

Wild East Action Fund

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Appalachian Trail
Conservancy

Program Overview

The Wild East Action Fund (WEAF) is a competitive grant program, administered by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), on behalf of the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership (ATLP).

The WEAF aims to increase the pace and scale of conservation by supporting partner projects that build local and regional collaborative capacity, activate community-driven conservation and climate-smart outcomes, and protect the lands and waters within the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) Landscape.

Strong conservation outcomes are rooted in place and cultivated through collaboration. The WEAF and the ATLP are ATC's primary mechanisms for investing in partner-led conservation beyond the Trail corridor. The WEAF is a critical funding incentive to serve local conservation values and needs, while supporting larger regional efforts and a national scale conservation vision to connect and protect to the A.T. and its landscape. The ATLP serves as the convening body to reinforce the critical connections across partner efforts to realize this large landscape vision, transferring knowledge across partners and uplifting conservation successes.

By providing targeted funding, WEAF empowers local organizations to advance high-impact conservation projects that strengthen the ecological integrity, resilience, and visitor experience of the Appalachian Trail Landscape.

This collaborative model enables ATC to leverage partner expertise and resources, multiplying conservation outcomes far beyond what could be achieved by the ATC through direct implementation alone. The WEAF and the ATLP are ATC's best avenues for centering and enhancing the A.T. experience through partner action by providing critical financial support that catalyzes conservation outcomes throughout A.T. Landscape.

DEFINING THE A.T. LANDSCAPE



The A.T. Landscape is operationalized as the outer shell of all HUC10 sub-watershed units that are transected by or abutting the Appalachian Trail.

26.7M Acres

119M+ People's Drinking Water Sources Protected

1,845 Populations of Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species Species

297 Natural Heritage Areas

31 Important Bird Areas

— HUC10 Sub-watershed Boundary
— Appalachian Trail (A.T.)



Catalyzing Conservation: WEAF 2018 – 2022 “The Early Years”

To establish the Wild East Action Fund initiative and support its early development, seed funding was generously provided by The Volgenau Foundation.



BY THE NUMBERS

5 Grant Rounds
Hosted

90 Grants
Awarded

88K+
Acres
Conserved



\$135M+
Matched

\$2.6M+
Disbursed

\$1 to \$38
Funding Leveraged



90+ Partners Supported



WEAF 2025

Eligibility & Funding Basics

The 2025 WEAF cycle was available to Tribal, State, and Local governments, nonprofit organizations, and regional conservation collaboratives with a designated 501c3 fiscal sponsor. Three grant categories were offered in 2025: Land Protection, Conservation Planning, and Community Resilience. Limited, off-cycle awards for Land Protection were also available by invitation-only.

ATC sought to disburse a minimum of \$400,000 through the Land Protection grant category across all 14 A.T. States. Both fee and conservation restriction land protection projects were eligible to receive funding. ATC sought to disburse a minimum of \$100,000 through the Conservation Planning and Community Resilience grant categories to partner projects located in West Virginia south to Georgia.

White Rocks Gateway, VT.
Photo by Ember Photography.



2025 Applicants

BY THE NUMBERS

34 Applications

28 Organizations

\$1.4M+ Funding Request

89K+ Acres

2025 Grant Awards

BY THE NUMBERS

18 Grant Awards

17 Organizations

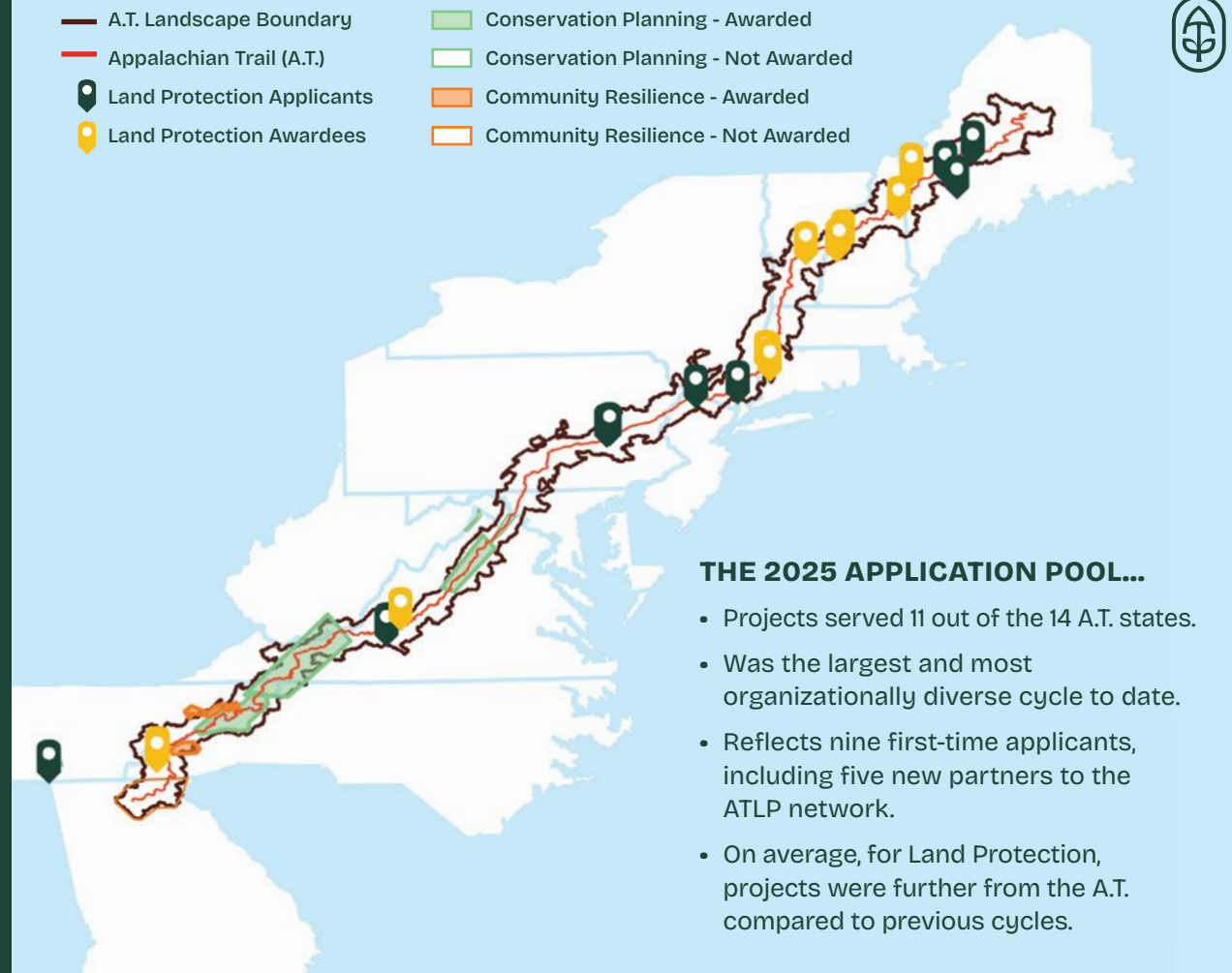
\$489K Disbursed

\$14M+ Total Project Cost

81K+ Acres Protected

18K+ Staff Hours

9K+ Volunteer Hours



→ Takeaways

- **A new grant category**, Community Resilience, supporting the intersection of conservation and thriving communities brought in a new cohort of applicants, underscoring the integrative and dynamic role that nature, conservation, and outdoor recreation play in the landscape.
- **The Conservation Planning and Community Resilience grant categories were only available for the five most southernly states** as a direct response to support recovery from Hurricane Helene. It is worth noting that many partners in the other nine states expressed significant support for these grant opportunities to become available in their regions.
- **In 2025, the HUC10 boundary set geographical eligibility** of the WEAf for the first time, likely encouraging a larger conceptualization of the A.T. landscape for many applicants.

2025 Land Protection Awardees

BY THE NUMBERS

81,510 Acres Protected

12 Projects Awarded

\$375,000 Disbursed

4.6 Acres protected for every \$1 invested by WEAFF

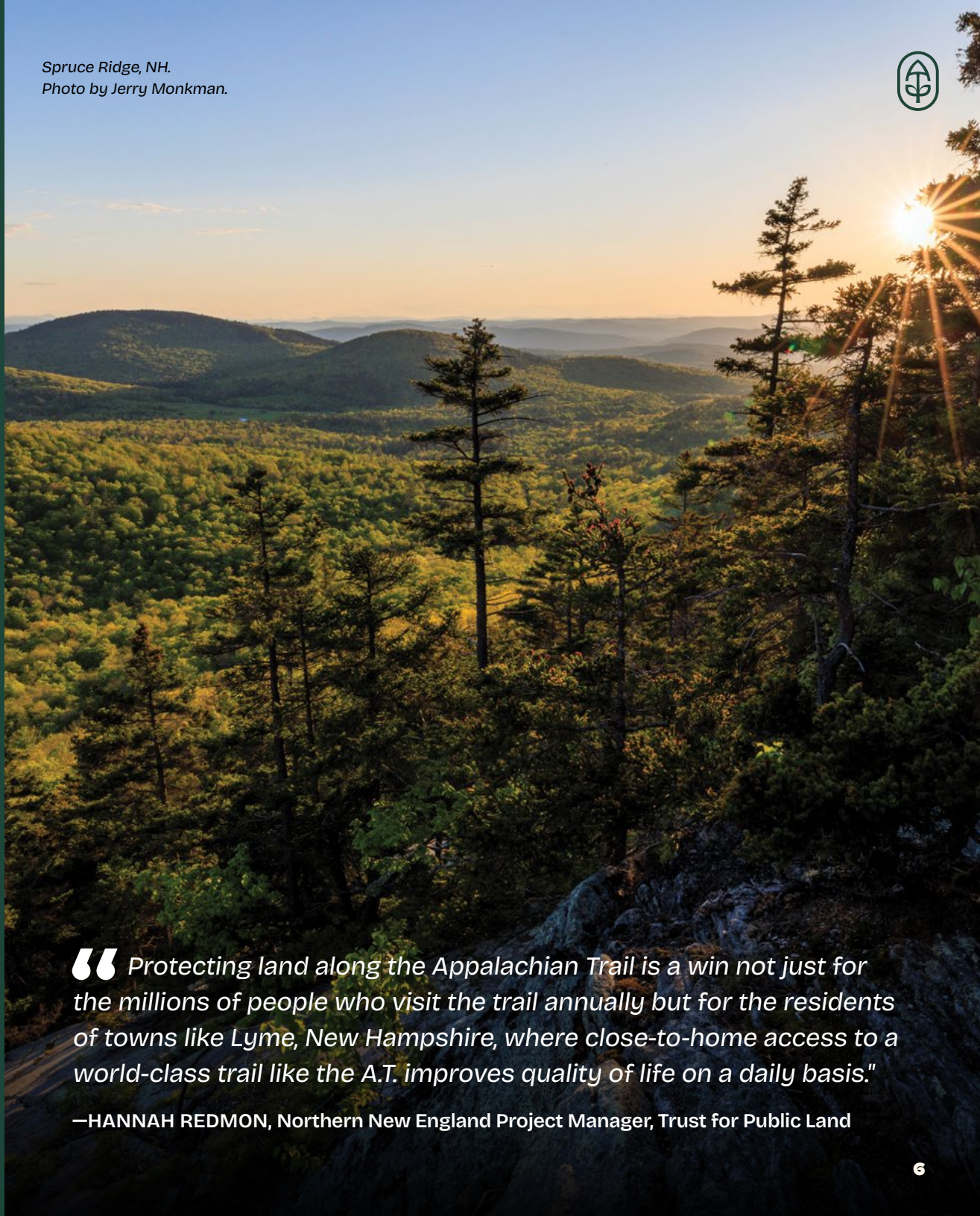
\$1 : \$200 Funding Leveraged

30+ Partners Involved

PROJECTS PER STATE



Spruce Ridge, NH.
Photo by Jerry Monkman.



“Protecting land along the Appalachian Trail is a win not just for the millions of people who visit the trail annually but for the residents of towns like Lyme, New Hampshire, where close-to-home access to a world-class trail like the A.T. improves quality of life on a daily basis.”

—HANNAH REDMON, Northern New England Project Manager, Trust for Public Land

2025 Awarded Land Protection Projects



Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust MAINE

The Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust received funding to support the Magalloway Collaborative to conserve a 78,000-acre parcel of land in northwestern Maine. This land provides critical wildlife habitat, exceptional recreational opportunities, and supports the local forestry industry.



Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests received funding to permanently protect over 100 acres of land in Shelburne, New Hampshire. This land will support both access to public recreation and maintenance of the A.T.



Northeast Wilderness Trust NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Northeast Wilderness Trust received funding to help establish the Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve in Grafton County, New Hampshire — a 2,079-acre property that contains a 2.1-mile section of the A.T. and is home to over 30 acres of critical wetland habitat. The Wilderness Preserve will provide regional habitat connections, new public access opportunities, and increased protection of the Trail.



Trust for Public Land NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Trust for Public Land received funding for acquiring the 74-acre Pressey Brook Headwaters property in Lyme, New Hampshire, including 0.4 miles of the A.T. Acquiring this property will allow the Trust for Public Land to enhance protection of the Trail segment as well as conserve wetlands and forest within the viewshed of the Trail.



Hanover Conservancy NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Hanover Conservancy received funding to support the costs of acquiring two critical tracts of forested land on Moose Mountain, adding a total of 126 acres to this climate-change resilient, high biodiversity region. Acquiring these two tracts will further the Conservancy's drive towards increasing the protective buffer around the A.T. corridor in Hanover, New Hampshire.



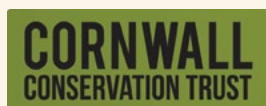
The Conservation Fund
VERMONT

The Conservation Fund received funding to preserve over 80 acres in Vermont, along the Appalachian Trail corridor. This additional acreage will widen the Trail corridor lands, further protecting the scenic values of the A.T. landscape.



Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy
CONNECTICUT

The Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy received funding to conserve over 100 acres of forestland to create the Surdan Mountain Preserve, a public preserve in Sharon, Connecticut, that adjoins the A.T. by an existing town trail.



Cornwall Conservation Trust Inc.
CONNECTICUT

The Cornwall Conservation Trust received funding to help conserve two key properties, Cobble Forest (42 acres) and Furnace Brook Forest (90 acres) totaling 132 acres within the A.T.-Mohawk Trail loop in Cornwall, Connecticut. Protecting these two properties will help to buffer the A.T. and support a variety of wildlife and plants, including 4 state-listed species.



Warren Land Trust
CONNECTICUT

The Warren Land Trust received funding to protect 135 acres of important diverse and sensitive natural resources that will increase climate resiliency in the A.T. landscape.



NDPonics
VIRGINIA

NDPonics received funding that will be used to acquire and protect critical old-growth forest, advancing the mission to connect nearly 800-acres of protected Indigenous land and create a continuous conservation corridor spanning more than 11,500 acres across Rockbridge and Botetourt counties. In reconnecting these landscapes, this project will enhance regional biodiversity, preserve cultural resources, and contribute to the long-term resilience of the A.T. landscape.



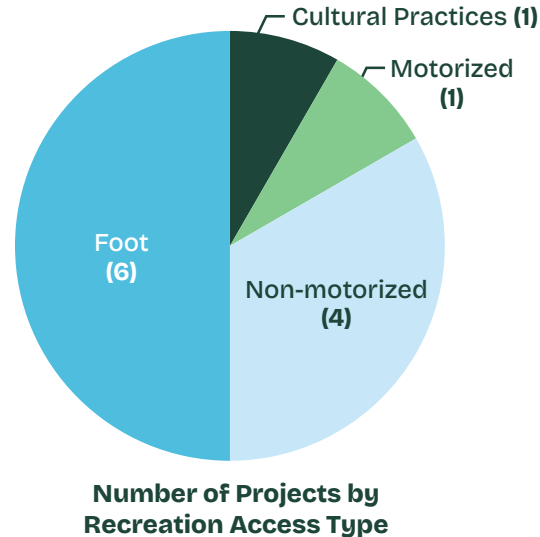
Mainspring Conservation Trust
NORTH CAROLINA

The Mainspring Conservation Trust received funding for two land protection projects that will protect over 450 acres including important rich cove forest surrounding the South Fork of Tuskegee Creek and mixed hardwood forest found near the A.T. treadway. These projects will benefit the ecologically important Little Tennessee River, protect access to the A.T., preserve critical habitat, and increase public access and recreation in the region.

2025 Land Protection Highlights

TREND: PUBLIC RECREATION ACCESS

In 2025, all awarded land protection projects will allow public recreation access. The WEAf encourages public access to lands as deemed appropriate by the final land manager based on resource sensitivity, historical use patterns, and public safety. The chart to the right shows the types of recreation access by the number of projects. Please note, if a project allows a more intensive recreation access type, it also allows all other less intensive recreation types, e.g. the project that allows motorized recreation access also allows non-motorized and foot access.



“The ATC is doing vital work to preserve and expand the ecological wonder that is the 2,200-mile A.T. wilderness corridor, and CCT is honored to be part of it. Cornwall’s Mohawk Trail forms a loop that starts and ends at the A.T.—indeed, it was historically part of it. CCT is grateful for the ATC’s support as we work to preserve lands between the two trails.” —SHELLEY HARMS, Executive Director, Cornwall Conservation Trust

→ Key Takeaways

- **The northeast received more awards this cycle than the other regions.** This is a typical funding pattern given the land use and ownership patterns found with the A.T. Landscape.
- **Cultivating Collaborative Conservation.** The ATLTP and WEAf have spurred collaborative land protection work in Maine, helping elevate it as a critical region with high conservation impact and potential.



Photo by Jerry Monkman.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Magalloway Collaborative

A bold conservation goal is underway in the northern reaches of the A.T. Landscape. We are excited to provide support for the Magalloway Collaborative in 2025. The scope and scale of this collaborative effort is significantly larger than anything seen before in our landscape. Magalloway is a multifaceted, multi-partner effort to conserve over 500,000 acres of woodland, ponds, rivers, and wetlands in western Maine, protecting both critical habitats and livelihoods for the local flora, fauna, and people of the region.



Learn more about this project.

2025 Conservation Planning Project Awardees

BY THE NUMBERS

3 Projects Awarded

\$55,000 Disbursed

3,600 Volunteer Hours

\$1 : \$2.40 Funding Leveraged

30+ Partners Involved

PROJECTS PER STATE



White Rocks Gateway, VT.
Photo by Ember Photography.





SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK TRUST

Shenandoah Regional Land Conservation Plan

This project will help to establish a land management plan for the regions surrounding Shenandoah National Park through the creation of an ArcGIS property map that includes both private and public land to inform a regional land protection strategy. This project will be overseen by the Shenandoah Regional Conservation Group, a working group established by the Shenandoah National Park Trust that is designed to increase collaboration with other conservation organizations (including tribal leadership) to create a landscape-scale conservation initiative with the park at its center.

“Shenandoah National Park anchors the natural ecosystem and outdoor recreation economy for our region. With the support of the Wild East Action Fund, this project will help us to think bigger as we collaborate with partners throughout the region to support conservation both within and beyond the park’s boundaries. We’re extremely grateful to partner with ATC on this important work.”

—JESSICA COCCIOLONE, Executive Director, Shenandoah National Park Trust





NEW RIVER CONSERVANCY

The New River Water Trail Land Protection and Communication Plan

A partnership led by the New River Conservancy (NRC) is completing a gap analysis funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC ARISE) to identify priority lands for development of the New River Water Trail (NRWT). WEAFF funds will be utilized to develop acquisition plans for the highest priority 'gaps' and activate the public to develop local and regional support for the water trail's further protection. Detailed acquisition plans will include maps, ownership information, likely funding sources, analysis of natural and cultural value, potential permanent protection strategies, identified barriers and other relevant information to support an effective land protection program for the NRWT. NRC will develop communication materials and coordinate messaging with local and regional partners to maximize public understanding of the value of conservation and the water trail to surrounding communities.

“ This award will help the NRC transition from action-planning for the New River Water Trail to implementation. We'll be able to describe what real-world improvements to our ecosystem and recreation infrastructure will look like as we undertake the incredible task of building Appalachia's great river trail.”

—ANDREW DOWNS, Executive Director, New River Conservancy

Photo courtesy of New River Conservancy





MOUNTAINTRUE

Catalyzing Stewardship and Recovery Through Natural Resources Inventory

The Catalyzing Stewardship and Recovery through Natural Resources Inventory Project is a collaborative project between MountainTrue and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC; a cooperating land trust). SAHC owns thousands of acres of land that were impacted by Hurricane Helene and is in the process of acquiring more. MountainTrue will map natural communities, rare species occurrences, non-native plant populations, and other significant features that were impacted by floods and high winds associated with the storm across at least 750 acres of conservation land. This information will help to prioritize land protection and stewardship activities such as non-native plant removal, fuel reduction, erosion control, habitat maintenance, and more.

“The Wild East Action Fund and A.T. Resiliency Fund are visionary, not just in protecting and stewarding the Appalachian Trail, but the landscapes and communities that surround it. In the wake of Hurricane Helene, inventorying the needs and special qualities of lands held by land trusts will improve the stewardship of lands, waters, wildlife habitats, and recreational opportunities. I look forward to working with ATC and their land trust partners to accomplish this project.”—JOSH KELLY, Resilient Forests Program Director, MountainTrue



→ Key Takeaways

- **Established and Essential:** Each of the recipients are trusted conservation partners and their planning project's reflect sophistication, depth, and foresight. Funding these projects support the organization's conservation leadership growth in their respective regions.
- **Network Resiliency:** These projects build or strengthen relationships across multiple organizations that will ultimately result in more robust collaborative conservation outcomes. The project support provided through the WEAFF awards builds resiliency within these regional conservation networks by aligning organizational values, missions, and visions, and prompting collective action—all while elevating the A.T. and its landscape as a priority area for their collaborative work.

2025 Community Resilience Grant Awardees

BY THE NUMBERS

3 Projects Awarded

\$55,000 Disbursed

4,000+ Volunteer Hours

\$1 : \$8.80 Funding Leveraged

+15 Partners Involved

PROJECTS PER STATE



White Rocks Gateway, VT.
Photo by Ember Photography.





NOLICHUCKY OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSOCIATION River Restoration Initiative

The Nolichucky Outdoor Recreation Association (NORA) River Restoration Initiative is a community-led river restoration effort launched in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, which left the Nolichucky River and surrounding lands in East Tennessee heavily impacted by flood debris. The project engages local outfitters, river guides, and volunteers to remove hazardous materials, reopen public access points, and restore the ecological health of this vital waterway. In addition to environmental benefits, the initiative provides meaningful employment for flood-impacted guides and helps stabilize the outdoor recreation economy. With over 40,000 pounds of debris removed in the first month alone, the project demonstrates both immediate impact and long-term commitment to environmental recovery and community resilience.

“The Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Wild East Action Fund has provided critical support to NORA’s Hurricane Helene recovery efforts. Their contribution to our river debris removal and clean-up initiative has strengthened our capacity to restore the Nolichucky and protect the communities and natural resources that depend on it.”

—TREY MOORE, Chairman, Nolichucky Outdoor Recreation Association





CENTER FOR NATIVE HEALTH

Cherokee Ecological Knowledge - Family First Community Climate Resilience

The Center for Native Health will facilitate a series of conversations around climate resilience in partnership with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) community. Grounded in Cherokee Ecological Knowledge (CEK), the strategic planning sessions will foster collaborations with Cherokee elders and fluent speakers, EBCI departments, regional land trusts, climate scientists and public health experts to develop a pilot project demonstrating climate resilience to wildfires, extreme heat, air/water quality and flooding throughout the southern Appalachian Trail landscape.

“The Center for Native Health (CNH) is delighted to acknowledge the generous support of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's A.T. Resiliency Fund and Wild East Action Fund. This funding for our Cherokee Ecological Knowledge: Family First Community Climate Resilience Project is instrumental in advancing CNH's community climate resilience initiative. We look forward to contributing to a more connected, healthier, and stronger Appalachian region through culturally rooted resilience strategies and collaborative partnerships.”

—KATIE TIGER, Program Director, Weaving Intergenerational Pathways





REBUILD HOT SPRINGS

REBUILD HOT SPRINGS AREA

Hot Springs Streetscape Restoration & Enhancement Project

Rebuild Hot Springs Area (RHSA) proposes replacing the water fountain located on the lawn of the Hot Springs Welcome Center with a modern fixture that includes a water bottle-filling station. In addition, this project will provide waste receptacles along the downtown sidewalks to replace those that were lost or damaged during Hurricane Helene. The goal of this project is to reduce single-use waste by encouraging refillable water bottles, and to promote responsible waste disposal along the A.T. through downtown Hot Springs while beautifying our streetscape and providing much needed amenities for visitors and our community. This effort represents a key component of a broader sidewalk restoration initiative underway in the Town of Hot Springs, North Carolina.

“In Hot Springs, the Appalachian Trail does not pass us by; it runs straight down Main Street. After Hurricane Helene disrupted vital public infrastructure, Wild East Action Fund's generous support enabled the restoration of our Welcome Center's water fountain with a new filtration system, as well as the installation of upgraded trash receptacles throughout our downtown. As the first trail town, these improvements help us protect public health and support a cleaner, more environmentally conscious gateway for all who pass through.”

—KEVIN REESE, Director at Rebuild Hot Springs Area

→ Key Takeaways

- **Catalytic Investments:** Each of these grant recipients represent new and innovative conservation partners directly benefiting the A.T., its landscape, and its local communities. These three organizations and projects represent the strategic growth of ATC and the ATLP's conservation networks at the local level, strengthening community support for A.T. and bolstering locally driven conservation capacity and action. Together, these two outcomes represent the foundation necessary to protect and enhance the A.T. experience that is tied to the lands, waters, and communities beyond the treadway.
- **Be The Change:** As climate change dramatically shifts weather patterns and intensifies weather events, flora, fauna, and human communities are being forced to adapt in order to withstand these changes. Nature-based solutions and climate-smart infrastructure, like those supported through these awards, are necessary approaches to ensure resilient a future for human, wildlife, and plant communities alike.

2025 Program Summary

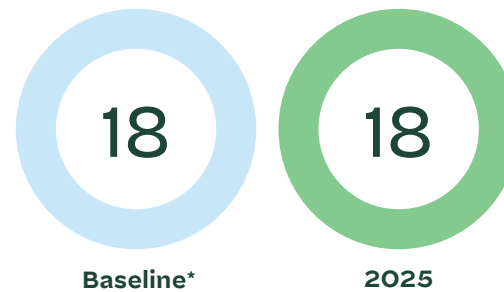
ADMINISTRATIVE CALENDAR

- **January – March:** Application, website, program information update and improvements
- **April – May:** Preparation to launch grant round, communication plan implementation
- **June:** Launch grant application period; collect and track mid-year reports of prior grant round awards
- **July – September:** Application vetting, review discussions and deliberation with advisors
- **October – November:** Grant notifications, grant agreements, grant disbursement, preparation of award announcement promotion
- **December – January:** Award celebration and ongoing communication; collect and track final reports of prior grant round awards

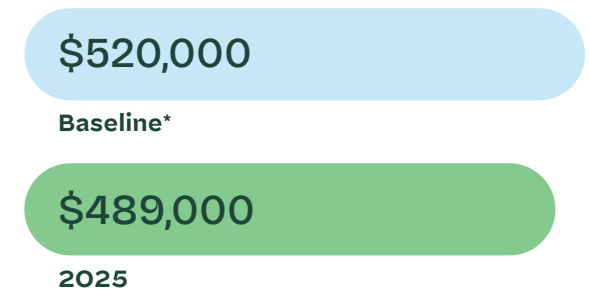
COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

- **Conferences & Events**
 - ATLP Annual Meeting - Roanoke, VA
 - Outdoor Economy Conference - Cherokee, NC
 - Partnership for National Trails System Lands Summit - San Antonio, TX
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Network Gathering - Amherst, MA
- **Virtual Audiences**
 - 265 A.T. Community Email Subscribers
 - 713 ATLP Email Subscribers
 - 120K Trailway News Email Subscribers
 - 3M appalachiantrail.org Annual Page Views
 - 728K Social Media Followers

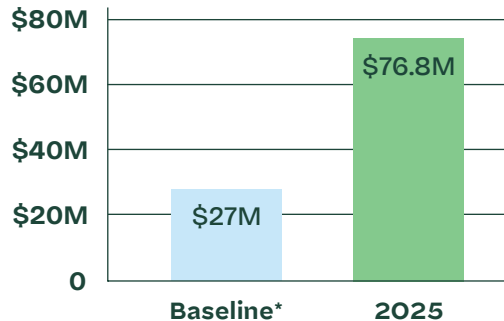
Annual Awards



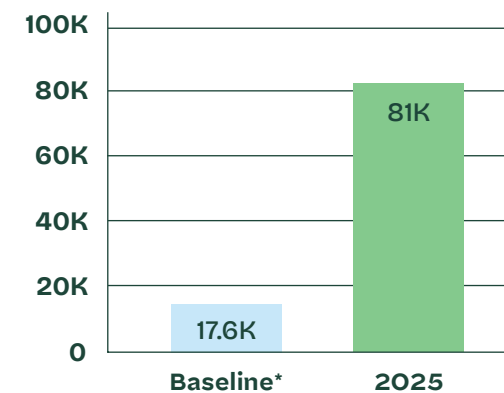
Annual Funding Disbursed



Total Matching Funds



Annual Acres Protected



2025 Award Funding Sources

Land Acquisition Fund	\$249,000
A.T. Resilience Fund	\$94,000
Mountain Valley Pipeline Fund	\$60,000
NC License Plate Grant Fund	\$35,000
National Park Foundation	\$26,000
Dunleavy Foundation	\$25,000
The Volgenau Foundation	\$24,000
	\$513,000

- Land Protection
- Community Resilience & Conservation Planning
- Land Protection & Conservation Planning
- Admin Time

*Baseline values were established by calculating the average of each metric during the WEAf's early years (2018-2022).



ABOUT THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Founded in 1925, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy works passionately to manage and protect the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. As the only non-profit devoted exclusively to the entirety of the Trail and its landscape, we endeavor to keep its vast natural and scenic beauty healthy, resilient, and connected, so that everyone can experience its transformative power for generations to come. Together with our supporters, partners, and thousands of volunteers, we **keep the Trail alive**.

For more information, please contact:

Jeri B. Ward, *Chief Growth Officer*
jward@appalachiantrail.org | 304.885.0793

Michael Cather, *Associate Vice President, Development*
mcather@appalachiantrail.org | 304.930.5277

Brian Wills, *Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations*
bwills@appalachiantrail.org | 304.885.0796

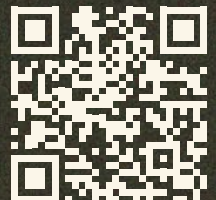
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

799 Washington Street, PO Box 807
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425 • 304.535.6331



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

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