



November 19, 2024

Via electronic mail

The Honorable Patty Muray
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DaLauro
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior, EPA,
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior, EPA,
and Related Agencies
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Interior, EPA, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree,
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Interior, EPA, and Related Agencies
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairs Murray and Cole, Ranking Member Collins and DaLauro, and Chairs Merkley and Simpson and Ranking Members Murkowski and Pingree,

On behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC or the Conservancy), I write to urge robust and appropriate support in a disaster supplemental for our federal public lands that have been impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Our public lands provide an incredible array of benefits to the American people, including an ability to economically and culturally recover from the devastation they are currently moving through. We strongly believe that any appropriations approved by Congress should address the repair and replacement of physical infrastructure injured in these storms and the ecological function and strength of our forests and parks as well. Our southeastern and Appalachian communities rely on these lands for their economic resiliency, health and well-being, and indelible sense of place.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is the §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that organized the construction of the 2,197-mile Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST or Trail) and has led its management for almost 100 years. The Trail is a “linear park,” surrounded by approximately 375,000 acres of government-protected land as well as many acres of privately owned and conserved land. The ANST, a unit of the National Park System, was built in part to provide a unique recreational experience along the spine of the Appalachian Mountain Range and to connect distant people and places. Today, the ANST connects eight national forests, six other units of the National Park System, four units of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and over 70 public land units conserved under state or local law.

The needs of our region are vast. Both the people and places of the ANST have been hit hard by the recent disasters and require additional support beyond the regular appropriations provided by Congress—either in the current Continuing Resolution or the unfortunately too low annual appropriations—in order to recover and rebuild. Many of our community members—neighbors, volunteers, ATC, NPS, and USFS employees—lived or may still be living without potable water, electricity, heat, access to the Internet, or drivable roads. Many have lost friends, colleagues, and family members. In the A.T. Community™ of Hot Springs, NC, Main Street (which carries the ANST through the town) was severely battered, including with the destruction of its sidewalks. In Erwin, TN, flooding and winds spread detritus and severely impacted a vibrant outdoor recreation economy in addition to destroying the Chestoa Bridge, which carries the A.T. In Damascus, VA, buildings were destroyed and an important community and cultural resource, the Virginia Creeper Trail, has lost 18 historic trestles, two of which were ANST facility assets.

Our public lands have also been severely impacted by the recent storms. Approximately 400 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, from Davenport Gap at the northern edge of Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Pearisburg, VA, on the border of West Virginia, have been impacted in some way and will require monetary and personnel support (from volunteers, NGOs, and our agency partners) in order to recover and rebuild securely. In the Cherokee National Forest, there are many places in which the ANST was simply erased. In the Pisgah, access and local staff and volunteers have been so severely impacted that detailed assessments are still being developed. In the USFS Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, an important recreational and natural amenity in southern Virginia, many portions remain impassable and unable to support the recreational economy or ecological health of the region. Worth noting is that the agency personnel serving this region are also living through the devastation and will need to support themselves and families as they help restore our public lands.

The rebuilding of our natural infrastructure, which provides the clean water, air, leisure and economic opportunities, and is fundamental to culture and sense of place of our Appalachian communities. Without funding support to clear downed trees and replant a heterogeneous, native forest, a rebuilt Blue Ridge Parkway can’t host the millions of visitors who make it America’s most-visited NPS unit and the George Washington/Jefferson National Forests can’t serve as the backyard and mountain refuge for the Commonwealth of Virginia. In the Pisgah National Forest, non-native and invasive species monitoring over the next decade must ensure that the delicate and unique southern Appalachian ecosystem recovers. The Cherokee and Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park won’t be able to inspire the wonder we rely on, nor be the engines of economic power that eastern Tennessee, western

North Carolina, and northern Georgia need to rebuild better what they've lost. And of course, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, which connects them all, will not be able to provide the unique connective and recreational opportunities for which Congress created it.

I am available at your convenience at either bmysliwec@appalachiantrail.org or 207-370-0540 to discuss this important issue. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brendan Mysliwec", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Brendan Mysliwec
Director of Federal Policy
Appalachian Trail Conservancy