



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy on Corridor Stewardship

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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail maintaining clubs (“Clubs”) and public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. Corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the United States Department of Interior (USDI) National Park Service (NPS) and its close working partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and other agencies.

ATC’s mission is: “To protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.” ATC’s Trail management and conservation policies are meant to provide guidance for (a) dissemination to the public; (b) use and implementation by the ATC and the Clubs; and (c) recommendations for land-managing and other agencies. It is the agencies who work within their defined procedures to propose, administer, and enforce public policy. ATC policies are recommendations developed to support appropriate, coordinated, Trail-wide management.

Overview

The Corridor was defined in the Appalachian Trail Comprehensive Plan (1981) as “the zone of land, outside existing boundaries of forests, parks, and game lands, in which recently acquired federal and state interests provide permanent protection for the Trail.” This definition of Corridor refers only to the lands that were acquired for the sole purpose of protecting the A.T. These lands form an area of protection which was originally designed to be an average of 1,000 feet wide and continues to expand with new acquisitions over the years. Corridor lands are administered by the NPS Appalachian National Scenic Trail Park Office (NPS-APPA), the USDA Forest Service (in locations where management was transferred from NPS-APPA to the Forest Service; called “transferred land”), or state agencies. The Corridor includes lands owned in fee and land interests held in easement. Corridor lands are lands on which ATC and trail maintaining clubs hold responsibility for ensuring that the boundaries are monitored and maintained for the protection of the A.T.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy recognizes that proper management of the exterior Corridor boundary is critical to the protection and conservation of the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) and surrounding public lands. From the very onset of the A.T. land protection program, ATC and NPS acknowledged that effective Corridor stewardship is a critically important and yet formidable task requiring a great deal of planning, cooperation, and attention from all levels of A.T. management. The aggressive NPS land acquisition program that established the A.T. Corridor, as well as the subsequent surveying and marking of its exterior Corridor boundaries, were only the beginning. Lost boundary monuments, fading paint blazes, missing witness trees and overgrown boundary lines, combined with ongoing threats posed to the Trail Corridor by urban sprawl and incompatible

land use, require a vigorous program of inspection (monitoring), boundary maintenance and repainting, and consistent follow-up to mitigate encroachments and prevent recurrence.

Policy

1. Throughout all Corridor stewardship field activities, safety is the top priority. Everyone plays a role in maintaining safety, and we strive to prevent accidents through training, awareness, and adherence to safety recommendations in applicable job hazard analyses (JHAs) posted on the ATC website. The most important safety rule is this: Each volunteer has the obligation to say “No” and walk away from any situation they determine to be an unacceptable risk
2. ATC, in consultation with Clubs and management partners, will continue to undertake the responsibility for monitoring and maintaining the exterior boundaries of Corridor lands as funding and capacity allow. Monitoring and maintenance activities will be documented and continuously updated with records including photographs, notes, and maps.
3. ATC will work with Clubs to recruit, support, and train A.T. volunteers in the monitoring of the Corridor and maintenance of the Corridor boundary, including the recruitment of Monitor Coordinators to Clubs where applicable.
4. ATC will develop and sustain trail-wide Standard Operating Procedures for boundary monitoring, including witness tree establishment and boundary line marking. Those additional procedures will be included in ATC’s A.T. Corridor Stewardship Field Book.
5. ATC will utilize the knowledge and resources of land management agencies and other partners to ensure boundary program activities follow standard practices. These monitoring and maintenance guidelines should be supported by the cooperative management system including the local Club, the land management agency, and the ATC.
6. In addition to Corridor land, ATC encourages the ongoing maintenance and monitoring accomplished by boundary programs on other lands which the A.T. crosses, including USDA Forest Service lands, state lands, and lands administered by other NPS units.
7. As capacity allows, ATC will provide information to local landowners regarding federal land boundaries and land manager policies to further ensure protection of Corridor lands. Proactive communication is the most effective way of maintaining friendly relationships, keeping communication channels open, and mitigating encroachments.
8. To the extent possible, ATC encourages federal fee acquisition of lands already held in easement. As funding and capacity allow, ATC will continue to monitor

easements to ensure easement terms are followed, update landowners of easement terms, and ensure new landowners are aware of such easements.

9. ATC expects agency partners to uphold the responsibility for acquiring the required Exterior Corridor Boundary Surveys (ECBS) on all federally acquired lands to adequately protect the ANST. All new surveys must follow the most recent version of the scope of work for exterior corridor boundary surveys as provided by the NPS National Trails Land Resources Program Center. ATC will work with agency partners to identify inadequate or absent ECBS and help seek funding to assist with new surveys as necessary
10. ATC will coordinate with NPS-APPA to obtain, digitally catalogue, and archive deed records for Corridor lands.
11. ATC will continue to develop, as funding allows, and enhance a sustainable Geographic Information System (GIS) and database systems to accommodate the complexity of managing lands, surveys, and boundary monitoring and maintenance tracking data. ATC will maintain accurate records of all A.T. Corridor monitoring and maintenance activities and associated data. Records are documented on the above-mentioned GIS and database systems and shared with agency and maintainer club partners, who may also contribute by entering and updating data.
12. As funding allows, ATC will continue to employ staff responsible for Corridor stewardship and data management, including Land Stewardship Managers, Coordinators, Technicians, and GIS Specialists. ATC is responsible for maintaining its database of boundary monitoring and maintenance data in cooperation with the Clubs and agency partners, ensuring they are aware of issues and challenges.
13. ATC expects that agency partners will be responsible for evaluating, addressing, and mitigating encroachment activities. ATC encourages land management agencies to increase their capacity to fulfill this obligation to ensure protection of the ANST.
14. ATC will continue to participate in an encroachment task force composed of ATC staff and NPS-APPA law enforcement. This task force will meet regularly to collaborate on encroachment mitigation and will report their activities and results to cooperative management partners.
15. ATC will participate in and support ongoing encroachment mitigation actions with the relevant land management agency as funding and capacity allow. ATC's participation may include identifying and documenting encroachments, reporting to the land management agency, participating in the encroachment task force, communicating encroachment issues with Clubs, communicating with encroachers and neighbors as applicable, thwarting encroachments by installing signs, notices, or physical barriers, and rehabilitating impacts from encroachments. To the extent possible, encroachment activities should be fully documented with photographs, notes, and maps.

16. ATC supports the role law enforcement plays in managing encroachments. To the extent possible, ATC supports communication between land management agencies and local law enforcement, fire, and rescue departments to manage encroachments efficiently and effectively.

17. ATC encourages the use of mitigation funding for on-site and in-kind restoration to rehabilitate damages incurred along the Corridor.