



Appalachian Trail Community Conservation Collaborative

A Community-Driven Project for
Conservation & Engagement



Program Overview

The **Appalachian Trail Community Conservation Collaborative** is a new initiative led by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) to support trailside communities in Pennsylvania as they lead conservation efforts that reflect local values and priorities. The Collaborative aims to empower communities by facilitating access to technical assistance, planning tools, funding resources, and peer learning to protect the natural and cultural assets of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) landscape while supporting economic vitality and climate resilience.

Community involvement is essential to ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of the A.T. landscape. The Trail is more than a footpath—it's a living corridor of biodiversity, clean water, scenic beauty, and local history. By centering the voices and leadership of the people who live near it, this initiative promotes conservation that is place-based, inclusive, and durable.

Pennsylvania's A.T. corridor is ecologically vital—home to rich biodiversity, clean water sources, and irreplaceable forests—and many nearby communities are eager to align economic and population growth with natural resource stewardship. The Collaborative provides these communities with planning tools, peer networks, technical assistance, and access to underutilized resources like the Highlands Conservation Act, enabling them to shape their own conservation priorities.

This effort is supported by a robust network of partners, including the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Conservation Landscape networks, local governments, trail-maintaining clubs, regional land trusts, and national initiatives like the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership. These collaborators bring expertise, local knowledge, and deep relationships to ensure community-led conservation is successful and sustained.

Objectives

- **Key Outreach and Engagement Goals**
 - Recruit up to **15 community teams** made up of diverse community leaders from designated A.T. Communities and other towns along the Trail corridor in Pennsylvania.
 - Ensure representation across geographies, community types, and local leadership sectors (government, nonprofits, businesses, and grassroots advocates).
 - Build durable partnerships between communities and conservation partners that extend beyond the project period.
- **Alignment with Conservation, Education, and Equity**
 - Advance nature-based conservation and climate adaptation through community-led planning.
 - Support outdoor education and cultural heritage preservation.
 - Prioritize historically underrepresented or disadvantaged communities to ensure inclusive participation and equitable distribution of conservation benefits.

- **Measurable Outcomes**
 - Completion of **tailored, community-specific conservation and climate assessments** which will include a tailored report identifying conservation opportunities, climate-related vulnerabilities, and an analysis of local assets, ecological, community health, and economic data
 - Delivery of **three in-person regional Impact & Innovation Workshops** to catalyze peer learning and project development.
 - Launch of at least **one community-led conservation project** from each participating community, providing access to resources and technical support to ready for implementation inclusive of grant opportunities, introduction to conservation specialists, and identification of additional resources on an on-going basis.
 - Host a **Vision to Action Summit** to publicly recognize and increase visibility of the efforts of each community, highlighting Pennsylvania communities as leaders in collaboration for conservation and stewardship of the Appalachian Trail.
 - Documented increases in community engagement, local leadership capacity, and access to funding or technical resources.

What are the community benefits of joining the Collaborative?

Joining the Appalachian Trail Community Conservation Collaborative offers a range of tangible and strategic benefits for communities, local leaders, and conservation partners.

- 1. Community-Led Conservation Support:** Access to technical assistance, tools, and resources to help communities plan and implement conservation projects that reflect local priorities.
- 2. Capacity Building & Training:** Opportunities to build leadership skills, strengthen organizations, and develop project planning expertise through workshops, innovation labs, and direct support.
- 3. Funding Access & Navigation:** Guidance and support to access underutilized state and federal funding (e.g., Highlands Conservation Act, Kittatinny Sentinel Landscape) to fund locally led projects.
- 4. Peer Learning & Regional Networking:** Engage with other communities along the Appalachian Trail, share successes and challenges, and learn through facilitated peer exchanges and summits.
- 5. Data-Driven Planning Tools:** Access and support to use powerful GIS tools like ATLAS IT and the Appalachian Trail Visual Resource Inventory to inform land use planning, identify conservation opportunities, and support grant applications.
- 6. Enhanced Economic Opportunities:** Position your community as a gateway to nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation economies by linking conservation with sustainable development.
- 7. Increased Visibility & Recognition:** Be part of a nationally recognized initiative led by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, elevating your community's conservation leadership and attracting potential partners. Currently undesignated A.T. Communities will be fast tracked to designation to become an official A.T. Community if desired.
- 8. Long-Term Partnership & Sustainability:** Join a growing network of communities working toward community resilience, environmental stewardship, and landscape-scale conservation along the iconic Appalachian Trail.