

*Increasing Opportunities
for Access on the
Appalachian Trail*

A DESIGN GUIDE

2007



Cover photograph: Two trail users meet on an accessible section of the Appalachian Trail in Falls Village, Connecticut. Courtesy of Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

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“The path of the Trailway should be as ‘pathless’ as possible; it should be the minimum consistent with practical accessibility.”

Benton MacKaye, from ATC’s Local Management Planning Guide

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INTRODUCTION

The 2,175 mile-long Appalachian National Scenic Trail traverses 14 states from Maine to Georgia. Visited by three to four million people each year, the Appalachian Trail is considered one of the most popular units of the National Park System. In 1968, the United States Congress designated the Appalachian Trail as the Nation’s first national scenic trail, “to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass”¹. This law, and the extensive land protection programs that followed, underscore the significance of the Trail as one of our nation’s most important recreational and scenic resources.

The Comprehensive Plan for the A.T. outlines the guiding principles for managing the A.T. It says that “The Trail will be continuous in its marking and be open to **all** to walk upon it.” (emphasis added) (p. 8). The purpose of this document is to build upon the core management philosophies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan including management through the Cooperative Management System; managed for traditional A.T. values and goals; diversity and character of A.T. lands will continue; maintenance and construction will be carried out in accordance with A.T. “Trail, Design, Construction, and Maintenance”; hikers are responsible for their own safety and comfort; an unregimented atmosphere and encouragement of self reliance; and providing opportunities for all hikers to experience the Appalachian Trail.

This manual was a direct result of an effort by A.T. managers to navigate the many issues related to trail management and accessibility and distill the numerous nuances down to an easily digested, and most importantly, user friendly document. Many sources were used in the development of this manual; however it is not intended to cover all aspects of trail management or accessibility. Rather, it attempts to integrate traditional design concepts with

increased awareness of accessibility issues to provide managers with an additional tool in sustaining the values of the Appalachian Trail.

Who Should Read This?

This manual is intended for any trail manager or partner, volunteer, professional, or agency staff member who wishes to learn more about accessibility and decision making processes for trail projects considering universal design. The manual incorporates examples from existing and ongoing projects along the Appalachian Trail but may be representative of other pedestrian trails.

About the Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a unit of the national park system and was America's first National Scenic Trail. A footpath running primarily along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains, the Trail provides opportunities for outdoor recreation in a natural, undeveloped environment to many thousands of people each year. The Trail is managed as a scenic, natural, and recreation resource for those who desire a challenging outdoor recreation experience or for those who wish to get away from the trappings of modern life.

Under a unique series of cooperative agreements with the Department of Agriculture (USDA Forest Service) and Department of Interior (USDI-National Park Service), the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has accepted management responsibility for a corridor of land surrounding the Appalachian Trail footpath. These "Delegation Agreements" assign responsibility for Trail management and protection to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which in turn has delegated that responsibility to its member clubs. In effect, this makes the Appalachian National Scenic Trail America's only volunteer-managed National Park.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is a nonprofit educational organization of over 35,000 members dedicated to protecting and promoting the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) along its 2,175 mile length from Maine to Georgia. The Conservancy is also a federation of 30 Trail-maintaining clubs (and their 125,000 members) whose volunteers manage and maintain the A.T.

[i] National Scenic Trails Act 16 U.S.C. §1242a2