

A JOURNEYS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY / SUMMER 2025

— SYNERGY EDITION —



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Synergy on the Trail: A white-lined sphinx moth (Hyles lineata) pollinates scarlet beebalm (Monarda didyma). Using their long proboscis, the moths can access nectar inside the long, tubular flowers. These striking creatures have a wide native range and can be spotted along the Trail in all 14 states, often when they emerge at dusk to seek out sweet-scented flowers. Photo by Greg Vandeleeest / iStock



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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.

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PHOTO BY ED COONEY

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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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PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS MOST

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL'S STORY IS one of endurance, adaptation, and collective stewardship. And my experience with the Trail and the ATC is no different.

Whether hiking or volunteering on the Trail or leading the organization entrusted with its care, these themes have resurfaced throughout my four decades of A.T. stewardship, and I am confident they are a focus for the ATC's Board of Directors as they search for my successor.

The Trail's remarkable partnership model represents one of conservation's greatest success stories. It is what first drew me to the Trail as an idealistic twenty-something-year-old. This collaboration between citizen volunteers and the federal government, alongside state and local jurisdictions, communities, and conservation organizations, has created a grass-roots network that forms the backbone of the Trail's endurance and resilience. And it is a shining example of how collective energy can truly create and protect what is most important.

As much as the core of the model remains steadfast, the collective network has also learned that it needs to adapt and change to meet whatever challenges it is facing. During my time stewarding the Trail, natural disasters and complex political challenges have continued to evolve and now represent some of our greatest challenges. While catastrophic weather events like Hurricane Helene devastated roughly 800 miles of Trail, shifts in ideology and national priorities have introduced new challenges that strike at the Trail's foundation.

For me personally, adaptation has been central to leading the ATC through the past seven years as its President and CEO. My tenure has seen Covid, political and social upheaval, Supreme Court decisions impacting the A.T., as well as hurricanes and wildfires. To ensure the organization continued to thrive and grow amid challenges, I had to be open to new approaches and ideas

to achieve our ambitious goals, admit and learn from my mistakes, and shift direction when necessary.

At the core of the A.T. and my work is the concept of stewardship, defined as the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. This definition is something I have always taken to heart, from the first time I stepped on the Trail with loppers in hand, to volunteering and eventually leading the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, to moving to the Board of ATC, and now in this final role as CEO.

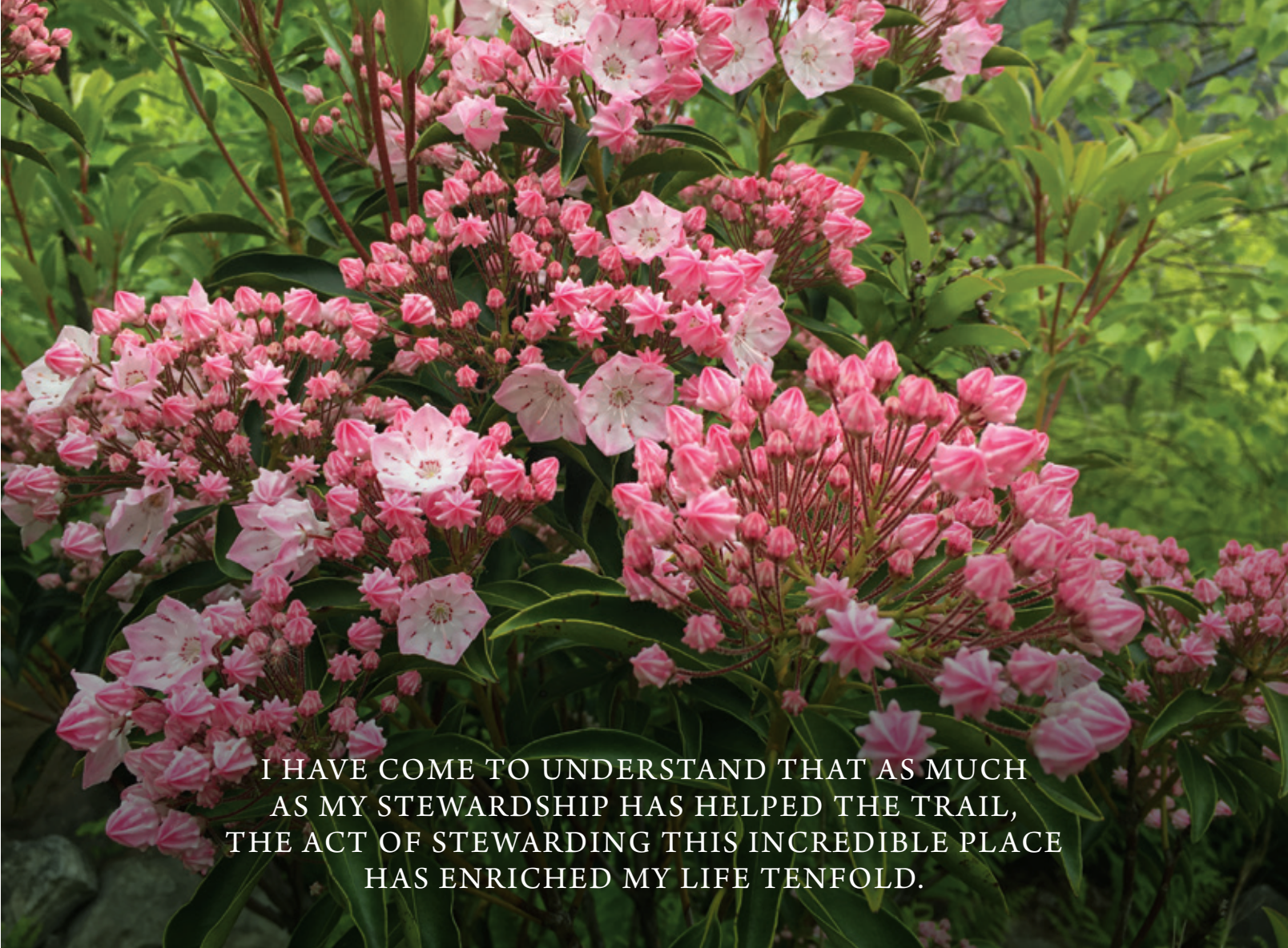
On June 6, the day before National Trails Day, the entirety of ATC's staff stepped away from their workstations and spent the day providing hands-on stewardship of the Appalachian Trail. Joined by partners and volunteers, it was an opportunity for us to reconnect with the resource and our mission in a tangible way. I have come to understand that as much as my stewardship has helped the Trail, the act of stewarding this incredible place has enriched my life tenfold.

As the Appalachian Trail Conservancy enters its second century, the tagline "Keep the Trail Alive" represents more than a slogan — it's a rallying cry for all who recognize the Trail's transformational power. Preserving the Trail transcends simple maintenance; it involves protecting a fundamental piece of America's identity and heritage.

To make sure the ATC and the Trail continue to endure, adapt, and thrive, the Conservancy made the decision to initiate the organization's first comprehensive fundraising campaign with a goal of raising \$50 million.

We marked the official public launch of this effort — the Appalachian Trail Conservancy Centennial Campaign — at our celebratory Centennial Gala held on June 11 in Washington, D.C. I am thrilled to announce that the campaign has already surpassed the halfway mark with more than \$26 million raised.

The campaign is a strategic investment across three critical areas of our work: Protect, Experience, and



I HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT AS MUCH AS MY STEWARDSHIP HAS HELPED THE TRAIL, THE ACT OF STEWARDING THIS INCREDIBLE PLACE HAS ENRICHED MY LIFE TENFOLD.

MOUNTAIN LAUREL (*KALMIA LATIFOLIA*), PENNSYLVANIA. PHOTO BY KAREN VIOLA

Belong. These encompass safeguarding threatened landscapes, preparing for increased use and climate change, deepening community connections, and inspiring the next generation of stewards. In this issue of the magazine, you will learn how you can support this important work and join in this campaign.

The Appalachian Trail embodies a promise that through partnership and perseverance, Americans can protect what matters most. This promise has been tested repeatedly, from the Trail's initial construction through decades of natural and human-made challenges.

The Trail's success reflects the unwavering dedication of supporters, volunteers, staff, partners, and federal colleagues who have accomplished things that once seemed impossible. The path forward requires the same qualities that have sustained it throughout history: resilience, partnership, and unwavering commit-

ment to preservation. The challenges ahead may differ from previous decades, but the fundamental approach remains unchanged: walk forward together and Keep the Trail Alive.

In an era of increasing division, the Appalachian Trail stands as a reminder of what Americans can accomplish when they unite around shared values of conservation, community, and stewardship. It offers proof that through collective action and dedication, irreplaceable treasures can not only survive but thrive for future generations to discover and cherish.

Thank you for all of your stewardship of the ATC and the Trail.

Sandra Marra / President & CEO

★ TRAILHEAD

HIGHLIGHTS / EVENTS

Sometimes called the eastern newt, the red-spotted newt (Notophthalmus viridescens) is one of the many fascinating species that make their homes along the A.T. Found in all fourteen Trail states, their sensitivity to changes in the environment make them useful for tracking the health of local ecosystems. Hikers often encounter the brightly colored red eft (the newt's terrestrial juvenile form) on the forest floor. Photo by Alla Kemelmakher Unsplash



FLIP-FLOP KICKOFF AT HARPERS FERRY

By Dakota Jackson, ATC Senior Director of Visitor Engagement

THE 2025 FLIP-FLOP KICKOFF BROUGHT 500 VISITORS TO THE APPALACHIAN Trail Conservancy's Harpers Ferry Visitor Center for a weekend of celebration, learning, and adventure. Highlights included workshops and inspiring remarks from ATC President and CEO Sandi Marra and Appalachian National Scenic Trail Superintendent Ed Clark. The event concluded with a warm send-off for 21 hikers beginning their flip-flop thru-hikes from Harpers Ferry.

The weekend showcased the strength of the Trail community and the beauty of this alternative thru-hike. The ATC is thankful for its partners at the Trail & Town Alliance of Harpers Ferry-Bolivar; the A.T. Communities of Harpers Ferry and Bolivar, West Virginia, and Brunswick, Maryland; the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club; and River & Trails.



Top: Flip-Flop Kickoff attendees explore Harpers Ferry during a Hike Through History with local guide Chris Craig. Photo by Caroline Ralston/ATC. Bottom left: The 21 flip-flop thru-hikers gather in front of the Visitors Center before starting their journey. Photo by Caitlin Miller/ATC. Bottom right: A volunteer from the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club helps a hiker shed pack weight. Photo by Andriana Barrios



APPALACHIAN TRAIL DAYS AT DAMASCUS

By Dakota Jackson, ATC Senior Director of Visitor Engagement

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY WELCOMED OVER 2,400 VISITORS to the Damascus Trail Center for Trail Days, an annual mid-May festival celebrating the A.T. Programs included an educational talk on tick bite prevention, making art on the Trail, and the history of hikers. There was a celebration of the ATC's 100th birthday, complete with cookies and an exclusive members-only raffle. The weekend ended with the revival of Hardcore — an A.T. volunteer opportunity for hikers at Trail Days — which was made possible by the Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club, the Appalachian Long-Distance Hiker Association, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's A.T. Resiliency Fund donors.

The ATC is grateful to Hike for Mental Health for their generous donation and to its partners who contributed to the raffles and tabled on the Trail Center lawn. This long-standing celebration of the A.T. was a fantastic opportunity to share passion for the Trail with ATC's partners and visitors, and to welcome new and longtime members to the Damascus Trail Center.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DREW HINES/ATC



BUILDING BRIDGES

By Mike Bowman, Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club Volunteer

HOW DO YOU MANUALLY MOVE THREE 41-FOOT, 1,300-POUND BRIDGE SUPPORT beams — down the Appalachian Trail, across two footbridges and multiple water bars — to their final resting place? That was the task the Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club (CVATC) assisted the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Mid-Atlantic Trail Crew with last Fall during a bridge replacement near Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Over two weekends in October, almost 60 volunteers participated in this endeavor. Using a series of bars and straps, a log dolly, and equipment rollers on the foot bridges, Crew and Club members maneuvered their load about a half mile down the A.T. It was a slow, tedious process navigating the length and weight of the stringers (the beams that help support the bridge) around trees, curves in the Trail, and over water bars. The log dolly was extremely useful but had to be disassembled then reassembled at every bridge crossing.

During the bridge replacement, the CVATC had to reroute the Trail, which entailed building and installing a 19-foot temporary bridge. This was another successful volunteer effort that moved all the required materials so the bridge could be built on-site.

All of the work was an amazing team effort that could not have been accomplished without guidance from the ATC's Bob Sickley, who managed the Mid-Atlantic Trail Crew, and Craig Dunn, the CVATC's Trail Master, who coordinated all of the volunteers. The Mid-Atlantic Trail Crew worked their magic to get all stringers and decking boards in place. By mid-April, enough railing was installed to officially open the new bridge to the public. The temporary bridge was dismantled, and the Trail was routed back across the new bridge.

In June, more railing was added to the bridge — some of it completed by volunteers and ATC staff on their Staff Field Day in honor of National Trails Days. Later this year, more will be done to make parts of the bridge compliant with the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). But the current progress is a great example of the vital work provided by a Maintaining Club and its volunteers and the collaborative efforts of those dedicated to the Appalachian Trail.



Above: CVATC volunteers and the Mid-Atlantic Trail Crew do the — literal — heavy lifting to get the bridge materials on-site. Photos by Rachel Lettre/ATC. Left: ATC staff work on the railings for the new bridge. Photo by Caroline Ralston/ATC



A SAFER AND MORE SCENIC CROSSING

By Linda Shannon Mulheren, President, Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club

ONE OF THE NEWEST REROUTES OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL JUST MAY be one of the most spectacular. The Route 311 road crossing — by the McAfee Knob trailhead in Virginia — is now a part of the A.T. proudly maintained by the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC). In the past, hikers had to make a mad dash across a dangerous stretch of the Trail: a curved, hilltop road where the speed limit is 55 mph. Hikers can now take their time and may even stop in the middle of the crossing above the busy road. The pedestrian bridge makes for a great hangout spot for day hikers, section hikers, and thru-hikers pausing to snack, snap a photo, or even take a break to chat with fellow Trail enthusiasts.

This portion of the A.T. — which is part of the Triple Crown segment of the A.T. that includes Dragon's Tooth, McAfee Knob, and Tinker Cliffs — sees over 50,000 visitors per year. From planning to construction, the bridge took over 20 years to come to fruition. It was quite an accomplishment involving major input

from a variety of agencies, including the Virginia Department of Transportation, local area governance, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the National Park Service, and the RATC. This cooperative management project was a huge challenge for all involved, but has resulted in a wonderful structure that brings a tremendous improvement to the Trail.



Above: From development to completion, the bridge's success is due to collaborative work from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Stonewall Bridge Inc., the National Park Service, the ATC, the RATC, Roanoke County, and the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission. Photo by ATC Staff.
Left: Linda and Kelly Mulheren install the sign rerouting hikers to the new crossing. Photo by Brian Boggs, RATC



ATC STAFF CELEBRATE NATIONAL TRAILS DAY WITH STAFF FIELD DAY

By Genevieve Andress, ATC Relationship Marketing and Membership Director

IN HONOR OF NATIONAL TRAILS DAY ON JUNE 7TH, ATC staff took Friday, June 6th as a Staff Field Day, and got out on the Trail working together in every region, from Georgia to Maine. The projects were a way for ATC staff to celebrate together, work together, learn new skills, and enjoy camaraderie and fresh air while caring for the Trail. In West Virginia, a crew participated in a day of maintenance along the boundary of the protected A.T. land corridor ❶. ATC staff helped install handrails on a footbridge and worked on invasive species removal in Pennsylvania ❷. In Georgia, Dan Ryan joined the Konnarock Trail Crew as they continue work on a multi-year project to build wilderness-grade trail with minimal land impact and structure in the Blood Mountain Wilderness ❸. The ATC team in New Hampshire removed invasive buckthorn that threatens the native plants critical to pollinators, birds, and bats ❹. An ATC crew worked in the Tribute Garden at ATC headquarters ❺. In Virginia, staff helped clear and prep an overnight site at Catawba Shelter near McAfee Knob ❻. Others helped out at ATC visitor centers in Harpers Ferry and in Monson, Maine. Those who weren't able to join an event volunteered with local trail groups in their communities. The ATC was thrilled to celebrate 100 years of protecting and managing the A.T. and honoring National Trails Day together.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATC STAFF: 1. JERI WARD; 2. ANN SIMONELLI; 3. DAN RYAN; 4. MICHELLE PRESLEY; 5. KAYLA DOCK; 6. MARY HODGES





PHOTO COURTESY OF HMBLE HSTLE CLOTHING

ATC & HMBLE HSTLE COLLABORATION

By Dakota Jackson, ATC Senior Director of Visitor Engagement

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY and HMBLE HSTLE Clothing have launched a collaborative collection — “Beyond Us” — celebrating 100 years of the Appalachian Trail’s legacy. Merging streetwear with outdoor culture, the pieces emphasize the importance of nature, community, and East Coast pride. Pieces are available now in the ATC Trail Store and additional apparel will be available throughout the year.

HMBLE HSTLE Clothing began as a way to fund the Humble Hustle nonprofit, an organization that provides programming for Roanoke youth. All sales of HMBLE HSTLE x ATC merchandise will advance the ATC’s mission and Humble Hustle’s efforts to provide pathways for youth to experience and connect with nature and the outdoors.

Learn more about their work at thehumblehustle.org

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

appalachiantrail.org/member-survey



Save the Date for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Annual Membership Meeting

The ATC’s annual membership meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on August 27, 2025.

The meeting is an opportunity to come together as a community to discuss the future of the ATC and recommit to educating and empowering current and future caretakers of the Appalachian Trail. The meeting will be live-streamed and all members are invited to participate.

The results of the 2025 Board of Directors election will be announced at the meeting. The slate of candidates will be published on the ATC website prior to the meeting, and all members whose membership is current as of August 1, 2025, are eligible to vote. Members will receive an email to cast their ballot online.

For more information, visit

appalachiantrail.org/2025meeting



Appalachian Trail
Conservancy

TRAIL STORE



ATC & Hmble Hstle

The Appalachian Trail is bigger than a recreational destination, a trail, a wilderness experience ... it’s **Beyond Us**. Blending streetwear and outdoor spirit, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and HMBLE HSTLE Clothing designed a collection for those who commit to protecting the Trail’s legacy and future in every step. Bold, functional, and purpose-driven, the pieces are a symbol of stewardship, East Coast pride, and the next generation of trailblazers.



Shop the collection today!
appalachiantrail.org/hmble-hstle

Proceeds support the ATC’s mission to protect, maintain, and advocate for the Trail and Humble Hustle’s mission to expose Black youth to the outdoors.

**Wear your love
for the Trail.**

ATC CELEBRATES 100 YEARS AT CENTENNIAL GALA

MORE THAN 200 GUESTS GATHERED at Washington, D.C.'s Union Station to celebrate the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's 100 years of dedication to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.), and the legacy of conservation, education, and advocacy that has shaped the Trail into a cultural and environmental treasure. The evening brought together trailblazers, stewards, policymakers, and supporters to honor the Trail's impact and chart its future.

Heading into its second century, the ATC continues to focus on three core pillars: Protect, Experience, and Belong. At the Gala, the Centennial Awards of Excellence recognized individuals and organizations that honor the pillars' values: **Protect** honors efforts to conserve the Trail's landscapes through stewardship and advocacy, including support for the Appalachian Trail Centennial Act. **Honorees:** *Sen. Tim Kaine, D-VA; Sen. Thom Tillis, R-NC; Rep. Don Beyer, D-VA; Rep. Mike Lawler, R-NY.* **Experience** highlights efforts to enhance how people engage with the Trail. **Honoree:** *L.L.Bean, for its enduring support of outdoor recreation and stewardship.* **Belong** celebrates work to make the Trail inclusive and welcoming. **Honoree:** *Dr. Mamie Parker, for her leadership in conservation and environmental education.*

During the Gala, author and adventurer Jennifer Pharr Davis moderated a fireside chat with entrepreneur, co-founder of Whole Foods, philanthropist, and A.T. thru-hiker John Mackey. In addition, Dr. Mills Kelly — professor emeritus at George Mason University and historian of the Appalachian Trail — presented a look back on the last 100 years of the ATC.

Gratitude was expressed to ATC's vital federal partners, including the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service, for their enduring collaboration in protecting the A.T. Deep appreciation was also extended to the 30 Trail Maintaining Clubs — the heart and soul of the A.T. — whose volunteers carry out the daily, hands-on work of keeping the Trail open and thriving. The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) was specially honored as the Centennial Gala's Tribute Partner. Founded in 1927 by a small group that included legendary Trail leader Myron Avery, today PATC's stewardship spans more than 240 miles of the Trail across four states. PATC's legacy of volunteerism exemplifies the enduring

spirit of the Trail and reminds us that behind every white blaze is a story of dedication, community, and care.

The Volgenau Foundation was honored with a Partnership Tribute for its commitment to conservation and their transformative and ongoing support of the A.T., high value ecosystems, watersheds, and scenic vistas. More than ten years ago, the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership (ATLP) was formed with a mission to provide permanent protection of highly valued areas within the A.T. landscape. Thanks to a generous gift from the Volgenau Foundation, the ATLP was able to not only convene its first meeting but has grown and thrived. More than 88,000 acres have been conserved through the ATLP network across eleven states. The ATLP's Wild East Action Fund has leveraged more than \$80 million from partner organizations to amplify on-the-ground conservation efforts.

Recognition was also given to SAIC — a premier Fortune 500 company — for their annual support of the ATC's work under both the Experience and Belong pillars. In addition, for the past two Earth Days, they have encouraged their entire staff of roughly 24,000 to fundraise for the ATC, matching dollars raised by employees and helping to build a new generation of Trail enthusiasts.

The ATC is committed to empowering the next generation of trail stewards — the future of A.T. advocacy and leadership — and has partnered with leading organizations with reach and access to youth, young adult, and underrepresented groups. The Greening Youth Foundation based in Atlanta was highlighted as being key to supporting future environmental advocates and stewards.

The ATC also announced the public launch of its Centennial Campaign, the largest fundraising effort in the organization's history, with a goal of raising \$50 million over five years to secure the Appalachian National Scenic Trail's future for generations to come. (For more about the Campaign please see page 20.)

The ATC extends its gratitude to all supporters, partners, and volunteers who have contributed to the success of the Centennial Gala and the ongoing mission to protect and preserve the Appalachian Trail for future generations.



Left: Jennifer Pharr Davis, Gala Speaker; Eboni Preston Goddard, ATC Board Member; Renee Alston-Maisonet, ATC Board Member; Dr. Mamie Parker, Honoree; Sandra L. Marra, ATC President & CEO; John Mackey, Gala Speaker; Yong Lee, ATC Board Member



Above left: Lisa Volgenau, VP of The Volgenau Foundation Board of Directors, accepts a tribute in honor of the Foundation's exceptional support of Appalachian Trail landscape conservation. Above right: Congressman Don Beyer, Sandra L. Marra, and Senator Tim Kaine. Below: ATC's Centennial Gala fills the East Hall of Union Station with celebration and shared commitment to the Trail's next 100 years. Photos by Ken Pak Photography





A SHARED LANDSCAPE

"I HAVE HAD A CAMERA IN MY HAND PRETTY MUCH EVERY DAY of my life since high school when it was a disposable camera in my back pocket. And I have been hiking and backpacking trails all over since I was a child. When I started section hiking the Appalachian Trail, it just made sense to bring my camera along for the inevitable moments of beauty."

Grayson Highlands State Park in Virginia has much to offer A.T. hikers. Passing longhorns along the Trail is a favorite highlight for many – though hikers are reminded to give the animals space. In addition to the sight of cattle, visitors to the region have the opportunity to experience southern red spruce sky islands, one of the most endangered ecosystems in the U.S.

Photo by Cynthia Viola
cynthiaviola.com

SECURING THE TRAIL’S FUTURE

A FIVE-YEAR CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT THE A.T.

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1925, THE Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) has worked to bolster the health, resilience, and connectivity of the A.T. and its surrounding lands. In celebration of its 100th anniversary, the ATC announced the public launch of its Centennial Campaign. It is the largest fundraising effort in the organization’s history, with a goal of raising \$50 million over five years to secure the Appalachian National Scenic Trail’s future for generations to come.

The campaign focuses on strategic investments aligned with the ATC’s three core pillars: Protect, Experience, and Belong.

Protect: Ensure a conserved and connected A.T. landscape and manage the Trail’s natural, visual, and cultural resources so people and nature can thrive.

Experience: Cultivate an engaged and expanding community that supports, volunteers, and advocates for the ATC and our mission.

Belong: Maintain the Trail and its infrastructure to ensure millions of annual visitors enjoy a world-class experience while seeing conservation in action.

According to Sandra Marra, President and CEO of the ATC, “The Centennial Campaign is a bold investment in our shared future — ensuring that the Trail continues to connect people with nature and one another, for the next hundred years and beyond.”

The Appalachian Trail spans nearly 2,200 miles from Georgia to Maine and is visited by millions of people annually. However, this beloved national treasure faces mounting threats, from rapid environmental change and unsustainable development to the dual challenge of increased visitor use and the need to ensure access for all. The Centennial Campaign will provide the necessary funding to enhance biodiversity, build resilient infrastructure, and expand access, ensuring that the A.T. remains a powerful force for conservation, recreation, and community engagement.

The Campaign will help advance high-impact initiatives, including:

■ **Wild East Action Fund:** A grant program that provides flexible financial support to organizations and collaborative projects that are advancing the protection and conservation of natural, cultural, historic, scenic, recreational, and community assets found within the A.T. landscape.

■ **Natural Resource Stewardship:** Focused on maintaining a healthy and resilient natural environment, this program supports the ecosystems that sustain the A.T. and enrich the experiences of all who visit.

■ **Ridgerunners:** These on-trail educators engage hikers, providing information on responsible recreation on the Trail — including Leave No Trace principles — and assist with trail maintenance and vital data collection, thereby enhancing the hiking experience.

■ **Sustainable Overnight Sites:** The ATC is developing a network of environmentally responsible camping sites along the A.T., balancing visitor needs with ecological preservation.

■ **Youth Crew Development:** By empowering young individuals through trail stewardship, this partnership program fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for the A.T.

■ **Young Adult Engagement Programs:** Designed to inspire the next generation of stewards, these programs encourage participation from young adults from all backgrounds to ensure the Trail remains “the People’s Trail” for all.



“THIS CAMPAIGN IS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN FUNDRAISING; IT’S ABOUT VISION. WE’RE STANDING AT THE INTERSECTION OF LEGACY AND OPPORTUNITY. WITH EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED, WE ARE PROTECTING NOT JUST LAND, BUT THE VALUES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC ACCESS THAT DEFINE THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL.”

~ Roger Klein, Campaign Advisory Council Co-Chair



Above: Round Bald, Tennessee. Photo by Jim Cotey. Left: Moose at Nahmakanta Lake, Maine. Photo by Keith “Stony Bologna” Eddy. Right: Youth stewardship on the Trail in Georgia. Photo by Rachel Lettre/ATC

The campaign was publicly announced at the ATC’s Centennial Gala, held at Union Station in Washington, D.C., on June 11, 2025. During this milestone celebration, the ATC proudly shared that, thanks to the generosity of visionary leaders who recognize the campaign’s critical importance to the Appalachian Trail, more than \$26 million has already been raised, surpassing the halfway point. This early momentum reflects confidence and a growing commitment to the Trail’s future — an open invitation to join the effort to ensure the A.T. endures for all who will follow in our footsteps.

“Our goal is to ensure that the Trail remains a place of inspiration and refuge for everyone,” said Greg Winchester, Campaign Advisory Council Co-Chair. “This Centennial Campaign is our call to action: to build a stronger, more resilient Appalachian Trail for the next 100 years and the millions of lives it will touch.”

To learn more about the Centennial Campaign or to make a tax-deductible donation, visit [keepthetrailalive.org](https://www.keepthetrailalive.org)



COLLABORATING TO PROTECT THE RIDGE

In partnership with nonprofits, all levels of government, Pennsylvania communities, Maintaining Clubs, and other organizations, the ATC's legacy of involvement in the Kittatinny Ridge region helps to preserve and protect this vital landscape.

BY ELIZABETH CHOI

THE KITTATINNY RIDGE

holds an undeniable presence. Known to the Lenni Lenape as “the endless mountain,” for many Pennsylvanians today the Kittatinny Ridge is both a familiar backdrop and a prominent reference point to show locals where they are and where they’re heading. Featuring much of Pennsylvania’s 230-mile section of the Appalachian Trail, it provides some of the most diverse views along the entire A.T. It is possible for a seasoned hiker to witness dense forests, patchworks of farmland, and scattered rural communities in a single day.

The uniqueness of the Ridge demands a few superlatives. It is the most climate-resilient landscape in the state, with a varied topography that includes outcrops, wetlands, and valleys, as well as forested ridgelines. These different habitats are also what make it one of the most biodiverse regions in eastern North America.

“The Kittatinny is so important in the Appalachians for species to be able to have that place to live and survive and to adapt and move as conditions change around them,” explains Marian Orlousky, Director of Science and Stewardship for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). The Kittatinny Ridge is part of the Atlantic Flyway and functions as a Global Important Bird Area, making it the most significant bird — and butterfly — migration corridor in the northeastern U.S.

Additionally, the Ridge contributes to the economies of 12 neighboring counties and close to 200 townships. The value in protecting open space, watersheds, and surrounding lands amounts to billions of dollars each year.

Given the importance of the Kittatinny region, Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) granted Conservation Landscape status to the 185 miles that extend from the Mason-Dixon line to the Delaware Water Gap. The Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape (KRCL) — whose key partners include the ATC, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Mid-Atlantic, and the DCNR — work alongside organizations, businesses, agencies, and local communities to “preserve the integrity of the Kittatinny Ridge and Corridor.”

The Appalachian Trail directly crosses only a few towns, and Duncannon, Pennsylvania — located in the Kittatinny Ridge where the Susquehanna and Juniata Rivers meet — is one of them. Photo courtesy of Wirestock / iStock

COALITION MEMBERS REALIZED THAT THEY NEEDED TO DELIVER THEIR CONSERVATION MESSAGE IN A WAY THAT RESONATED WITH THE NEARBY MUNICIPALITIES AND TOWNSHIPS ... RETURN-ON-ENVIRONMENT REPORTS ... ATTACHED DOLLARS SAVED OR EARNED TO ITEMS SUCH AS CLEAN WATER, CLEAN AIR, EROSION CONTROL, AND POTENTIAL RECREATION REVENUE.

“As a critical stretch of the A.T. in an increasingly vulnerable corridor due to development threats, the Kittatinny Ridge offers immense potential to advance the goals of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Landscape Conservation Program,” says Katie Allen, ATC Director of Landscape Conservation. “It links communities, biodiversity, climate resilience, and cultural heritage across state and regional boundaries.”

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF NATURE

Before the KRCL, there was the Kittatinny Ridge Coalition, an alliance of organizations, agencies, and academic institutions. Led by the ATC and Audubon, the Coalition’s early years focused mainly on the science part of conservation. “There was a researcher at Gettysburg College who did a cerulean warbler study,” recalls Orlousky. “There was some bat monitoring that we supported, a lot of invasive species-focused monitoring, and a lot of birds.”

Orlousky further describes how each Coalition member would apply a particular expertise and lens to an issue: “[The Nature Conservancy’s] angle in the early 2000s was land acquisition and land protection and evaluating the highest priorities for that. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy was very interested in a corridor of protected land around the Trail, as well as ecological resiliency and health.”

Coalition members realized that they needed to deliver their conservation message in a way that resonated with the nearby municipalities and townships. The Coalition worked to develop return-on-environment reports that helped define the value of various aspects of the Kittatinny region. The reports attached dollars saved or earned to items such as clean water, clean air, erosion control, and potential recreation revenue.

Much of the land surrounding the Kittatinny

Ridge remains privately owned. As a result, these reports have become an essential tool for making the economic case for conservation, with land acquisitions and conservation easements being another important strategy. Each year, the region faces increasing pressure for more residential and commercial development due to rapid population growth and the proximity of several interstate highways. Katie Hess, ATC Director of Pennsylvania Landscape Conservation, explains: “A lot of [the development pressure] is driven by logistics corridors from the East Coast moving goods to the interior of the country and distributing it along the East Coast.”

A LANDSCAPE-SCALE ENDEAVOR

In 2018, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources formally named the Kittatinny area as a Conservation Landscape, one of eight in Pennsylvania including the South Mountain Conservation Landscape. Both Kittatinny Ridge and South Mountain are part of the ATC’s landscape conservation initiatives.

“Being designated a Conservation Landscape in 2018 helped unify the landscape and elevate the status of the Ridge,” says Jeanne Barrett Ortiz, former External Lead for the KRCL and Senior Program Manager for Landscape Conservation at Audubon Mid-Atlantic. “[The] DCNR recognized the importance of this landscape in the late 90s, and it’s because of this, and continued DCNR support, that the KRCL has been recognized as a critical landscape in Pennsylvania.”

The KRCL and its partners have launched a number of successful initiatives. For example, researchers at the Center for Land Use and Sustainability at Shippensburg University worked on a geographical information system (GIS) project, which allowed land protection and university partners to identify “the



Above: The 185 miles of the Kittatinny Ridge in Pennsylvania (inset) and the path the Appalachian Trail takes through it as seen through ArcGIS mapping. Below: The region’s farmlands are ideal for solar installations that provide needed renewable energy. According to the Pennsylvania DCNR, “balancing renewable energy development with maintaining the rural landscape will be essential for the Kittatinny Ridge in the years ahead.” Imaging courtesy of Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources: storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bb8a24fa758a45d98266c714f7520613





Above: Given the different landforms along the Ridge, even experienced hikers may have difficulties trekking the A.T. in the region. However, the amazing vistas — such as this view of the Lehigh Valley from Bake Oven Knob — are worth the effort. Photos by Jordan Bowman/ATC (left) and Nicholas A. Tonelli via flickr CC BY 2.0 (right). Below: Mature trees along the Kittatinny Ridge provide an ideal nesting and foraging habitat for cerulean warblers (Setophaga cerulea). Discovery of warbler males exhibiting breeding behavior on the Ridge led to the area being designated as a Global Important Bird Area in 2015. Photo by Dominic Sherony via flickr CC BY-SA 2.0



“CONVENING MAY BE THE NUMBER ONE THING THAT WE DO IN LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION ... WE CONVENE PEOPLE AT A REGIONAL SCALE TO RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER, TO DO PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING IN ORDER TO DRIVE INNOVATION.”

~Katie Hess, ATC Director of Pennsylvania Landscape Conservation

most critical lands to protect along the KRCL for conservation value and to help bridge a gap in connected greenspace,” according to Ortiz.

GIS also helped to supplement the information from return-on-environment reports. County planners could access GIS analysis tools to explore different attributes of a land parcel, such as whether it was an important birding area or a good area for water. “This puts the tool in the county planner’s hands and in the township’s hands when they’re trying to make a decision,” says Kristen Hand, DCNR’s Internal Lead for the KRCL. “It’s useful information at their fingertips. And they can say, ‘Okay, well you know, we want to save this parcel for open space.’ It even gives the developers an alternative site.”

These efforts led one county to advocate on behalf of the KRCL. “Carbon County got their return-on-environment study and actually were able to turn it into a 10-million-dollar bond in the county to try and help conserve open space,” says Hand. “They have really been a guiding light, and have been wonderful in helping us spread the word to other counties and other municipalities to show how this tool can be used.”

Another major achievement was the creation of a new strategic plan and conservation plan. “With these plans, we were able to figure out exactly who needs to be at the table and how we want to move into the future, into our vision and mission,” explains Hess. “And then the communications plan really bumped up our ability to communicate with stakeholders and visitors across the whole range.”

The work that went into creating the strategic plan and the conservation plan also contributed to the KRCL becoming a Sentinel Landscape in 2024. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership unites federal agencies, state and local governments, and private organizations in working toward landscape conservation and resilience goals. The Kittatinny Ridge hosts Fort Indiantown Gap, the nation’s busiest National Guard training center, and several military facilities. Being

a Sentinel Landscape will help bring more resources to the KRCL.

Rose McCarthy, the special projects liaison for the Pennsylvania Governor’s Office of Policy and Planning, describes the implications of this latest designation: “It’s obviously extremely important to maintain what are called encroachment buffers around military installations, to try to deal with municipal zoning. [This is] to not reduce development, but to be more mindful when doing development, so that you’re not contributing to massive amounts of light pollution that impact military training.”

Kittatinny Ridge Sentinel Landscape Coordinator, Tanya Dierolf, adds that one of the main objectives of the partnership will be to work with “willing landowners and land managers to advance sustainable land use practices (both permanent protection and technical assistance/implementation of best practices) around military installations.”

The KRCL also continues to expand the protection of land on and around the Ridge through acquisitions and easements. These efforts are led by The Nature Conservancy and local land trusts and supported by the DCNR and other agencies and organizations.

COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

While scientific research provides a crucial foundation for conservation efforts, effective action can often require creating the proper space for dialogue. This involves including those interested in or affected by policy decisions, as well as fostering a sense of community. “Convening may be the number one thing that we do in landscape conservation,” says Hess. “The way that we practice it is we convene people at a regional scale to relate to one another, to do peer-to-peer learning in order to drive innovation.”

The success of the original Coalition was made possible through the efforts of many dedicated

“TOGETHER WE DEVELOPED STRONG PARTNERSHIPS, LEVERAGED RESOURCES, AND ESTABLISHED A SENSE OF KITTATINNY RIDGE IDENTITY... THE NUMEROUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE KRCL ARE DUE IN LARGE PART TO PARTNERS ALONG ITS LENGTH.”

~ Jeanne Barrett Ortiz, former External Lead for the KRCL and Senior Program Manager for Landscape Conservation at Audubon Mid-Atlantic



The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is a small raptor that makes its home in grassy areas, farmlands, meadows, and even in cities and towns — all the types of land found in the Kittatinny Ridge. Photo by Andrew Weitzel via flickr CC BY-SA 2.0

members and partners. Dan Kunkel of the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, Diane Husick with Moravian College, Gettysburg College, East Stroudsburg University, and Fort Indiantown Gap were just a few of the individuals and groups that were instrumental in the collaboration.

Today, the KRCL continues to benefit from the knowledge and commitment of diverse partners, including Mid-Atlantic Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Manada Conservancy, the Center for Land Use and Sustainability at Shippensburg University, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Natural Lands, Berks Nature, Lebanon Valley Conservancy, and many others. Additionally, Maintaining Clubs — Mountain Club of Maryland, Cumberland Valley AT Club, York Hiking Club, Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club, Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club, Allentown Hiking Club, Keystone Trails Association, Appalachian Mountain Club — Delaware Valley Chapter, and Batona Hiking Club — are vital partners in managing the Trail and the surrounding landscape.

“Together we developed strong partnerships, leveraged resources, and established a sense of Kittatinny Ridge identity — along a ridgeline which is long and linear,” says Ortiz. “Not so easy.... The numerous accomplishments of the KRCL are due in large part to partners along its length.”

When you consider the complexity and expanse of the Kittatinny region, the holistic and coordinated approach of a landscape partnership makes perfect sense. “ATC’s leadership in the Kittatinny Ridge exemplifies how strategic partnerships can safeguard the Trail’s ecological integrity while reinforcing the state’s DCNR leadership in large-scale, connected conservation efforts,” says Allen. “For the Trail, it means access to this vital artery of the A.T. is protected. Not just the footpath, but the experience of its scenic beauty and ecological richness.”

To find out more, visit appalachiantrail.org/landscape



PHOTO BY ATC STAFF

Trail Protectors Needed

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.



Volunteer today!
appalachiantrail.org/volunteer

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BLAZiNG THEIR OWN TRAiL

A South Carolina teacher brings the Trail experience and lessons of responsible recreation to her students.

BY LEON M. RUBIN

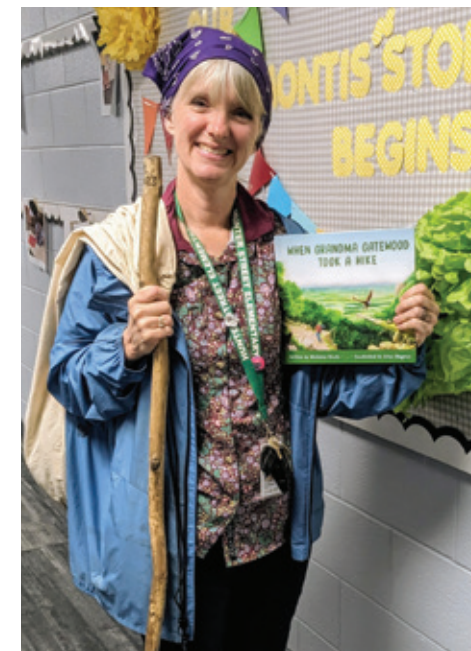
The Appalachian Trail doesn't pass through upstate South Carolina ... unless you're a student in Ginger "Iris" DeHaan's first grade classroom. For the past four years, this insatiable hiker and innovative teacher has been incorporating the Appalachian Trail experience into her lessons. She does this in a way that's inspiring a new generation of Trail enthusiasts — perhaps even a few future A.T. thru-hikers.

DeHaan calls her program *Iris and the Triple Crown Classroom*. Throughout the school year, she creatively integrates the A.T., the Continental Divide Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail, and even the Iditarod dogsled race into language arts, math, science, social studies, and more. "A lot of people think that it's some kind of curriculum that I'm following, but it's more like a way of life," she explains. "I weave the trails and trail life into what the school requires me to do."

The children, called her Fabulous Firsties, start the year with an A.T. Basecamp experience. They learn about Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and receive Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) hangtags and LNT tags for their backpacks. They also take photos at the Arch at Amicalola Falls State Park in Georgia — or an approximation of the Arch made from a white foam pool noodle.

DeHaan teaches math skills by tracking their mileage. They calculate how far they've gone and how far they plan to go. An "itty-bitty little hiker" on a big A.T. map helps them monitor their progress along the Trail.

If they're reading about trees, they'll talk about the Keffer Oak in Virginia. As DeHaan explains, "For phonics, if we're learning ff, ll, ss, and zz, I'll say, 'Oh, for ff, let's use cliff.' And then I'll talk about Tinker Cliffs in Virginia. I'm constantly weaving what I know about the Trail into the lessons."



Left: Wearing their "hiking gear," students use the school's playground to experience what it might be like to maneuver through different Trail landmarks and obstacles. Above: Ginger DeHaan — who takes her trail name, "Iris," from the purple flowers that remind her of her mother and her Appalachian heritage — dresses as Grandma Gatewood to teach her students about A.T. history and some of the famous people associated with the Trail. Photography by Cameron DeHaan

ON “THE TRAIL”

DeHaan tries to bring many real-life A.T. hiking experiences into her classroom. When the young hikers need supplies, they go to the “gear shop,” which is decorated with gear company logos that she has collected during the Appalachian Trail Days celebration in Damascus. Firsties experience “trail magic” when they demonstrate good behaviors. The students even get trail names. Some like to choose their own and others are earned — just like on the Trail. Some recent names include Hammerhead, Mudslide, and Buffet (DeHaan explains that every day at snack time this student “has 45 different things!”).

When DeHaan tells them about Grayson Highlands, the students bring stuffed animals — preferably horses — and arrange them in the playground. “Then we hike around the ponies, which is always fun,” DeHaan laughs. Everyone has a good time while also learning about giving space to and respecting wildlife.

As DeHaan and her Firsties slog through “Rocksylvania,” they use a pebbly portion of their playground



and eat ice cream to simulate the Half-Gallon Challenge. When they have cookies, DeHaan tells them about the Southern and Northern Cookie Ladies. They sit on the floor and watch hiking movies like they’re at the Warwick Drive-In in New York.

The students learn about how to navigate different parts of the Trail, like large boulders they would pass under. “I take two chairs, put them together, and put a bean bag over the top. They take their backpacks and go under it,” she explains. “For Ma-hoosuc Notch, we go to the playground. They have their backpacks on, and they climb and crawl and all this cute stuff.”

And Mount Katahdin? “I have an old easel, so I wrote all the things that are on the Katahdin sign and put it at the top of the hill. We go up the hill and I teach them how to smack the sign,” DeHaan shares. “They genuinely, in their hearts, summit Mount Katahdin! It’ll make me cry if I think about it. It’s the coolest, cutest thing ever.”

A TRAIL EXPERIENCE AS INSPIRATION

About five years ago, DeHaan experienced a debilitating illness. During her recovery, she discovered videos about hiking the A.T. She and her husband, Cameron (an experienced mountaineer), eventually started out by hiking a section of the A.T. in Georgia.

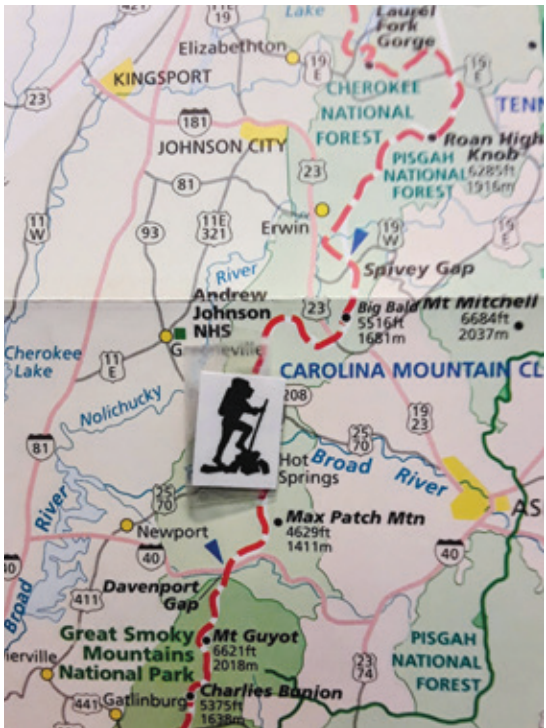
They went to Trail Days and then hiked to the Grayson Highlands with three of their children. “That day, as we were finishing our hike, I froze. Tears were streaming down my cheeks,” she recalls. “Cameron asked what was wrong, and I said, ‘I can’t go back.’ And then a voice inside my soul said, *Take it with you*. I was confused until it hit me! I couldn’t get down the Trail quick enough to get to my notebook and start writing all the ideas that flooded my mind.”

The result of that inspiration has generated interest along the Trail. DeHaan was a speaker at A.T.

The students start day one at “Basecamp” and are aided by the actual presentation (sent from the helpful folks of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club) that is used for hikers beginning their journey at Amicalola Falls. Each Firstie also receives a Leave No Trace tag and a hangtag (provided by the ATC) as they learn about LNT principles. According to DeHaan, “We zip-tie the tags onto their backpacks and they practically guard it with their lives — they love it!”



Above: Generous organizations and businesses provide Trail-related supplies like carabiners, so the Fabulous Firsties can feel like a part of the A.T. community. Below: As DeHaan and her students make their way through the Trail, they learn about maps and the different states the A.T. passes through.



Gateways in Georgia in March and at Trail Days in Damascus in May. She has also been featured on the *Trail Dames Podcast*. Closer to home — and most importantly: “The parents rave about how their children change for the better,” she says with pride.

A FOCUS ON HIKER EDUCATION

Those who share their love and knowledge of the A.T. with current and future generations are all vital parts of protecting the Trail — and beyond. Knowing how to engage in responsible recreation is one of the most important ways to preserve the A.T. and the Trail experience.

DeHaan’s work with her students aligns with the ATC’s and its partners’ efforts to emphasize hiker education and personal responsibility. Among their many duties, Ridgerunners on the Trail share responsible hiking practices with visitors. And people of all ages can learn more at one of the Conservancy’s three Visitor Centers in Damascus, Virginia; Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; and Monson, Maine.

“It’s always fun to talk to families,” says Caitlin Miller, the ATC’s Information Services Manager. “There’s this moment where you can kind of see the concept of the A.T. click in their minds. It’s like a spark. Teaching them about the Trail early captures a part of their imagination.”

For as long as she can, DeHaan intends to keep igniting those sparks. “This is how I govern my classroom and my life,” she says. “I instill in the children a love for nature, caring about the Earth, the people in it, the animals, and preserving it for the future.”

Miller is a fan of DeHaan’s program. “Teaching kids from a young age about stewardship of our public lands and wild places really hooks them, and I think from there, they grow up with that outdoor ethic. She’s doing that and makes it fun by engaging that adventurous spirit that people love about the Trail.”

To see Iris and the Triple Crown Classroom in action, look for the Iris’ Hiker Box channel on YouTube (@thehikerbox-sc8zs)

For ATC hiker resources, visit appalachiantrail.org/hiker-resources

SYNERGY AFTER THE STORM

—
BY HEATHER B. HABELKA
—

"IT DOESN'T COME INTO QUESTION THAT THERE WAS A HUGE AMOUNT OF DEVASTATION AND DESTRUCTION IN THE AREA. IT'S PRETTY REMARKABLE THAT THE TRAIL, AT THIS POINT, IS EVEN PASSABLE. AND IT'S BECAUSE OF ALL THE HARD WORK AND COOPERATION OF OUR PARTNER AGENCIES, ATC STAFF, AND CLUB VOLUNTEERS."

~Frank White, Mt. Rogers Appalachian Trail Club's Regional Partnership Council Representative in Virginia

After the Trail Days Festival in Damascus in May, enthusiastic volunteers joined the Hardcore crew to work on Trail impacted by Hurricane Helene. Photo by Ben Earp

WHEN HURRICANE

Helene slammed into 800 miles of Trail in North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia, the Appalachian Trail's Cooperative Management System (CMS) was put to the test. It stood strong during the storm and in the aftermath — expanding partnerships, engaging new members, re-energizing volunteers, and creating deeper connections within Trail communities.

The CMS is often compared to a three-legged stool. In broad terms this means the ATC, its thirty affiliated and independent A.T. Maintaining Clubs, and its agency partners each represent a leg of the stool that supports Trail conservation — working in concert to fund, maintain, and protect the world's longest footpath. “The three-legged stool is a great analogy, because without one of those three parts it will fall over it. It won't work,” says Frank White, Mt. Rogers Appalachian Trail Club's (MRATC) Regional Partnership Council Representative in Virginia. “To me it's amazing. All of these different entities, from government agencies to youth volunteers, working together for the greater good. It points out the shared vision and the importance of the Trail to people. Without the Cooperative Management System there's no way the sections of Trail devastated by Helene would be open right now.”

A METHODOICAL AND COOPERATIVE RESPONSE

“From the very start people wanted to help, but we asked volunteers to stay away from the affected Trail,” explains Kathryn Herndon-Powell, the ATC's Regional Director for the Virginias. “Our initial focus was on life and safety. We needed to make sure our ATC communities, including our colleagues, Trail Club volunteers, and agency partners were safe.”

As the ATC's Internal Helene Response Task Force came together, the ATC stepped in to support its federal agency partners by filling a critical gap. “We established a separate point of information and communication because in the immediate aftermath, our agency partners didn't have the capacity to focus on the A.T. It's a recreational resource, and they were making sure their own people were safe, getting campers out of campgrounds, restoring communication towers, and clearing roads for power companies,” Herndon-Powell says.

“Clubs have experienced severe storms before. Immediately after Helene, our volunteers were ready to go out and do Trail assessments. But what I hadn't experienced before was the severity of the damage. The Forest Service had a pretty significant concern about our safety,” shares Steve Perri, the Regional Partnership Council Representative for the Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club (TEHCC). “We were thinking how bad could it be? Little did we know. I'd never seen trees pushed over like that before.”

However, placing this short-term pause on Trail recovery didn't stop Clubs from mobilizing. “The Trail Club volunteers, instead of staying at home, immediately started working in their communities. The Carolina Mountain Club (CMC) helped people who had lost their homes or who were clearing trees, mud, and debris from their homes and yards. This speaks to what a great asset our Trail community is. It speaks to the heart of people that the A.T. attracts,” recalls Anne Sentz, the ATC's Regional Manager of the Smokies and North Carolina.

“After the initial life and safety assessments were complete, the ATC began facilitating communication, streamlining response processes, guiding volunteers, and centralizing ways to conduct Trail assessments and clear Trails,” explains Herndon-Powell.



CMC and TEHCC volunteers gather before heading to the Trail to clear Helene debris near Roan Mountain in Tennessee. Photo courtesy of Paul Curtin, Carolina Mountain Club



Top: In November, the CMC coordinated a workday — with 130 participants — to help restore area trails and parts of Hot Springs impacted by Hurricane Helene. On the Trail north of Tanyard Gap, Matt Drury, the ATC's Associate Director of Science and Stewardship, and a volunteer from Florida worked on tree removal. Photo courtesy of David Huff. Bottom left: After the tree was removed, a group of new volunteers repaired the tread. Photo courtesy of Rocko Smucker. Bottom right: In honor of National Trails Days in June, ATC staff — including ATC's Volunteer Engagement Specialist Jessie Johnson — coordinated with the CMC to clear and repair parts of the Trail near Hot Springs. Photo by Maddy Kaniewski/ATC

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF A.T. MAINTAINING CLUBS

Jerry Kyle, the ATC's High Country Regional Manager works with three of the four Clubs that were, and continue to be, most heavily impacted by Helene: Piedmont AT Hikers Club (PATH) in North Carolina, MRATC in Virginia, and TEHCC in Tennessee, which was hit the hardest. “Our Clubs play a critical day-to-day role in keeping the Trail open. But each of my three clubs were even more cohesive after Helene hit. They were unified by focus, process,

and wanting to get out there and open the Trail corridor,” he shares. According to Kyle, all three Clubs gained new members, re-engaged volunteers, and put in countless volunteer hours. Clubs even worked through the winter months to re-open the Trail for thru-hiker season and to support the local businesses that count on the season for their survival.

To that end, CMC's Friday Crew, which before Helene included fifteen members, has seen an uptick in volunteers. After the hurricane, close to forty people often participate in weekly Trail maintenance.

According to Paul Curtin, A.T. Supervisor for the CMC, volunteer hours increased during recovery by 25% which has resulted in increased memberships and donations, “The most new members we ever had was 180 in 2023. In 2024 we added 500 new members. We’re on pace for another 500 this year and will have 2,000 members by the end of this year.” While this growth can cause challenges, Curtin highlights the possibilities, “It’ll be great for the future of Club leadership. There’s talent within this new group and they’ll rise up. Our leadership will grow stronger and stronger.”

In Tennessee, TEHCC recorded 190 recovery events totaling 8,043 volunteer hours, with 867 of those hours completed by skilled sawyers trained in the safe use of chainsaws and crosscut saws. “I think everyone became more confident, and more skilled for everyone’s benefit, not just our Club’s,” stresses Perri. “We completed recovery work without any accidents. To me that is a testament to the Forest Service’s sawyer training. Helene recovery has improved our ability to get out in the field, work efficiently and consciously, and be aware of hazards when doing sawyer work.”

Kyle also observed a shift in how the Clubs approached recovery efforts. “Clubs tend to be siloed. They take care of their section without a lot of outside help. With Helene, they pulled together internally and really opened up to help during the recovery. We had sawyers and maintainers from other Clubs come

in, form teams, and help clear sections of the Trail.” White agrees, “It doesn’t come into question that there was a huge amount of devastation and destruction in the area. It’s pretty remarkable that the Trail, at this point, is even passable. And it’s because of all the hard work and cooperation of our partner agencies, ATC staff, and Club volunteers.”

According to Perri, Helene recovery has expanded and strengthened the Club’s already solid relationship with the Forest Service, “There is an increased awareness of our Club’s work. They trust us when it comes to safety,” he shares. “They observed us in action out in the field and saw how we took a technical and staged approach to repairs from assessments to execution to volunteer safety.”

IMPACT TO THE TRAIL’S BIODIVERSITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

With the exception of 5.5 miles of the 800 impacted miles, the Trail is open. However, Kyle stresses that the “Trail may be walkable, but it’s certainly not optimal by any means. Trail maintenance plans are being assessed, expanded, or modified. Many trees that are still standing are damaged as are their root structures. This inter-connectivity creates an ongoing falling threat.”

White echoes Kyle’s assessment. “Our big focus is on bringing the Trail back to its intended state, instead of a workaround state,” he says. “We’re also keeping an



In March, during the Southern Partnership Meeting in Blowing Rock, NC, the four Clubs most impacted by the hurricane provided presentations about the situation on their sections of the Trail. The ATC extended their appreciation and recognized the Clubs’ extraordinary contributions to the Trail after Helene. From left to right: Steve Perri (TEHCC), Jerry Kyle (ATC staff accepting on behalf of MRATC), David Atkinson (PATH), and Paul Curtin (CMC). Photo by Suzanne Neal/ATC



Hardcore crew members and volunteers who attended Trail Days get ready to hit the Trail. Volunteer opportunities like these are made possible thanks to the A.T. Resiliency Fund, the TEHCC, the Appalachian Long-Distance Hiker Association, and the ATC. Photo by Ben Earp

eye out for any impending safety issues that are a holdover from the storm while continuing to bring the Trail up to the standard that it was.”

Canopy reduction is also a concern, resulting in significant changes to the Trail’s landscape including expanded views, new clearings, increased sunlight, erosion, and altered water runoff channels. In addition, canopy reduction is impacting biodiversity, although the extent is unknown. “The Trail will be going through a new cycle of seasons. There’s places where we have rare species of flowers and plants. We don’t know how they’re going to adapt,” Perri explains. “Hikers will notice nature’s impact and evolution.”

In response, the ATC is planning for the short- and long-term phases of Helene recovery. “It’s going to be a long road, and many years before we can say we’ve really recovered and before we know what the long-term impacts are,” stresses Herndon-Powell. “More sunlight on the Trail means more invasives taking hold. Sections of tread may need to be relocated as we navigate water runoff and repair rootball holes. There will be ongoing removal of fallen trees and extra weakened trees that present overhead hazards to campers and hikers. Bridges and shelters will need to be inspected, stabilized, or rebuilt. And there is an increased fire risk both from downed trees and from branches hanging from above.”

WEATHERING THE NEXT STORM AND PROTECTING THE TRAIL

The nation’s political climate is also posing a significant threat to post-Helene recovery plans.

According to Franklin Tate, ATC’s Regional Director - South, “Our Forest Service and National Park Service partners are staying the course in a time when the future of their agencies remains uncertain due to budget cuts,” he says. “The same holds true for the global community who supported the Trail’s recovery. People from around the world contributed to the Appalachian Trail Resiliency Fund — an amazing testimony to how much folks love and support the A.T.”

This support is vital to protecting the Trail and ensuring access to it. Sentz emphasizes how important the Trail is to many, “After a disaster, people really need these types of outdoor spaces for their mental and physical health. We felt a sense of urgency, and we still feel that sense of urgency, to make sure the Trail remains a safe place for people to explore. I had my life changed by the Trail. It’s not just this isolated footpath. It’s something that people really need in their lives.”

For Helene recovery resources and updates, visit appalachiantrail.org/helene

To find volunteer opportunities, visit appalachiantrail.org/volunteer

To learn more about the ATC and its partners’ initial response to Hurricane Helene see “Communities Clearing the Way” from the Spring 2025 issue of *A.T. Journeys*. journeys.appalachiantrail.org/issue/spring-2025



| PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION |

MAINTAINING EVERY MILE

MAINE APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1935

RANDOLPH MOUNTAIN
CLUB / est. 1910

DARTMOUTH OUTING
CLUB / est. 1909

APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN
CLUB / est. 1876

AMC WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS
CHAPTER / est. 1929

GREEN MOUNTAIN
CLUB / est. 1910

AMC CONNECTICUT
CHAPTER / est. 1921

BATONA HIKING
CLUB / est. 1928

KEYSTONE TRAILS
ASSOCIATION / est. 1956

BLUE MOUNTAIN EAGLE
CLIMBING CLUB / est. 1916

YORK HIKING CLUB / est. 1932

CUMBERLAND VALLEY
APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CLUB / est. 1991

NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY
TRAIL CONFERENCE / est. 1920

AMC DELAWARE VALLEY
CHAPTER / est. 1962

ALLENTOWN HIKING
CLUB / est. 1931

SUSQUEHANNA APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1954

MOUNTAIN CLUB OF
MARYLAND / est. 1934

POTOMAC APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1927

OLD DOMINION
APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CLUB / est. 1969

TIDEWATER APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1972

NATURAL BRIDGE
APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CLUB / est. 1930

ROANOKE APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1932

OUTDOOR CLUB
AT VIRGINIA TECH / est. 1970

MOUNT ROGERS APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1960

PIEDMONT APPALACHIAN
TRAIL HIKERS / est. 1965

TENNESSEE EASTMAN HIKING
& CANOEING CLUB / est. 1946

CAROLINA MOUNTAIN
CLUB / est. 1923

SMOKY MOUNTAINS
HIKING CLUB / est. 1924

NANTAHALA HIKING
CLUB / est. 1968

GEORGIA APPALACHIAN
TRAIL CLUB / est. 1930

THE A.T. REMAINS A
LARGELY GRASSROOTS
EFFORT OF MORE THAN
5,000 VOLUNTEERS
ACROSS 30 TRAIL CLUBS.

THANK YOU TO THE
APPALACHIAN TRAIL CLUBS!

FIND YOUR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY AT [APPALACHIANTRAIL.ORG/WAYSTOVOLUNTEER](https://www.appalachiantrail.org/waystovolunteer)

2024

Impact Report



NORTH CAROLINA PHOTO BY SCOTT RAMSEY PHOTOGRAPHY

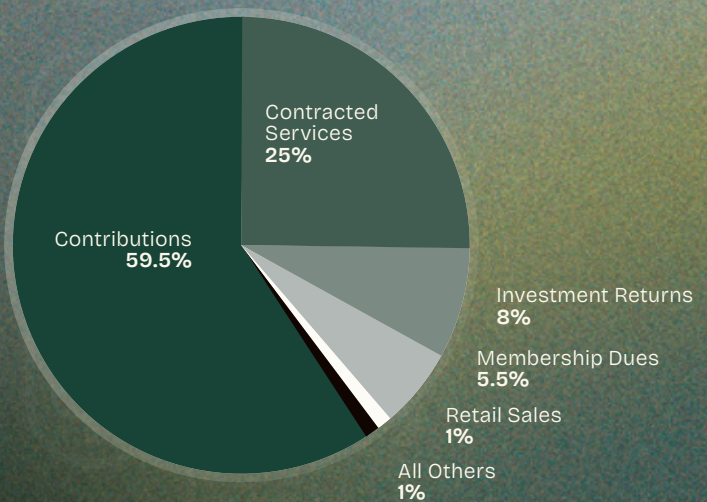
THANK YOU

to the thousands of generous members, donors, volunteers, partners and supporters who made the work of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy possible in 2024. Because of your ongoing investment in our mission, we were able to protect, manage, and advocate for the A.T. in 2024, and continue to work tirelessly on behalf of the Trail in 2025. Millions of visitors enjoy the A.T. every year, and you are part of making that possible.

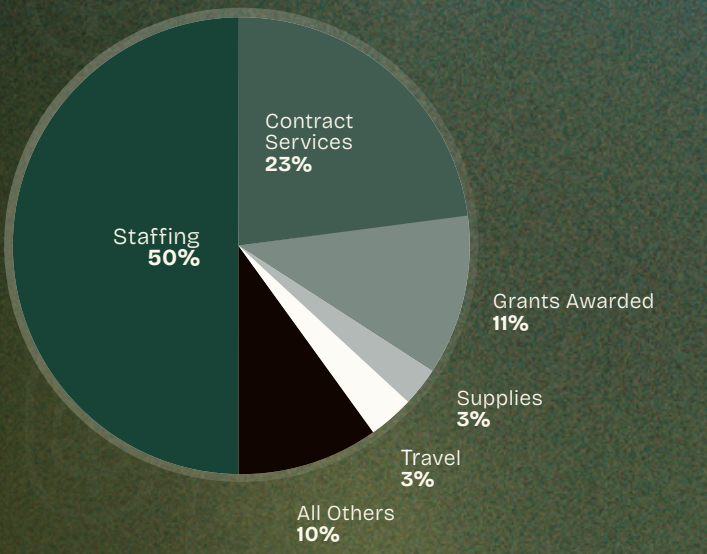
We hope these pages have demonstrated that impact in every issue. In this report, you'll find more information about our 2024 financials as well as a listing of our most generous supporters. You can view our full audited financial statements on our website at appalachiantrail.org/transparency.

One of the most important gifts our members and supporters bestow upon us is their trust in managing the funds they donate. We take this responsibility very seriously and hold ourselves to the highest standards of financial accountability and transparency.

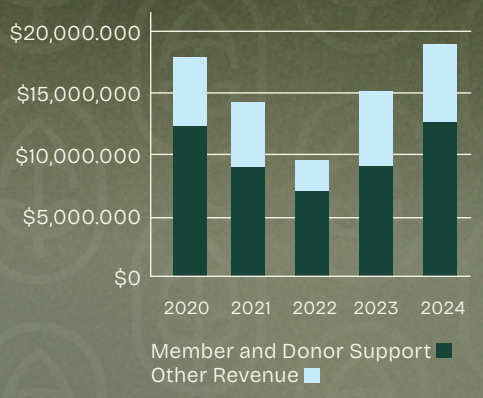
2024 OPERATING REVENUE \$19,134,783



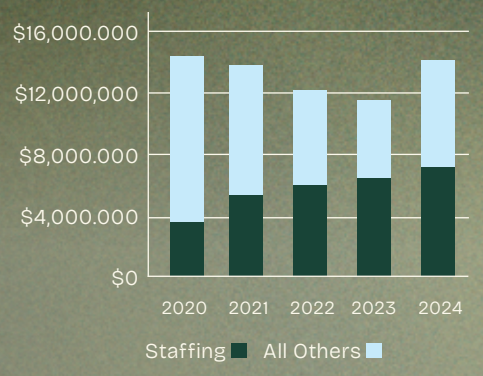
2024 OPERATING EXPENSES \$14,208,761



OPERATING REVENUE



OPERATING EXPENSES



Thanking our 2024 Donors

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is grateful to the following individuals, foundations, family foundations, and corporations whose generosity made our work possible in 2024.

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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy thanks the inspiring partners who contributed \$10,000 or more in 2024, demonstrating extraordinary leadership in safeguarding the A.T.'s future.

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With gratitude, we recognize the corporate partners who leverage their investment to strengthen the resiliency of the A.T. and ensure its protection for generations to come.

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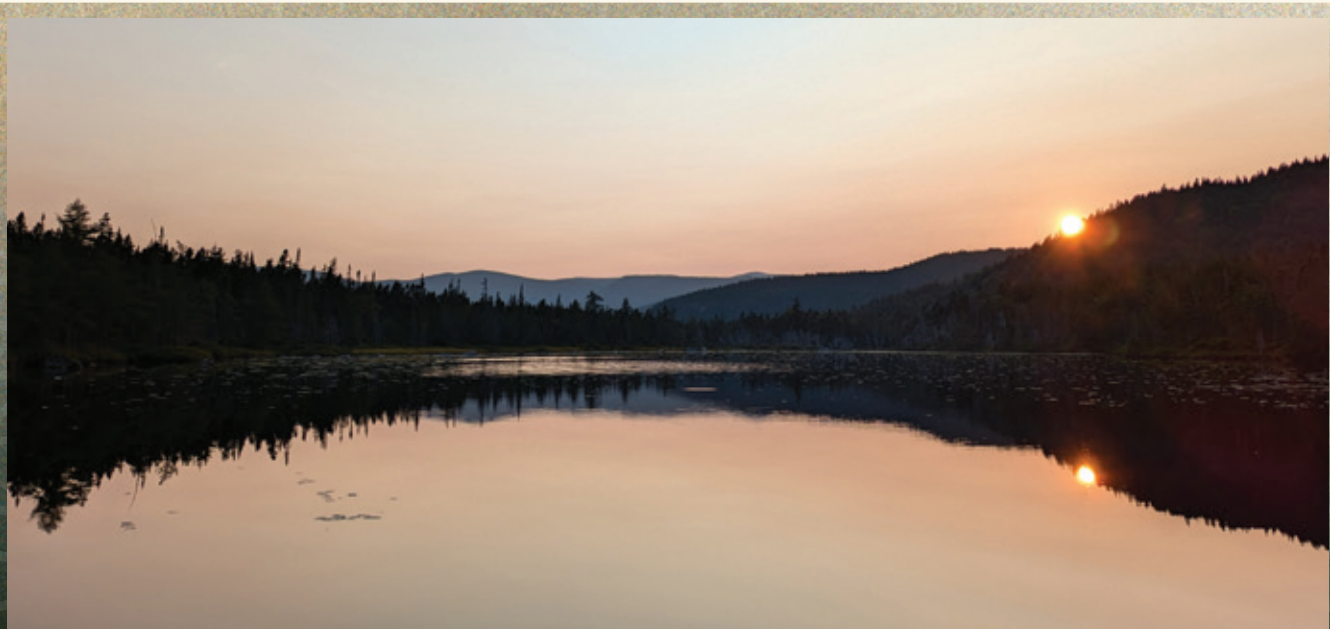


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With deep appreciation, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy honors those whose estate gifts were realized in 2024, leaving a legacy that will have a lasting impact on the future of the A.T.

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We make every effort to ensure the accuracy of our records and recognize each of our generous supporters as they wish to be acknowledged. If we have made an error or omission, please accept our sincere apologies and contact us at philanthropy@appalachiantrail.org so we may correct our records.

^aA.T. Resiliency Fund, ^bBoard of Directors Member as of 12.31.24, ^cCampaign Advisory Committee Member, ^dStaff Member, ^eDeceased



PHOTO BY CHRISTINE KUSIOR

Create your Legacy

August Is National Make a Will Month.

Leaving a gift to the ATC in your will helps ensure we can carry out our mission to protect the Appalachian Trail for future generations. Contact us to learn the many ways you can leave a lasting legacy to benefit the Trail.



Scan the code to complete our simple online form
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If you've already made a planned gift, please let us know so that we can partner in honoring your legacy.



**Appalachian Trail
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FINDING A BALANCE

A TRAIL ADVOCATE USES HER EXPERIENCES ON THE A.T. AS PART OF MANAGING HER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

BY BRIANA APGAR

I RECOMMITTED TO THE TRAIL IN THE height of my anxiety and the bottom of my depression. The isolation and financial strain of being furloughed during the pandemic had intensified my distress. On a hope and a prayer and a Salomon flash sale, I bought trail shoes and set out.

Moving, taking one step after another was cathartic — something that I could do when I could not do much of anything else. Trailheads and peaks were destinations that I could reach while still in a sort of zombie mode. It was a positive way for me to feel a little more productive, a little more human. This remedy for my “big empties” was to go bigger and emptier: my smallness in wilderness was strangely comforting. The sun came up and the sun went down, regardless of how I felt about it or how I felt about myself. The world kept turning. The Trail stretched ahead of me. I couldn’t mess that up.

So, I pushed on. One foot in front of the other. More miles, more peaks, more victories. I became highly motivated, absolutely convinced that if I were the best version of me, I could “cure” myself the way antibiotics clear an infection. I truly believed that my struggles with mental health were only situational, despite being recurrent for years. Rather than accepting a depression diagnosis as truth, I rejected it as a label of inadequacy. I believed if I reached some *When*, I would be healed. I would be secure *When I found a new job*. I would be content *When I finished 100 miles*.

I would be happy *When the pandemic ended*. It was easier for me to rationalize away my struggles during this global crisis. Of course I was depressed! Weren’t we all a bit depressed?

I believe that many of us approach the Trail in search of peace and solitude. We hope to be healed or at least find some comfort through our connection to nature. But I think the Trail’s greatest gift of all is its confrontation: *What followed you into the woods today? How do you feel out here — untitled and unnamed?*

The Trail is my corridor in the chaos. One morning while sitting on McAfee Knob at sunrise, I was forced to hear one of those quiet questions that’s usually drowned out by the noise of my daily life: *Why are you so unhappy?* This time, I had no pragmatic response. The pandemic was over. The world was recovering, but I was still oscillating in space. All of my *Whens* had come to pass. I had long surpassed 100 miles. I got the job. I graduated. I had racked up some big victories, both outside and in the office. It was a beautiful sunrise in a beautiful place. I was bathed in the most brilliant color, but I was still flatlined by grey. I realized that I could no longer deny my struggle. I was tired of believing in the false narrative that some arbitrary *When* would be able to fix me for good. I knew it was time to make a change. I could no longer justify these feelings and excuse their persistence.

Managing my mental health is something I work

on every single day but no longer condemn myself for. There are so many mental and emotional bags and boxes I’m sorting through, but dropping that self-blame lightens the load some. It’s a lot like being on the Trail — just as every ounce counts in your trail pack, every bit of shame weighs you down. ***So, we must choose to carry with us only that which serves us and helps us continue onward.*** I decided to unpack both my GPS unit and my stigma toward my diagnosis. I chose my aluminum cookware over steel, just as I chose words of self-love over deprecation. Of all my hikes, Acceptance was the most challenging summit, but I’ve been feeling more vibrant lately, even on overcast days. More miles, more peaks, more victories. And now, more color.

The Trail has been my literal path to a better lifestyle, together with faith, community, and professional resources. We are all unique and all of our own

The information in this article should not be considered a substitute for professional mental health or medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. For any questions regarding mental health, consult a qualified mental health professional. If you are facing a mental health crisis, contact a professional or emergency services immediately.

THE TRAIL HAS BEEN MY LITERAL
PATH TO A BETTER LIFESTYLE,
TOGETHER WITH FAITH,
COMMUNITY, AND
PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES.

SUNRISE AT MCAFEE KNOB, VIRGINIA. PHOTO BY TIM LEWIS

remedies will vary. But if you are struggling and have set your own *When*, please remember that your mental health is important *Now*. And in life, just as on the Trail: every journey begins with that first step.

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Briana Apgar is an ATC Next Generation Advisory Council Member. She is the Program Manager and a faculty member for the Carilion Clinic Biodesign Program at Virginia Tech. Her career focus is health equity and community resilience and outreach. Apgar has an MBA from the University of Virginia Darden School of Business and a Master of Public Health degree from Virginia Tech. She also volunteers as Vice President for Girls on the Run of Central Virginia the Blue Ridge and is a member of the Junior League.

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THE COOPERATIVE SPIRIT

BY HAWK METHENY

WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN MANY individuals who have contributed substantially to the Appalachian Trail and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) for the past 100 years, most folks will humbly claim that they could not have done what they have accomplished alone. In fact, the remarkable success of the A.T.'s Cooperative Management System (CMS) works best when several partners combine their knowledge, talent, resources, and commitment toward a shared objective. In essence, the sum of the individual parts creates a whole (or in our case, a 2,197-mile Trail) that not any one partner could accomplish on their own.

From one day to the next, this cooperative spirit plays out remarkably well through a combination of actions to ensure that the A.T. is protected and managed to a high standard. Every once in a while, this synergy is raised and tested at a heightened level, and several years ago I had the benefit of participating in a few technically complex shelter projects on the A.T. that brought together the right people, at the right time, in the right place. We were replacing the shelter at Kinsman Pond in the White Mountains with a log structure (Full Scribed Swedish Coped design) that was initially pre-built off-site, disassembled, transported to a staging area, then airlifted by helicopter to the shelter site.

The project required full engagement of all partners in the CMS planning, communicating, and working in stride. The White Mountain National Forest as land manager provided engineering review and design approval, permits, and the necessary compliance processes with the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA). The NPS Appalachian National Scenic Trail office (APPA) provided public funding, the local trail

club provided skilled labor, and the ATC provided technical expertise and additional private funding through generous donations. The project also involved two outside contractors: the highly skilled, highly regarded principal from the Wooden House Company from Wells River, Vermont, and one of the top pilots from JBI Helicopters based in Pembroke, New Hampshire.

As you might imagine, flying 18-foot-long, 20-inch-diameter logs weighing 400+ pounds each that are hanging below a helicopter from a 75-foot-long cable in mountainous terrain and weather is a highly skilled endeavor. It would be impressive enough to gently lower the logs through a small opening in the tree canopy to the ground. However, on this project, we lowered the logs directly into their individual precise locations on the shelter. Since each log had been notched to precisely fit the log below and above it, they were lowered and settled in with a satisfying clunk when properly placed. Initially, the logs were placed one at a time, then we flew two at a time onto alternating locations in the shelter walls. The process required constant communication by two-way radio between the pilot and construction crew, diligent heads-up overhead awareness, and troubleshooting on the fly (sorry for the pun).

It was thrilling to work with these two contractors who were at the top of their individual crafts — like being in the presence of a top-performing athlete or musician — their attention to detail and unrivaled competency were integral to the success of the project. We had all four shelter walls and the gable roof structure constructed in six hours, and that included the pause between flights when the helicopter would fly the 8 miles round trip to retrieve more logs or to refuel.

In short, everything about the project flowed seam-



Above: Kinsman Shelter being constructed. Photo courtesy of Appalachian Mountain Club. Below: On Wildcat Mountain on the A.T. in New Hampshire. Photo courtesy of Hawk Metheny



lessly and stands as a testimony to what is possible when everyone shares a vision and commitment. This is just one of many examples of how this type of synergistic collaboration and cooperation occurs. It is often behind the scenes, and the average A.T. visitor may not realize how many partners are involved in ensuring that the A.T. Experience is rewarding and available to all.

As we enter the second century of A.T. management and a new suite of challenges, diligence and determination will persevere and my confidence in the

CMS remains high. Whether protecting additional land, recovering from a hurricane, laying out and constructing a Trail relocation, or building sustainable overnight sites, we need only to review the A.T.'s rich, storied, enduring, and resilient history to be inspired by what can be accomplished through collaboration and unwavering support. The Appalachian Trail stands as possibly one of the most impressive and successful examples of a bold idea being brought into reality through an internationally renowned public-private partnership. Please continue to join us through whatever means you are able. Together we will Keep the Trail Alive.

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Hawk Metheny has been involved with A.T. management in a variety of roles for 35 years, starting out with the Appalachian Mountain Club as a backcountry caretaker and trail crew member, then A.T. program manager in the Whites, to ATC board member, then senior regional director and now ATC's Vice President of Regional and Trail Operations. Hawk has worked across the full spectrum of A.T. management and is still amazed and deeply appreciative of what can be accomplished through partnerships.

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HOT SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA. PHOTO BY KAT DELLINGER