



Critical Federal Legislation that Protects the Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian Trail (A.T.), founded in the early 20th century, has been strengthened by federal legislation since 1964.

The federal laws established the co-management system, protect the footpath and surrounding land, and ensure the Trail remains a recreational destination for generations to come.

The A.T. runs through:

8 National Forests

6 National Parks

14 States

2 National Wildlife Refuges

1964

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) made it possible to acquire land along the A.T. that has special environmental, scenic, and cultural significance. Since its passing, the LWCF has been vital in preserving and securing land buffers along the A.T. and more recently in the greater Trail landscape, from being purchased and developed by private entities.

1968

The National Trails System Act

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Trails System Act into law, which established federally protected public trails in both urban and rural areas for public access and enjoyment.

Under the legislation, the Appalachian Trail was formally established as a National Scenic Trail, which cemented the A.T. as one of the premier trails in the United States.

1978

An Act to Amend the National Trails System Act

Ten years later, President Jimmy Carter enacted legislation known as the “Appalachian Trail Bill.” This brought significant changes to the management of the A.T., including directing the ATC to report annually to Congress on the progress of land acquisitions by the National Park Service (NPS) and the USDA Forest Service (USFS).

2020

2020: The Great American Outdoors Act

The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) set up permanent funding for the LWCF and created the Legacy Restoration Fund to provide stronger annual support for public lands stewardship, including the A.T. The GAOA also helps the ATC, Trail clubs, and thousands of volunteers ensure that the A.T. footpath, corridor, and surrounding landscape is conserved, maintained, and accessible to all visitors.

Each of these laws have contributed to the improvement and conservation of the Appalachian Trail. The management of the A.T. requires a combination of public support, volunteers, and private contributions to preserve the American treasure that is the Appalachian Trail.