

June 25, 2025

Via electronic mail

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the undersigned non-governmental operational partners of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST), we write to urge you reject funding cuts important to public lands and conservation that have been included in H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, in the Senate reconciliation text, or have been included in the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2026. As members of these communities and stewards of national park and forest lands, we know that the health of both are intertwined. Furthermore, we urge you to reject the repurposing of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars from land protection and to oppose mandates to sell public lands.

Our public lands are a legacy conserved by our forebearers for our descendants. They provide clean water, air, recreational and economic opportunities, and help us understand who we are as a nation. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST, A.T., Trail) was protected by Congress "to provide for the maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or culture qualities..." of the Appalachian Mountain region. Each of our organizations are long-time partners of the National Park Service (NPS) and the USDA Forest Service. While each of us are local NGO management partners of the ANST, several of us have responsibilities beyond trail maintenance and stewardship of the ANST Corridor. Our individual A.T. Club members have decades of experience. As organizations, many of us were present for the inception of the "A.T. Project" and our predecessors built the original Trail nearly 100 years ago. It is our honor and responsibility to serve the public, including in speaking up on the importance of these issues.

The core agreement in the National Trails System Act, which created the ANST, is that the federal government would be ultimately responsible for the well-being of the Trail and its surrounding conserved corridor in exchange for the volunteers we organize providing the on-the-ground, day-in and day-out work that enables the Trail to be safely used by people to experience its Congressionally identified values. We are proud to have upheld our end of this bargain for the past 57 years, in addition to the 43 years we built and stewarded the Trail before it became a federal trust resource. Current annual Congressional appropriations have been insufficient to manage trust resources and support the volunteer stewardship of the A.T. Further cuts will increasingly complicate our work on behalf of the American people.

Among provisions in H.R. 1 that we oppose are the revocation of "surge" funding (section 80304) provided by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This funding was provided to hire term staff positions to clear a backlog of work including compliance for the volunteer-created and -performed trail and corridor maintenance projects of the ANST. While similar projects are able to move through compliance within a few months in conventional parks, because of the sheer number of projects our more than 5,000 combined volunteers generate across the 2,197 miles and more than 375,000 acres of the A.T., completing compliance with the current staffing assigned or

shared to the A.T. can take years. The surge position at our unit office is critical to speed up legally required federal reviews and let us keep the Trail in working order. The positions funded under this provision are to increase efficiency in the federal government. Rescinding these funds would instead increase inefficiency.

We also oppose the rescission of natural resource funds provided by the IRA (sections 80302 and 80303 of H.R. 1). The NPS' natural resource mission is perennially underfunded as Presidential Budget Requests and annual appropriations consistently prioritize facility assets over natural and cultural resource assets. This is despite the NPS Organic Act describing its mission as "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life [sic] therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." The NPS was created to protect America's special places by protecting the things that make them special. The ANST is a remarkable achievement of our public-private Cooperative Management System, but without the vistas, waterfalls, biodiversity, and cultural icons of the Appalachian Mountains, the Trail is nothing. We do the work we do so that, as A.T. visionary Benton MacKaye said, anyone can "walk; to see and *see* what you see." The rescission of these funds would impact many important projects that conserve the natural environment and allow the American people to experience them, including a 39-park unit grasslands project that runs the length of the ANST.

The attempts to impair the LWCF included in the brief President's Budget Request and H.R. 1 (section 80301) by diverting dollars mandated for land protection and supporting private forest conservation are counter-productive and fatally injure President Trump's generational conservation achievement in the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). Every acre of the A.T. that has been conserved since 1968 has relied on the LWCF, whether through state-led or federal-led acquisitions. Over 3,000 individual federal transactions alone have been conducted to build this heavily used corridor spanning 14 states. Public land in the eastern United States is incredibly important and increasingly difficult to come by as our population increases and human development continues to spread. The LWCF is critical to enhancing the A.T. Corridor to continue to provide an outstanding recreational experience to the millions of Americans who visit it annually as well as protect our drinking water, filter air, and provide other critical ecosystem services to the American people. Diverting these dollars into deferred maintenance is a false choice. Each of our organizations supported the creation of and urge the extension of the Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF). The LRF and LWCF are twin pillars of public lands: we use the former to manage what we have and we use the latter to ensure increased opportunities to prevent further strain on current assets. We urge Congress and the President to uphold the promise of GAOA by using the LWCF as intended and separate fund deferred maintenance needs.

Furthermore, because the A.T. has been built by bringing land into public ownership, we understand how precious each acre can be and how difficult it is to protect land. Each of the A.T.'s eight national forests is a product of the Weeks Act, which was enacted to restore heavily degraded lands in order to protect sourcewater and to return land to use, whether for timbering, recreation (the primary economic benefit provided by our forests today), or any of many multi-uses in the USFS' mandates. Current law provides for targeted disposal of federal lands, and, in response to specific challenges, Congress retains the authority to legislate on land transfers to

serve specific purposes. Mandates to dispose of federal land threaten the ability of the public to enjoy wild and natural places, particularly on the landscape scale that has been painstakingly reassembled along the A.T. over the past 100 years. The recently released Senate reconciliation language proposes to sell upwards of 3 million acres across 11 western states. That is around 10x the size of the A.T. Corridor. Although the Senate text excludes “components of the National Trails System,” that would likely only apply to miles underfoot. Most lands that contribute to the Congressionally identified values of National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHTs) are not necessarily catalogued as such, even on the internationally beloved ANST.

As representatives of thousands of stewards of American public lands and resources as well as representatives of hundreds of thousands of taxpayers, we keenly feel the need to make sound investments. Divesting our public lands, whether of needed support or of the acres themselves, are not sound investments. We urge you to reject provisions that undermine the Great American Outdoors Act and the ability of the National Park Service and USDA Forest Service to meet their land and resource management responsibilities. We will continue to serve the American people in stewarding the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Appalachian Landscape communities that enable it, but we cannot do this work alone.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Mountain Club
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
BaToNa Hiking Club
Blue Mountain Eagle Hiking Club
Carolina Mountain Club
Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club
Georgia Appalachian Trail Club
Green Mountain Club
Keystone Trails Association
Maine Appalachian Trail Club
Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club
Mountain Club of Maryland
Nantahala Hiking Club
New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
Old Dominion Appalachian Trail Club
Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech
Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers
Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club
Smoky Mountains Hiking Club
Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club
Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoe Club

Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club
York Hiking Club