area of the trail. And there's a lot of work to be done at the local-ordinance level but there's a lack of capacity to do that work. We also need more capacity to identify and address big-pinch points in the Landscape. How can we increase capacity in these two areas?

We also need to expand who we're engaging. We need to include organizations that work in health, culture, and economic development to develop inclusive values. We also need to be sure not to underestimate the ability of small, local land trusts to get work done. We talk about them like they're tiny organizations with, maybe, one staff person. In fact, a lot of them are quite sophisticated and already doing a lot of the work that we're talking about. We need to make those connections stronger, too.

VA-MD State Line to CT-MA State Line

How our lands and water are managed are a mirror of our social dysconnectivity. We have an opportunity to connect rural, depressed communities with urban, depressed communities. But we need to better understand these communities' needs so we can provide the appropriate support. These communities have champions who can act as spokespersons for our work. We need to better engage the people who live in the places we work because they know the area, they're the dominant authority in their area, and they should have a leading role in conservation in their area.

We're not working with one corridor; we're working with a network of corridors – corridors within corridors – including networks of watersheds. Our work is predominantly land based but, if we're trying to be inclusive of people, we must be inclusive of the river networks that the indigenous communities hold sacred and that define their culture. Additionally, there's huge aquatic biodiversity across the A.T. Landscape, we'd be ignoring a huge proportion of species if we're only doing land-based conservation planning.

Our work is also predominantly land protection based. We should include stewardship, as well. This would be a great way to get NRCS engaged.

Capacity, capacity, capacity: There's funding available but not people to spend it. We should look at where our focal areas align with funding organizations. If they don't align, we should bring them into the conversation to show them the importance of aligning these areas.

CT-MA State Line to Katahdin

We have a good roadmap for connectivity to address ecological bottlenecks. We shouldn't reinvent the wheel when there are so many resources we can use, adapt, and scale to the A.T. Landscape. We also need to better define the A.T. Landscape so we know what scale we should be planning for. Small corridors aren't displayed on large corridor maps. We need priority areas in each state to elevate local knowledge and narrow in on smaller scale corridors and linkages.

There's a lack of local representation at ATLP and the Annual Meetings. We have a role in communicating local priorities and we need them to be able to elevate those priorities without the Trail overshadowing small groups/voices/regions. We need these gatherings to learn from each other and to bring the lessons we learn home. There would be a huge value-add to hosting regional convenings and/or regional committees. We should also explore how to bundle funding opportunities to increase funding for local projects.

Co-creating a Roadmap for Connectivity – Building Coherence

Are conserved lands meeting the needs for a climate resilient landscape?

ATLP needs a partner driven plan for ensuring conserved lands add to climate resilience in the Landscape. We also need forward looking analyses to drive acquisition/conservation of lands that will continue to be climate resilient as the environment changes and/or lands that are likely to be converted to an incompatible use/landcover type. The Partnership focuses heavily on forested lands but what about agricultural lands? Where are forests being converted to ag land? Where is cropland being converted to grassland for carbon sequestration? Where can we expect these changes in the future?

ATLP is well positioned to host a central repository for Landscape data to support partners with a variety of decision-making needs, including climate resilience. ATLP could also provide tools, information, and guidance for analyzing ecosystem services and the associated ecological processes. ATLP could provide coordinating support and guidance for:

- Coalition building
- Communication to the public by local/regional partners
- Linking priorities across scales
- Connecting partners at the local, state, and regional scales
- Connecting acquisition priorities and funding

What kind of mapping do we need across the Landscape to support intensive connectivity work?

Environmental change is happening faster than our conservation work. Maps are a tool, not a solution, but they can create the ability to keep an eye on the larger context as the environment

shifts. Our work can't and shouldn't replace the work and mapping that all of our partners are doing. For maps to be useful, they must be accessible and complement the work of ATLP's partners.

Mapping often occurs at the regional scale and is implemented locally. ATLP needs to be confident in its scale before mapping can be done. Mapping should also be forward looking towards expected climate change impacts, population growth, landcover change, etc. In PA, the majority of conserved lands are above 1500 feet in elevation. Is this trend ubiquitous across the A.T. Landscape? If so, elevate the importance of conserving valleys, lateral ridgelines, river bottoms, wetlands, etc.

Why do we want mapping? To identify important corridors to conserve? To show progress towards accomplishing conservation goals? To validate our assumptions of priority areas to conserve? What are our science needs vs. operational needs?

Additional mapping priorities

- Watersheds & aquatic connectivity
- Optimal energy transmission line locations (as people move into the A.T. Landscape, they want access to modern amenities such as high-speed internet)
- Partner focal geographies
- Human connectivity: trails, access points, public transportation, gateway communities, etc

Closing Remarks & Reflections

Closing Remarks from Gary Tabor, Center for Large Landscape Conservation

Connectivity is a race against time. The most organized partnership survives and wins the race. Yet, perfection is the enemy of the good. Don't let the challenges of today bog down work to improve the future. Don't force people to be in the room, align with groups of similarity. And don't forget about the places in between protected areas.

Nature is dynamic yet we use static maps to depict it. The data used in maps is often out of date before the analysis even begins. We should view areas of prioritization as areas of strategic opportunity. The priorities should come from the top down and the bottom up because everyone needs to feel their concerns are being addressed and have value.

Closing Remarks from J.T. Horn, Trust for Public Land

It takes a long time to get where we are, but we've built the foundation to begin the hard work and do it the right way. Right now is the best moment in J.T.'s 30 years of working in conservation to do this work and take big risks. If we're only telling a land protection story, we're going to miss the boat and the boat will be too small. So, we have to open the tent to smaller organizations and marginalized communities. We need to take some risk with how we set the table so we can look back ten, twenty, thirty years from now and know we did the best that we could with the resources we had.

Reflections

- ATLP and our discussions at this meeting align with IUCN terminology for connectivity, giving it a global context and providing common language to communicate across boundaries and borders.
- Parks Canada is making a concerted effort to be able to work outside of their park boundaries. How can we replicate that here?
- This work transcends space and time. How can we create a vision to carry this work forward over the next 100 years?

- Perhaps our ecological connectivity isn't as good as we claim. We need to consider our focal areas in the context of the most optimal connectivity corridor for the Appalachian Trail Landscape that Travis shared.
 - We need a focal area that's bigger than the HUC10 shell we've been working with.
 - The Alleghany Highlands Trail overlaps more with the optimal connectivity corridor in the north than the A.T. How can we get AHT engaged with the partnership to achieve mutual goals?
- Connectivity is important but special places don't get conserved unless people care about them. As Michelle Mitchell said, "In the end, we will only have saved what we love, we will only love what we know, we will only know what we are taught, and we are only taught what we experience." We must provide opportunities for people to experience the trail so we must consider access to the corridor and the human connection to the Trail and Landscape.
- Travis' maps show that we need to be science driven to be effective in reaching our goal of a protected and connected Appalachian Trail Landscape.
- The energy around the A.T. is an opportunity that we need to take advantage of and leverage.
- The acre you protect locally is important nationally.

Notes from Action Planning for an Appalachian Trail Landscape Conservation Framework Breakout Groups

Session Objective

This exercise was conducted to start ATLP on a journey of creation. The ideas generated will be used to build a shared conservation framework that engages partners and achieves the goals of the Partnership. The Strategic Conservation Committee will refine the framework to create a strategy that identifies conservation priorities, objectives, and goals. At the 2024 ATLP Annual Meeting, we will invite our partners to help us build an action plan to achieve the work that began with these conversations.

Geographic Focused Groups

Springer Mountain to VA-MD State Line
Based on the provided map and your own regional knowledge, which areas would you nominate for intensive focus? What opportunities and challenges exist in this region?
Theme: The problems and solutions are inherently interconnected, avoid the silos (don't leave out the human connectivity)
Conversation topic: Ecological/bio connectivity is pretty strong in much of the southern region...Until you hit the "fork" in central-ish VA.
Takeaway: There is a need for protecting the connectivity and the cascading ecosystem services in the more northerly region
The Northern Piedmont region is bumping up against the Trail, Blue Ridge Parkway and Greater Roanoke Area (westward)

Question: What is the point of the Trail?

- Human benefits (psychological, physical, social well-being, etc.) form the direct engagement with the Trail and the Landscape

What steps might be taken to foster collective action toward conserving these areas?

Greater support for community-based conservation approaches and on the ground projects to get folks engaged and activated

A.T. Communities are an entry point for municipal level/county engagement for improved ordinance and zoning and can act as nodes to foster human-A.T. Landscape Connectivity

Underlying questions: Where is the capacity?

VA-MD State Line to CT-MA State Line

Based on the provided map and your own regional knowledge, which areas would you nominate for intensive focus? What opportunities and challenges exist in this region?

I-81 corridor and warehouses

- We can improve the future of this corridor for biodiversity and human needs through greater focus on the Kittatinny Ridge corridor, Maryland, the MD to NJ corridor.
- There are highly articulated steps already identified: Folks are ready to go. There's high biodiversity but little land conserved. There has been conservation driven by things other than the trail, such as water quality and military buffer zones – Sentinel Landscapes. Also farmland conservation. These are helpful for fattening the corridor.

The Northern terminus of the Blue Ridge north through the Cumberland Valley.

- Great cultural importance and also a gap in connectivity.
- Goal: Connect to the Kittatinny Ridge.

Identify the places that are most at risk and figure out how we can support the local land trusts/communities as partners.

- There are places with huge biodiversity and huge conservation gaps – so how do we fill in gaps?
- Northern half of AT in MD, regional conservation partnership, it's two counties – Washington and Frederick. We are launching a strategic planning process. Three watersheds that have their headwaters along South Mountain. The idea is to connect Catoctin Mountain and Elk Ridge. One result is a green infrastructure plan for Frederick County. Two valleys on either side of trail - Antietam watershed and Catoctin watershed: Huge potential but lower priority than the northern half of the AT in MD.
- 84 Corridor, south of CT border in New York, Fahnestock to CT border: A lot of state park land – Sterling Forest, Bear Mountain, Hudson Highlands. Then there is a hole, which is slightly protected by a narrow corridor, but there are wildlife problems there. I-84 cuts through and is a serious barrier. There already is a significant amount of development in this area. But we have been talking about a spur or alternate route for the trail as a more rural route and could be leveraged for biodiversity and connectivity.

- Blairstown in NJ is quasi protected: The march of development is coming. It is a priority area for TNC and others. Good energy to tap into. How do we tap into the vista needs – lots of land? This is more about viewshed than the trail itself.
- Forest Legacy funding can only go to designated areas. Should consider how those overlap with our priority areas. (And Forest Legacy does not have a lot of applications from PA and VA. Expanding that is a priority for Forest Legacy.)
- Where the Pochuck and Walkill drainage is along NY and NJ border is another gap. Wildlife Refuge expansion is one idea. There may not be federal funding for that, but there are opportunities/targets in that area that could be acquired. There is a lot there; questions of how much is enough.
- PA Turnpike crosses the Kittatinny in a tunnel, but it wants to eliminate tunnels and cut the mountain. First one is the Allegheny Front. They are viewing wildlife bridges as an appropriate alternative to a mountain! Could use ATLP lobbying to speak to the effect that these priorities are having. The renewable energy infrastructure in PA is hitting us hard.
- NJ Highlands
- We did not consider CT needs specifically.

Take stock of what we need to be speaking to – renewable energy, transportation infrastructure, etc. In terms of threats, roads and highway corridors.

What steps might be taken to foster collective action toward conserving these areas?

WORKING BEYOND THE TRAIL

- What do we do about ecological connectivity that isn't on the AT? If we are trying to plan for the next 50 or 60 years, will the models we saw yesterday be consistent over that time. Do we shift all our efforts to those areas based on that? We should look to connect those two areas where feasible. The trail corridor is the "front." You can see where human activity has been halted – partially because it is mountains, but also because it is the trail that has kept development at bay to the west. Keep the trail there as that barrier and continue to work to the west.
- What about everything beyond the red line? Do people see themselves in that space? What about spur trails, etc. Move from looking only north-south but also east-west – connecting biodiversity area/corridors. (The rungs of a ladder – using stream corridors, spur trails, etc. Bringing in all other priorities.)
- 60-80 miles west of the trail is the Allegheny Front, which parallels it. There are some protected areas in between – may be ways to connect those. Chestnut (to the west of that) is most at risk. Laurel Ridge Trail is more protected – at least on the southern end. Lots of restoration there – old mine lands.
- We need to look at the projections for the buildout of the human factor: There are models that show that over 20-50 years. That may change how we look at the map.
- There are places in the southern Kittatinny that are narrow. We need to think about how to work with those communities there to work on that.

CAPACITY, CAPACITY, CAPACITY

- Timing is a capacity challenge – not big enough to swoop in when lands become available. But sometimes it is an immediate issue of who will hold land when it becomes available.
- More project money out there – broadly – than there is capacity to receive and implement. Kittatinny – the northern has a lot of larger land trusts, southern doesn't have as many – limited capacity. We should build capacity of local partners. Perhaps they can monitor for easements they don't own.

- There are federal agencies seeking to grow partnership and capacity that already exists. Federal agencies could and should invest in existing land trust community. Baseline capacity, staff development.
- LTA facilitates and funds partnerships – with LWCF funding, for example. LTA’s model is a good one for building capacity.
- Also look to building capacity at state agencies, who could hold the easements.
- There are places where we can protect the property, but we don’t necessarily have a holder. This is a real problem. Often the land trust doesn’t have capacity to help identify projects or secure funding.
- Grow the conservancy side of the ATC.
- Get clear on the parcels that are targets, and take them to the land trusts.
- There are conservancies that have not been engaged.
- Establishing partnerships. Farmland/NRCS funding is key. RCPPP.

COMMUNICATIONS and ADVOCACY

- I don’t think there’s a compelling or clear vision for what is being discussed. When people hear about the trail, they think about the trail but not the large, connected landscape we are discussing. need clarity for what comes with this trail. There are so many conservation initiatives. This is about biodiversity, community, value of these lands to people who own or live among them – economic opportunities of outdoor recreation. There is skepticism among some communities.
- Need to tap into the potential power of the partnership voices: develop unified messaging/toolkit that can be customized for partners. Need to make the case for why this is important.
- The original plan for the trail includes a compelling vision for the “realm” that will be part of scenic values. They were also looking at social engineering, e.g., CCC-style camps, for example. We have to communicate those values to others.
- Why couldn’t multiple partners speak to the threats in this broader landscape no matter where they call home? Is there a network that can be established that can create all partners to comment on local issue – e.g., eliminating tunnels along PA Turnpike. Can we establish key messages for issues that we need collective voices? Take advantage of nested networks to impact some of the pressure that is being exerted. You need local component to be ready to go – you cannot lobby without that. Keep people on top of topics and communicate that out.
- Identify key spokespeople/groups on specific topics/issues. For example, sportspeople, etc.
- Convening is key.
- Next year talk about not just acquisition but also stewardship.

CT/MA State Line to Katahdin
Based on the provided map and your own regional knowledge, which areas would you nominate for intensive focus? What opportunities and challenges exist in this region?
It’s not really for us to decide what to do on ground - local orgs?
Staying Connected Initiative linkages - incorporate them in different states, but rely on local knowledge for local linkages

Communications - use AT story but different regional stories
What steps might be taken to foster collective action toward conserving these areas?
Look to existing initiatives - Maine Mountain Collaborative, High Peaks Initiative, Staying Connected Initiative, Wabanaki Conservation Committee, RCPs, NATLP.
Figure out what to do with NATLP - subsume or form relationship with ATLP. What about regional meetings?
Parcelize so get smaller scale partners involved - define Appalachian Landscape
How important is the CEQ guidance in formulating this? Should our work be directly tied to CEQ/federal government?
Convening capacity is needed, or staff capacity at the federal level
State funding as match is an important tool
Use grant program like Wild East, OSI and others as a carrot for local partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push money out to local conservation
Partnership structure can be more efficient

Special Topic Groups

Are conserved lands meeting the needs for a climate resilient landscape? If not, what can we do to ensure they do?
Resource: Blog Post on the publication, “Protected Areas Not Likely to Serve as Stepping Stones for Species Undergoing Climate-Induced Range Shifts”
Develop a plan for protecting and stewarding land that can support cross-scale implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-scale prioritization (threats, pinch points (connectivity), transportation, etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Linking priorities across scale to support communication and decision-making ○ Support connections between acquisition priorities and funding/justification
Develop a central repository of AT data to support a variety of decision-making needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can ATLP provide tools and info to meet the needs (communication, fit within priorities) of local public and orgs to implement policies and practices
Some main themes of needs to support better coordination for resilience planning/coordination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links between geology, vegetation structure, etc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Would like to consider what's currently growing, what could be growing, and the associated natural resources (wildlife, etc) • Support with coalition building, communication to public and local orgs, linking priorities across scale in a cohesive manner, needs for GIS and other remapping support to decision-making, identifying key partners at local to regional scales,

- AT acts as a “shield” to protect western areas
- Connectivity of watersheds
- What are the ecosystem services and ecological processes associated with resilience

What kind of mapping do we need across the landscape to support intensive connectivity work?

Resource: [Synopsis](#) of discussions on mapping from 2022 ATLP Annual Meeting

Capacity is a critical part of the puzzle. We have insufficient current levels of capacity and activity to do this. Agencies (partners?) should develop this mapping based on CEQ guidelines.

It's a tool to inform the strategic vision, refine that vision, and communicate that vision. It's a way to bring people back into the room. It's not a replacement for thinking. ATLP needs to be that eye in the sky - keeping an eye on those items that fall in-between the cracks.

Mapping Ecological Connectivity:

- A map at the big scale of a set of identifiable values that are important to conservation in the context of climate change - large contiguous blocks of habitat, pinch points (already available)
- Plus risk assessment + scenarios - here are the threats, here are the folks working there, and here are the action steps.
- Scale is important (perhaps we stay regional), risk (what is the risk today and in the future), boundary (stay broad - include that western fork), and pinch points
- There could be a technical mapping team, and a technical resource for folks.

Mapping Connectivity For People: connecting trails, access, public transportation, & communities; (obviously this will need more than just mapping to open the door - there's much more safety, feeling comfortable, access to transportation, food, etc)

Making sure these maps and data layers are accessible.

The convergence of the four datasets that Travis presented is remarkable - it gives us a common language, since we each have our own biases to different landscapes. I'd add the dataset from UMass Amherst (Scott Jackson), which shows veins across landscapes.

- Then the question becomes what does ATLP want in terms of scale? Most of these datasets sit at a regional level, and the implementation is at a local level. Are we thinking regional? Are we thinking local?

Why do we want mapping?

- identify important corridors we want - its not a trail corridor, its a network of corridors
- to show the conservation goals - so that you can achieve action through fee purchase, conservation easement, zoning, etc. - implementation, goals.
- What are our science needs vs. our operational goals?

Part of the task is making it happen and getting it done. Is it top down? There has to be someone looking at the big picture, and understanding the value of the collective whole, and keeping an eye on that gap that is CRITICAL, especially one that land trusts might not be looking at. Then there is

getting her done on the ground - then the question is - that's the job of the local land trusts, agencies, volunteers. Do we have a dreamscape? And then is it also our job to build a system?

Time is important - climate change & development. We need to be mapping not what exists today, but what exists 50 to 100 years from now.

There's an incredible amount of mapping, but we haven't been able to translate the mapping to what the partners need on the landscape, but also how do we communicate the vision with something that's digestible, and visionary. What of the existing data do we have that will go into formulating the map, what is that decision making process going to be, and who is involved. What are the elements that's going to resonate the most with people. Boundaries always limit us - needed, but sometimes lead to people feeling like they are "out" if they aren't depicted on the map.

- Boundaries are important - the partnership is loosely defined. Partners coming together to create and share a vision. Intentionally left it a little fuzzy.
- Use mapping to understand where the best places are to put those efforts - rather than making assumptions. Mapping can help us to check our assumptions.
- Scale is an important question - challenge to focus locally, it would be easier for us to start at a landscape scale. What are the goals of the partnership? How can we represent those through spatial data and analysis? And get an understanding of the state of the AT landscape.
- State of the landscape report - annually, spatially enabled and look at where have we come in the last year toward meeting these conservation goals that we've set out.
- Capacity - unless we have the capacity - funding or technical prowess & expertise. An examination of capacity within the partnership going forward is really important.

Is the mapping we have sufficient to meet our goals?

Mapping can help us to identify missing strategic conservation partners or partnerships. Who does have their eye on the western corridor lands that show up as having high ecological values? Are we talking with them? Where does the vision, strategic focus, etc meld with what other people are doing to create a better whole? Socioeconomic partners and people who may not always connect with the woods/trail, etc. There are a lot of people who are excited to get into the woods, mapping should try to identify those folks - how do we reduce the barriers to getting out there?