



May 14, 2025

Via electronic mail

Chair Kevin Cramer
Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee
Committee on Environment and Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Angela Alsobrooks
Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee
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Chair Cramer and Ranking Member Alsobrooks,

We write in support of certain federal programs within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Environment and Public Works that we hope will be supported in surface transportation reauthorization legislation. In particular, federal policies that support the roadways and trails infrastructure of the National Park and National Forest Systems, infrastructure improvements for fish and wildlife movement, and programming support for regional commissions that serve the Appalachian Trail Landscape we operate within. The National Forest System (NFS) contains 367,000 miles of roadways with 60,000 maintained for passenger use, providing primary roadways systems in large portions of rural America. The National Park System manages 13,100 miles of roadways within its system, many of which are heavily trafficked, especially in the peak visitation season.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is the 501(c)(3) organization that coordinates the Cooperative Management System of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST or Trail), a unit of the National Park System. We work with our trail administrator in the National Park Service (NPS), consulting trail administrator in the USDA Forest Service (USFS), 14 states, and 30 A.T. Club trail operators to provide the necessary care and direction to the ANST. The Trail runs 2,197 miles through over 375,000 acres of land conserved or managed for it (the A.T. Corridor), traversing eight national forests and six other national park units in the process. It is found both in Wilderness Areas and on American Main Streets. The ANST is the backbone of the largest continuous stretch of public land in the eastern United States, connecting people and places and intersecting everything from town roads to interstate highways.

We hope the Committee will be able to consider and include these recommendations, including opportunities for the public to provide input, which is core to the cooperative management principles of the ANST.

Federal Lands Transportation: Under the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP), funds are available to federal land managers (FLMs) to support transportation facilities adjacent to or enabling access to federal lands (such as the ANST and its connected federal units). Beyond roads, the facilities serving the ANST that are best poised to benefit from this program are our trailheads. Many of our trailheads were developed during times of lower population density around the Trail or in times of less informed visitor use management practices. Due to the narrowness of the A.T. Corridor in states such as Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York, deficiencies in federal transportation facilities often spread to adjacent state land managers and state roads—often indistinguishable from each other to the public—so addressing federal issues improves state relationships and public safety. The NPS receives approximately

\$332–360 million annually under FLTP (\$27,481 per mile of road). The USFS receives \$24–28 million per year (\$400 per mile of road). We request continued support for the NPS and a larger, and more appropriate, annual distribution to the USFS.

Federal Lands Access: Under the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP), supplementary support to the FTLTP is provided to states to improve access to federal lands, or for roads within federal lands. As the federally conserved unit present in more states than any other, there are a high number of state and federal road systems that intersect and enable access to the ANST. Additionally, the ANST traverses 78 distinct conserved units organized under state law, so providing access to PennMar Park in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or to Mount Greylock Reservation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts improves access to the federal ANST as well. As visitation to all public lands has increased in recent years, particularly for the central and northern Appalachian sections of the Trail, this has meant an influx to those state-conserved lands in the densely populated Northeast. Development of these transportation facilities supports and helps manage visitors, which in turn boosts tourism and provides stronger markets for local services like lodging, dining, and retail, generating revenue and supporting local jobs. The outdoor recreation industry across our 14-state region generates \$168 billion in consumer spending. Continued support of the FLAP commensurate with demand will ensure that our state cooperative management partners have access to an appropriate fund source to help them plan and develop transportation facilities that support and help manage visitors to the ANST.

Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects: The Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program (NSFLTP) provides competitive grant funding for large-scale, high-cost infrastructure projects on federal and tribal lands with a minimum construction cost of \$12.5 million. In an era of rising visitation and rising costs, the NSFLTP is extremely important to meet particularly larger projects on our public and tribal lands. We are very supportive of this program and the opportunities it opens up for our FLMs. Under the IJA, at least one project per year from the set-aside for Federal Lands Transportation projects must be awarded to an NPS unit with over 3 million visitors. We request the extension of this program and that a similar directive for a mandatory project be included for the USFS, which, along the A.T. Corridor, regularly sees visitation at or exceeding 3 million people annually in each of our forests.

Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads: The Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads Program (ERFO) provides funding to FLMs to repair their roads damaged by natural disasters or catastrophic events. ERFO funding is allocated in response to eligible damage reports and is used to supplement FLMA repair programs. The road systems serving federal lands—particularly those in mountainous and flood-prone areas like the Appalachian Trail Corridor—are especially susceptible to storm damage and washouts. Following the devastation of Hurricane Irene, ERFO was essential for restoring the roads in the Green Mountain National Forest, reconnecting communities that had been cut off from each other. Most recently, we are relying on ERFO funds to rebuild in Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia following the 1,000-year storm in Hurricane Helene. Quick access to ERFO funds is essential to maintaining public safety, visitor access, and economic activity in communities connected to our public lands. We request that Congress continue to authorize the full \$100 million annually for the Emergency Relief (ER) Program, which includes dedicated support for the Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads (ERFO) component.

Recreational Trails Program: The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides formula funding to

states to support the development and maintenance of recreational trails for both motorized and nonmotorized users. It is incredibly important for both of these user groups to have viable trails as, in the absence of sufficient trails for motorized use, some motorized users will focus their recreation activity on non-motorized trails, negatively impacting the user experience and creating safety hazards, something that is unfortunately far too common in areas bereft of public land, such as around the A.T. Corridor in New York and New Jersey. Funded through a portion of federal fuel taxes collected from off-road vehicle use, RTP is one of the few federal programs dedicated specifically to trail infrastructure and putting the decision-making power in the hands of the states. Both ATC and the A.T. Clubs use RTP as a source of funds for our work, supplementing the more than \$7 million we provide in expert volunteer labor. Particularly for our Clubs that work on more than simply the ANST, RTP is a very useful community-informed fund source. Although off-road recreation contributes an estimated \$280 million annually in fuel tax revenue to the Highway Trust Fund, RTP is currently funded at just \$84 million per year. We request the full funding of RTP, which will support the booming recreational economy and support trails for a variety of users across the A.T. Landscape.

Appalachian Regional Commission and Northern Border Commission: While not strictly transportation related, the Appalachian Trail Landscape is served by two important regional commissions, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC). These commissions support economic development in 487 distressed and transitioning counties within the Landscape, focusing on improving and seizing upon opportunities existing within and between them. The economic vitality of these regions is interrelated with the health of the Appalachian Trail, including through enhancing the outdoor recreation economies that attract and deposit money in local business and tax coffers and improving the coordinated conservation efforts of the ANST's connected lands that provide for clean water, air, and exceptional recreational opportunities. The economic opportunities of communities within and surrounding our public lands can be enhanced by the presence of these lands, and government policy should be to support the health of the lands in tandem with the health of our gateway communities. We request that the ARC and NBRC be given authority to support economic development through outdoor recreation and conservation, as well as to coordinate with each other and other federal offices for the benefit of the greater Appalachian Trail Landscape, which they both serve.

Culverts and Fish Passage: The ANST is not a mere footpath; rather, it is a federally conserved National Park System unit incorporating forests, wetlands, mountains, riverways, and road walks. The Trail crosses 1,700 streams and approximately 100 rivers, from the mighty Kennebec River in Maine and Fontana Dam on the Little Tennessee River in North Carolina to Virginia's slow-moving Fox Creek or Massachusetts' Scenic Hoosic River. The National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program has been a valuable contributor to improving fish passage since its creation in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Within the National Park System, culverts that impede fish passage are not eligible for funds to repair or replace them as long as they are enabling water to move through them. On the ANST, we have experienced barriers to fish passage that are ineligible for funding because, although they degrade the natural values contributing to the Trail's designation, the infrastructure is functioning according to its (faulty) design. We request this program be made permanent and authorized at a funding level commensurate with demand. Further, we request that the Committee enable this or a similar program to support efforts on federal lands, particularly those units that do not receive appropriations to support large infrastructure repair or removal.

Legacy Roads and Trails: The USFS has responsibility for over 160,000 miles of trails and 6,700 road and 7,200 trail bridges in addition to the 370,000 miles of roads mentioned above. The Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program (LRT) is critical to ensuring needed roads function and less needed roads may be transitioned to trails, better serving recreational opportunities for a variety of users—all done in order to support watershed and sourcewater management which is essential to the USFS’ Congressionally established mission. This watershed and sourcewater management is accomplished in part by addressing deficiencies in aquatic organism passage and improving trail/road resiliency. The LRT is an essential tool for the USFS’ infrastructure asset management. We request continued support for the LRT at the level commensurate with demand.

Wildlife Crossings: The A.T. Corridor is one of the most ecologically critical corridors for species movement in the country—the most important in the eastern United States—and its north/south trajectory makes it particularly valuable for the long-term adaptation and survival of species, particularly our incredibly ecologically unique southern Appalachians. Connecting so many people and places across such a vast distance, the ANST, its users, and surrounding communities are very familiar with the safety issue presented by wildlife-vehicle collision. Whether on the heavily trafficked I-40 in North Carolina and I-90 in Massachusetts or on the forest roads in the Cherokee and White Mountain National Forests, the possibility of a surprise encounter with an Elk, Moose, or other large animal requires a high degree of care is never far from motorists’ minds. In addition to the danger presented to motorists, the ANST was created in part to protect the natural values of the Appalachian Mountain Range, requiring that we provide adequate care for the biological diversity and necessity of animal movement (not just for large animals). We request the wildlife crossing pilot be made permanent and that the authorized funding level be increased commensurate with demand and in line with inflation.

We are grateful for the attention of the Committee and hope it is able to incorporate these requests into surface transportation or other legislation within its jurisdiction. If additional information would be helpful, I may be reached at bmysliwec@appalachiantrail.org or 207-370-0540 at your convenience.

Respectfully,



Brendan Mysliwec

Director of Federal Policy
Appalachian Trail Conservancy