JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / FALL 2023

TRANSITIONS EDITION

DEPARTMENTS

FEATURES

As the nights grow longer, our thoughts turn inward about what we have accomplished thus far this year and about our starry-eyed ambitions for the future. Photo of the night sky in the 100-Mile Wilderness in Maine by Chris Gallaway/Horizonline Pictures

ON THE COVER
A small stand of beech trees with red leaves coated in rime ice captures the often sudden transition from fall to winter. Photo near the summit of Little Hump Mountain, North Carolina, by Daniel Burleson

A.T. JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / FALL 2023

MISSION

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

A.T. Journeys is published on matte paper manufactured by Sappi North America mills and distributors that follow responsible forestry practices. It is printed with Soy Seal certified ink in the U.S.A. by Sheridan NH in Hanover, New Hampshire.

A.T. Journeys (ISSN 1556-2751) is published by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 799 Washington Street, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, (304) 535-6331. Bulk-rate postage paid at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and other offices. Postmaster: Send change-of-address Form 3575 to A.T. Journeys, P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425.

CREATE YOUR LEGACY

PHOTO BY SARAH JONES DECKER

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If you've already made a planned gift, please let us know so that we can partner in honoring your legacy.

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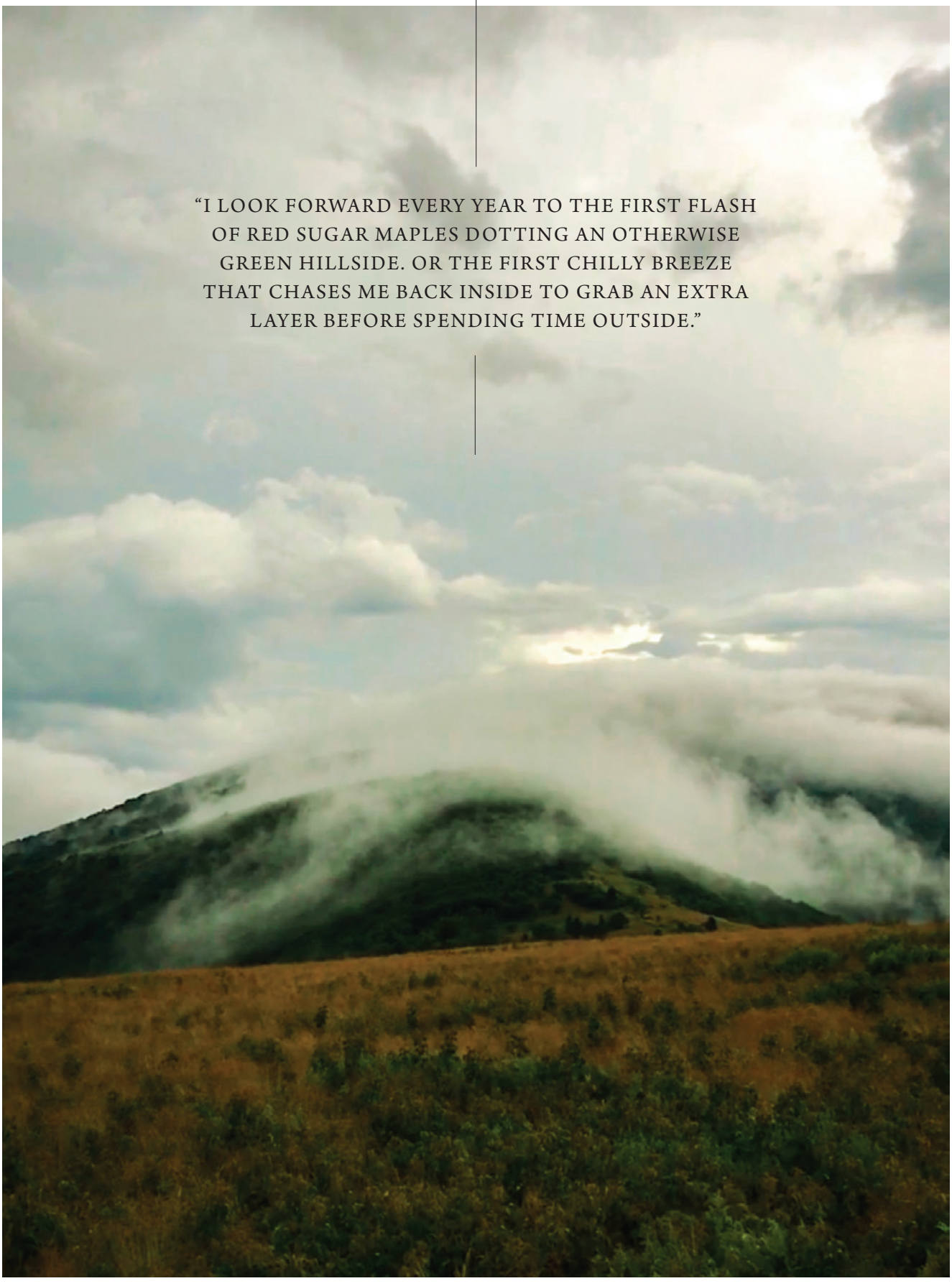


"I LOOK FORWARD EVERY YEAR TO THE FIRST FLASH OF RED SUGAR MAPLES DOTTING AN OTHERWISE GREEN HILLSIDE. OR THE FIRST CHILLY BREEZE THAT CHASES ME BACK INSIDE TO GRAB AN EXTRA LAYER BEFORE SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE."

Mists shroud a hilltop in Tennessee. Photo by Cynthia Viola / www.cynthiaviola.com

NEW BEGINNINGS

PERHAPS FOR SOME OF YOU, THE FALL is a season of endings. As the days shorten, the leaves fall, and last months of the year fly by, it's natural to feel like everything is coming to a close. But for me, the fall has always been a season of beginnings. That may still be a holdover from childhood of the school year starting anew every fall — a rhythm that gets established so early in life that it never seems to lose its grip on us.

Whatever the reason, I look forward every year to the first flash of red sugar maples dotting an otherwise green hillside. Or the first chilly breeze that chases me back inside to grab an extra layer before spending time outside. Or the crunch of leaf litter under my boots as I walk along a familiar stretch of Trail.

I've also been thinking about beginnings because I recently had the opportunity to visit the birthplace of the A.T. The Trail's founder and visionary, Benton MacKaye, was staying with friends at a farm in northern New Jersey when he wrote down his vision for a trail through the Appalachian Mountains from Maine to Georgia (see "Where It All Began," page 32). I got to visit the grounds of the estate, which is now a private club that hosts a five-mile hike twice a year to benefit local community nonprofits. I contemplated why certain places inspire us and how we act on that inspiration. And I thought about the hard work that happens after inspiration strikes — the work that goes into making a vision a reality.

Today, the ATC is still hard at work ensuring that the Trail envisioned a century ago remains an accessible, enjoyable, and challenging recreational experience for you. Increasingly, our work to protect that experience means not only maintaining the footpath itself but also conserving the natural landscape that surrounds it, including the plants and animals that call it home. It may not occur to you that the health of the streams and rivers in that landscape affects your enjoyment of the Trail. But as you'll read in "Vital Pathways" (page 20), enabling the endangered Atlantic salmon to return to its freshwater spawning ground improves the ecological connectivity of the landscape and the many benefits it provides to us all.

The Trail and its many natural resources truly never fail to amaze me with their power to transform, to heal, and to lead anyone who walks on the A.T. to growth and self-discovery. As the organization that is responsible for this sacred place, the ATC remains committed to our mission to protect, manage, and advocate for the Trail — a mission that becomes only more critical with every new year.

I hope that 2024 will be a year of new beginnings for you — and that you will find even more time to spend on the Trail you love.

Sandra Marra / President & CEO

TRAILHEAD

HIGHLIGHTS / EVENTS

WELCOMING A NEW SUPERINTENDENT

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL Conservancy (ATC) is pleased to welcome Ed Clark as the new superintendent of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. A veteran of the National Park Service (NPS), Clark has worked at both the park and national level for several decades, building strong public–private partnerships and providing strategic leadership. Clark will be the fifth park manager/superintendent of the Trail since Congress designated it the first National Scenic Trail in 1968.

Superintendent Ed Clark is the fifth park manager/superintendent of the Trail since Congress designated it the first National Scenic Trail in 1968. Photo courtesy of National Park Service

"I am honored to be selected as the superintendent of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail," said Clark. "The Appalachian Trail is such a unique and treasured landscape. I am eager to begin collaborating with other federal, state, tribal, and community partners to continue to protect this natural gem. I look forward to meeting the dedicated staff and partners that support the Trail and working to support our shared vision."

Clark formerly served as the Pacific West Region's senior project manager supporting complex projects such as Colorado River water issues, Lake Mead water levels, and statewide permitting efforts. From 2014 to 2017, Clark served as the superintendent of Gettysburg National Military Park and Eisenhower National Historic Site, while also serving in key park planning positions.

"As the lead NGO for the management and stewardship of the Appalachian Trail, the ATC is excited to begin working with Ed to implement a collaborative vision for the second century of this beloved trailway," said Sandra Marra, ATC President and CEO. "More than just a simple footpath, the A.T. and its surrounding landscape promote ecological health and biodiversity, sustainable outdoor recreation economies, and a truly unique recreational experience. Ed brings valuable community engagement experience that will be critical to advancing our collective efforts to protect and maintain this valuable national resource."

Prior to his post at Gettysburg, Clark served as superintendent of Manassas National Battlefield Park for five years, where he provided service-wide leadership for the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War and the broader Civil War to Civil Rights commemorative efforts. He has also served as the acting associate regional director for operations for the National Capital Region of the National Park Service and the acting national coordinator for National Heritage Areas.

Clark's other previous assignments include deputy chief ranger at Shenandoah National Park and supervisory park ranger at the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Clark is the successor to Superintendent Wendy Janssen, who retired in December 2022. He began his duties in early October 2023.

Left: Heading north into Dicks Creek Gap, Georgia. Photo by Katie "Heartbeat" Johnson submitted as part of the ATC's 2023 state-by-state photo contest. *See more photos on page 46.*

NEW ATC BOARD MEMBERS AND DIRECTORS

AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING ON AUGUST 26, 2023, THE ATC WELCOMED four new officers as well as four members of its Board of Directors. Taking the helm of the board following the tenure of Colin Beasley is Jim LaTorre. He is a long-time member of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, where he has served as a trail maintainer, campsite maintainer, boundary monitor, certified sawyer, and member of Trail Patrol. The board officers serving alongside LaTorre are Vice Chair Nathan Rogers, Treasurer Katherine Ross, and Secretary Rajinder Singh.

In addition to their passion for the A.T. and for outdoor recreation, the following four new board members bring expertise in conservation, legal affairs, marketing, and youth engagement.

- ***Renee Alston-Maisonet*** works to connect under-represented youth to the outdoors and careers in conservation.
- ***Bill Holman*** is North Carolina State Director of The Conservation Fund, where he is responsible for advocating for conservation priorities in that state.
- ***Roger Klein*** most recently served as Deputy General Counsel for a pioneer of smart technology.
- ***Gregory Merritt*** has held senior marketing positions at clean-energy firms and other companies seeking to drive new business.

Congratulations, welcome, and thanks to all for your leadership!

In addition to becoming chair of the ATC Board of Directors in 2023, Jim LaTorre completed his section hike of the A.T. Here, he accepts his official 2,000 miler certificate from President and CEO Sandra Marra.

ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION IN TRAIL STEWARDSHIP

A PASSIONATE GROUP OF YOUNG ADULTS CAME TOGETHER IN EARLY October at the AMC Mohican Outdoor Center to cultivate a shared commitment to making the Appalachian Trail, public lands, and the outdoors a welcoming place for all. At this year's Emerging Leaders Summit, 27 people aged 18 – 30 spent three days connecting with nature (even in the rain) and one another, meeting environmental leaders, learning trail skills, and gaining a deeper understanding of how to effectively protect, manage, and advocate for the A.T.

"This transformative experience has deepened my commitment to preserving the beauty and heritage of the Appalachian Trail while addressing the need for greater representation and inclusion in the outdoors. I'm excited to join a network of passionate individuals dedicated to protecting this natural treasure and making it more accessible to all," said Sara Rose Monahan, a 2018 graduate of Villanova University and a participant in the 2023 summit.

Co-sponsored by the ATC, the AMC, and the Wilderness Society, the event had a record number of applicants including a higher number of Black, Indigenous People of Color applicants than previous years. Selected participants received a scholarship covering lodging, meals, and registration costs.

Learn more about the Emerging Leaders Summit at **appalachiantrail.org/emerging-leaders**.

A record number of applicants sought the opportunity to cultivate leadership and Trail stewardship skills at the 2023 Emerging Leaders Summit, held at the AMC Mohican Outdoor Center. Photos by Noel Waldron

★ TRAILHEAD
Globetrotting

TRAIL-BLAZING IN BRAZIL AND JAPAN

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL IS a model for long-distance trails across the country and around the world. Its distinct structures and wayfinding, unique management system, and reliance on volunteer maintenance have inspired and been replicated by long trails across continents.

But the A.T. doesn't influence other trails all on its own. ATC staff have played and continue to play active roles in sharing what we have learned over the past 98 years about managing and protecting this iconic public resource. This fall, ATC staff participated in international trail conferences in Brazil and Japan to share some of their experience and expertise.

The Second Annual Brazilian Trails Congress, held in September, was a gathering of representatives from 28 regional trails in South America's largest country. Through lectures, roundtables, exhibits, and — of course — trail walks, participants shared best practices on caring for and maintaining trails.

In November, ATC staff traveled to Japan for a long-trail forum as well as a trail maintenance symposium. The latter was sponsored by the Shine-tsu Trail Club, with which the ATC has signed a Friendship Trails Agreement to foster the continued exchange of ideas and information.

★ TRAILHEAD
Googling

DO YOU DOODLE ABOUT THE A.T.?

GOOGLE DID! ON OCTOBER 2, 2023 — THE 55TH anniversary of the National Trails System Act — the search engine giant featured an A.T.-themed animated doodle on its homepage. When you clicked play, a trail journal flipped open, allowing you to leaf through 10 illustrated pages of facts about the Trail, its history, and long-distance hiking traditions.

On page seven, for example, you learned: "The oldest and most important tradition of the Trail is to leave it just as you found it, allowing everyone to enjoy the same natural beauty."

Doodles have been featured on the Google homepage for more than 20 years, and since then some 5,000 doodles have educated Google users about a variety of topics, including holidays, historic anniversaries, and the lives of famous artists, pioneers, and scientists. This is the first time the Appalachian Trail has been the subject of a doodle. National parks were honored in 2016, on the occasion of the National Park Service's 100th anniversary.

To create the doodle, artist Nate Swinehart visited several iconic locations along the Trail, including Clingmans Dome in Tennessee, McAfee Knob in Virginia, and the Hunt Trailhead in Maine, among others. Watercolor paintings and pencil sketches from those visits appear in the doodle, along with some of the plant and animal species that call the Trail landscape home.

During the day the doodle appeared on Google's homepage, visitors to the ATC's website increased by 320 percent compared to the average daily number of visitors for the previous nine months of the year. Engagement on our social media channels also increased.

If you missed it, you can still see the doodle on Google's website, at **google.com/doodles/celebrating-the-appalachian-trail**.

Gift an Appalachian Trail Conservancy membership
to protect the footpath, support the work of A.T. volunteers, enhance our understanding of conservation science, provide free and critical information to ever-growing audiences, and expand our landscape protection efforts to protect the Trail's awe-inspiring vistas and vital wildlife migration corridors.

appalachiantrail.org/giftmembership

A HARVEST OF FALL HUES

THE TRANSITION TO AUTUMN OCCURS at a different pace and time along the entire length of the Appalachian Trail. But everywhere, it provides a new and beautiful filter on a familiar landscape. Here, a patch of goldenrod on Little Hump Mountain, in North Carolina, provides a splash of yellow in a sea of ochre, russet, and garnet-hued grasses and trees. The A.T. winds its way southward towards Yellow Mountain in the distance.

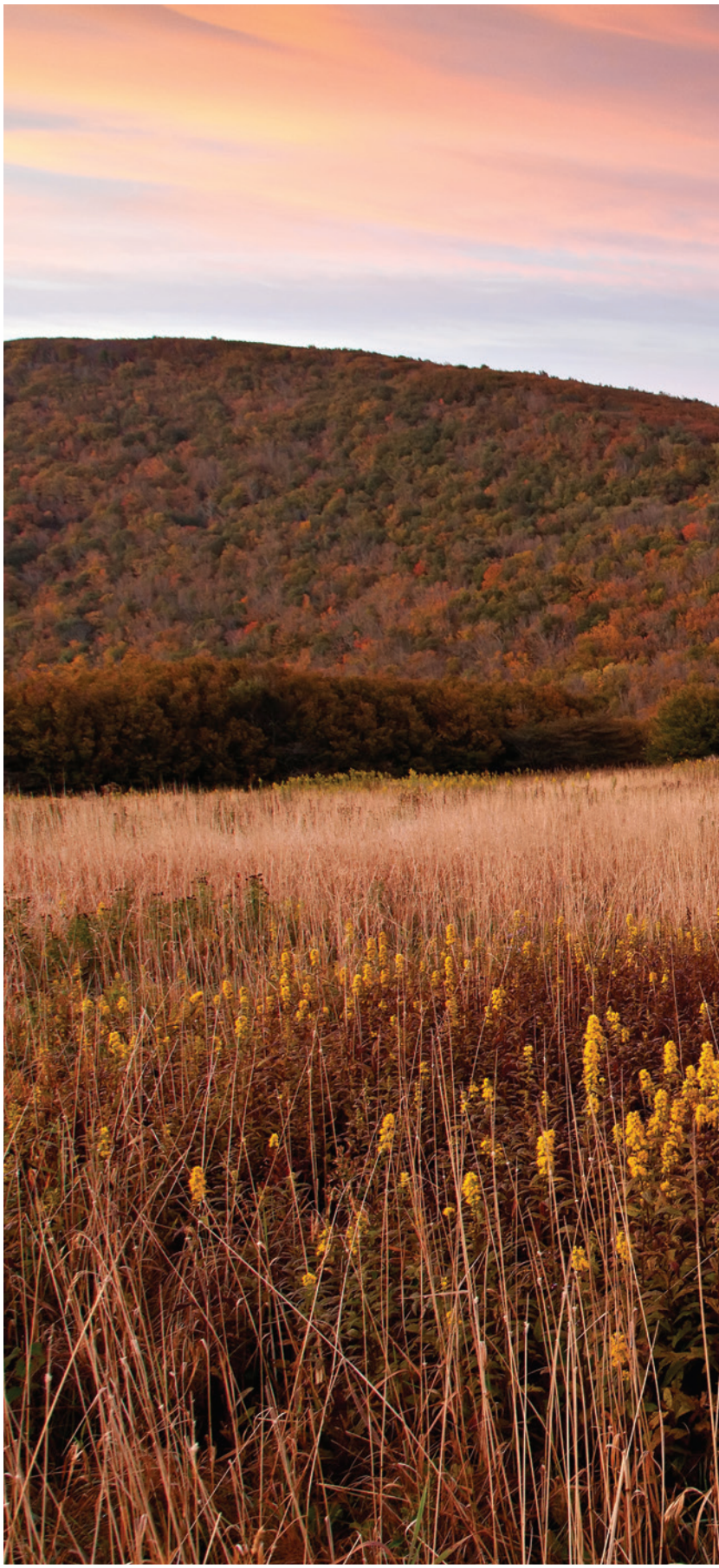


Photo by Daniel Burleson

Daniel Burleson is a photographer based in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. imagecarolina.net

PROVIDING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

A RETIRED THRU-HIKER AND HIS WIFE SUPPORT THE ATC'S MISSION WITH A GIFT IN THEIR WILL.

THE FIRST PERSON TO COMPLETE AN official thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail famously said that he did so in order to "walk the war out of my system." Earl Shaffer, who completed his thru-hike in 1948, had served for four years in the Pacific Theater during World War II. At Iwo Jima, he witnessed the death of a childhood friend. For Shaffer, walking the Appalachian Trail was a way of coping with what today we would call post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

The tens of thousands of people since Shaffer who have attempted a thru-hike, and the fewer than 30,000 who have completed one, have no doubt a wide variety of motivations for undertaking the challenge. Many attempt the feat at moments of transition in their lives, whether from student life to adulthood, from military service to civilian pursuits, or from professional careers to retirement.

For Ken LeRoy of Bayfield, Colorado, it was the transition to retirement after a busy and productive career in the insurance industry that provided the motivation to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. "I knew I was not going to just play golf," reflects LeRoy

Above: Ken and Pat LeRoy live in what they consider "a little slice of heaven," in Bayfield, Colorado. Left: An acquaintance's offhand remark about an amazing hiking trip that included Max Patch, in North Carolina, planted the seed for Ken's A.T. hike. Photo by Scott Ramsey

"INSTEAD OF FEELING THE PAIN OF THE MILES UNDER MY FEET, I WAS EXPERIENCING THE INTENSE JOY OF BEING OUTSIDE, ANTICIPATING THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING AND THE FLOWERS THAT WOULD SOON ADORN THE LANDSCAPE."

about his plans for retirement when he first began researching his options. "And so I decided I would hike the A.T."

A native of southern California, LeRoy had spent time hiking in his 20s as a young professional living in northern California. He enjoyed carrying his young kids on his back on hikes. Later, in his early 50s, while he was living in Birmingham, Alabama, he recalls meeting someone who said the best hiking experience of his life had included a visit to Max Patch, in North Carolina. The discovery that Max Patch was on the Appalachian Trail helped to crystallize LeRoy's intent to hike the A.T. following retirement.

FROM IDEA TO REALITY

"I didn't think it would be so tough," recalls LeRoy about the first days of his thru-hike, even though he had prepared well for the adventure. "On the third day of my hike, I began to wonder how I could fake an injury that would get me off the Trail."

LeRoy had made no secret of his plan to hike the entire Trail. Many of his retirement gifts had included the gear needed for a thru-hike.

But within a couple of days of getting into the routine of hiking for miles a day, recalls LeRoy, "It became a sort of job. Instead of feeling the pain of the miles under my feet, I was experiencing the intense joy of being outside, anticipating the arrival of spring and the flowers that would soon adorn the landscape."

The discipline required to hit the daily mileage goals also became a sort of blessing for a corporate executive who had worried about the impact of downsizing, and closing branch offices, during a period of economic instability. "It was a relief to focus on the

next water source, and where I would resupply, and where I would spend the night," reflects LeRoy. "It was a relief to go to bed at night with the only worry of whether my bear bag was hung high enough."

Like many hikers on the A.T., LeRoy was not aware of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy or its role in protecting and managing the Trail. As he headed north from Georgia, he recalled meeting volunteers and learning about the trail clubs that maintained sections of the footpath. It wasn't until he reached the ATC's headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, that he understood the part the conservancy plays in leading the public-private partnership that ensures the A.T.'s continued existence.

Ken LeRoy began his northbound thru-hike upon his retirement in 2000 and received much of his gear as retirement presents.

PRESERVING THE A.T. EXPERIENCE

After completing his thru-hike in 2001, Ken and his wife, Pat, decided to become life members of the ATC. Then, a few years into their retirement, they increased their annual giving by donating directly through their IRA provider with their required minimum distribution. They have also thoughtfully included the ATC in their estate plans by making the conservancy a beneficiary of their will.

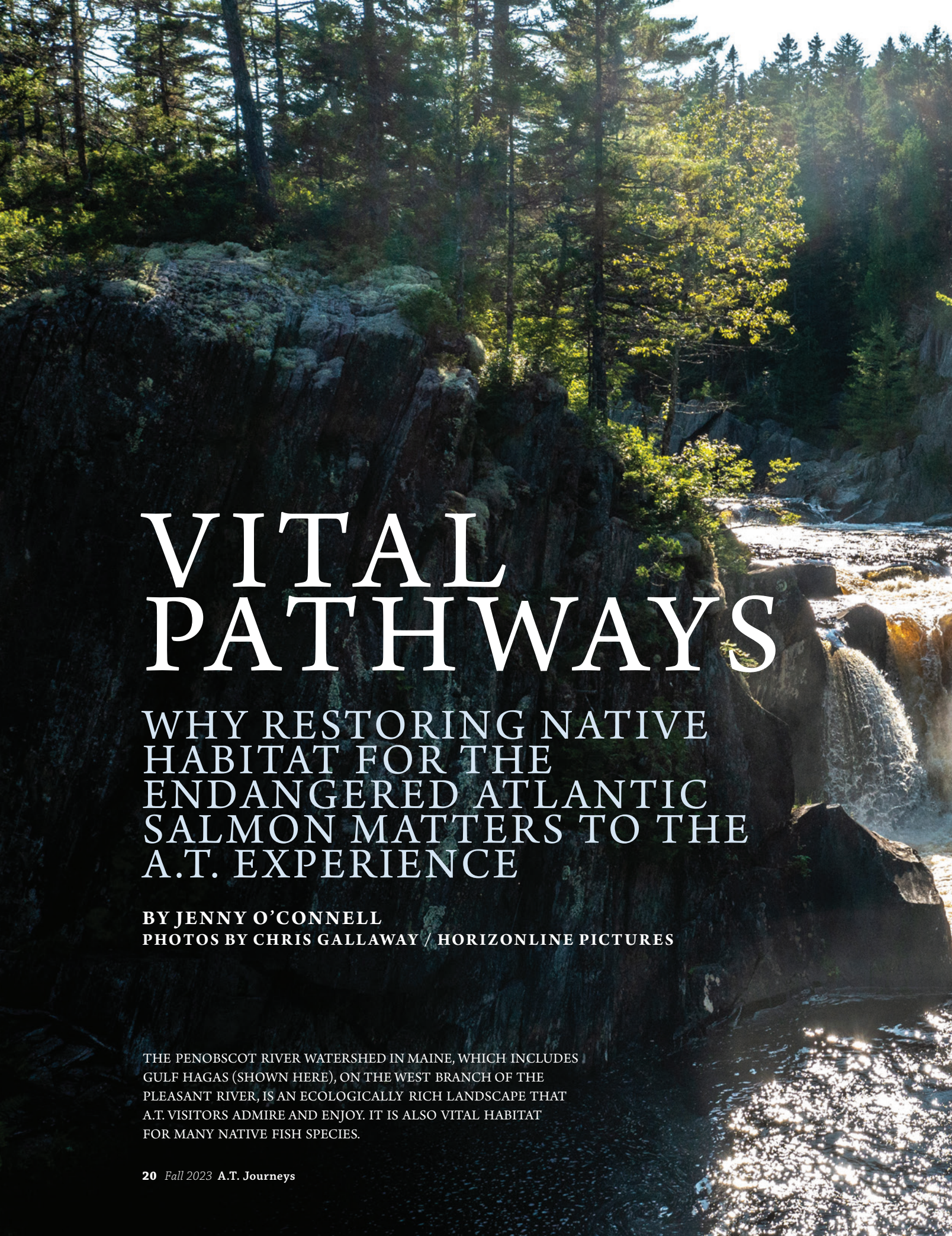
"Our children are comfortable in their jobs, so we felt we could prioritize our charitable giving, while still providing for our two grandsons," says LeRoy. "By giving to the ATC, we are helping ensure that people who aren't yet born will have the opportunity to have the same experience that I did on the A.T."

The highpoints of that experience — in addition to completing all 2,190+ miles — included giving himself a Trail name and encountering a little bit of Trail magic. As for the Trail name ("Geezer"), LeRoy jokes that he knew the tradition of other people bestowing Trail names and doubted he would like anyone else's choice. So he got ahead of things by baptizing himself "Geezer," which he felt was appropriate given the disparity in ages between himself, as a retiree, and the 20- and 30-somethings he encountered along the Trail.

And as for the Trail magic? It was a fellow hiker in Caratunk, Maine, who heard him on a payphone trying to make airline reservations for his return home and offered to put him up for a few days before his flight departed from Bangor. More than 20 years later, the two are still in regular touch.

It's a classic example of generosity on the Trail that is constantly paid forward. Just as Ken and Pat LeRoy are seeking to pay it forward with their generous legacy commitment to the ATC.

To learn more about how you can support the ATC's work through an IRA, donor-advised fund, estate plan, or other deferred commitment, contact Heather Hackett at **hhackett@appalachiantrail.org**, or visit **appalachiantrail.org/planned-giving**.



VITAL PATHWAYS

WHY RESTORING NATIVE HABITAT FOR THE ENDANGERED ATLANTIC SALMON MATTERS TO THE A.T. EXPERIENCE

BY JENNY O'CONNELL
PHOTOS BY CHRIS GALLAWAY / HORIZONLINE PICTURES

THE PENOBSCOT RIVER WATERSHED IN MAINE, WHICH INCLUDES GULF HAGAS (SHOWN HERE), ON THE WEST BRANCH OF THE PLEASANT RIVER, IS AN ECOLOGICALLY RICH LANDSCAPE THAT A.T. VISITORS ADMIRE AND ENJOY. IT IS ALSO VITAL HABITAT FOR MANY NATIVE FISH SPECIES.

IF YOU

HAVE BEEN TO MAINE'S 100 MILE WILDERNESS, you have probably crossed over the spot without knowing it: the place where, just beyond the intersection of the Appalachian Trail, Henderson Brook slips quietly under the road. Katahdin Ironworks (KI) is the name of that road: long, dusty, remote; built to transport lumber. You likely traveled the rugged KI road in a vehicle coated with a layer of dirt, or perhaps on foot, sweating under the weight of your backpack. To you, that intersection of water, road, and trail was a blip in time, a link to somewhere else.

To a federally endangered Atlantic salmon, it's a lifeline.

"This is one of the highest points anywhere in the eastern seaboard that Atlantic salmon can get back to their historic habitat," says Steve Tatko, Vice President of Conservation Research and Land Management for the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). "It's really humbling to think that we are able to now, 180 years later, bring the Atlantic salmon back to this place where they have belonged since the glaciers retreated."

When you stand on the bank of Henderson Brook, you're surrounded by trees, sloping hillsides, and the sound of water. There's a feeling of layers: wind rustling the canopy above, the stream moving below, and you among the trees, lichen, and wildlife of the understory. Cold, clear water bounces off rocks, rippling and gurgling on its way over a restored streambed. As it flows past you, the water travels downstream and downhill to the West Branch of the Pleasant River. It eventually merges with the Penobscot River, which ends its winding journey in the Gulf of Maine and the Atlantic Ocean.

What you don't see is the 90-foot-long galvanized steel culvert that has been at the center of a 10-year restoration project undertaken by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), the AMC, and their local, state, and national partners.

When Marian Orlousky visited the site in 2021 and first laid eyes on the culvert, she was struck by its enormity. "I immediately handed my phone to the project engineer and climbed inside," says the ATC's Director of Science and Stewardship. She realized that a photo of someone standing inside the mouth of the culvert would be invaluable in demonstrating the magnitude of the obstruction. "While I was aware of

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CROSSES JUST A FEW YARDS DOWNSTREAM OF WHERE HENDERSON BROOK FLOWS INTO THE WEST BRANCH OF THE PLEASANT RIVER (ABOVE RIGHT). UNTIL RECENTLY A 10-FOOT-TALL AND 90-FOOT-LONG STEEL CULVERT (BELOW) ON HENDERSON BROOK BLOCKED FISH FROM ACCESSING THEIR HISTORIC HABITAT. MAINE IS HOME TO THE ONLY REMAINING WILD SALMON POPULATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.

AS AN INDICATOR SPECIES, THE PRESENCE (OR LACK THEREOF) OF ATLANTIC SALMON HELPS US UNDERSTAND HOW HEALTHY A RIVER ECOSYSTEM IS. HOW CLEAN, HOW CONNECTED, AND HOW DIVERSE.

the culvert's dimensions and had seen many photos of it before my first visit, I was still stunned by what stood before me. None of those images accurately captured its size and presence," says Orlousky.

The photo of Orlousky at the mouth of the culvert is striking, the top of her head reaching only halfway up the 10-foot-diameter opening. Stepping up into it, she says, really drove home the problem. The culvert is perched too high above the streambed for juvenile fish to jump into it, and it's impossible for them to swim upstream through a shallow 90-foot pipe without their usual slow-water rest places and deep pools behind rocks and boulders. The culvert was situated at the lower end of the 3.9-mile-long Henderson Brook, just before it drops into the West Branch of the Pleasant River. Its location effectively blocked 3.3 miles — 84 percent of the brook — to all fish passage and movement upstream.

RESTORING CONNECTIVITY

We are forever pulling maps out of pockets, punching in GPS coordinates, charting landmarks and miles—but rarely do we stop to locate ourselves in a watershed. Think of a piece of paper: if you were to crumple and unfold it again, you'd see the ridges, the streams, the valleys, the places water would run off or collect. Dump a little water out on the crumples and you'd see the way it runs downward from source to sea, how the creases flow into each other, how everything, everything is connected.

You don't have to be a fish person to feel a little awe toward the Atlantic salmon. Sometimes referred to as the "King of Fish," they are muscular, fast, and sleek — brown and bronze as juveniles in rivers and streams, they turn silver as adults in the ocean, measuring 28 to 30 inches long in adulthood and anywhere from 8 to 30 pounds (as much as a three-year-old human child). The colorfully speckled fish are anadromous, which means they live in both fresh and saltwater, beginning their lives in small tributaries like Henderson Brook, where they hatch in the spring and spend two to three years growing in the shady, cold water before swimming out to the ocean to mature. They'll migrate as far as Greenland, traveling three to five thousand miles and back, as they feed and grow for up to two years at sea. Then, at around four years old, the adults are guided home by the chemical imprint of their birth waters to spawn.

Once native to nearly every U.S. river north of the Hudson River, the Atlantic salmon population was decimated by historic overfishing, poor water quality, and habitat destruction, such as dams and culverts, like the one on Henderson Brook, that block migratory movement. Alewives and eastern brook trout — for whom the West Branch and its tributaries are one of the last great strongholds — are also impacted by a degraded and fragmented habitat. Today, Maine is home to the only remaining populations of wild Atlantic salmon in the United States.

As an indicator species, the presence (or lack thereof) of Atlantic salmon helps us understand how healthy a river ecosystem is. How clean, how connected, and how diverse. "We already knew that Henderson Brook offers superior aquatic habitat, and environmental DNA sampling conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2021 confirmed that Atlantic salmon were already using the lower reaches of the brook," says Orlousky, who has a

THE 10-YEAR PROJECT TO RESTORE THE AQUATIC CONNECTIVITY OF HENDERSON BROOK INVOLVED PARTNERS FROM THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB AND THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES, AMONG MANY OTHERS. THE CULVERT REMOVAL BENEFITS WILD ATLANTIC SALMON AS WELL AS EASTERN BROOK TROUT (ABOVE RIGHT).

THE WEST BRANCH AND ITS TRIBUTARIES MAKE UP A SIGNIFICANT WETLAND COMPLEX WITH MILES OF UNDEVELOPED COLD-WATER STREAM HABITAT AND THOUSANDS OF ACRES OF PRODUCTIVE FORESTLAND. ADDITIONAL SPECIES THAT CALL THE REGION HOME INCLUDE THE COMMON LOON AND AMERICAN BULLFROG.

HIGH-QUALITY STREAM SYSTEMS LIKE HENDERSON BROOK SERVE AS EXCELLENT HABITAT FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF INSECTS, AMPHIBIANS, AND MANY OTHER FORMS OF PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE. REMOVAL OF THE CULVERT AND RESTORATION OF THE STREAM WILL HAVE A LONG-TERM BENEFIT FOR THE ENTIRE ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY.

background in biology, ecology, and resource management. "So it was clear that restoring the connectivity of the brook would be a valuable step towards restoring Atlantic salmon."

And while fish have been the primary focus of the project, high-quality stream systems like Henderson serve as excellent habitat for a wide variety of insects, amphibians, and many other forms of plant and animal life. Removal of the culvert and restoration of the stream will have a long-term benefit for the entire ecological community, as well as the human communities that surround it. "Protecting the resources in the Trail landscape helps protect all the people who live within and around it," adds Orlousky. "Whether they actually hike or visit the Trail at all, they're still benefitting from the ecological services that the landscape provides."

ONE SMALL STEP FOR THE WATERSHED

Removing the culvert was the first step. The bank where it sat was reinforced, and then the streambed was restored with native stone and boulders that serve as "fish steps," allowing for intuitive, easy movement up the stream. A 70-foot bridge now spans the stream, open underneath so animals, water, and even storm debris can move freely beneath it. "Fish began moving upstream the same day the culvert was removed," Tatko says. "There's no recovery period. They're drawn to cold, fast-moving water. The return is instantaneous."

The Henderson restoration process, which began in 2014 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified the brook as one of the greatest priorities for fish passage remediation in the state of Maine, has taken 10 years to design, plan, fund, permit, and implement. And while the fully reconnected and accessible Henderson Brook is certainly something to celebrate, both Tatko and Orlousky acknowledge that it's just one step in tackling the bigger issue of restoring the Pleasant River system and the greater Penobscot River watershed.

"It's one thing to stand there and see this huge culvert and understand that it's blocking almost the entire length of this water resource," says Orlousky. "But there are thousands of these perched culverts scattered across the state, mostly on these small-level tributaries, and it's the cumulative impact of all those aquatic barriers that's really the challenge for Atlantic salmon recovery." The availability of smaller tributaries has a significant impact on juvenile salmon (parr) production, because they serve as extensive nursery areas for young fish who spend the first two years of their lives in these waters. Research conducted by the state of Maine indicated that once accessible, Henderson Brook alone would be capable of supporting 964 salmon parr.

Luckily, as our collective understanding of watershed management improves, many dedicated people continue to drive restoration efforts. "There's been a tremendous amount of work for decades to get to this phase of recovery by so many groups, and so many tribal nations, and we are incredibly humbled to be a part of that," says Tatko, who grew up on the edge of the 100 Mile Wilderness in the small town of Willimantic, Maine.

"WHAT YOU START TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT THIS PLACE IS THAT IT'S A FOREST THAT HAS ALWAYS HAD PEOPLE IN IT. THE WABANAKI LITERALLY WATCHED THE FOREST GROW UP AROUND THEM, ABOUT 7,000 YEARS AGO, AND SO IT'S NEVER BEEN WITHOUT PEOPLE. YOU HAVE THIS CONTINUITY OF PEOPLE AND FOREST THAT IS UNBROKEN."

Tatko believes that honoring the connections local people have to the land is inseparable from the conservation movement. "What you start to understand about this place is that it's a forest that has always had people in it. The Wabanaki literally watched the forest grow up around them, about 7,000 years ago," he says. "And so it's never been without people. You have this continuity of people and forest that is unbroken."

A PLACE OF WHOLENESS

"When Benton MacKaye originally conceived of the Appalachian Trail, he was aimed at creating a mechanism for accessing and engaging with the natural, cultural, and scenic resources of the Appalachian Mountains," Orlousky says. "It was less about getting from one point to another, and it was more about experiencing and immersing yourself in the landscape. So, in order for us to protect and conserve that experience, we have to protect and conserve that landscape."

In a landscape taxed by development, the connected and conserved lands along the Appalachian Trail's 2,198 miles offer refuge to the plethora of terrestrial and aquatic species and ecological communities that make up one of the most biodiverse units of the National Park System. This particular slice of the Maine woods — home to moose, lynx, bear, foxes, rich and vibrant plant communities, as well as countless other species — is the largest contiguous forest left in the eastern United States. It is also the largest patch of temperate deciduous forest left anywhere in the world that has escaped the grasp of agriculture and has continued to live as a forest. "That's why these fish can return," Tatko says. "The place is still whole. It's still intact."

What does it mean to be a person who sees this wholeness? Who stops on a bridge over a creek and wonders what life it supports? What does it mean to walk over a piece of land not to get to an end destination, but as an act of communion?

"The beautiful thing to me about the 100 Mile Wilderness is that I feel as though I am part of the landscape. Rather than a momentary visitor or an onlooker, I'm just one other living creature existing in it," Orlousky says, citing the feeling of separation she often feels when visiting larger parks. "Here in the Maine woods you are depending on yourself, on where your feet can take you, on what you can carry on your back, and on your knowledge of the environment that surrounds you."

Perhaps it was, in part, this connection that inspired Orlousky and Tatko to work in a field where they could enact change, a place where science and traditional ecological knowledge are actively being applied in service to the things they loved. Orlousky, who grew up fishing the stream behind her childhood home in Pennsylvania, just a quarter-mile from the A.T., describes holding a young Atlantic salmon for the first time during a recent visit to the site with a biologist from the Maine Department of Inland Resources: "I had a huge smile on my face, because I never imagined that I'd have the chance to hold in my hands an Atlantic salmon caught in these waters. Hopefully, with these efforts, myself and many others who come after me will be able to return to the Appalachian Trail, the West Branch of the Pleasant River, or the Penobscot and actually catch an Atlantic salmon flyfishing."

As for the fish?

"They're using it," Tatko says. "They're already running up and down through the site."

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE 70-FOOT-LONG STEEL AND CONCRETE CLEAR-SPAN BRIDGE WAS INSTALLED IN THE SUMMER OF 2023, FISH BEGAN PASSING UNDERNEATH IT. (ABOVE RIGHT) PROJECT PARTNERS, FROM LEFT: PETE RUKSZNIS, MAINE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES; STEVE TATKO, APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB; AND MARIAN ORLOUSKY, ATC. *Photos below and above left by Leah Beck*

"HERE IN THE MAINE WOODS, YOU ARE DEPENDING ON YOURSELF, ON WHERE YOUR FEET CAN TAKE YOU, ON WHAT YOU CAN CARRY ON YOUR BACK, AND ON YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT THAT SURROUNDS YOU."

ORLOUSKY GREW UP FISHING THE STREAM BEHIND HER HOME IN PENNSYLVANIA. SHE HOPES TO RETURN ONE DAY TO HENDERSON BROOK TO CATCH AN ATLANTIC SALMON FLY-FISHING.

WITH GRATITUDE

The ATC would like to thank the following donors who contributed to the Henderson Brook restoration project: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in partnership with the Atlantic Salmon Federation of Maine, Bass Pro and Cabela's Outdoor Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Fish Passage Program and Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, Michele and Dan Coleman, KBF Canada, National Park Trust, Appalachian Mountain Club, Davis Conservation Fund, National Park Service, the Volgenau Foundation, and numerous ATC members and supporters.

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PHOTO BY CHRIS GALLAWAY / HORIZONLINE PICTURES

Every year, 6,000 volunteers dedicate more than 200,000 hours of sweat and hard work to preserve one of the greatest public lands projects in American history.

Our volunteers are the glue that holds the Appalachian Trail together. But volunteerism is not cost free, and every year brings new challenges to overcome. Our volunteers depend on your donations for: gear and equipment, training and skills development, and volunteer management and recruitment.

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appalachiantrail.org/give

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

HOW AN ESTATE IN NORTHWESTERN NEW JERSEY WITH TIES TO THE SETTLEMENT HOUSE MOVEMENT BECAME THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL.

BY ANNE MERRILL

SOMETIMES

THE PLACES THAT WE VISIT FOR ONLY a short amount of time — whether on vacation, or for work, or for a family wedding or reunion — can have a disproportionate impact on the trajectory of our lives. Because you're reading this magazine, the Appalachian Trail may likely be one of those places for you. Perhaps it was a weeklong scouting trip in the Smokies while in middle school, or a two-day backpacking trip in the White Mountains with friends during college. Perhaps it was an afternoon walk along the Trail through Harriman State Park after a business trip to New York. Whatever inspired your lifelong love of the A.T. may have been just a few moments of time in a life filled with work and family commitments.

For Benton MacKaye, the visionary founder of the Appalachian Trail, it was a visit to northern New Jersey in the summer of 1921 that changed the course of his life. That summer, MacKaye was grieving his wife, Betty, who had died from suicide in New York City in April. A friend invited him to come stay with him at a small farm he had recently purchased near Mt. Olive, New Jersey. That friend was Charles Harris Whitaker, an architect and editor of the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* (AIA).

MacKaye had already begun musing about a trail from Maine to Georgia through the Appalachian Mountains. He later said he first came up with the idea on a hike up Stratton Mountain in Vermont in July 1900. But it was while staying with Whitaker, far from the noise and distractions of city life, and at his friends' urging, that he put pen to paper and started sketching out his ideas in writing.

Intrigued by what he read of MacKaye's ideas, Whitaker arranged for a meeting with Clarence Stein, a fellow architect and urban planner. The place Whitaker chose for the three men to meet was Hudson Guild Farm in nearby Netcong, New Jersey. Understanding his selection of venue requires a brief foray into the history of the settlement house movement.

BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Settlement houses originated in England in the 1880s in response to problems caused by industrialization, immigration, and the rapid growth of cities. A group of British university students opened the first settlement house in London's East End, believing that by living among poor people they could promote cross-cultural understanding and break down barriers between social classes. The movement quickly spread across the ocean, where settlement houses began popping up in the major metropolitan areas of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

In the late 1890s, Dr. John Lovejoy Elliott established Hudson Guild, a settlement house in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. In recent years, the neighborhood had seen an influx of immigrant families from Ireland, Italy, Germany, and Greece, as well as African Americans who were fleeing the South. The new arrivals found jobs in the shipyards and factories along the Hudson River and lived in poorly built tenement buildings or rooming houses nearby. The increase in population density and poor sanitary conditions soon heightened underlying problems of disease, hunger, and crime.

Elliott had met Jane Addams, the founder of Hull-House in Chicago, a few years before and was deeply moved by what settlement houses were striving to accomplish. In Chelsea, he organized a social and recreation club for young men, which was quickly followed by clubs and programs for other groups including children and working women. "Our fundamental purpose is to help people help each other and themselves," Elliott said about the primary aim of these programs.

In the following years, Hudson Guild established the first free kindergarten in New York City and offered vocational training, athletic programs, healthcare services, and summer outings to nearby parks and campgrounds. Some 20 years after its founding, the guild bought a property in northern New Jersey to enable city children to learn about farming and enjoy traditional camp activities. The goal was not to make "farmers out of city folks," Elliott later clarified, in an interview with the *New York Times*, but to enable people to "learn about how things grow and about other mysterious things that happen in the country, concerning which city people know so little."

FROM FARM TO TRAIL

The New Jersey property acquired by the Hudson Guild in 1917 consisted of 500 acres and included a working farm, three farmhouses, and an estate house built by New York architect Clarence Curter. In addition to the activities provided for the settlement house residents, Hudson Guild Farm hosted

IN JULY 1921, CLARENCE STEIN (LEFT), BENTON MACKAYE (SHOWN ABOVE LEFT IN 1964), AND CHARLES WHITAKER MET AT HUDSON FARM GUILD (ABOVE RIGHT) TO DISCUSS MACKAYE'S VISION FOR AN APPALACHAIN TRAIL; BELOW: TODAY, THE PORCH OF HUDSON FARM CLUB OFFERS SCENIC VIEWS OF THE GENTLY ROLLING HILLS OF NORTHWESTERN NEW JERSEY.
Photos below and on previous page by Jack Carroll

BIANNUAL HIKES ON THE GROUNDS OF HUDSON FARM CLUB BENEFIT LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (ABOVE); AT THE COMPLETION OF THEIR HIKE, PARTICIPANTS CHOOSE WHICH ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT BY DONATING PLAY MONEY, IN THE AMOUNT OF THEIR AGE, THAT IS THEN MATCHED WITH ACTUAL FUNDS. *Photos by Jack Carroll*

THE TRADITION OF SOCIAL WELFARE IS ALIVE AND WELL AT HUDSON FARM CLUB AND ITS ASSOCIATED FOUNDATION. TWICE A YEAR, THE CLUB ORGANIZES A HIKE ON ITS GROUNDS FOR OVER A THOUSAND RESIDENTS OF NEARBY COMMUNITIES TO ENJOY THE SCENIC BEAUTY AND WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS.

meetings and conferences on a variety of topics of interest to the progressive movement: education, universal suffrage, workers' protections, corporate regulation, and environmental conservation.

It is undoubtedly Hudson Guild Farm's reputation as a place for airing and debating big ideas that prompted Charles Whitaker to choose it as the backdrop for the meeting he facilitated with Benton MacKaye and Clarence Stein about the former's ideas about a recreation project involving an Appalachian Trail. Stein had designed some buildings on the farm and so was already familiar with the location.

On Sunday, July 10, 1921, the three men met — in the "room where it happened," to quote Lin-Manuel Miranda's lyrics from *Hamilton* — and emerged after Whitaker agreed to publish an article by MacKaye in the AIA journal, and Stein agreed to help promote the idea through his professional circles.

The significance of the meeting is hard to overstate. MacKaye's biographer, Larry Anderson, wrote in his 2002 book that the July 1921 meeting "launched the Appalachian Trail." MacKaye himself, reflecting on the meeting some 50 years later, wrote to the ATC chairman at the time, Stanley Murray, "On that July Sunday half a century ago, the seed of our Trail was planted. Except for the two men named, it would never have come to pass."

A CENTURY OF GIVING

Hudson Guild still exists today, continuing to serve Chelsea and the greater West Side neighborhood of Manhattan. It provides social services, physical and mental healthcare, and other programs to some 25,000 people annually. The guild no longer owns the property in New Jersey, having decided some 30 years ago that owning a farm was no longer necessary to accomplish its mission. In the late 1990s, businessman and philanthropist Peter Kellogg led a group that purchased the farm property and some additional land. The Hudson Farm Club now operates as a private year-round outdoor experience for its members.

The tradition of social welfare is alive and well at Hudson Farm Club and its associated foundation. Twice a year, the club organizes a hike on its grounds for over a thousand residents of nearby communities to enjoy the scenic beauty and wildlife sightings. The hike is one of several fundraising activities that benefit local charities and public service organizations. This fall's hike, for example, benefited local fire, police, and emergency response units as well as the county's schools, youth sports and organizations, and neighborhood food pantry, among other social causes.

The hikes typically raise from $50,000 to $150,000 — depending on the turnout (and the weather) — but the donations are only part of the point. "The greatest reward is the community coming together and working towards a common goal of completing the hike," said Sharon Leon, the volunteer organizer of the fall hikes on the Byram township side of the grounds.

One can only imagine that Dr. John Lovejoy Elliott, who established Hudson Guild as part of his lifelong experiment in "neighborliness," would approve.

And so it happened that a brief sojourn in New Jersey — a mere couple of months in a lifetime that lasted 96 years — changed the course of MacKaye's life. Just as the Trail that he envisioned has had a transformative effect on the lives of all who spend even only a few hours appreciating its many wonders.

CONSERVING THE A.T. EXPERIENCE

REFLECTIONS ON THE EFFORTS AND EVOLUTION OF A CONSERVANCY.

BY LAURA BELLEVILLE

OVER 18 YEARS AGO, I JOINED THE Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) as the Central and Southwest Virginia Regional Director, eventually becoming Vice President of Conservation and Policy. At the time, the then Appalachian Trail Conference boldly decided to change its name to Conservancy and focus its efforts on conserving the Appalachian Trail experience for future generations to enjoy.

The dictionary definition of a conservancy is an organization designated to conserve and protect natural resources. What sounds simple on paper is, of course, far more complex on the ground — especially for a resource like the A.T., which traverses over 2,198 miles of diverse terrain from marshland to forest, grassy bald to alpine tundra.

Since I began my journey with the ATC, I have had a close-up look at what a conservancy does, and I am proud of what our small but mighty team has accomplished in protecting what Benton MacKaye articulated at the fifth meeting of the ATC conference, in 1931: "A realm and not a trail marks the full aim of our effort. The trail is but the entrance…"

Above: A scenic view along the A.T. in North Carolina. Photo by Pamela Roy

"I AM PROUD OF WHAT OUR SMALL BUT MIGHTY TEAM HAS ACCOMPLISHED IN PROTECTING WHAT BENTON MACKAYE ARTICULATED [...] 'A REALM AND NOT A TRAIL MARKS THE FULL AIM OF OUR EFFORT.'"

PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY

Given the challenges of encroaching incompatible development, the growing list of invasive species, and the loss of ecosystem function, it's an enormous task to manage the A.T. landscape to support the ecological services required to sustain biodiversity and allow species to adapt and move. The Trail passes through many ecosystems, making it a crucial corridor for wildlife — especially considering the changing climate.

Every year, the team manages hundreds of acres that enhance views and are home to declining species such as golden-winged warblers, metalmark butterflies, and other species that prefer early successional habitat. Also known as young or disturbed habitats, early successional habitats were historically maintained through natural processes such as wildfires, flooding, windstorms, and the activities of large herbivores. These habitats support diverse wildlife by providing both food and cover. Could you imagine hiking the entire Trail without enjoying a monarch butterfly flitting across a meadow?

Part of the work of maintaining critical ecosystems requires addressing immediate threats to the health of an entire species. Many people are familiar with the American chestnut story. Once a keystone species across the Appalachian forests, the tree is now gone due to the chestnut blight. To every extent possible, we don't want that to happen again to other forest species. That's why the ATC's team has worked in recent years to treat the emerald ash borer (EAB), an invasive insect species that has been causing significant damage to ash trees (Fraxinus species) throughout North America. We are working swiftly to protect ash trees against EAB in an attempt to conserve some individuals that could ensure the survivability of the species once EAB has declined.

PARTNERING FOR LAND CONSERVATION

In 2015, the ATC and National Park Service recognized that we could not accomplish landscape conservation gains alone. We need the support of as many conservation partners as possible. So we convened the A.T. Landscape Partnership (ATLP), which includes over 100 partners today. The ATLP steering committee developed a strategic plan that identifies increasing the pace and scale of conservation within the Trail landscape. That landscape is broadly an area of approximately 5 miles on each side of the protected Trail corridor. The total A.T. landscape, including the protected Trail corridor, national parks, forests, and state lands, is nearly 27 million acres. Approximately 32 percent of this area has been conserved. In the coming decades, how might we get to 50 percent conserved while focusing on unprotected viewsheds and regions

The ATC's work to preserve biodiversity of the Trail landscape includes attention to species as small as a metalmark butterfly and as large as a 70-foot-tall ash tree. Above, seasonal staff monitor the metalmark butterfly population along the Trail in western Connecticut. Below, ATC staff and partners inject a healthy ash tree with an insecticide that inoculates it against the Emerald Ash Borer. Photos by Chris Gallaway / Horizonline Pictures

that provide functional connectivity for wildlife between larger, protected areas?

The ATC supports land conservation partners by providing leverage grants that allow our partners to move land acquisition projects across the finish line. Thanks to generous donations from The Volgenau Foundation and other private donors, the ATC has recently contributed nearly $4 million towards conserving over 80,000 acres within the Trail landscape.

The ATC also undertakes strategic land acquisition work through a land trust that now holds nearly 6,000 acres in fee or easements. Most recently, we worked to conserve nearly 1,000 acres in the Catawba Valley right under McAfee Knob. This area sits just outside the expanding outskirts of Roanoke, Virginia, and is vulnerable to new development. Today, the A.T. views, healthy forests, and headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay watershed in this region are protected forever, for all. The team is now planning and implementing forest restoration projects in this area and is considering opportunities to accommodate recreation and overnight use.

PROTECTING HIGH-QUALITY VIEWS

In recent years, the ATC and NPS have turned our attention to gathering and cataloging data about the scenic resources of the Trail. Our goal is to protect high-quality views well into the future. To do that, we must understand and document what we have today. It's both an art and a science to describe natural beauty, and we are fortunate to work with experts at the NPS and U.S. Forest Service to help us gather data on scenic quality, landscape features, and the level of impact a view has already sustained. Our team is well on its way to inventory scenic resources from all A.T. viewpoints. So far, we have collected data from points in West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maine. On deck next is Virginia.

Last but not least, the ATC's conservation agenda would not be complete without our advocacy work on Capitol Hill. During the 1980s and '90s, the ATC's then Executive Director, Dave Startzell, was a force to secure federal commitments to complete the Trail corridor. Today, over 99 percent of that corridor is protected. But that doesn't mean our work to actively engage Congress and federal agencies has ended. Given our broader landscape conservation

From left, Laura Belleville, Jackie Randle of The Bruce Trail Conservancy (Canada), and Cassidy Lord of the ATC at the second annual Brazilian Trails Congress in September 2023. Laura and Jackie are international board members of the World Trails Network.

goals, we need sustained policy-focused capacity. Since 2014, through the efforts of our federal policy director, we have worked with Congressional partners to create an A.T. House Caucus and have engaged in targeted federal policies to increase funding for conservation work.

The ATC's evolution as a conservancy is ongoing. On the horizon, the ATC is working with partners to analyze how the Trail landscape supports a broader East Coast conservation corridor for recreation and wildlife movement. With a changing climate, we need to have more strategic and targeted investments to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Benton MacKaye's prescient vision for the Trail is as relevant today as 100 years ago. With the Trail on the ground, we can, and should, invest more to achieve the broader conservation vision. As a Conservancy, we will continue strategizing, planning, and implementing projects that sustain this landscape into the next century and beyond.

–

Laura Belleville served in a variety of conservation-focused roles at the ATC for 18 years. In October 2023, she took on a new position as Senior Director of Conservation Programs at the National Forest Foundation.

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ATC'S 2023
STATE-BY-STATE
PHOTO CONTEST

Water meets sky at Lonesome Lake in New Hampshire. Photo by Brad "Jaws" Gibson

IN FEBRUARY 2023, WE PUT OUT THE CALL TO our online community to share their favorite photos of the Appalachian Trail in each state. We're pleased to report that our community responded enthusiastically to our call! Nine months and 14 states later, the ATC received over 1,900 photos! The most photos came from Maine, followed by Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Virginia.

As these pages attest, the images show the Trail in all its majesty — across all seasons and landscapes, from the southern balds to mountainous alpine areas, from pastoral lands to leafy green forests, from wetlands to rugged outcrops. In addition to the varied landscapes, the photos also point to the rich biodiversity of life along the Trail, from barred owls to salamanders, luna moths to wild ponies, Virginia bluebells to flame azaleas.

Although the 2023 contest has come to a close, we always welcome photo and video submissions via our website: ***appalachiantrail.org/media-submission-form***

A barred owl near Mount Prospect Overlook in Massachusetts. Photo by Amelia Stach

Above: Near Rand's View in Connecticut. Photo by Susie Milner; Below, Left to Right: Lehigh Gap in Pennsylvania. Photo by Matt "Grasshopper" Zimmerman; Near Pawling, New York. Photo by Tom Scully

Above, Left to Right: The view from Weverton Cliffs in Knoxville, Maryland. Photo by Alesha Donohue; Daybreak "somewhere in Tennessee." Photo by Steve Holsenbeck; Below: In the north Georgia woods. Photo by Brian Corbett

PUTTING A SHELTER IN PLACE

BY TRACY LIND

VISITORS WHO SPEND THE NIGHT IN AN Appalachian Trail shelter — or who rest and rejuvenate there for any amount of time — likely do not wonder how the shelter came to be. Most do not pause to consider how the wood and other materials got to the site, or who planned and built the shelter, or who maintains it throughout its decades of existence.

Perhaps that is as it should be. The Appalachian Trail is meant to be a simple footpath through the woods. However, with an ever-changing environment and increased visitor use, maintaining the A.T. is far from simple.

In fact, it takes thousands of people from dozens of organizations, agencies, and other entities to ensure the Trail remains a world-class outdoor recreational experience. I recently had the chance to see this complex cooperative management system in action while overseeing the replacement of two popular shelters in Connecticut.

After 40 years of service, the original Brassie Brook and Riga shelters had suffered from the cumulative impacts of weather, a small fire, pests, and general wear-and-tear. Volunteers with the AMC–CT Appalachian Trail Club recognized that the shelters were nearing the end of their useful life, and the ATC agreed they should be replaced.

We selected Woodlot Woodworks in New York to build two Adirondack shelter kits fitted specifically to each site. Once all the materials for the new shelters were ready, I arranged for their shipment to staging areas. Then, we closed the existing Brassie Brook and Riga shelters in September 2022 to begin demolition. Volunteers hiked almost two miles in and out to each site, carrying tools and other equipment. After breaking down the shelters, they cut and dispersed the native logs throughout the forest so they could revert back to nature.

The most dramatic part of the project came when airlifting the construction materials to the shelter sites. But first, we had to find locations for the airlifts that would minimally impact the hiker experience and the environment. This meant arranging for my ATC colleagues Marian Orlousky and Dan Hale to conduct a botanical survey to make sure we weren't threatening any rare or endangered species. I also secured the assistance of a National Park Service ar-

chaeologist, Joel Dukes, to scout the site for tribal or cultural resources that could be vulnerable.

Finally, after 24 separate airlifts of project material loads, each weighing approximately 7,000 pounds, construction began at the two sites in April and May 2023. Volunteers once again hiked two miles in with tools to construct the new shelters. The new Brassie Brook shelter opened in June, followed by Riga the next month. In all, it took almost five years and over 1,200 hours of volunteer labor to remove and replace the shelters — which are just two out of more than 250 along the Trail.

There's a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Clearly, it takes a grassroots effort and a host of volunteers and partners to raise an A.T. shelter. I am forever grateful for the past, current, and future generations of people who dedicate their time and energy to protecting and maintaining this one-of-a-kind public resource.

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Tracy Lind is ATC Regional Manager for Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

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Constructing the new Brassie Brook shelter in Connecticut required a dozen airlifts of logs, roofing, and other materials. The effort involved in coordinating the project resulted in jubilation upon the safe delivery of shelter components. The shelter opened in May 2023. Photos by Christoph Geiss

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