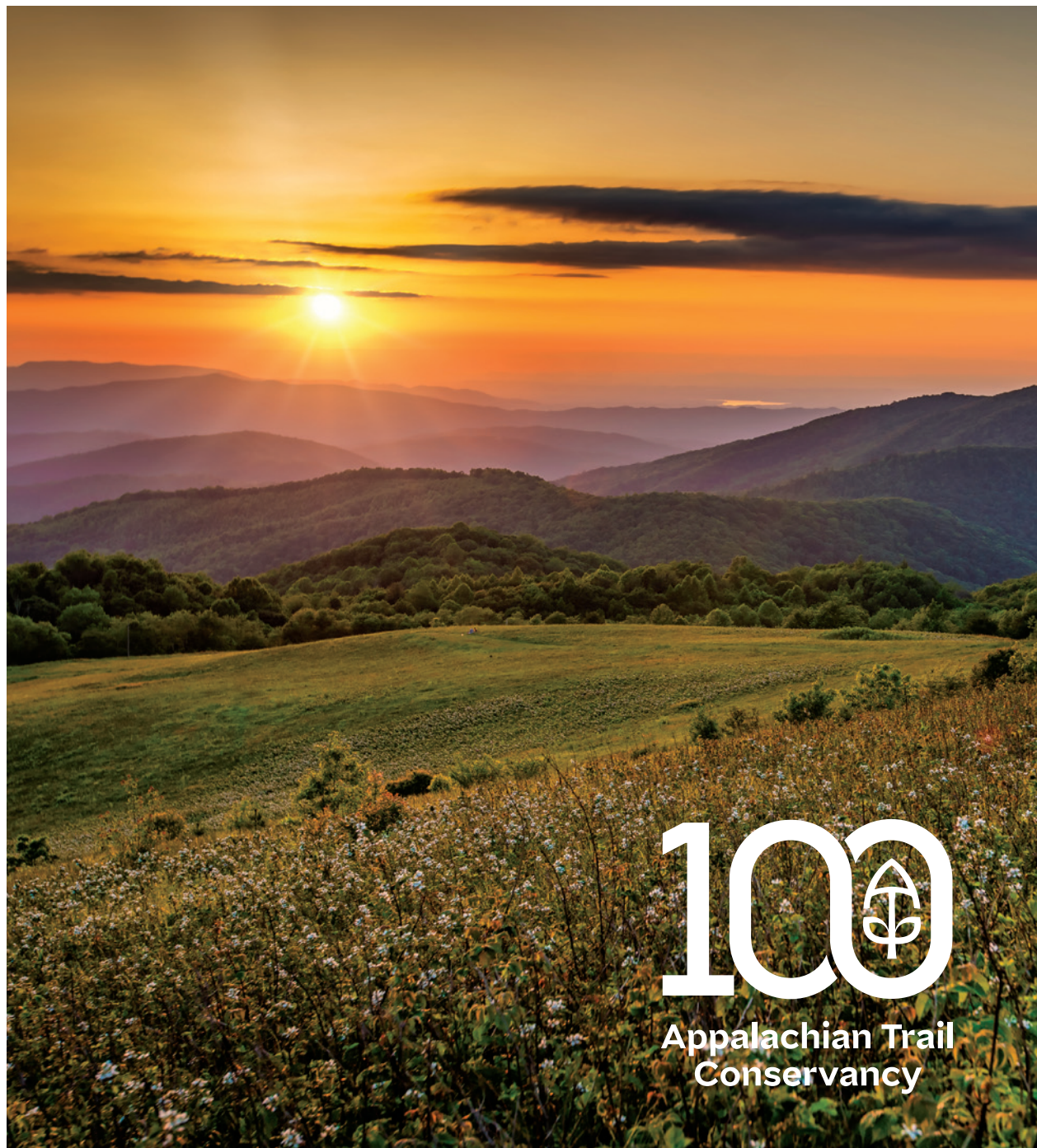


# A JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / SPRING 2025

CELEBRATION EDITION





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*Max Patch on the North Carolina – Tennessee border.  
Photo by Katherine Dellinger*



THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL  
CONSERVANCY AT 100  
EST. MARCH 3, 1925



# A JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / SPRING 2025

## MISSION

Our mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

## VISION

The Appalachian Trail and its landscape are always protected, resilient, and connected for all.

## ATC EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ATC calendar with  
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The Appalachian Trail needs your support all year long! Start a monthly gift today and help the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's ongoing efforts to keep the Trail protected and connected. **Become an A.T. Hero and receive the ATC's official calendar, plus your regular membership benefits.**



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PHOTO BY ED COONEY

Observations, conclusions, opinions, and product endorsements expressed in *A.T. Journeys* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of members of the board or staff of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

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CONTRIBUTORS



**Katherine Dellinger**

Kat grew up in Florida and Hawaii, spending most of her childhood at the beach. She attended undergrad at Florida State University, moved up to North Carolina for graduate school, fell in love with the state, and has lived in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains since finishing her graduate degree in 2006. Kat has always loved photography and incorporated it into her passion for hiking. Her favorite trekking partner is her 5-year-old Vizsla, Truman.

Kat is an avid hiker and loves all aspects of being in the backcountry. She has thru-hiked the John Muir Trail and High Sierra Trail, with plans of repeating the HST this fall. Her favorite part about where she lives is her access to the Appalachian Trail. In less than 2 hours she can get to Carver's Gap, Grayson Highlands, Hot Springs, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park. She has section hiked hundreds of miles of the A.T., including multiple trips to the White Mountains of New England.

Kat has been a nurse anesthetist for 17 years, and maintains her work/life balance by focusing on open-heart anesthesia during the week and not getting lost in the woods on the weekends. She hopes to pass on her love for the outdoors to her children, who have spent many nights in the backcountry with her, gazing up at the Milky Way.

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

In "The Digital Trail" article (*A.T. Journeys*, Fall 2024) our coverage of digital resources at Basecamp did not include the vital contributions of Georgia Appalachian Trail Club volunteers and Trail Ambassadors. We sincerely apologize for the omission and have updated the digital version of the magazine to reflect the invaluable help the Club volunteers provide hikers starting their journeys at Amicalola Falls.



**Leon M. Rubin**

After hiking about 100 miles of the Appalachian Trail – Front Royal to Harpers Ferry and Harpers Ferry to Caledonia State Park – with his dad and some former Boy Scout buddies back in the '80s, Leon M. Rubin left the A.T. behind until he serendipitously ended up moving to Dahlonega, Georgia, (an A.T. Community™) in 2006. Since then, he's hiked what he likes to call "bits and pieces" of the Trail, finally making it to Springer Mountain last year – twice! He volunteers as a Trail Ambassador with the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club and enjoys connecting with and encouraging hikers he meets at A.T. Basecamp.

Leon is a freelance writer and retired public relations consultant who spent most of his career working with nonprofit organizations. An Ohio native, he lived in South Florida for more than sixteen years before he came to North Georgia, essentially qualifying him for "halfback" status. He loves exploring the numerous trails and waterfalls in the region whenever possible. Leon is happily married with three children, two granddaughters, a dog, and a passel of cats. He's grateful for the opportunity to share his love for the Trail through writing for *A.T. Journeys*.



**Tara Wu**

Tara Wu, a New England native, was once terrified of mountains. She fell in love with Southern Appalachia after facing that fear and thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. Redirecting her career to conservation and sustainability, Tara is now completing her second graduate degree in Spatial Data Science.

Based in Asheville, she currently supports National Forests in North Carolina with GIS mapping, technical writing, and infrastructure assessment following natural disasters. Tara also serves on the ATC's Trail Management Committee.

Her passions include trail work, running, and landscape photography. She loves to write about places that matter and people who deserve recognition.

In her spare time, Tara and her husband maintain sections of the A.T. They reminisce over their time spent as caretakers in New Hampshire and foster a variety of animals. After finishing her degree, Tara hopes to return to marathon running – 23 marathons down, a million more to go.



**Appalachian Trail Conservancy**

**TRAIL STORE**



# Shop Centennial

Celebrate the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's 100th anniversary in style with new swag in the ATC Trail Store. Every purchase advances the ATC's mission to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.



**Shop the collection today!**  
**atctrailstore.org**

Scan the code today. Use code **ATCMEMBER** at checkout for your membership discount!

**Wear your love  
for the Trail.**



# A UNIFYING FORCE FOR THE A.T.

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THAT DREW me to volunteer on the Appalachian Trail, with the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, was how the management of the Trail was accomplished through an incredible collaboration between everyday citizen volunteers and the federal government.

As I got more involved, I learned that it is not just federal partners but state and local jurisdictions, adjacent communities, supporters, other partner organizations, and thousands of volunteers beyond my one Club that together make up the critical grassroots effort of the Trail's protection.

And the singular, consistent entity pulling all these pieces together is the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. For 100 years we have been the unifying force that makes sure the Trail's millions of visitors each year can experience the transformative power of the Appalachian Trail.

2025 is a year of celebration and acknowledgment of all that has transpired these past 100 years for the Conservancy and our Trail Clubs. This incredible example of what can be accomplished when people come together to build and protect something greater than any one of the individuals involved stands as a testament to the power of cooperation and purpose.

However, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy is not a monument to the Trail — something that is static and stands unmoving — rather it is the current upon which the A.T. and the Cooperative Management System that sustains the Trail is able to move through both rapids and smooth waters so that it remains afloat and accessible far into the future.

Since 1925, the Conservancy has led the management, protection, and conservation of the Appalachian Trail and its surrounding landscape. Benton MacKaye envisioned a place where humans could connect with the natural world and find respite from what he called the problems of living. And now, more than ever, we need this place and space.

From building the Trail to ensuring permanent protection for what has become the world's longest footpath, the Conservancy, along with its maintaining Clubs and thousands of volunteers, has done the work of creating the "People's Trail." The result is that the Trail continues to be a thing of dreams for people from all over the world each year, who experience the transformational nature of the A.T., whether by thru-hiking all 2,197.4 miles, tackling sections here and there, or walking for an hour on a sunny day.

Milestones tend to be when we look back and congratulate ourselves on what we have accomplished. And it is important to take note of success. But it is also important to recognize that our 100th birthday, March 3rd, has come and gone, meaning ATC is now in its 101st year. We've passed our "Centennial" and are already into our next century. So, while we are excited about this year's celebrations, the bulk of our focus and work is toward the future because nothing guarantees that what we have accomplished to date will endure for the next 100 years without continued work and vigilance.

Recent decisions to freeze federal funding for trails and lay off federal land managers threaten the future of the A.T. These quick and broad actions ignore the volunteers who diligently maintain the trails and undermine the largely rural outdoor recreational economies that generate \$1.2 trillion in economic output annually, according to new data released by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable.

While we have private financial support and rely on volunteers for frontline work, federal funds provide key seed money and supply costs — not to mention expertise — that ensure the Trail is safe and accessible for all. We also depend on personnel in the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and National Park Service (NPS) for oversight and supervision of crucial trail improvement projects, like bridge replacements, privy upgrades, invasive species removal, and natural re-

BENTON MACKAYE ENVISIONED A PLACE WHERE HUMANS COULD CONNECT WITH THE NATURAL WORLD ... AND NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE NEED THIS PLACE AND SPACE.



source restoration. The current 10 percent reduction of USFS staff and 5 percent reduction at the NPS will further hinder already understaffed teams.

With increasingly catastrophic weather events and the threat of no federal support, the dangers to the Trail will increase in ways not seen in nearly a century. Natural disasters like wildfires, hurricanes, and floods have tested the Trail before but, up to this point, the public-private partnership of our Cooperative Management System has ensured that it remains

accessible and vibrant. For the first time, the future of this system is in question.

Preserving the Appalachian Trail is about more than just maintaining a hiking path; it's about safeguarding a vital part of America's identity and heritage. Once that is lost, we can't get it back.

Only together can we be sure to keep the Trail alive.

Sandra Marra / President & CEO



# ★ TRAILHEAD

HIGHLIGHTS / EVENTS



## APPALACHIAN TRAIL FOREVER STAMPS NOW AVAILABLE

By Ann Simonelli, Communications Director

ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, THE U.S. POSTAL Service held a first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony for the new Appalachian Trail Forever stamps at the Amicalola Falls State Park Visitor Center in Georgia.

The pane of 15 stamps — one for each of the 14 states the A.T. traverses and one depicting the “green tunnel” — celebrates the beauty of this iconic national scenic trail in honor of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s 100th anniversary. The special event attracted a crowd of more than 200 people, including legendary thru-hiker Gene Espy, stamp collectors, members of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, and A.T. enthusiasts and hikers. The event helped kick off the ATC’s centennial celebrations ahead of its March 3 birthday.

Author and adventurer Jennifer Pharr Davis served as the mistress of ceremonies and shared how she, like many other thru-hikers, have a special appreciation for the postal service as they rely on post offices near the Trail to pick up resupply boxes during their journeys.

Daniel Tangherlini, member of USPS Board of Governors, remarked: “These stamps, like the Trail itself, symbolize some of the most important aspects of our national identity — conservation, community, volunteerism and civic commitment.”

ATC president Sandi Marra, whose father was a career letter carrier, closed the ceremony with gratitude

for this recognition for the Trail. She reminded the audience that this beloved and internationally revered treasure needs thoughtful and proactive care and strong collaboration with private and public partners, local communities, and passionate individuals to ensure that future generations can continue to step foot on the path and walk away transformed.

Other ceremony participants included Angie Johnson, director of state parks and historic sites for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources; Michelle Mitchell, director of recreation, wilderness, heritage, and volunteers for the U.S. Forest Service; and Meatrice Carter, USPS Atlanta consumer affairs, who sang the national anthem.



The A.T. stamps can be purchased at the Damascus Trail Center, ATC’s Harpers Ferry Visitor Center, through The Postal Store ([store.usps.com](https://store.usps.com)), by calling **844.737.7826**, by mail through USA Philatelic, or at Post Office locations nationwide.

Left: Amicalola Falls, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Viola / [cynthiaviola.com](https://cynthiaviola.com); Above left: Sandi Marra, ATC president and CEO, speaking during the ceremony. Photo by Ann Simonelli; Right: Courtesy of USPS





Slayton Johnson (co-owner) and Mike Crooks (a rafting guide) of Wahoo's Adventures. Photos courtesy of Wahoo's Adventures

## ATC SPONSORS FREE DAILY FERRY IN ERWIN, TN

HIKERS PASSING THROUGH ERWIN, TENNESSEE, can now safely cross the Nolichucky River using a free daily ferry service. In the past, visitors to the Trail used the Chestoa Pike Bridge, which was destroyed during Hurricane Helene. The river raft ferry will transport hikers near the former site of the bridge and will be the official route of the A.T. during its operation this spring.

The hiker ferry is made possible through the generous donations to the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund and the efforts of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and its partners — including Wahoo's Adventure Nolichucky, Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club (TEHCC), Uncle Johnny's Nolichucky Hostel Cabins & Camping, Unicoi County, and the town of Erwin. The ferry will operate from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily through June 15.

For more details visit [appalachiantrail.org/ferry](https://appalachiantrail.org/ferry)



## Volunteer with Konnarock

A joint venture of the ATC, southern Trail clubs, the U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service, the Conservancy's Konnarock Trail Crew takes on A.T. maintenance projects from Rockfish Gap in Virginia to Springer Mountain in Georgia. No experience is necessary, and the ATC provides training and equipment. During various sessions from April to mid-August, volunteers learn and use maintaining skills to perform vital trail work in a supportive environment with fellow A.T. advocates.

For more info and to register for a crew session, please visit [appalachiantrail.org/konnarock](https://appalachiantrail.org/konnarock)



Professional saw crews — hired through the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund — help to clear the Trail affected by Hurricane Helene. Photo by Jim Baum

## BUSINESSES RALLY FOR A RESILIENT A.T.

By Brian Sewell

HURRICANE HELENE WAS A STRIKING reminder of the threats facing the A.T. and trailside communities. But the response it inspired reflects the commitment of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's corporate and business partners to promoting a resilient Trail. As the scale of destruction became clear, the partners expressed solidarity with affected communities, shared ATC updates, and kickstarted the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund.

Donations to the Resiliency Fund in the aftermath of Helene helped the ATC assess the widespread damage and deploy crews that cleared thousands of downed trees and other hazards. The outdoor app AllTrails was among the first to contact the ATC about ways to help. Through a donation and free in-app

advertising, AllTrails was a catalyst for recovery in multiple ways, describing its pledge as “a promise to support the ATC in getting people back to the trails they love.”

Major support also came from Athletic Brewing Company, which contributed to the Resiliency Fund and the work of the ATC's Konnarock Trail Crew in the south. ATC President and CEO Sandi Marra said the company's contribution will “help ensure the People's Trail remains open, connected, and able to withstand the effects of future disasters.”

Additionally, the ATC is grateful for other partners — including BearVault, Osprey, Wild Tribute, and FarOut — and the 1,220 individual donors who supported the Resiliency Fund.





# HIKING THE HILL IN SUPPORT OF COOPERATIVE A.T. MANAGEMENT

By Brendan Mysliwiec, Director of Federal Policy and Legislation

IN FEBRUARY, THE APPALACHIAN Trail Conservancy participated in the 28th annual Hike the Hill event, where the hiking and trails community visits Washington, D.C. to discuss important issues with federal lawmakers. ATC staff and board members met with the staff or Members of nearly 30 Congressional offices from states along the Trail and on both sides of the aisle. The recent freezes of federal assistance and mass layoffs led to timely discussions about the crucial role federal partners play in the management of the A.T. The Appalachian Trail and its Cooperative Management System (CMS) has many strong supporters in Congress and the ATC takes seriously its obligation to help them champion cooperative management and the Trail’s iconic landscape.

The CMS has been working on the A.T. for 100 years and relies on mutual trust and respect. Sudden disruptions in services from any partner creates a burden on the other partners. In the A.T.’s CMS, the volunteer corps and ATC and Club employees do the majority of the work. However, without federal partners, none of this work is possible. The ATC is committed to telling the story of the Trail’s cooperative management and encouraging members to share how important the A.T. is to everyone.

The ATC is also working closely with the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service to address Hurricane Helene recovery needs in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. This includes treadway and facilities projects, natural resource management, and mapping. Although the hurricane has strained the Trail, recovery efforts have strengthened the Conservancy’s partnership with federal agencies. The ATC will continue to work with its governmental and non-governmental partners to preserve the vibrant and dynamic A.T. Landscape and to support conservation, recreation, and the sense of place that makes the Appalachians irreplaceable.

For more information on cooperative management and the ATC’s advocacy efforts, visit: [appalachiantrail.org/advocacy](https://appalachiantrail.org/advocacy)

# CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: ATC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE nominations for positions on the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Board of Directors are being accepted through May 27, 2025. This year, the ATC will welcome up to seven board members, some of whom are returning directors. A slate of nominees will be recommended by the Nominating Committee to be approved by the full Board and then voted on by ATC membership. Results will be announced at the ATC’s annual meeting in August, and directors will begin serving on the governing body at the winter 2025 meeting.

If you, or someone you know, are interested in serving on the ATC Board, we welcome your nomination. The Nominating Committee considers many criteria when reviewing nominations. Candidates should have a passion for the ATC’s mission of protecting, managing, and advocating for the Appalachian Trail, along with a commitment to its values of land protection, volunteerism, and community engagement. As stewards of this national treasure, the Board aspires to represent all people who use the Trail now and in perpetuity.

In honor of the ATC’s 100th anniversary this year, the Conservancy launched an exciting Centennial Campaign to keep the Trail alive and lay the financial foundation to protect and manage the A.T. for the next 100 years. Candidates with capital campaign experience and those who are able to take an active role in fundraising are encouraged to highlight this in their nomination.

To learn more about how to submit a nomination and what to include with your nomination, visit [appalachiantrail.org/board2025](https://appalachiantrail.org/board2025)

# New Member Survey Now Open

Receiving *A.T. Journeys* is just one benefit of being a member of the ATC. Help us deliver a meaningful membership experience by taking our survey today.



Scan the code or visit [surveymonkey.com/r/ATCmember2025](https://surveymonkey.com/r/ATCmember2025)



# Photo Submissions for the Official 2027 ATC Calendar

Do you have a photograph that just screams, “This is the A.T.”? Would someone enjoy looking at it for up to 31 days straight? Submissions of color digital images for the official 2027 ATC calendar will be accepted until July 15, 2025. The specifications are not the same as used for our social media or various contests.

Learn more and submit photos at [appalachiantrail.org/calendar](https://appalachiantrail.org/calendar)



# ATC FILM FEATURED IN AMERICAN CONSERVATION FILM FESTIVAL

SAVING THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN RED SPRUCE was chosen as an American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) Official Selection for 2025. In the southern Appalachians, red spruce trees on the highest mountaintops form dark green “sky islands,” and are the center of a complex ecosystem that several endangered species rely upon for their survival. The short film by Chris Gallaway of Horizonline Pictures presents the efforts the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and its partners — including the Southern Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative — are making to preserve and restore the red spruce forests. During its film festival in March, the ACFF hosted a screening of the film and a conversation with Katie Allen, ATC’s Director of Landscape Conservation. In support of the ACFF and the red spruce, Alma Bea — a Shepherdstown, WV, restaurant focused on Appalachian cuisine — gave red spruce saplings to diners who attended the film festival.



Scan the code to watch the movie, or visit [appalachiantrail.org/spruce](https://appalachiantrail.org/spruce)



A NEW LOOK AND BOLD VISION

By Caroline Ralston

THE ATC MAY HAVE JUST TURNED 100, but plans for its centennial celebration year were years in the making. This once-in-a-lifetime milestone is an opportunity to build awareness, respect, and support for the Appalachian Trail and the collaborative efforts critical to ensuring it is protected, healthy, and connected for all.


One key centennial initiative was to strengthen the ATC’s brand. The project began with thorough research and stakeholder and expert interviews, which confirmed some hard truths: Data showed a general lack of knowledge or understanding about the Conservancy’s programs and work. All learnings were compiled, assessed, and fine-tuned until a concept materialized that felt just right.

In February, the ATC unveiled its new look and

bold vision for the next 100 years. The ATC’s brand identity now more accurately reflects the scope of the ATC’s work, how it has evolved over the last 100 years, and the personality of the amazing and dedicated individuals who share their passion, talents, knowledge, and love for the outdoors by becoming ATC members, volunteers, partners, and staff.


The logo concept was inspired by the conservation of nature and the biodiversity that is critical to the A.T., as well as the ongoing efforts needed to maintain the Trail and its surrounding landscape. The design symbolizes the budding growth and climate resiliency that sprout directly from ATC’s conservation efforts, and the outstanding volunteer work required to maintain the integrity of the treadway.

ELEMENTS OF THE ATC’S NEW LOGO




Our Logo

The ATC’s new logo concept was inspired by the A.T. and its surrounding landscape, biodiversity, mountains, and volunteerism.




A.T. Symbol

The A.T. is at the heart of our work and at the heart of the new logo.




Protected Ecosystem

The ATC protects not only the treadway, but the connected corridor of lands surrounding the Trail, represented by the closed ring that encircles the logo.




Growth & Biodiversity

The A.T. is an important corridor where biodiversity can thrive. The ATC’s work to conserve one of the most critical landscapes on our planet is represented by two leaves growing outward.



Mountain Peak

The Trail’s diverse landscapes, from the green tunnel to mountain peaks, represented by the pointed top of the logo, inspire millions of visitors to the A.T. each year.



Shovel

The work of volunteers is integral to maintaining the treadway and is represented by the shovel.

RIGHT: HUMP MOUNTAIN RISING HIGH ABOVE BRADLEY GAP, NORTH CAROLINA. PHOTO BY EDDIE O’LEARY

THEN & NOW

The ATC’s previous and new logo.



ALWAYS & FOREVER

The Appalachian Trail symbol remains unchanged, as does the ATC’s dedication to ensuring the Trail not only exists but thrives as a national scenic treasure, enriching the lives of those who explore it.



“Keep the Trail Alive”

is the ATC’s new motto and represents our steadfast commitment to conserving and caring for all 2,197.4 miles of the A.T. and its surrounding landscape. Every day, and in all that we do, we strive to keep the A.T. alive for future generations, so that everyone can step on its path and walk away transformed.



**Roanoke  
Appalachian Trail  
Club’s Giving Back  
Celebration**

*By Linda Mulheren, RATC President*

One hundred years of hard work has brought us a great Trail that we all know and love. In honor of the ATC’s 100th anniversary, the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC) is sponsoring prizes and awards for those Giving Back and helping to fulfill our mission to preserve the Appalachian Trail for generations to come. We hope you’ll aim for 100 volunteer hours, but any amount will be rewarded. Anyone can volunteer. We have needs big and small – some require work in the woods, many do not. Will you help us protect this iconic treasure? We care for some pretty awesome miles of the A.T. in Southwest Virginia, and this work truly takes a team!

For more information and updates visit [facebook.com/RoanokeATC](https://facebook.com/RoanokeATC) or [RATC.org](https://RATC.org).

**CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS  
AT ATC VISITOR CENTERS**

*By Emily Mayo, Senior Manager – Visitor Centers*



CENTENNIAL CAKE PHOTO BY ATC STAFF

TO CELEBRATE THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL Conservancy’s 100 years of dedication to protecting the iconic Trail, two of the ATC’s Visitor Centers hosted special events to honor the Trail’s history and to inspire future generations of Trail enthusiasts to continue supporting this beloved landmark. In Harpers Ferry, WV, community members gathered to mark the ATC centennial, and a total of 101 visitors stopped by, including 85 tourists who were curious about the history and future of the Appalachian Trail. A highlight of the event was the cake competition, featuring six entries from volunteers, ATC staff, and Brandt from Cross Trails Hostel. Dedicated volunteers who have made the ATC’s mission possible over the years were celebrated at a special lunch, thoughtfully organized by Visitor Center Supervisor Melanie Spencer, which took place on the second floor of the Visitor Center. It was an opportunity to reflect on the contributions made by those who dedicate their time and effort to the Trail’s preservation, education, and outreach.

The celebrations continued in Damascus, VA, where the spirit of community and service was front and center. The event welcomed 114 visitors, many of whom were introduced to a variety of volunteer and partner organizations. Notable contributors included the Mount Rogers A.T. Club, the Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club, Grayson Highlands State Park, the United States Forest Service, and Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards. Visitors had the chance to enjoy an A.T. history presentation, crosscut saw demonstrations, and vendor booths showcasing local products and services. The day also featured a performance of a song written by The Crooked Road Singer Songwriters paying tribute to the Appalachian Trail’s unique cultural heritage.

The events in Harpers Ferry and Damascus not only celebrated the achievements of the ATC over the past century — and the crucial role of dedicated volunteers, local communities, and A.T. visitors — but also set the stage for the next 100 years of stewardship, education, and advocacy. We look forward to continuing this journey with you — whether on the Trail, at the Visitor Centers, or through support of the ATC’s mission. Thank you to all who made this celebration a success, and here’s to the next 100 years!



**JOIN THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

*By Caroline Ralston*

EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE ATC LAUNCHED A NEW CENTENNIAL WEBSITE, [keepthetrailalive.org](https://keepthetrailalive.org). Designed to help our friends and supporters join our year-long Centennial Celebration, the site features ATC’s vision for the next 100 years, history, videos, limited-edition merchandise that supports our mission-driven work, and other ways to get involved.

The ATC’s Centennial Celebration continues through 2025 with events throughout the 14 states. Here is a sampling of where you can find the ATC this spring.



With hiking workshops, pack shakedown, and a send-off breakfast for flip-flopers, this free community event is a great excuse to visit Harpers Ferry and a great way to start your flip-flop thru-hike. Camping is available at the Brunswick Family Campground and a shuttle between Brunswick and Harpers Ferry is provided by River and Trails Outfitters and the towns of Harpers Ferry, Bolivar, and Brunswick.



Hot Springs has long been a beloved stop for A.T. hikers and, since 1987, Trailfest has been a cherished tradition. This year, the celebration goes beyond the Trail to support the town’s recovery following Hurricane Helene – it’s about community, resilience, and the spirit of rebuilding together. (The event has a new name, the Town & Trail Fest, but is the same great festival!)



The Appalachian Trail Days Festival is the biggest event of the year in Damascus and the world’s largest celebration of the Appalachian Trail and hiker culture. Stop by the ATC’s Damascus Trail Center for programs, giveaways, and good times. The Town of Damascus still faces a long road to recovery from Hurricane Helene but is now open for business. The Friendliest Town on the Trail needs your continued support.

To stay informed visit [keepthetrailalive.org](https://keepthetrailalive.org), follow the Appalachian Trail Conservancy on social media, and sign up for our weekly Trailway News email.



## PERSPECTIVES

REBUILDING WITH RESILIENCE:  
WHAT THE A.T. CAN TEACH US AFTER THE STORM

By Tara Wu

BENTON MACKAYE ENVISIONED THE Appalachian Trail as a sanctuary, removed from modern distractions. For those who hike its nearly 2,200 miles, the Trail offers a unique opportunity to find purpose through resilience, community, and self-sufficiency. These lessons can reveal a deeper understanding of what it takes to lead a meaningful life.

Before I hiked the A.T., I was already familiar with minimalism — not by choice, but out of necessity. Growing up in poverty as a neurodivergent woman, I developed resilience and self-sufficiency to navigate life's challenges. However, it was not until my journey on the A.T. that I realized how little I truly needed to feel fulfilled. Self-sufficiency became my strength, while the hiking community provided the necessary support during moments of injury, exhaustion, or mental struggle.

The A.T. taught me fearlessness, but upon summitting Katahdin, a new anxiety emerged. I feared that returning to the “real world” would distance me from the grounded self I had found. Would society's focus on wealth and status overshadow the lessons learned on the Trail? In the seven years since my hike, life off the A.T. has shown me that fear is inevitable but can be confronted through self-reliance and community — especially in times of crisis.

**From Thru-Hiker to Homeowner**

Two years ago, my husband and I bought our first home in North Carolina. After years of transient living, homeownership felt foreign. We chose Asheville for its connection to the mountains and its potential as a base location for trail maintenance and conservation. We purchased a modest home, determined to live simply. At first, we slept on the floor, embracing the minimalist lifestyle we valued on the A.T., but as time passed, building a home felt right. Like golden winged warblers atop a grassy bald, we slowly gathered materials that would make our nest cozy.



A crew clears trees near Asheville.

Photo by NPS/W. Kinsey

Our quiet life was interrupted on September 27, 2024. Two evenings prior, Hurricane Helene's precursor storm hit. My husband and I joked about the storm arriving early, unaware of the danger ahead. The night of the storm, we took shelter in our basement. By 5:00 a.m., the power cut out. We were prepared, having learned from our A.T. experience to stockpile supplies, but the storm soon escalated beyond our expectations.

**The Strain of Self-Sufficiency in Crisis**

The following days were disorienting. We had no electricity, phone service, or running water, and our neighborhood was isolated from the rest of the city. As supplies dwindled, we found ourselves searching for water and propane. Tempers flared as people

fought for limited supplies. The perpetual whir of search-and-rescue helicopters overhead drove home the reality that self-sufficiency alone could not carry us through this crisis. In these dark moments, our neighbors stepped up. Many made dangerous trips across the state to bring back supplies for those who couldn't leave. Their acts of kindness mirrored the camaraderie of trail families on the A.T., showing me once again that self-reliance doesn't mean isolation; it means finding strength in yourself and sharing that strength with others.

**Facing Fear Together:  
The Role of Community**

The storm tested both our physical and emotional endurance. The constant search for survivors and victims reminded us of how fragile life can be. Despite the uncertainty, our neighbors' support helped us cope. I found myself reflecting on a lightning storm I experienced during my hike through the Smokies, and the comfort from a communal feast and roaring fire at the shelter later that night. This memory helped me reframe current challenges as part of a larger journey.

In the wake of Helene, lessons of self-reliance and sharing strength once again became clear. After a week, my husband and I were finally able to fill our car with fuel and began volunteering with disaster relief efforts. We worked alongside familiar faces — Appalachian Trail Conservancy and Forest Service staff — who were also helping. From shoveling mud out of downtown Hot Springs to conducting wellness checks on missing persons and completing trail hazard surveys, the spirit of mutual aid that thrives on the A.T. was alive in our region. Even in the toughest of times, the lessons of the Trail endured.

**Rebuilding After the Storm:  
A Call for Those Who Love Appalachia**

As the weeks passed, it became clear that recovering from a disaster of this scale would take years. The physical damage from the storm is still devastating. Roads, communities, and forests have been severely compromised or entirely destroyed. Landslides, flooded neighborhoods, and toppled trees serve as a constant reminder: we cannot rebuild in isolation. While self-sufficiency is invaluable in the face of disaster, it is community strength that truly endures. Rebuilding efforts, from restoring trail towns to repairing trails, must be driven by collective strength. Volunteers must also embody patience and compassion, offering both physical and emotional support to those who have lost so much. Rebuilding southern Appalachia requires more than just repairing homes — it calls for restoring the essence of these mountain towns: the people, culture, and deep connection to the land.

Fear is an inevitable part of a crisis, but it is through self-reliance and community that we can face it and rebuild. Whether on the A.T. or in a storm-ravaged town, individual strength is magnified when shared with others. To those who cherish these mountains and communities, please help contribute to the recovery from Hurricane Helene. Whether by volunteering, donating, or offering a helping hand to neighbors, we must all share our strength. In doing so, we will rebuild not only the physical structures of these towns but also the spirit of resilience that makes these communities so special.

Editor's Note: See page 6 to find out more about Tara Wu and page 40 for her article on Hurricane Helene restoration efforts.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY

APPALACHIANTRAIL.ORG/SHARE

We want to share stories of the recovery and rebuilding efforts in our A.T. Communities. Please submit updates and images so we can shine a light on these efforts and encourage additional support.



## VIGNETTE

## CELEBRATING SISTER CLUBS: THE SHIN-ETSU TRAIL CLUB AND THE GEORGIA APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUB

By Jay M. Dement

IN OCTOBER, A GROUP OF GEORGIA Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) members made an ambassadorial trip to Japan to engage the Shin-etsu Trail as a “Sister Trail.” The GATC Hiker Pals included Eddi Minche, Jay Dement, Lynne Beeson, Marianne Skeen, Marion McLean, Richard Judy, Shelley Rose, Sherry Rotondo, and Susie McNeely. This included the current and five past presidents and a former president of the Len Foote Hike-Inn. The trip was the result of a connection begun almost twenty years ago when our members hosted some of the Shin-etsu Trail Club (STC) founders who visited the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the GATC to learn about the organizational structure of long-distance trails. (Sarah Adams, ATC’s Regional Manager – Georgia and Nantahala, has deep ties with the Shin-etsu Trail and has been helpful in the STC’s growth.) Members of the STC visited us again in the spring of 2023, giving rise to the idea of traveling to Japan to hike their trail.

The Shin-etsu Trail is a 68-mile woodland trail on the border between Nagano and Niigata Prefectures in the alpine region of central Japan. The trail showcases primeval forests of beech, birch, larch, maple, cedar, and more. Inspired in part by the Appalachian Trail, the Shin-etsu Trail is the pioneer of long-distance trails in Japan, with other long trails being developed in recent years. The trail is on land mainly owned by the national government (Forest Service) and municipalities. Five percent is owned by private landowners, who have given permission to use the land.

The STC’s guiding principles are to ensure that the precious natural, cultural, and historic resources of the area can be preserved into the future. The club has created an impressive infrastructure for the trail. There is a great website and comprehensive trail guide, published in Japanese and English. The trail is well marked with blazes and location infor-



Club members take a break from the trail to enjoy a meal together. Photo courtesy of Jay M. Dement / GATC

mation and is easy to follow. When the STC undertakes a new project, support comes from the national government, prefectural governments, and private foundations. In addition, sales of goods, dispatch of guides, and cooperative funds for trail maintenance are the main sources of funding.

Operations are managed by one full-time staff member and six part-time staff members. Additionally, more than 30 registered guides are available to share their knowledge of the trail with visitors. About 300 volunteers help maintain the trail per year.

### The Hike

We were amazed by the attention and support the STC provided our Hiker Pals group, including pre-trip planning, hotel reservations, and shuttling. We also enjoyed the expertise of highly qualified and certified guides while on the trail. Lodging included western and traditional rooms, many with onsens (hot spring baths), as well as traditional Japanese breakfasts and dinners.

The hike proved to be very strenuous. Some parts of the trail are very steep with grades of  $\pm 35$  percent — the A.T. is generally graded at  $< 20$  percent. In place of steps there are footholds carved into the mud to help get up and down slopes, which make it challenging when wet and slippery.

While we had some clouds and light rain, most of the time, the views were spectacular. The trail goes through many beech forests, which receive heavy snowfall up to twelve feet. This causes the trees to bend, many leaning over the trail and creating obstacles. There is resistance to removing these hurdles, which we would consider blowdowns. Their Japanese philosophy is that one walks closer to nature when having to navigate a natural environment.

One day about thirty STC members joined us for our hike. It was amazing to see so many show up for us! We started with a group circle introducing ourselves and then we were led in some warm-up exercises. Later that same day, after hiking 8 miles, we were surprised with trail magic. The club had set up a number of chairs and cooked us oden, a Japanese traditional specialty for us to enjoy. They also had a Treasure Box with other goodies.

### Trail Maintenance Meeting and Symposium

After nine days on the trail, it was time for the STC’s annual two-day meeting and symposium. Trail clubs and organizations from all over Japan were represented at this event with some attendees driving many hours each way to participate.

The trail maintenance workshop was split into three teams. We discussed A.T. clearance standards and why we cut trees and brush. Trail maintenance training concentrated on the need for water management. The idea of moving water off the trail was a new concept for many. Berm removal and drainage dips were discussed and demonstrated. Each team visited their respective sections and made general observations about the condition and discussed solutions. Then the volunteers broke into smaller groups and started working. One worker commented that she would usually dig the trail down the middle (cupping) but now understood that was not a good idea. In addition, we were able to share the concept of developing trail standards and trail eyes.

The STC then hosted a national symposium including local dignitaries and the Forest Service. Representatives of four trail clubs discussed the current state of their trails, comparing challenges, ideas, and



Members of the GATC presented this plaque to the Shin-etsu Trail Club. Photo courtesy of Jay M. Dement / GATC

funding issues. Morgan Sommerville, ATC’s Director of Visitor Use Management, participated via Zoom to present information about how the ATC operates and how it coordinates with clubs, the Forest Service, and Park Service. Lynne Beeson and Jay Dement discussed how the GATC operates. These interactive sessions generated many questions — especially about succession, how to attract members, funding, and trail sustainability.

The meeting concluded with GATC members presenting a plaque to Hiroshi Kimura, Representative Director, and Atsushi “Big West” Onishi, Executive Director, declaring the Appalachian Trail in Georgia and Shin-etsu Trail as Sister Trails. The STC made a nice donation to the GATC and the Hiker Pals donated in the club’s name to the STC.

After spending almost two weeks with our new friends, it was almost tearful having to say goodbye. We owe great thanks to the Shin-etsu Trail Club for the outstanding hospitality that made our adventure very memorable. Many friendships were formed over a shared love of the trail.

–  
Jay M. Dement is a past president of the GATC. He was also the driving force in the creation of the Trail Ambassador program in Georgia. In 2017, Jay was recognized by his peers in the southern region (SORO) of the A.T. as their Volunteer of the Year.

–



SHIMMERS OF GOLD

**FOR ONLY A FEW WEEKS IN SPRING,** careful hikers in parts of North Carolina may catch a glimpse of the rare blue ghost firefly (*Phausis reticulata*). Lighting up the forest floor, the males signal to their mates – a celebration of life and hope for future generations.

Though the fireflies’ lights look blue to our eyes, professional photography reveals their true yellow and green glow.

Tim Reaves is a landscape and night photographer in Asheville, NC.

Photo by Tim Reaves  
timreavesphotography.com





# LOOKING OUT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS ON THE TRAIL

INSPIRED BY DECADES OF HIKES ON THE TRAIL, A NORTH CAROLINA  
COUPLE SUPPORTS THE RIDGERUNNER PROGRAM

BY JEFFREY DONAHOE



SINCE THE LATE 1950s, ELIZABETH AND RON Levine have loved hiking — especially on the Appalachian Trail — together, with their two children, or with friends. According to Ron, each trip was threaded to the next by “enjoying the A.T.’s solitude and its dazzling sights.” The hikes also included some close encounters with skunks and snakes, stories that have entered family lore.

The Levines both grew up in New York City. Liz is from the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, near Ebbets Field, which was home to the Brooklyn Dodgers for more than forty years. Ron grew up in Jamaica, Queens, in an apartment looking out on the elevated train tracks. Every thirty or forty-five seconds, the trains’ ear-shattering clatter would shake the building. “It was really urban living,” Ron recalls.

Urban living may seem an unlikely start to a shared love of the outdoors and hiking, but Liz’s family had a country home that had introduced her to the pleasures of a retreat from the city. “I’m sure that country oasis had a lot to do with her willingness to let me encourage her to hike the Trail with me,” Ron says. “After a very short time, I didn’t need to encourage her anymore. She was enjoying the Trail very much.”

## **A New Home Includes the A.T.**

Both Levines chose careers in medicine — pediatrics for Ron and dermatology for Liz. As soon as Ron finished his pediatrics residency in the early 1960s, he was drafted into the U.S. Public Health Service and assigned to the North Carolina State Health

Department. Liz joined him in Raleigh and spent her last year of residency at Duke University.

When Ron completed his two-year U.S. Public Health Service commitment, the state health department asked him to stay on, and he eventually became the State Health Director of North Carolina. Liz joined a dermatology practice where she enjoyed the challenge of treating local patients of all ages. She also dedicated her time to the state’s medical community as president of the North Carolina Medical Society and later as president of the Licensing Board for the state’s physicians.

Living in North Carolina was a big adjustment for them, but they knew that putting down roots in Raleigh offered career opportunities and a place to raise a family that a return to New York could not match. Another reason to settle in North Carolina was the easy access to the Appalachian Trail.

## **On the Trail**

“We used to take our kids, and sometimes their friends would join them,” recalls Liz. “Back then, we never knew in advance what we would find as far as sleeping accommodations on the Trail. If there was a shelter, we slept in a shelter. When there wasn’t a shelter, we slept in tents or sleeping bags.”

The Levines hiked the Trail in sections, focusing on the southern parts first, like the southern terminus at Springer Mountain in Georgia. Over time, they made it as far as New Hampshire, almost to the Trail’s northern terminus in Maine. “If we had gone north to south, I think we would have been better able to

*Elizabeth and Ron Levine’s more than sixty years in North Carolina have been marked by their generosity and service to the state’s communities. And now, thanks to their love of the Trail and respect for the ATC’s work, fellow A.T. hikers — in North Carolina and beyond — will benefit from their gift to the Ridgerunner Program. Photo of a spring sunrise over the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina by skiserg1. Photo of the Levines on the Trail in the early 2000s courtesy of Elizabeth and Ron Levine*



deal with the weather, rocks, and ice we encountered in the north,” Ron says. Tackling the Appalachian Trail inspired the Levines to hike in Greece, Iceland, South America, and the Swiss Alps.

Ron also volunteered with maintaining crews on the A.T. in North Carolina and Tennessee. It started when he ran into a crew on the Trail. “They told me they needed everyone they could get. So I volunteered several times. It was fun.”

### **Caring for the Trail Today and Tomorrow**

Ron just turned 90 and Liz is approaching 90 this year. But even though the Levines have — as they say — “aged out as hikers,” they have not lost their love for the Trail. “We have a tremendous trail system here in Raleigh. Trails in every direction. It’s beautiful,” Ron says. “The trails are much more developed now than when we came to North Carolina and started hiking the A.T.”

The Levines recently made a gift to support future operations of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Like many other hikers, Liz and Ron first learned about the ATC through its plentiful trail maps and guides and became members. When they decided to support the ATC financially, they invested time thinking and speaking with ATC staff about the impact of a potential gift.

One point was constant: “We wanted the gift to support future generations of hikers,” Liz says.

### **More (Hiking) Boots on the Ground**

The Levines’ gift will support the Ridgerunner Program, a boots-on-the-ground effort to promote responsible recreation along the Trail. Ridgerunners are seasonal staff — hired by the ATC and partner organizations — who patrol highly visited sections of the A.T. They embed themselves into daily Trail activities by hiking their sections and sleeping in tents and shelters along the way. They meet with visitors and share responsible hiking practices like following Leave No Trace principles, staying on the footpath, and respecting the Trail’s varied ecosystem. They share local information and help hikers avoid emergency scenarios. Ridgerunners are also an important part of collecting data — including trail conditions, overnight site usage, and other visitor impacts — that is then used for making decisions about the A.T. Many Ridgerunners also perform basic maintenance on the Trail and its overnight sites.

In 2023, thirty Ridgerunners had nearly 68,000 hiker interactions along the Trail. The ATC hopes to expand the Ridgerunner Program’s success by scaling up the program to double its impact, adding positions and lengthening seasons where visitation trends and



*The Levines’ longstanding love of the outdoors encompasses hikes in countries around the world, their ATC membership, Ron’s trail work with the Konnarock Trail Crew, and support for Trail staff and the hikers they assist. As Ron says, “We are all really invested in the Trail and the opportunity for people to get out into this beautiful world.” Photos courtesy of Elizabeth and Ron Levine*



resource impacts highlight the need. This goal will require enhanced financial support for transportation, gear, training, and supervision.

“Given the length of the A.T., you don’t have the chance to always meet up with Trail staff, so supplementing the work with folks on the ground felt like a great way to educate and inspire hikers into the future,” says Liz. They are proud to support a program that will have a positive impact on the hiking experience for all and for the Trail itself.

The Levines note that their gift coincides with the ATC’s 100th anniversary. “It’s really meaningful for us because we’re turning 90 while they’re turning 100,” Ron points out. “They’re barely older than we are and look at how much they are doing!”

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ATC

# Lead with Generosity

## Join a Donor Society

The ATC’s donor society members are a community of dedicated leaders whose generosity makes a lasting impact on the protection, management, and future of the Appalachian Trail. As a society member, your support advances ATC’s highest priorities by protecting the Trail and its natural resources, enhancing a world-class experience for hikers from all walks of life, and strengthening the community of stewards who care for this national treasure. **Join us in keeping the promise of a wild, connected, and thriving Appalachian Trail for the next 100 years and beyond.**



“For 100 years, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has managed the challenge of protecting this national gem. In the next 100 years, the Trail and the ATC will face even greater challenges. This is why we support the ATC to Keep the Trail Alive.”

Ed and Janelle Guyot  
A.T. Trailblazers from New Hampshire



“The Appalachian Trail has defined and nurtured us from the beginning of our relationship and through a horrific interstate crash and recovery. In 2024, the A.T. became our special wedding venue. The A.T. has never let us down and we will never let her down!”

Jerry and Laura Aron  
Benton MacKaye Leadership Society  
Members from North Carolina



Interested in leading the way?  
[appalachiantrail.org/donorsociety](https://appalachiantrail.org/donorsociety)

Benton MacKaye Leadership Society \$10,000+ Annually  
A.T. Trailblazers \$1,000 - \$9,999 Annually





# THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP: Celebrating Ten Years of Collaboration, Innovation, and Conservation

Conserving the largest natural landscape on the East Coast,  
the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership protects the Trail's  
biodiversity, safeguards scenic views, and fosters climate resiliency

—  
BY HEATHER B. HABELKA  
—

“WHEN YOU’RE STANDING ON A HIGH POINT ON THE APPALACHIAN Trail, you want that sense of wilderness and wonder. But you’re looking out at largely private land. At any time, that view can change and remarkably shift the experience that is the Trail,” says Katie Allen, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Director of Landscape Conservation and Managing Coordinator of the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership (ATLP). “This incentivizes us to protect the A.T. experience beyond the Trail.”

The ATLP was formed in 2015 by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the National Park Service to connect the wild, scenic, and cultural wonders of the A.T. and its surrounding landscape. Now in its tenth year, the Partnership has become a nationally recognized, celebrated, and replicated conservation model — remaining unified in its partner-driven mission to acquire and steward 20,000 acres of critical landscape annually.

*Over the last decade, the ATLP has been shielding critical landscape from the industrial world, encroaching development, and a changing climate. Right: The view from Shenandoah National Park. Photo by Brian Wing*





“THIS IS ABOUT THE LANDS, THE VIEWS, AND THE COMMUNITIES ALONG THE A.T. AND HOW WE CAN FURTHER THE MISSION TO PROTECT THE A.T. EXPERIENCE. WE’RE HERE TO ENSURE PEOPLE OF TODAY HAVE ACCESS, AND THAT FUTURE GENERATIONS GET TO HAVE THE SAME EXPERIENCE—REGARDLESS OF WHAT HAPPENS TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF THE CORRIDOR.”

~Ed W. Clark, Superintendent, Appalachian National Scenic Trail – National Park Service

“The ATLP views the Eastern Seaboard as one landscape and represents a partnership focused solely on conservation. Before the ATLP, no one was looking beyond the Trail to the landscape,” explains Dan Ryan, the ATC’s Vice President of Conservation and Government Relations. “Think of it this way: The ATC’s priority is the Trail. NPS’s priority is the Trail corridor. The ATLP’s priority is the landscape.” Allen adds that the Appalachian Mountains, the A.T. Landscape, and the Trail are all nestled within the Eastern Seaboard, and they’re all connected. In addition to conserving the landscape, the ATLP also focuses on recreation access.

“This is about the lands, the views, and the communities along the A.T. and how we can further the mission to protect the A.T. experience,” says Ed W. Clark, Superintendent, Appalachian National Scenic Trail – U.S. National Park Service (NPS). “The ATLP is here to ensure people of today have access, and that future generations get to have the same experience — regardless of what happens to the world outside of the corridor.”

The ATLP is convened and funded primarily by the ATC and the NPS, with support from private and public donors. It is led by a twenty-member steering committee and driven by a membership base of over one hundred aligned organizations including ATC-affiliated Trail maintaining clubs, government agencies, conservation networks, land trusts, and non-

profit conservation organizations. According to Allen, “Our members come together with a shared goal to accelerate the pace and scale of conservation along the A.T. landscape.”

“In a word it’s collaboration,” shares Clark. “The ATLP has brought in partners we otherwise wouldn’t be able to engage with whether they’re land conservancies, local governments, or state agencies. It’s brought a cross-section of people together who have similarly aligned mission goals.”

#### BUILDING CRITICAL CORRIDORS

The ATLP is designed to represent the fourteen-state Trail landscape and to safeguard biodiversity, foster climate resiliency, respond to encroaching development, and ensure public access to nature and outdoor recreation. This critical landscape also provides habitats and migratory routes for native wildlife as species respond to environmental changes and rising temperatures.

Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director of the Appalachian Mountain Club, emphasizes how valuable the Trail is to preserving biodiversity and providing climate refuge for plants and animals. “North America has lost over three billion birds since 1970,” Townsend says. “This landscape is critical to supporting their migration. The forest is free from light pollution and birds are able to rest



*The Trail landscape provides strongholds for native plants and animals to move and adapt as the environment changes around them. Above: A deer along the A.T., Roan Mountain, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Viola / cynthiaviola.com; Below: The American painted lady butterfly. Photo by Bryan Tompkins, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; Pink lady’s slipper orchids. Photo by BlueRidgeKitties/flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0*







*Above: Attendees of the ATLP Annual Meeting join Appalachian National Scenic Trail Superintendent, Ed W. Clark, in the historically significant Dunker Church during a field trip to Antietam National Battlefield. Clark discussed his landscape management experience specific to battlefields and intersections with large-landscape conservation and National Heritage Areas. Photo courtesy of the ATC; Below: A park ranger at Antietam National Battlefield speaks during the ATLP's Annual Meeting about upcoming preservation, restoration, and conservation projects. A view of the battlefield and the ridgetop where the A.T. runs can be seen in the distance. Photo courtesy of the ATC*



## “THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS WERE SPENT ON SECURING THE TRAIL. THE NEXT ONE HUNDRED WILL BE SPENT ON MEANINGFUL CONSERVATION.”

~Pete McKinley, Ph.D., Senior Conservation Biologist with The Wilderness Society

and find food. If you enjoy watching birds in your backyard, land conservation applies to you.”

For Jeff Hunter, Southern Appalachian Director of the National Parks Conservation Association, his research on wildlife crossings in North Carolina and Tennessee is in perfect alignment with the ATLP. “Landscape acquisition and connectivity mitigates impacts to wildlife and protects the black bear, elk, white tail deer, red and gray fox, and bobcat populations,” he explains.

According to Marian Orlousky, the ATC’s Director of Science and Stewardship, the benefits of protecting these wild lands extend beyond the immediate Trail. “We all rely on large blocks of healthy forest for clean air and clean water, for flood and erosion control, for mitigation of natural disasters, and to support our livelihoods and well-being,” she says.

### CREATING ACTION IN A COMMITTEE SETTING

While conservation is key to the success of the ATLP, the people who comprise the Partnership are just as important. “The relationships formed within the ATLP are one of the strongest, most important products of this effort,” Townsend says.

Pete McKinley, Ph.D., Senior Conservation Biologist with The Wilderness Society, agrees, “There’s a solidarity and a warmth in meeting, connecting, and building consensus with people doing the same work in different states.”

Allen emphasizes that the ATLP’s strength, success, and longevity is due to the dedication of its partners, “The ATLP’s leadership is focused on maintaining, supporting, and expanding the ATLP’s membership. To achieve this, we facilitate a number

of in-person and virtual touchpoints with our partners throughout the year.”

One of the ATLP’s most notable — and eagerly anticipated — events is the Annual Partner Meeting. A main focus of this year’s Annual Partner Meeting is the ATLP’s Strategic Plan. Updated every three years, the Plan outlines the key actions and core functions of the Partnership, ensuring a systematic, science-focused approach to project selection; a balance between community, economic, and ecological value; and the continued delivery of support and resources.

A key component of the 2025 - 2028 Strategic Plan is the development of a digital lookbook. Spearheaded by the ATLP’s Strategic Conservation Committee, the lookbook will serve as a collective portfolio of projects across the landscape that meet required conservation criteria and are ready for funding. It will allow the ATLP to track each project’s progress, serve as a clearinghouse for advocacy and education materials, and support outreach to public funders, government policy and decision-makers, and private foundations. “The lookbook will allow us to analyze, access, and advocate for the ATLP’s priority projects,” explains Allen. “For example, if we’re looking to acquire a water-based parcel, we’ll be able to go to a water-focused funder or to the legislator who represents the district where the project is located.”

The lookbook will also give the ATLP the ability to view the Trail’s fourteen-state corridor as a whole. “By identifying high- and low-capacity gaps, we’ll be able to potentially fill those gaps and use this data to build relationships with new partners and landowners on the ground level,” says Allen. “We’ll be looking at pinch points to conservation needs such as creating a resiliency pathway for climate refuge, supporting biodiversity flow, or protecting scenic views.”



“THE CHALLENGE IS TO ENCOURAGE THINKING BEYOND  
HIKING WHEN MAKING ECONOMIC AND LAND USE  
DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS. WE OPEN THE CONVERSATION  
AT A LOCAL LEVEL AROUND FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT,  
CLIMATE RESILIENCY, AND NATURAL DISASTERS THAT DIRECTLY  
IMPACT APPALACHIAN COMMUNITIES. THESE CAN  
BE ADDRESSED USING A NATURE-BASED APPROACH.”

~Katie Allen, ATC’s Director of Landscape Conservation and Managing Coordinator of the ATLP

**CELEBRATING NATIONAL  
RECOGNITION**

Over the past ten years, the ATLP has earned recognition as a best practices model and is being replicated by conservation organizations across the country. Recently, the ATLP was featured as a “Best Practice in Action” in the U.S. Department of the Interior’s manual, *Implementing Landscape-Level Approaches to Resource Management*.

“It’s an honor, a truly big deal, to be mentioned in the publication that provides guidance on how to do this work successfully,” says Allen. “It underscores how much work our partners are doing, and how well and quickly they are doing it.”

**REFRAMING CONSERVATION  
CHALLENGES**

A large part of the ATLP’s sustained success is its ability to adapt to the Trail’s changing landscape, to accelerate its conservation efforts, and to proactively address challenges. One of the most complex challenges of a partnership at this scale is how different Maine is from Georgia, and how different the needs of each region are.

Max Olsen, the ATC’s Landscape Program Assistant, is coordinating the ATLP’s first regional program in the Northeast in response to this challenge. The goals of this pilot program are to examine the efficacy of regional ATLP models and to establish best practices for replication along the entire Trail. “There

are a number of local land trusts and conservation nonprofits that are ready to be activated,” he says. “The Trail has an awesome history of being a grass-roots entity that leads from the bottom up. It’s a natural fit for the ATC to embrace community-based regional models as a way to get the Trail’s landscape in front of a larger number of local audiences.”

To that end Katie Hess, the ATC’s Director of Pennsylvania Landscape Conservation, shares how the state’s significant investment and demonstrated success has laid the foundation for the ATLP, and has played a major role in the Partnership’s growth. “The process is key, it’s not just about the geography,” she says. “We’ve been doing this work in Pennsylvania since 2006 and are able to scale up methods and provide advice and expertise while respecting partners’ priorities and territories.”

Sustainable funding is also an ongoing challenge for the ATLP. The Wild East Action Fund is a flagship program of the ATC’s landscape conservation work. Initially seeded by a private funder, the Fund exhausted its resources several years ago. However, when funded, it allows grants to be made to the ATLP’s partners to conduct due diligence prior to presenting a parcel to the NPS, U.S. Forest Service, or private funder for acquisition. The Fund covers surveys, appraisals, legal fees, and planning to incentivize focused prioritization of conservation projects from Georgia to Maine. To date, the Wild East Action Fund has granted over \$2 million to 90 projects, protecting over 88,000 acres across the A.T. Landscape. “The ATC’s goal



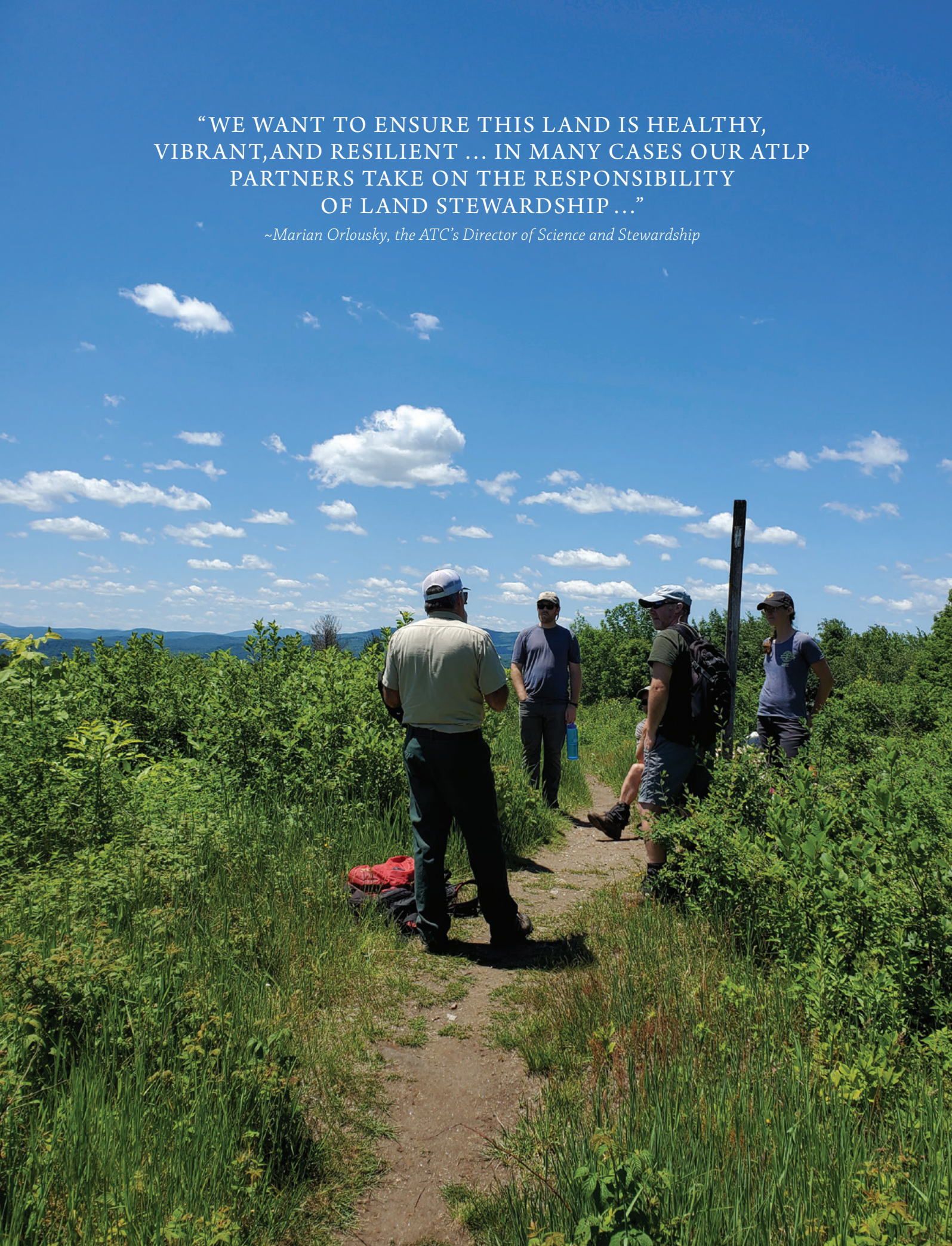
The 20,000 additional acres acquired by the ATLP each year will add to its current scenic views. Above: Lehigh Gap in Pennsylvania. Photo by Joana Barraza; Below: Pinwheel Vista in New Jersey. Photo by Kathleen O’Keefe





“WE WANT TO ENSURE THIS LAND IS HEALTHY,  
VIBRANT, AND RESILIENT ... IN MANY CASES OUR ATLP  
PARTNERS TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY  
OF LAND STEWARDSHIP ...”

~Marian Orlousky, the ATC's Director of Science and Stewardship



*“Our landscape, anchored by the A.T., is so critical to a much bigger landscape and the complexity and diversity that spans the Trail’s fourteen states,” explains Allen. In addition to the threat of over development, overgrowth of trees or invasive species can also affect the historic landscape views. Efforts by the Partnership include working with volunteers, stewards, and local communities to preserve the vistas and maintain the open space. Left: Dupuis Hill, a protected open area in Vermont. Photo by Ilana Copel; Above: Upper Lewis Field in Vermont. Photo by Ilana Copel*

is to make this a stable funding source and to open the Fund to another round of grantees,” says Ryan.

Once the parcels are acquired, stewardship presents its own set of funding and maintenance challenges. “We set land aside that will never be developed and will be protected forever,” Orlousky says. “But we want to ensure this land is healthy, vibrant, and resilient for the next one hundred years. In many cases our ATLP partners take on the responsibility of land stewardship, and we’re able to secure funding from private funders and foundations. Volunteer Trail maintaining clubs take on a tremendous amount of responsibility tending to meadows and grasslands and doing invasive species work.”

#### FOCUSING ON OUTREACH TO BUILD TRUST

ATLP’s outreach and partnership relies heavily on building trust with the local Trail communities. According to Allen, “The challenge is to encourage thinking beyond hiking when making economic and land use development decisions. We open the conversation at a local level around floodplain management, climate resiliency, and natural disasters that directly impact Appalachian communities. These can be addressed using a nature-based approach.”

Brendan Mysliwiec, the ATC’s Director of Federal Policy stresses, “The underlying presumption of the ATLP is that it cannot be a purely governmental effort. It cannot only be the Park Service and the

ATC making plans and driving development of this large landscape project. It’s finding how to include people, making sure everyone who is willing to contribute knows how to contribute, and that we are serving the community.”

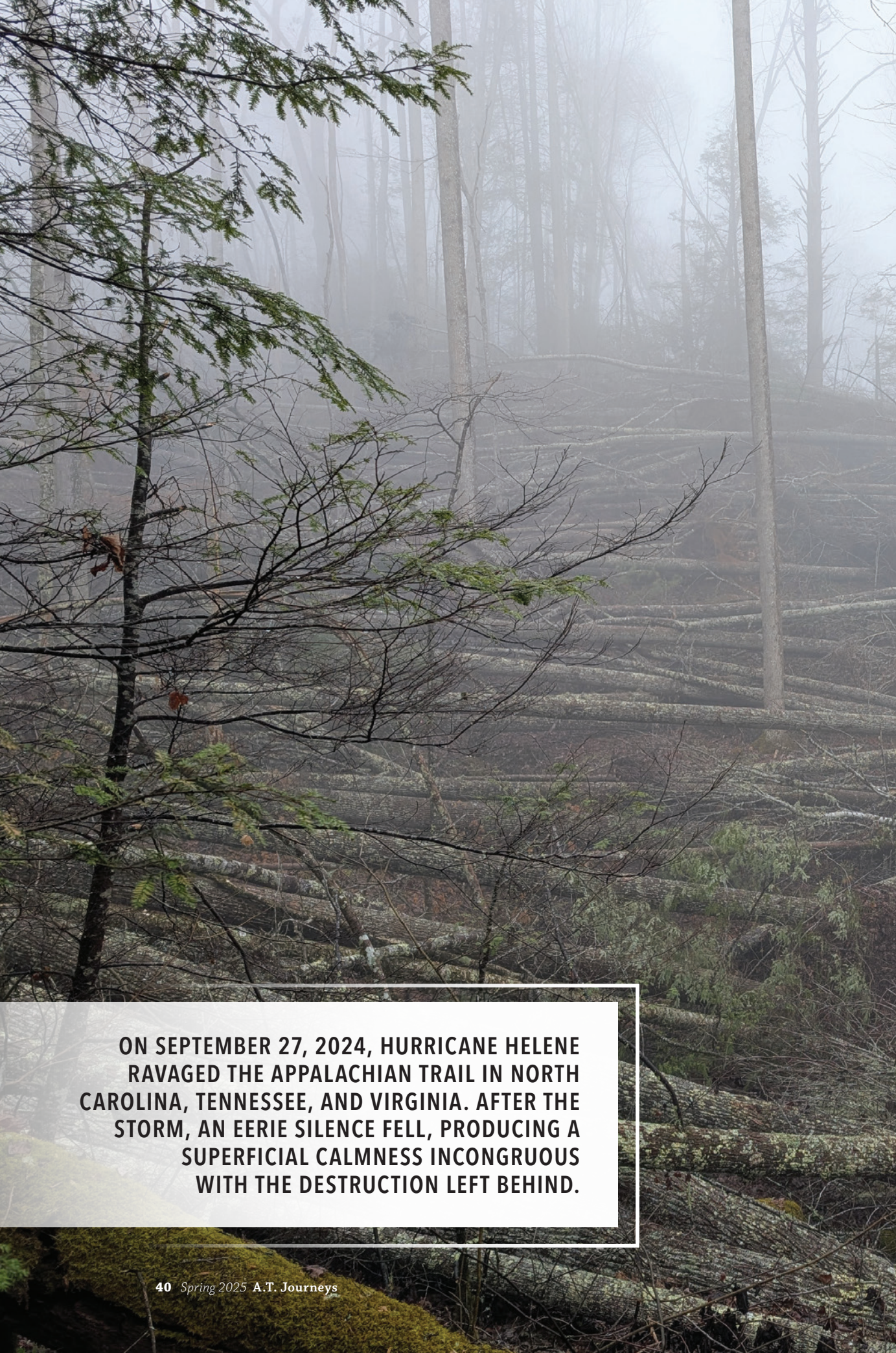
Another benefit to local Trail communities is the power of the Partnership. “When a local community is going up against a developer or a corporation, we’re on the ground with them. They’re not alone,” Olsen explains.

Simon Rucker, Executive Director of the Maine Appalachian Land Trust, agrees. “By tying a conservation project to the A.T. you’re benefiting from greater visibility and greater funding opportunities,” he says. “It’s a people-powered network where we come together, work together, and learn from each other.”

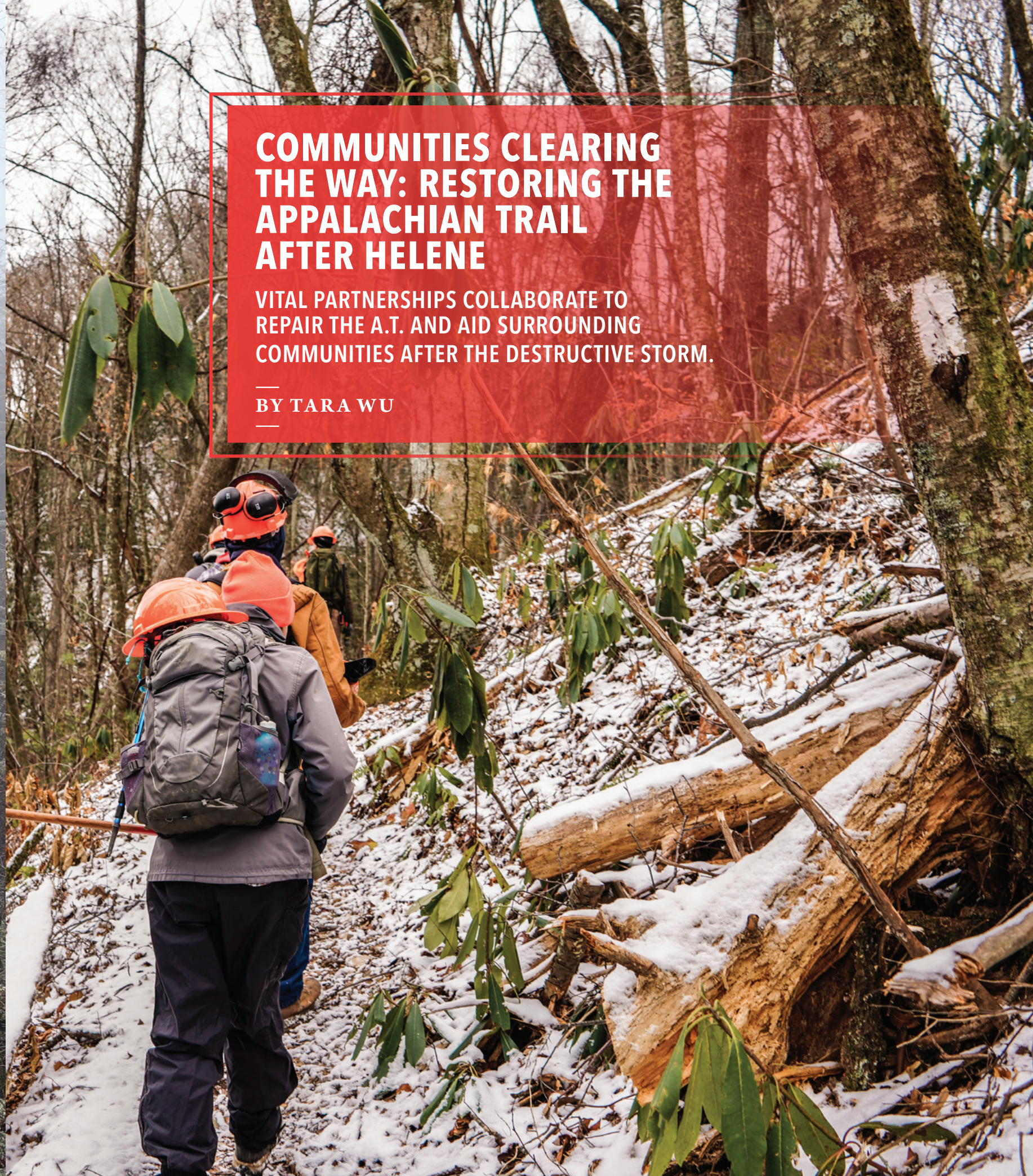


To find out more about the ATLP and sign up for the newsletter, visit [appalachiantrail.org/ATLP](https://appalachiantrail.org/ATLP)  
To learn more about how you can support the Wild East Action Fund and the ATLP, contact [philanthropy@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:philanthropy@appalachiantrail.org)  
To connect with an ATLP Coordinator, email [atlp@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:atlp@appalachiantrail.org)





ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2024, HURRICANE HELENE RAVAGED THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL IN NORTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, AND VIRGINIA. AFTER THE STORM, AN EERIE SILENCE FELL, PRODUCING A SUPERFICIAL CALMNESS INCONGRUOUS WITH THE DESTRUCTION LEFT BEHIND.



## COMMUNITIES CLEARING THE WAY: RESTORING THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL AFTER HELENE

VITAL PARTNERSHIPS COLLABORATE TO REPAIR THE A.T. AND AID SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES AFTER THE DESTRUCTIVE STORM.

— BY TARA WU —



# FOR GENERATIONS,

the A.T has been sustained collectively by land managers, agencies, and volunteers. As the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) approached its hundredth year of facilitating partnerships, a wounded Trail cried out for help. Assistance for the Trail would come, but addressing community safety came first.

Paul Curtin, A.T. Supervisor for Carolina Mountain Club (CMC), became a volunteer powerhouse, cleaning out Swannanoa and Marshall, towns buried in mud. He and CMC members also removed trees from yards in Black Mountain. “My wife calls me a full-time volunteer,” said John Beaudet of CMC and Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club (TEHCC). Beaudet set to work clearing roads of landslide debris so communities could access supplies.

Accounting for family, friends, and colleagues was paramount. Jim Baum, a Virginia Ridgerunner, recounted connecting with his colleagues in an employee text group. “As we were communicating next steps for the Trail, two ATC folks were missing from our team.” (Both were later accounted for, once they regained access to cell phone and internet services.)

The Forest Service (USFS) immediately started clearing roads, freeing residents. “The U.S. Forest Service was on a life and limb rescue mission,” explained Franklin Tate, ATC Associate Regional Director, referring to staff from both Pisgah and George Washington-Jefferson (GWJ) National Forests.

## A STRATEGIC RETURN TO TRAIL

Soon enough, all eyes centered on the Trail. “The public was asking us how things were going,” explained Tate. “We work under a Cooperative Management System, and had to wait for all of our partners to weigh in.” Although surveying damage was a necessity, Trail access was difficult and hazardous. As a result, Forest closures were enacted in all three states.



Crews — such as those one mile north of Temple Hill Gap, Tennessee (above left), and south of Spivey Gap, North Carolina (above right) — were essential to gauging the situation after Helene. “I really started to figure out the conditions of the Trail by talking to the on-the-ground folks, the volunteers that were out there every day,” shared Franklin Tate, ATC Associate Regional Director. Photos courtesy of Paul Curtin, Carolina Mountain Club; Left: To this day, along different parts of the Trail, crews continue to address Helene damage, including massive root balls and the holes they created. Photo by Drew Hines/ATC; Previous pages: Left: Downed trees south of Spivey Gap, North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Paul Curtin, Carolina Mountain Club; Right: A trail crew south of Damascus, Virginia. Photo by Tyler Irving

An internal Helene Response Task Force made up of ATC representatives in the storm’s impact areas and beyond connected with partners in the regions to identify needs, prioritize assessments, and provide clear communications — both internally and externally. The ATC’s response also included launching [appalachiantrail.org/Helene](https://appalachiantrail.org/Helene) to provide guidance and updates about the Trail.

The ATC also created the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund (ATRF) to aid A.T. communities, repair damaged Trail infrastructure, and restore the surrounding landscape. The ATRF launched in October, and generous individual donors, members of the Board of Directors, partner organizations, and corporations provided much-needed funding.

“It was remarkable what the ATC did with the Resiliency Fund to assemble crucial resources,” said Baum. Through the ATRF, his season was extended. “We needed to get a set of eyes on closed trail,” remarked Doug Levin, Trails Supervisor for Mt. Rogers Appalachian Trail Club (MRATC). “Jim’s familiar with the Trail. In case of danger, he knows how to get himself out.” Baum was provided mentorship by the U.S. Forest Service. “Jake Smith and Ed Wright [USFS staff] were focused on getting campground hosts to safety,” Baum explained. “Rather than working out of his office, Ed’s office became the hood of a pickup truck. It makes you work harder when you get somebody like that.”

Disaster response teams from three National Forests — GWJ, Cherokee, and Pisgah — also con-

ducted assessments. National Park Service A.T. office (APPA) staff served on Incident Management Teams, triaged damages, and secured funds. Forest Service employees, such as Brandon Church, hiked the A.T. from Davenport Gap to Damascus. Others scouted specific Ranger Districts.

## BACK TO TRAIL IN VIRGINIA

As scouts reported damages, the community responded.

When the Piedmont AT Hikers (PATH) returned to Trail days after the storm, they found “the worst damage to the Trail anyone could imagine,” according to David Atkinson, the club president. Saw teams toiled for weeks, ensuring passage. Further south, the MRATC was itching to return. “I was advocating to get us out and assess amid closures,” recalled Levin.

“It was a fluid situation, and communication was key,” remarked Kathryn Herndon-Powell, ATC Central Virginia Regional Manager and interim Senior Regional Director. “What skills and supplies are needed, who’s available, and who can work in which areas? Can we be a liaison between overly stretched agency personnel and eager people? How can we plan opportunities to clear and repair the Trail?”

“We focused on southernmost Virginia, as resources weren’t there. Other clubs had lots of active members and certified sawyers,” shared Jerry Kyle, ATC’s High Country Regional Manager. The 28-mile section from Elk Garden to the Virginia-Tennessee



“I THINK THAT THIS COMBINATION OF CONTRACTED SAWYERS, PARTNERS, AND VOLUNTEERS WAS KIND OF THIS MAGIC MIX. ROUND UP OUR COMMUNITY, BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER, HAVE THAT MORALE BOOST OF ALL THE OTHER CLUBS, EVERYONE STANDING SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH EACH OTHER.”

~ Kathryn Herndon-Powell, ATC Central Virginia Regional Manager and interim Senior Regional Director



The initial response and continued restoration work are a collaborative effort. As Joe Morris, A.T. Project Manager for Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club (TEHCC) said, “There are people with thousands and thousands of hours of experience working in the woods, building trail and maintaining trail, dealing with situations like this. And they know what they’re doing.” Left: Photo by Drew Hines/ATC; Above: Photo by Tyler Irving

border also quickly emerged as the most heavily impacted miles in Virginia, with 90 percent of the trees on the ground in some areas. According to Baum, he “thought it would take three years to cut all the blowdowns.”

The ATC contracted Rx Fire Effects, a professional disaster crew to help. They started their work just as a saw team from New River Gorge National Park was wrapping up their detail in the area. The work was completed in ten days. Anthony Horton of Rx Fire Effects praised the guidance of ATC staff as crucial to their success.

The northern half of MRATC’s section reopened in late October, and the club sprang into action. To assist, the ATC coordinated two multiple-day events near Marion and Damascus, sending certified volunteer sawyers recruited from other A.T. clubs into the hardest hit areas. Despite significant weather challenges, participants came from near and far. “It was like herding cats,” laughed Levin. “They immediately wanted to work. They’ve traveled here, they have the gear. It was inspiring.” The ATC coordinated volunteer accommodations with hostels and restaurants, which helped to support impacted economies.

Thanks to the all-hands-on-deck approach of combining professional saw crews and volunteer efforts, supported by the swift generosity of donors to the A.T. Resiliency Fund, the entire A.T. through Virginia was open to hikers on December 13.

#### A PASSION TO SERVE IN NORTH CAROLINA

October 25th marked CMC’s return to the Trail. Since Cherokee National Forest reopened the A.T. earlier than Pisgah, Curtin utilized Church’s reports to identify a Tennessee worksite between Sam’s Gap and Devil’s Fork Gap. “There were hundreds of trees down within a half mile stretch,” Curtin explained. “The worst part was getting into the work, climbing over a tremendous amount of stuff.” Once CMC was able to work in North Carolina, their priority was blowdowns. “Our sawyers did an unbelievable job, and really built up their skill level.”

One of the biggest volunteer events was in Hot Springs, North Carolina, with 105 volunteers including District Ranger Jennifer Barnhart and Natalia Muglia from Pisgah’s Appalachian Ranger District. Upon residents’ request, one group removed trash stuck in trees and along the banks of the French Broad River.

#### TROUBLE IN TENNESSEE

With over 22,000 hours of trailwork, Carl Fritz knows the A.T. in Tennessee better than anyone. In mid-January, he and Church set out through eight inches of snow to Cherry Gap Shelter. “When we got to the shelter, I couldn’t find it. I could tell on the GPS that I was on one side of it, and I crawled through the trees to the other side. Trees were two



feet in diameter, stacked on top of each other six feet high,” Fritz recalled. “It was unbelievably bad.”

Everyone agreed that Tennessee received the brunt of the storm. “TEHCC is doing 98 percent of the work,” remarked Curtin. “Why were some areas pristine and others completely blown apart?” asked Joe Morris, A.T. Project Manager for TEHCC. “Anything that was facing east-southeast got hit hardest. That’s almost everything in Tennessee.” The most impacted sections included Elk River, Iron Mountain Gap, and wilderness areas Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) has served.

Before the storm, the Elk River bordered a field which the A.T. traverses. During Helene, the river rose 16 feet, filling the entire valley. “We ran into an 8-foot-high debris field consisting of door frames, trees, pieces of houses, root balls. It’s not normal A.T. material. We resorted to sawzalls,” Fritz explained, referring to saws often used for demolition and rescue work. TEHCC was able to cut a path through the debris, but the scenic view was gone. In its place, the community left makeshift shrines of propane tanks, children’s rocking horses, and wooden crosses.

“We’ve gotten most of it cleared now,” remarked Sawyer Coordinator Tony Messina. “The Forest Service has cleared quite a bit as well.” APPA (the National Park Service office that oversees the Trail) provided key assistance on USFS lands that would not have been available without the A.T.’s National Scenic Trail status and APPA’s administrative role.

### COMMONALITIES THROUGH CRISIS

Across state lines, volunteerism skyrocketed. MRATC gained new members. “CMC had to bring so many hard hats and tools,” said Curtin. In Tennessee, hostels such as Boots Off provided lodging for traveling volunteers.

Volunteer hours surged. By late January, CMC committed 3,500 hours of labor to the A.T. TEHCC boasted 4,700 hours and over a hundred events club wide. “It’s almost a full-time job in Virginia,” laughed Levin. “I know it’s temporary, so it’s okay. A bad day in the woods is still better than any day in the office.” Unbelievably, there were no injuries during any of the volunteer events.

Respect for all those who helped overflowed. The ATC was praised widely for critical leadership and communication. Crew leaders were recognized for tenacity and expertise. Scouts were heralded for providing vital insight. Contracted sawyers and other resources arrived as needed, thanks to the



*It will take years for dedicated volunteers and professional staff to address all of the damage. Fortunately, there’s a new generation of A.T. advocates to help them care for the Trail. Above: Students from the Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech (OCVT) spent their spring break helping the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club (MRATC) with Helene restoration. Photos courtesy of the OCVT*

PHOTO BY DREW HINES/ATC

AS THE TRAIL AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES CONTINUE TO RECOVER, THE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLECTIVE EFFORTS WILL CONTINUE TO BE KEY.



ATC, APPA, and USFS staff. Volunteers were revered for their service. As the Trail and surrounding communities continue to recover, the partnerships and collective efforts will continue to be key.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

Partnerships helped the Trail during its darkest hour, but there are many ways to continue to support the A.T.

**Flexibility will be key.** While the Trail will be passable, “the experience will be different,” Curtin explains. “Views will be blocked. You may experience a claustrophobic feeling. You’re not going to be able to set up camp just anywhere.” Hot Springs will offer fewer services. Tennessee will be challenging with root balls and many closed shelters, but resupply will remain strong. “Bring plenty of sunscreen,” warns Fritz. Visitors should plan their hikes carefully and check for updates regarding closures or restoration work on the Trail. Wildfire risk is high, and weakened trees continue to fall, so backpackers should be especially cautious when selecting a campsite or choosing to have a campfire.

**Lend a hand.** As trailwork transitions to tread

repair, filling root ball holes is crucial. Maintenance crews will continue to address these issues and volunteers are always welcome to join service projects on the Trail. Volunteers and visitors can also serve in impacted towns such as Asheville, Hot Springs, Marshall, Erwin, or Damascus.

**Perhaps one of the greatest gifts visitors and supporters can offer the A.T. is perspective.** “The forest is always in some stage of regeneration. It’ll take years for damage to heal,” explained Beaudet. “It’s always been a hodgepodge of old and young forest. It’ll come back.”

“Actually,” he reflected, “there’s going to be a lot of wildflowers come spring. The sunlight is going to hit places it hasn’t hit in really a long time.”

For Helene recovery resources and updates, visit [appalachiantrail.org/helene](https://appalachiantrail.org/helene)

The Konnarock Trail Crew has added multiple weeks to their schedule for Helene-related tread repairs. For those details and other volunteering opportunities, visit [appalachiantrail.org/volunteer](https://appalachiantrail.org/volunteer)



# A TRAIL FOR ALL PEOPLE— FOREVER

BY  
LEON  
M.  
RUBIN

## WANTED:

Students to hike and maintain the Appalachian Trail. No experience necessary.

You might not see that exact wording on campus recruitment flyers in states along the Appalachian Trail, but it wouldn't be far off the mark.

Students at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia; Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire; and Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, share a decades-long tradition of involvement with the Trail — from day hiking and backpacking to full-fledged trail maintenance. “They take on great responsibility,” explains Leanna Joyner,

Senior Director of Partnerships and Trail Operations for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. “They maintain sections of trail just like the other clubs.”

## COLLEGE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT WITH THE A.T. OFTEN CONTINUES FOR LIFE

In fact, the Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech (OCVT) and the Dartmouth Outing Club (DOC) are official “Affiliated A.T. Maintaining Clubs” under the auspices of the ATC’s Cooperative Management System. The Bates Outing Club (BOC) also maintains sections of the Trail in collaboration with the Maine Appalachian Trail

Club. According to Joyner, “We want the Trail to be a place for all people. It’s more than just being a place to hike. Through stewardship of the Trail, we hope to be sure everyone feels welcome.”

## STEWARDSHIP IN MANY FORMS

These three student clubs take their stewardship responsibilities extremely seriously — although the work isn’t all serious. Christina McIntyre is the Director of Professional Development, National and International Scholarships, in the Virginia Tech Honors College and OCVT faculty adviser. “A big part of our mission is to keep the section maintained and have fun doing it,” she says. “We get a lot of first-timers. We want them to have a fun experience that makes them want to return.

*For many, a love of adventure on the Trail and the commitment to protect it starts — or is strengthened — through college and university clubs. Photo courtesy of the Bates Outing Club*





Thanks to their school’s outdoor recreation clubs, traditions and dedication to the Trail live on through each year’s members. Archival photos courtesy of the Bates Outing Club

We try not to overwhelm someone on their first trip. They come back because they find it fulfilling. It’s a tangible way to contribute to the Trail and the environment. They form a sense of community, often with people they wouldn’t meet on campus.”

Ivy Brundage, social media and outreach officer for the club, says, “OCVT has given me a real sense of connection to the outdoors. As someone who doesn’t have a car and probably wouldn’t have access to a lot of the activities without OCVT, it’s been amazing to see how people come together when they’re on these trips.” Club President Jesse Macklin, who has hiked about 500 miles of the A.T. from Maine to Connecticut (and would love to thru-hike someday), adds, “My favorite part about the club is it encourages people to go out and appreciate the Trail, and then they have a drive to protect it. I love when new people start helping with trail maintenance.”

Paul Jeffers and Max Sheehan, the club’s trail maintenance officers, oversee work on two sections totaling about 33 miles. “I do a lot of hiking, so I just feel good about being able to give back some volunteer time,” Jeffers says.

Sheehan agrees. “It’s very rewarding to help clear and maintain sections of trails that I hike along with so many other people.” He understands that the A.T. is also important to the surrounding communities and

is glad to help. “I love hiking and most of the time on the weekends there’s nothing I would rather do than get out and go walk — with some tools.”

**LONG-TERM BENEFITS**

The ATC’s Leanna Joyner says there are clear long-term benefits for students. “Our hope is that young people have such strong exposure so that as soon as they’re able, and have time, they feel the heart pull back to contribute to the A.T. If that means that they do that when they’re 45 or when they’re 65, then that’s still good.”

Alan Bellows, a Bates College alum and the Maine Appalachian Trail Club’s treasurer, is a case in point. “I was very active in the Bates Club when I was a student,” he says. “I worked at Baxter State Park for the Youth Conservation Corps during summers. Then I did nothing with the A.T. while life intruded for the next 40 years. But as I got older and approached retirement, I had a lot more time and so I became re-involved. You get that lifelong connection, which helps to sustain the club and the Trail.”

Bennett Witcher, a 2016 Virginia Tech graduate who is now the shelter supervisor for the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club, is another example of someone coming back to the Trail — though his story is slightly

benefits from having many students to help with work that would normally take the club a year to complete.

Elsewhere, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club used to have a robust college spring break program, although it’s been challenging to rebuild post-Covid. Still, college students outside of outdoor recreation clubs just might represent an untapped resource for Maintaining Clubs looking to cast a wider net for volunteers.



Left: OCVT members perform Trail work with the Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club (MRATC). Courtesy of the Outdoor Club at Virginia Tech; Center: A hiker passes Trail signs created by the Dartmouth Outing Club. Photo by Richard Frear, U.S. Department of the Interior; Right: The members of the DOC are responsible for Trail work on parts of the A.T. near Trapper John Shelter, which they also built and maintain. Photo by Ilana Copel

different since he thru-hiked the A.T. with his parents and sister when he was eight years old. Witcher became involved with the OCVT in 2012 and ended up as trail maintenance officer and then president. An aerospace engineering major, he observes that the club provided a welcome diversion from the rigors of academic life for science-focused students.

Today, he works a desk job as an engineering consultant. “For me there is definitely still that aspect of escape,” he shares. “I don’t want to go all ‘spiritual necessity of nature,’ but I enjoy the outdoors far more when I’m off on my own or with a small group of friends surrounded by trees.” Like Joyner, he believes that building a sense of belonging among students by bringing them back multiple times to work on the Trail pays off. “Those are the people who I think really stick with the A.T. long-term.”

**CONTINUING THE TRADITION**

The Bates Outing Club’s history with the A.T. spans more than one hundred years. In fact, Bellows points out that Bates College students participated in work trips with Myron Avery, one of the early pioneers in developing the Trail.

“Bates is a place that’s really steeped with traditions, and this is a long-standing tradition,” notes Catie Luedee, Associate Director of Outdoor Education and Programs in the Office of Campus Life. Students “love the idea of being part of something bigger than them and something that alumni did before them.” The BOC now maintains around 3.5 miles of trail. Luedee feels that the students gain “a better understanding of the responsibility they have to be stewards of the land they occupy.”

The Dartmouth Outing Club’s association with the Trail goes back decades, as well. Willow Nilsen, As-

sociate Director of the Dartmouth Outdoor Programs Office, suggests that the A.T. wouldn’t exist if not for the trail system Dartmouth students developed in the 1920s. This symbiotic relationship remains strong — and beneficial — as its members work to maintain 54 miles of the A.T. plus 25 miles of other trails.

“There’s a certain amount of trail maintenance that’s problem-solving on the spot,” Nilsen says. “You have to just sort of figure it out. Building skills, learning to trust themselves — that independence and self-efficacy is something students don’t necessarily always get in our educational system nowadays.” She adds, “The sense of camaraderie in the outdoors and working together with other people outside is incredibly meaningful.”

Camaraderie is a theme that resonates strongly with Joyner. “We have an epidemic of loneliness in the United States. And it’s not confined to people in senior living facilities. Social media doesn’t necessarily result in genuine human connection, which is an essential part of our being,” she says. “It is so, so valuable to have opportunities to be in community with others. And volunteering is one way to be in community while helping communities.”

The best way to get involved is by looking for opportunities that suit your availability at [appalachiantrail.org/waystovolunteer](https://appalachiantrail.org/waystovolunteer). If college groups want to connect with A.T. Clubs, please email [volunteer@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:volunteer@appalachiantrail.org). Have a story to share about an A.T. college club experience? Send it our way at [appalachiantrail.org/share](https://appalachiantrail.org/share)

UNTAPPED RESOURCES

In Pennsylvania, thanks to Dickinson College's lacrosse coach Dave Webster and the Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club's (CVATC) Craig Dunn, student athletes dedicate a day to help maintain the A.T. near Carlisle. According to the CVATC, the relationship has become a tradition to look forward to and gives the team an opportunity to get off campus and experience the A.T. Besides sharing lessons in Trail stewardship, the CVATC

benefits from having many students to help with work that would normally take the club a year to complete.

Elsewhere, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club used to have a robust college spring break program, although it's been challenging to rebuild post-Covid. Still, college students outside of outdoor recreation clubs just might represent an untapped resource for Maintaining Clubs looking to cast a wider net for volunteers.



# CELEBRATING THE 2024 2,000-MILERS



**Northbound: 772**  
**Southbound: 34**  
**Flip-Flop: 73**  
**Section Hikers: 117**



**EVERY YEAR,** thousands of people embark on the adventure of a lifetime: setting out to hike all 2,190+ miles of the Appalachian Trail. In 2024, 996 hikers celebrated the completion of the journey, and gained recognition as official 2,000-Milers by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. A 2,000-Miler is anyone who's completed the full Trail, whether in a single 12-month span (a thru-hike) or as a series of section hikes.

**Congratulations to ALL of the 2024 2,000-milers!** See the full listing at [appalachiantrail.org/2000miler](https://appalachiantrail.org/2000miler).

ABOVE: FRANK "IRONMAN" BRUMMER, SECTION HIKE: "Just super grateful for the ATC and all the volunteers."

TERESA "LIGHTNING" GADIENT, FLIP-FLOP THRU-HIKE



MARY "RESTLESS" MONTIGNY,  
NORTHBOUND THRU-HIKE



ERIC "CHEETO" LIU,  
NORTHBOUND THRU-HIKE



TIMOTHY "GUINNESS" CAIN, NORTHBOUND THRU-HIKE  
"The kindness I experienced on the trail was truly AWESOME.  
If you have lost faith in humanity, hike this trail!"



A NOTE FROM "CHICKPEA," NOBO '24

For me, the idea to thru-hike was born when I was 16, on a family backpacking trip to the White Mountains of New Hampshire. It took me 20 years to realize the dream, and in 2024 I completed a northbound thru-hike. The journey itself is complete, but any 2,000-miler will tell you that the time spent on the Trail is forever with you, a touchstone that remains even when you're back to "normal" life.

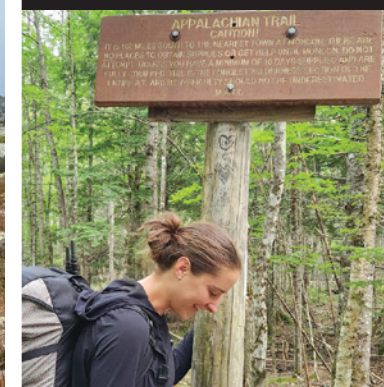
If you've ever stepped foot on the A.T., you know the feeling: of relief, of community, of peace. It's "a footpath for those who seek fellowship with the wilderness," but also a footpath for those who seek fellowship with other people. On the Trail, so much of what keeps us divided in regular life is stripped away. I was honored to meet so many amazing fellow travelers on my journey. Thank you to everyone who walked with me for a few steps or a few miles, who chatted with me over dinner at camp, or relaxed together at a hostel. I talked to day hikers, section hikers, people who have been hiking the Trail for decades or who were stepping foot on it for the first time. And words can't really express the gratitude I have for my fellow thru-hikers, who know what it takes to get all the way there.

**Congratulations to everyone who finished the Trail in 2024.** To those who have more miles to go: I'm so excited for you. You get to continue on your journey and make the most of what remains.

I can't imagine a world without the Appalachian Trail in it, and all the people who love the Trail. Thank you for being one of them.

*Genevieve "Chickpea" Andress NOBO '24  
Relationship Marketing and Membership Director  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy*

CHLOE "CRICKET" ANDRIE,  
SECTION HIKE "The Appalachian  
Trail has changed my life."



ETHAN "FLY LORD" O'REILLY,  
SOUTHBOUND THRU-HIKE





# GNAT THERAPY

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE TO FACE ADVERSITY ON THE TRAIL AND BEYOND

BY ALLISON KIRSCH

ON A RECENT HIKE, I LEARNED SOME things about myself from a swarm of gnats. Yes, *gnats*. I was in the middle of the Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains, 10 miles in on day two of a five-day solo backpacking trip on the Appalachian Trail. Gnats were swarming around my face and buzzing in my ears like miniature weed whackers. It was difficult to ignore the tiny beasts because they were literally following me — pursuing me with a persistence that just about made me weep with frustration.

On this section of the Trail where there was not much tree cover, I was hot, sweaty, and irritated. Then my thoughts started to make me laugh:

*My sweat must be like takeout food for these gnats — they're taking home their salty snack to their families. Maybe these gnats are delivering for DoorDash!*

This burst of humor softened my irritation and brought me back to my reasons for being out on the Trail. Nature feels like a welcome refuge from the hustle and bustle of daily life. I love the sights, the sounds, and the feeling of awe I get when I am immersed in her beauty. I tune in, live in the moment, pay better attention to the world around me. I breathe more deeply, my jaw relaxes, and my mind is at peace. It is THERAPEUTIC.

Hiking the A.T. is also one of the most demanding things I have taken on in my life so far. I have com-

pleted around 800 miles as a section hiker and have been on the Trail with friends, my daughter, with strangers, and often all alone. People unfamiliar with backpacking often ask me why the heck I'm doing it.

"Where do you go to the bathroom?"

"Aren't there bears?"

"Are you sure it's safe for a woman to be hiking alone?"

They have yet to ask me if I'm worried about all the gnats on the Trail.

As I humorously considered the gnats, my therapist brain switched on — when I'm not hiking for my own pleasure and adventure, I work as a psychotherapist and am a Certified Clinical Adventure Therapist (CCAT) — and I realized that my humor was very much a coping strategy. Since my car was parked some 60 miles north, my only alternative to continuing to hike with the gnat parade was to sit down and let them make a permanent home on my face and in my ears. So, I kept going — on the Trail and with the humor. My next thought was that maybe the buzzing was actually the gnats cheering, "You can do it!" in Gnatish, the well-known language of the gnats.

In my psychotherapy practice, I have a real office with a door, but I also provide therapy in outdoor spaces. I feel lucky to spend a good portion of my days among the trees and smelling the fresh air. However, I am trained to think about lessons from my own experiences on the Trail. My attention is honed to uncover the metaphors the Trail is showing me, like

Right: Mills Gap, Virginia. Inset: Fork Mountain, Virginia. Photos by Allison Kirsch





WHEN I THINK ABOUT WHY I DO THIS  
BACKPACKING THING, THE SIMPLE  
EXPLANATION IS THAT IT'S GOOD FOR ME —  
BODY, MIND, AND SOUL.

the glaring one about how an impediment like a swarm of gnats can potentially trip me up and prevent me from achieving my goals.

I was drawn to Adventure Therapy because I find outdoor activities personally therapeutic. Whether hiking, canyoneering, creeking, looking at a beautiful sunset or a million stars, or simply walking barefoot on grass, connecting with nature is soothing to my system even when it's strenuous, challenging, or gnat-filled. I didn't grow up hiking or camping, so I didn't always know this about myself. When I was going through a particularly hard time in my life, I explored Shenandoah National Park with my sister and adventured in the Pisgah National Forest on an REI group trip. Neither trip was technically therapy, but both were definitely therapeutic. And they led to me adding *Hike the A.T.* to my bucket list.

When I think about why I do this backpacking thing, the simple explanation is that it's good for me — body, mind, and soul. Backpacking is physically and mentally challenging and shows me what I'm capable of. The sense of accomplishment after gnat-infested, rain-soaked, or blister-filled days is incredibly fulfilling.

Every day on the Trail I have to plan, pivot, and persevere. Nothing is predictable and often things don't go as planned, but I have to accept what I can't control...like lots and lots of gnats! I can focus on the most basic daily tasks, and there is power in the simple fact that I'm carrying everything I need on my back. Hiking allows me to hear myself more clearly and listen to my intuition when making decisions, deepening trust in myself.

But what did I really learn from the gnats on this hike? There are hard parts of backpacking trips that are expected that I can plan and prepare for, such as a particularly hard climb, rain, darkness, and where

to find water and shelter. Then there are the unexpected hard things. I did not have a gnat map, and they didn't seem at all bothered by the bug repellent I was wearing. Every time I swatted them away, they seemed to multiply. I had to accept that they were there, and I had to deal with my emotions rather than trying to control the gnats themselves.

Even the best-planned hikes sometimes go awry. Like the time I pushed for a 20-mile day only to find the shelter area deserted. It was the first time I slept alone in the woods — with my sleeping bag cinched tightly around my head to drown out the sounds that, so soothing and nature-y during the day, took on a very different tone in the dark of night. Or the time when my spork inadvertently pierced the bag my freeze-dried meal was cooking in, as I helplessly watched the liquid seep out through the bottom and pool on the picnic table.

The gnats taught me that it's sometimes only by letting go that I can truly feel the pleasure of the process of achieving my goals. Like the time that I grinned my way through a torrentially rainy section of the Trail in Georgia and earned my trail name: "Sunny."

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*Allison "Sunny" Kirsch, LCSW-C, CCAT, SEP, is an A.T. section hiker, Adventure Therapist, and lover of nature, adventure, and travel. She is an ATC and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) member; serves as a volunteer trail maintainer in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C.; and is volunteering in her first term as PATC Treasurer. Allison loves the trail community, and you can find her offering trail magic on the Maryland section every spring.*  
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## Change the Trail and let the Trail change you.

The Appalachian Trail wouldn't exist without volunteers. It needs people to take care of the pathway, build steps, and trim trees. It needs protectors of plants, animals and the vital ecosystems that make the Trail such a special place. It needs writers, photographers, and students of nature. **It needs you. Take the first step and sign up to volunteer.** There's a way for everyone to make a difference, from maintaining the Trail, removing invasive species, writing newsletters, joining a trail crew, and so much more. Volunteering on the A.T. is a great way to make friends, learn something new, and have fun in nature. **No experience needed** — just a desire to keep the Trail alive for the next 100 years.

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

Trail Work | iNaturalist Observer | Volunteer Vacations | Behind the Scenes





# HONORING THE PAST, EMBRACING TOMORROW

BY JERI WARD



Jeri Ward hiking the A.T. in the Green Mountains near Stratton Summit, Vermont. Photo by William Camden

AS THE ATC CELEBRATES ITS 100TH anniversary this year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the impact this organization has had on me and the broader A.T. community. The Appalachian Trail is not just a hiking trail — it is a national treasure, a symbol of American ingenuity, and a sanctuary for all who seek solace and connection with nature.

The ATC’s centennial celebration serves as a moment of reflection — a time to honor the countless volunteers, staff, and supporters who have contributed to the Trail’s longevity. These volunteers, who generously donate their time and energy, are the backbone of the Trail’s maintenance. This milestone represents a century of dedication to protecting and maintaining the Appalachian Trail, which provides over 3 million annual visitors, hikers, and outdoor enthusiasts with breathtaking access to the natural beauty of the United States. From seasoned hikers to newcomers drawn to the serenity of nature, the A.T. unites people across generations and backgrounds, inspiring a collective sense of responsibility for protecting access to public lands.

**We must pause and recognize special moments like this to reflect on the past and — arguably, more importantly — renew our commitment to the future.**

When living in the Midwest, before joining the ATC Board and ultimately the ATC staff, I was inspired to learn more about the iconic A.T. from afar — including how it came to be and how it endures. I assumed my tax dollars maintained it until I took the time to do my homework and learned that the Trail is not entirely funded and operated by the federal government via the National Park Service. Instead, it’s a tapestry of partners, woven together to protect and maintain it collaboratively. I believe there are millions more like me who do not know what it takes to sustain a long-distance trail like the A.T.

While the Trail is a beloved destination for millions, only a small fraction actively contributes to its maintenance and preservation. The long-term sustainability of the Trail requires that future generations understand, appreciate, and participate in maintaining and supporting public resources like the A.T. We must bridge this gap and inspire more people to get involved. For the ATC staff and our dedicated Trail Maintaining Clubs to continue their essential work, we need to increase awareness, understanding, and the number of individuals engaged in protecting the Trail.

The A.T. also faces contemporary challenges: more frequent damaging weather events, increasing visitor numbers, and uncertain access to federal funding. These pressing issues require strategic solutions and

dedicated advocacy. For instance, we are implementing measures to mitigate the impact of weather events, thoughtful approaches to visitation to ensure sustainability, and exploring alternative funding sources. The ATC is up for the challenge and is already taking action by collaborating with communities and stakeholders and investing in conservation projects to safeguard the Trail and its surroundings.

As stewards of the Trail, the ATC must continue to dispel myths and find innovative ways to reach everyday visitors and outdoor enthusiasts. To ensure this iconic Trail’s ongoing relevance and stewardship, we must capture a modern audience’s attention and foster a broad base of supporters who will protect, maintain, and advocate for the Trail and access to public lands.

The ATC’s bold new vision — **the Appalachian Trail and its landscape are always protected, resilient, and connected for all** — and branding are intended to do just that. Our new tagline, “Keep the Trail Alive,” creates a sense of urgency to get involved. By reinvigorating its brand message, the ATC strives to energize its existing supporters and attract a new generation of supporters, advocates, and volunteers passionate about preserving this iconic Trail for future generations.

I envision the ATC as a beacon of conservation and stewardship, embracing new technologies and innovative practices. The ATC is unwavering in its commitment to protecting, managing, and advocating for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Through the dedication of our staff, supporters, partners, and volunteers, we will keep the Trail alive and thriving for another century. Let us work together so that future generations can say, “Let’s go!” instead of reminiscing, “Remember when...”

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*Jeri Ward, ATC’s Chief Growth Officer, is a national marketing and communications leader with extensive storytelling experience for both nonprofit and corporate sectors. Before joining ATC’s leadership team, she served on its Board of Directors since May 2022. Jeri previously led Northwestern University’s global marketing and communications strategy as Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer. She was the first female Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer at Audi of America and has also held various positions at Ford Motor Company. Jeri holds a mechanical engineering degree and dual graduate degrees from Northwestern University. She enjoys hiking in Virginia with her fiancé and Labrador retrievers.*  
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# Appalachian Trail Conservancy

[appalachiantrail.org](http://appalachiantrail.org)

P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0807



# Keep the Trail Alive.

[keepthetrailalive.org](http://keepthetrailalive.org)

JOHN "FLAVORTOWN" CONLON, FLIP-FLOP THRU-HIKE, MCAFEE KNOB, VIRGINIA