



ATC Land Protection Policy

(Adopted by ATC Board of Directors, May 2009)

Program Mission

The mission of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy Land Protection Program is to enhance the primitive outdoor recreational experience of the Appalachian Trail through the protection of Appalachian Trail lands. These include the Trail itself, its immediate corridor, lands with significant ecological or cultural value, and surrounding viewsheds and soundscapes. Further protection will be provided through promotion of compatible land uses in harmony with the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural values that surrounding lands contribute to the visitor experience.

Program Priorities

To accomplish its purposes, the Program will focus its efforts on defined priority areas. These areas will be established based on:

1. Comparative analysis among all identified unprotected Appalachian Trail lands employing GIS modeling and field investigations;
2. Discontinuities in the integrity of the A.T. corridor as wildlife habitat and potential migration corridor;
3. Opportunities to leverage ATC resources by working with existing and potential partners and coalitions;
4. Level of threat to A.T. values from potential development for incompatible land use.

Best Practices and Standards

In 2006, the ATC Board of Directors adopted the Land Trust Standards and Practices published by the Land Trust Alliance in 2004, acknowledged that the Standards and Practices represent ethical and technical guidelines for the operations of a land trust, and committed to making continual progress toward implementation of these standards and practices.

Program Means

For any given defined priority area, ATC will select and use those means it deems to be best suited to achieve its mission. Among the means that may be employed are to:

1. Build alliances and coalitions with other conservation partners;
2. Develop regional planning tools and advocate for planning and zoning legislation and ordinances;
3. Engage local communities through outreach and green infrastructure planning;
4. Seek and accept donations of fee or easement interests on critical tracts, directly or through partners;
5. Purchase fee or easement interests on critical tracts, directly or through partners.

Partnerships

The Program relies heavily on local relationships to provide a close connection to the community. Trail clubs and other partners can assist by:

1. Designating one or more individuals to serve as the organization's liaison to the program;
2. Raising awareness of the A.T., the Conservancy and the importance of the Trail as a recreational and natural resource within local communities and governments;
3. Identifying lands outside the Trail corridor that have a tangible and important connection to the Trail and hikers' experience (such as viewsheds, side trails and water sources);
4. Identifying funding prospects and other resources to support protection work;
5. Providing volunteer energy and time to support other aspects of land protection, depending on the interests and strengths of the organization and its members.

Role of Volunteers

Volunteers can play significant roles in ATC land-protection efforts—as advocates within their own communities and in other trail-side communities for A.T.-compatible land-use planning and zoning practices; as an early-warning mechanism of potential incompatible development near the A.T.; as ambassadors for A.T. land-conservation efforts; as liaisons to landowners who have or may be interested in conserving their lands or interests in lands; and as monitors of ATC- or publicly-owned properties. ATC will communicate opportunities for volunteer engagement in its land-conservation work through a variety of means and also will provide necessary training, where appropriate, provided such engagement can be accomplished safely, efficiently and in a manner consistent with ATC legal, fiduciary and procedural obligations.

Criteria for Seeking and Accepting Property Interests

In land protection activities, ATC takes the role of convener and coordinator and is always the holder of last resort for both easements and fee properties. ATC primarily works through partners including federal and state agencies as well as local, regional or national land trusts.

ATC may accept direct stewardship responsibility only for:

1. Properties that lie directly across the Trail or are adjacent to the trail corridor, and;
2. Properties that provide access to the Trail (e.g., secure side trails) or offer other needed trail facilities (e.g., parking lots).

The basis for limiting the scope of ATC’s direct stewardship responsibility is 1) ATC is best equipped to deal with a contiguous land base centered around the corridor, and 2) considering the large number of existing land trusts, it is very likely that another organization can be found to hold easements on lands farther away from the trail corridor.

ATC recognizes that specific parcels important to preserving the trail experience as defined by the criteria below may not fulfill the conditions outlined above for direct stewardship. In those cases ATC will exert all possible efforts to find and work with local or agency partners to protect these properties. In cases where no local or agency partners can be found to hold the interests, ATC may consider taking on these interests provided that:

- the benefit to the trail experience is unarguably demonstrable and considerable
- ATC is capable of stewarding and enforcing the interest, resources will come with the interest and the responsibilities being accepted are reasonable and within ATC’s means and capacities.

The criteria below will guide decisions as to whether specific parcels are of interest to ATC, and as such should be pursued either directly if above conditions are met, or through partners and possibly co-held (i.e., part of the “partnershed” or Appalachian Trail Countryside). The parcel must meet most of these criteria:

1. Is in a priority area as defined by ATC’s GIS modeling and field investigations;
2. Is contiguous to the trail corridor;
3. Is contiguous to other protected lands – the parcel will have a landscape level impact;
4. Contains both the day and night viewsheds and soundscapes – visible and audible from the trail;
5. Is vulnerable to development pressures;
6. Is of significant size: the bigger the natural area protected the better (though size is relative in different regions);
7. Is adjacent to Wilderness or remote areas that the Trail passes through;
8. Contains important conservation or ecological values, such as:
 - a. Protects water resources important to the trail;
 - b. Would protect landscapes of historical significance or documented cultural resources
 - c. Is wooded, in traditional agricultural use or similar natural state;

- d. Promotes landscape level ecological diversity and habitat connectivity.

As these criteria reflect the conservation values of importance to ATC, all easements involving ATC in the future should contain language specifically addressing these values. Conversely, ATC should not be responsible for monitoring activities and conservation values that are not of direct import and consequence to its stated priorities and criteria.

In addition to these conservation criteria and to the assessment of other potential holders, before taking ownership of additional land interests, ATC will consider during its land transaction review its stewardship responsibility and resources available. When accepting any additional interest, ATC must calculate the long-term cost of stewardship and secure the necessary resources in its Monitoring Fund. In all instances, ATC will seek to consolidate the A.T. land base by transferring interests to the regional A.T. land holding agency, whether it be state or federal.

Any transaction involving land interests, including acceptance of a gift, acquisition, sale, transfer or donation, must be reviewed by the Land Transaction Review Committee (or a succeeding Board committee with a similar charge) and approved by the Board of Directors.