



Appalachian Trail  
Conservancy



ONE YEAR LATER

# Recovery and Resilience After Hurricane Helene





PHOTO BY TYLER IRVING

## In its more than 100-year history,

the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) has withstood storms, wildfires, and the steady pressure of millions of boots. But on September 27, 2024, Hurricane Helene dealt the most severe blow yet to this legendary trail and nearby communities.

Helene's catastrophic wind and rain cut through a third of the A.T., snapping massive trees like matchsticks, washing away bridges, and ultimately disturbing 81,500 acres of the A.T. landscape across Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia. Damages impacted more than 800 miles of the A.T., with 430 miles of the Trail closed by land managers for public safety after the storm.

The scale of devastation was staggering. But through the tireless efforts of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), A.T. maintaining Clubs, agency partners, and hundreds of volunteers, nearly all of the Trail (with a few temporary detours still in place) from Georgia to Maine was cleared within five months of the storm.



## HELENE'S TOLL ON THE TRAIL



**81,500 acres**  
bordering the A.T.  
affected

**800+ miles**  
of the A.T. impacted

**430 miles**  
of Trail closed  
after the storm

**5 miles**  
remain closed  
at Iron Mountain Gap and  
Nolichucky River Bridge  
(with detours in place)

**8**  
A.T. Communities  
damaged



# Rapid Response and Unified Effort

**As guardians of the Appalachian Trail, the ATC is responsible for protecting, managing, and advocating for the A.T. in collaboration with public and private partners.** This includes maintaining the Trail's integrity, preserving its surrounding landscapes, and ensuring a safe, accessible experience for hikers.

In times of disaster, the ATC is on the front lines, coordinating rapid response, restoring access, managing long-term recovery efforts, and strengthening the Trail's resilience against future events.

Even before the storm hit, the ATC was already at work organizing resources so that within hours of the storm, we could activate quickly. Our disaster response efforts included:

## 13 A.T. Clubs engaged

### Emergency communications

The ATC issued **more than 55 safety alerts** and updates across email, web, and social media to guide and inform the Trail community. We also launched an online Helene recovery resource hub, becoming the central source of A.T. information for hikers, volunteers, land managers, and the public.

### Partner coordination

The ATC brought together **13 local A.T. Clubs** and **7 public agencies** to share information and coordinate efforts to clear the Trail.

### Trail assessment and repairs

The ATC and partners assessed the full extent of the damages and repairs that will be needed to restore damaged bridges, shelters, trailheads, and signage, as well as the sections of the treadway that were washed out, eroded, or blocked by downed trees and other debris.



TOP: Fallen trees blocked Moreland Shelter in Tennessee after the storm. BOTTOM: Shelter cleared by Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoe Club volunteers. PHOTOS BY TONY MESSINA.



## Volunteer mobilization

The ATC and the local Clubs gathered and trained **more than 680 volunteers**. These volunteers spent **19,135 hours clearing & repairing the Trail** in Helene-impacted areas.

## Fire mitigation

The ATC launched an unprecedented **25-acre mitigation project** to protect **2,000 acres of critically imperiled southern spruce fir forest** from post-storm wildfire risk. Fire safety messaging was prioritized, and a temporary burn ban was implemented on Roan Mountain to protect this ecologically sensitive area and the species that depend on it.

## 19,135 volunteer hours repairing the Trail



Volunteers at A.T. Hardcore Work Day, Damascus, Virginia, May 2025. PHOTO BY BEN EARP.

## Advocacy for federal support

The ATC worked alongside agency partners and local A.T. Clubs to advocate for **more than \$22 million** in federal disaster relief funds to support the necessary work to make recovery possible.

## Professional saw crew activation

In heavily affected areas, the ATC funded and deployed professional saw crews, logging **4,416 hours** clearing complex blowdowns and hazardous trees obstructing the Trail.

## Non-native & invasive species mitigation

The hurricane's winds and rains uprooted and damaged many native plants and trees, leaving room for fast-spreading non-native species to take root. The ATC and partners were able to quickly begin inventorying, monitoring, and managing invasives to head off the spread—work that will continue for decades as the forests regrow.

## 4,416 hours clearing blowdowns



Carl Boggess with the Natural Bridge A.T. Club cleared hazardous trees obstructing the Trail. PHOTO BY TYLER IRVING.



## BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE WITH THE

# Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund

In the weeks following Hurricane Helene, the ATC launched the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund (ATRF), which supports three priorities:

**Rebuilding A.T.  
infrastructure**

**Restoring the Trail's  
landscape and improving  
climate resilience**

**Reconnecting A.T.  
Communities and  
trail towns**



Konnarock Trail Crew assesses tree damage along the Trail near Unicoi, TN. PHOTO BY BEN EARP.

As federal disaster relief can take months to arrive, donations to the ATRF enabled the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and our partners to quickly activate the people and expertise needed to begin clearing debris, repairing damaged treadway, supporting affected communities, and restoring critical ecosystems.

More than just a disaster response tool, the ATRF is a vital investment in the Trail's future, helping ensure that the A.T. can withstand future storms and remain a safe, accessible, and inspiring resource for generations to come.



## ATRF SNAPSHOT



# \$850,000

raised in inaugural year

# 1,095

# donors

rallied to support  
recovery and resilience



## CORPORATE, FOUNDATION, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Athletic Brewing

AllTrails

BearVault

Chattanooga Hiking Club

Harpers Ferry Parks  
& Recreation

Massengill-DeFriece

Foundation

Osprey

Shin-etsu Trail Club

Volgenau Climate Initiative

Wise Pines Hostel

**"AllTrails was proud to help kick-start the funding for the A.T. Resiliency Fund. We're inspired by the progress made over the last year to help the A.T. get back on its feet after Hurricane Helene."**

— PITT GREWE, ALLTRAILS





# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ATRF in Action



## Nolichucky River hiker ferry

After Helene's floodwaters washed away the Chestoa Pike bridge near Erwin, TN, the ATRF supported a ferry service that safely transported more than 1,100 hikers across the Nolichucky River during peak season.



## Equipment for A.T. Clubs

3 A.T. Clubs received grants for chainsaws, protective gear, and essential tools for post-storm trail maintenance, along with training and certification for 35 individuals to operate crosscut saws and chainsaws on federal land.



## Specialized saw work in Wilderness Areas

ATRF enabled the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) to restore access to the A.T. in federally designated Wilderness Areas in Tennessee and Virginia. With just a week's notice, expert trail crews were deployed to clear hundreds of trees with crosscut saws, completing the bulk of the work in just a month's time.



## A.T. Community recovery

With support from the ATRF, volunteers and community members in Hot Springs, N.C., a designated A.T. Community™, worked to clean up storm debris along the A.T. and the French Broad River corridor.

**From left to right: A rope-cutting on the banks of the Nolichucky River launched the new A.T. hiker ferry service, March 17. PHOTO BY VALERIE BRADLEY. Saw crews gather at a Virginia trailhead, December 2024. PHOTO BY TYLER IRVING. Trae Schadegg and Kacy Hirschfelt use a crosscut saw to clear a fallen tree. PHOTO BY REBEKAH MORRISON. The French Broad River flowing past Hot Springs, North Carolina. PHOTO BY FRANCES DAVIS.**



SPOTLIGHT

# Konnarock Crew Steps Up for Helene Recovery

The Konnarock Crew is the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's flagship volunteer trail crew, dedicated to maintaining the southern stretch of the Appalachian Trail—from Georgia to Virginia. Each summer, volunteers of all backgrounds spend three days to a week working on remote sections of the Trail, gaining hands-on skills, living in the backcountry, and making a lasting impact. No prior experience is required—just a love of the outdoors and a commitment to giving back.

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**“In Japan, we’re facing more frequent typhoons and heavy rains, so I strongly feel the need to establish a volunteer-based recovery system like Konnarock.”**

— KUMI AIZAWA, MANAGING DIRECTOR, MICHINOKU TRAIL CLUB

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TOP: Konnarock volunteers Riley Phillips and Martha Wayne demonstrate the size of a root ball. BOTTOM: Kumi Aizawa and Shin Hasegawa travelled from Japan to assist with Trail repairs. PHOTOS BY BEN EARP.



In 2025, with support from the Appalachian Trail Resilience Fund, the ATC expanded the Konnarock program by adding several additional crew weeks focused on repairing trail segments severely impacted by Hurricane Helene. Projects addressed extensive treadway damage, including root ball holes and erosion caused by major blowdowns.

Among the crew members were international volunteers from Japan, who brought experience from maintaining Japan's long-distance Michinoku Coastal Trail and Shin-etsu Trail—showcasing the power of global collaboration in protecting the world's great trails.





# The Path Forward

One year later, we are still healing from the damage left by Hurricane Helene. While full recovery will take years, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy remains steadfast in our commitment to fully reconnecting the Trail and creating a more resilient A.T. in the face of future storms.

Thanks to the unwavering support from donors like you, we've laid a strong foundation with the establishment of the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund—and we're ready to build on it.

Every donation to the ATC helps ensure we can respond quickly when the next storm hits, keeping the Trail open, safe, and thriving for today's visitors and for future generations.

**Together, we will finish the work, strengthen the Trail's future, and keep the Trail alive.**

## SUPPORT THE A.T.'S RESILIENCE

[appalachiantrail.org/donate](https://appalachiantrail.org/donate)

