

PART 3

Public Use, Public Information, and Emergency Response

CHAPTER 3 (A)

Emergency Planning and Coordination

Responses to law-enforcement, fire-control, and search-and-rescue emergencies are the responsibility of local, state, and federal public agencies. Those responsibilities are spelled out in state memoranda of understanding, which exist in about half the Trail states ([Appendix G](#)). They should be understood by state authorities in any case: states retain full responsibility for enforcing state and local laws and regulations. As private, volunteer organizations, ATC and the Trail-maintaining clubs have no legal responsibility to respond to emergencies. However, ATC and the clubs play a critical role in educating hikers, agency partners, and the public about the Trail and in managing the A.T. so as to reduce problems of this kind. As the on-the-ground managers, ATC and the Trail clubs must prepare contingency plans, be ready to assist the appropriate agency in responding to law-enforcement, fire, and search-and-rescue episodes, and act as an early warning system, or as “the eyes and ears” of agency partners, to prevent or mitigate problems. When authorized by agency officials, ATC or its affiliated clubs have occasionally (and provisionally) posted areas along the Trail that have experienced recurring law-enforcement problems in order to advise hikers of certain risks (*e.g.*, vehicle break-ins, harassment, *etc.*).

ATC’s goal for emergency planning and coordination requires a determination of clear, specific agency responsibility for law enforcement, fire control, and search-and-rescue response through the various jurisdictions crossed by the A.T. This can be a complex undertaking. Considerable time and effort are required on the part of ATC and Trail club planners and their state and local governmental agency partners to clarify responsibilities.

A key element of an appropriate emergency response is *jurisdiction*— the power or right to exercise authority over or administer the law in an area. In general, state and local jurisdictions retain their authorities and responsibilities for response to emergencies on the Appalachian Trail. The vast majority of federally acquired A.T. lands—including most recently acquired National Park Service lands and all national forest lands—are under *proprietary jurisdiction*. Under this form of federal jurisdiction, the United States, as owner, exercises all the rights of a private party. In addition, commissioned rangers of the National Park Service or U.S. Forest Service may legally enforce federal regulations. The police and emergency powers of the states should be exercised in connection with illegal acts of private persons to the same extent as they are exercised on privately owned lands, using state and local laws and regulations. States may not enforce federal regulations except to the extent that those regulations have been adopted by state legislatures.

In addition, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Shenandoah National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park have *either exclusive or concurrent jurisdiction* within their boundaries. In Shenandoah National Park and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, NPS rangers enforce both NPS regulations and state laws, and state law-enforcement jurisdiction is limited. In Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, C&O Canal National Historical Park, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, and Blue Ridge Parkway, both federal and state officers can enforce federal and state laws.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—The following policies and guidelines have been approved by ATC’s Board:

Contingency Planning for Emergencies: Law-enforcement, fire-control, and search-and-rescue jurisdictions must be contacted during preparation of local management plans by the

clubs and periodically thereafter. ATC and the clubs must establish basic familiarity with the Trail among all jurisdictions crossed by NPS corridor lands, so that there is less confusion and ambivalence when emergencies occur. Specific tasks consist of informing local authorities about the Trail's location by providing current maps and sharing phone-contact lists for emergencies. Frequently, meetings are needed to explain the A.T. to local jurisdictions so that contingency plans are prepared with local authorities and each partner's responsibilities are clear. (ATC Board of Managers, April 1987)

Responsibilities and Disclaimers: Authorized law-enforcement agencies have the primary responsibility for responding to and prosecuting crimes that occur on the A.T. or directly affect its hikers. ATC and its member clubs will cooperate in facilitating responses, if requested, but assume no legal responsibility. ATC and its clubs do not assume any duty to warn any hiker of any specific criminal risk on the Trail. (ATC Board of Managers, April 1984)

Incident Reporting: ATC will act as a central repository for reports of incidents to hikers' security, law-enforcement violations, fires, and search and rescue. ATC has developed an incident report form and guidelines that clubs are encouraged to use. [[Appendix M](#)]

ATC includes common-sense [personal safety tips](#) for hikers in some of its publications and on its Web site. Appropriate revisions are being made to all relevant ATC publications as they are updated or reprinted.

Information for hikers on [reporting incidents](#) and the [incident report form](#) are on the ATC Web site, and a simplified form is included in the *Appalachian Trail Data Book*. ATC will distribute reports of incidents that are reported to have occurred in their Trail sections to the Trail-maintaining clubs and land-managing agencies. Clubs are requested to share information on incidents that they receive with ATC and the NPS Appalachian Trail Park Office and may use the form in [Appendix M](#) to do so. Incident reports may be mailed or sent by fax to ATC headquarters, or e-mailed to incident@appalachiantrail.org.

NPS Policy—The objectives of the NPS law-enforcement program are the prevention of criminal activities through resource education, public-safety efforts, and deterrence, the detection and investigation of criminal activity, and the apprehension and prosecution of violators. This function is not delegated to ATC and the Trail clubs: only federal, state, or local law-enforcement officials may carry out enforcement. NPS Appalachian Trail lands are administered under proprietary jurisdiction. Insofar as practical, the NPS seeks to acquire concurrent legislative jurisdiction for all NPS lands, which would allow NPS law-enforcement officers to enforce federal criminal statutes and assimilate state law when no federal law or regulation exists (section 8.3 and 8.3.5 of 2006 NPS [Management Policies](#)).

The [A.T. Comprehensive Plan](#) states:

Managers will foster an unregimented atmosphere and otherwise encourage self-reliance and respect for Trail values by users. Hiker regulations will be kept as unrestrictive as possible and should be developed only to the extent they are proven necessary to protect the physical Trail, its environment, and the interests of adjacent landowners. In certain high-use areas along the Trail, the need for regulation has been demonstrated, and managers will give these areas special attention.

Enforcement should not detract, if possible, from the hiking experience and will be exercised only in a way that complements and reinforces educational approaches. Where the footpath is within the Appalachian Trail corridor purchased by the National Park Service, or is outside

the boundaries of existing public use areas, the Trail clubs and their agency partners will work with local law-enforcement officials to assure their understanding of law-enforcement needs and of the primary emphasis on education.

Examples of agreements and statements that have been developed to guide emergency-response actions on lands acquired by the National Park Service for the Appalachian Trail are listed below:

- The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement, and the Massachusetts Department of State Police shall be responsible for the conduct and coordination of law enforcement, fire control and search-and-rescue activities on such lands in accordance with applicable policies and procedures established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and shall advise the NPS as soon as possible of major emergencies or controversial events [Memorandum of Understanding Guidance Document for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, signed 2003].
- To the degree that NPS has a duty to meet law-enforcement responsibilities along the Trail, this is not transferable to ATC. ATC cannot be authorized to enforce Federal regulations nor to serve in a law-enforcement capacity. Of course, the [National Trails System Act](#) does not preclude, and may serve to encourage, state and local law-enforcement responsibilities (Solicitor's Opinion, U.S. Department of the Interior, March, 1983).
- The Solicitor, in a memorandum dated September 1, 1983, determined that both ATC and local Trail clubs are authorized to seek local law-enforcement assistance to protect Appalachian Trail lands and to register complaints for violations on those federal lands. Local law-enforcement authorities must recognize their responsibilities to enforce local and state laws on NPS property and understand the relationship of volunteer managers to these lands [letter from NPS Associate Director to ATC, September 1985].
- All incidents resulting in injury to persons, or damage to property in excess of \$300.00, must be reported by persons involved to the superintendent [the NPS Appalachian Trail park manager in the case of the A.T.] as soon as possible [*Code of Federal Regulations*, Title 36, Section 2.33].
- There is no plan for development of NPS law-enforcement capability along the Appalachian Trail outside of established units of the National Park System through which the Trail passes. Reliance has been and should continue to be on state and local laws to provide law-enforcement support when necessary. This system has proven successful in providing protection for the Trail and its users over the long tradition of the Trail [letter from NPS Associate Director to ATC, September 1985].

Considerations for Planning

Inventory—Each Trail club should have a current list of emergency contacts that includes addresses and phone numbers of federal, state, and local officials responsible for dealing with emergencies. Since jurisdictions frequently overlap, it may be appropriate to include a map showing the respective jurisdictions of each agency. The inventory should be as comprehensive as possible and must be kept current in order to be of any use in an emergency situation.

Setting Trail Club Policy—Club policy should recognize the respective roles of federal, state, and local government authorities, particularly regarding law-enforcement issues. Clubs should take an active role in developing working relationships with local government officials so that roles are defined prior to an emergency. Determine the lead agency responsible for handling both the technical emergency response and the public-information aspects of an incident. Law-enforcement officials receive extensive training in this regard and would normally assume a lead role at the scene. Club policy should always include prompt notification of ATC and the NPS A.T. Park Office in the event of any major emergency on the Trail or on corridor lands.

Action Plan—An action plan should include a current inventory of emergency-response personnel and specific guidance on procedures to be followed in responding to different categories of emergencies. One or more members of the Trail club should assume responsibility for maintaining regular contact with appropriate emergency-response officials. It is recommended that regular (annual) informal meetings be held with local and state officials. The Appalachian Trail Park Office can help facilitate such meetings and ATPO staff should be included in them.

CHAPTER 3 (B)

Special Events and Large-Group Use

Use of the Appalachian Trail by large groups, commercial outfitters, sponsored spectator events, and races or endurance competitions generates impacts that are inconsistent with the concept of a simple footpath. Large groups can cause serious damage to soils along the margins of the foot-path and trample vegetation over wide areas when they congregate at views and lunch spots. An encounter with a large group of people on the Trail also can have a detrimental effect on the experience of a hiker seeking solitude or a small group of hikers seeking to “get away from it all.” These issues also exist with “[Trail Magic](#)” activities that draw and concentrate large numbers of hikers, such as hiker feeds.

Additionally, ATC, Trail clubs, and agency partners receive complaints about groups monopolizing shelter space, leaving no space available for others. The individuals registering these complaints often make reference to the Trail community’s emphasis on providing a Trail environment where individuals can seek solitude and personal accomplishment.

Policies on large-group use and commercial activities along the A.T. depend partially on the direction set by the land-managing agency. Restrictions on group size and purpose are most strict within established national parks and designated wilderness areas. Clubs should work closely with public landowning agencies to promote clear direction at the local level on special events and large-group use.

Although large-group use is generally inconsistent with the purposes of the Trail and should be discouraged in most cases, occasions might arise when such uses serve desirable ends and can be considered as a permitted use. In these instances, local A.T. managers should consider various approaches for minimizing the impacts of the proposed use upon the Trail environment and the experience of other visitors.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—ATC’s Board of Managers adopted a group-use policy in November 1987. In November 1993, the policy was amended slightly to clarify the wording. The amended policy reads as follows:

- Local clubs should consider how to best accommodate groups by reducing group size or by other means that would allow use to take place while protecting Trail values.
- Groups spending one or more nights on the Trail should not exceed 10 members at any one overnight-use area, and day-use groups should not exceed 25 members at any one location, unless clubs designate otherwise in their local-management plans.
- Shelters along the Appalachian Trail normally provide space for no more than six to 12 individuals. As a courtesy to other users, groups whose numbers meet or exceed the capacity of a Trail shelter should make arrangements to camp in accordance with local policies.
- Trail clubs and agency partners should consider designating or constructing campsites specifically for use by groups of 10 or less in or near areas where group overnight use at Trail shelters has caused resource damage or resulted in frequent complaints from other Trail users.

- ATC and its member clubs should encourage organizations that simultaneously deploy multiple groups on the Trail (such as summer camps and college outing clubs) to consider their impact on the Trail and other users of the Trail. Where practical, ATC, Trail clubs, and agencies should assist these organizations in developing alternatives that meet their organizational goals, while preserving the Trail experience for other users.
- Clubs and agencies should develop education and outreach programs to inform users of this policy and to encourage peer pressure and voluntary compliance.
- All ATC guidebooks and other publications will be revised as appropriate to be consistent with this management principle.

ATC and the Appalachian Long Distance Hiker's Association (ALDHA) have endorsed and disseminated "[Suggestions for Providing Trail Magic](#)" that encourage Leave No Trace practices. ATC and ALDHA promote volunteerism as the best form of "Trail magic," and also point out that leaving unattended food or beverages on the Trail can have negative impacts on wildlife and on hiker's health and the outdoor experience.

NPS Policy—The National Park Service strictly limits special events, assemblies, military maneuvers, and commercial activities in national park units and often must do an environmental assessment before issuing a permit for such activities. These "special events" are prohibited unless "there is a meaningful association between the park area and the event, the observance contributes to visitor appreciation or understanding of the park, and a permit has been issued by the Superintendent." ([Code of Federal Regulations](#), Title 36, Section 2.50)

The [A.T. Comprehensive Plan](#) states:

- Commercial endeavors designed to profit from visitor use are not an acceptable component in the Trail corridor.
- Management actions will discourage activities that would degrade the Trail's natural and cultural resources or social values, such as use by groups or organizations involved in promotion, sponsorship, or participation in spectator events or competitive activities, or by groups which by their size or commercial interest generate use which is inconsistent with the concept of a simple footpath.

Considerations for Planning

Inventory—Unless the Trail club has developed or plans to develop group-use sites, no inventory is necessary. If the Trail club does maintain any group-use sites, a short list of those sites and any restrictions that may apply is sufficient.

Setting Trail Club Policy—In developing club policies for large-group use, Trail clubs should emphasize that large groups are in most cases incompatible with the purposes of the Trail. The club may wish to sanction large-group use on a case-by-case basis, but should consider the following questions:

1. Can organized groups use the A.T. in the "off season" (such as before Memorial Day or after Labor Day)?

2. Are there potential resource impacts to consider (such as impacts to soft soils, vegetation, or rare plants)?
3. Can large groups find their own overnight accommodations off the A.T.? Does the club maintain group-use sites where large groups can be accommodated?
4. Are there particular sections of the A.T. that have modest slopes, well-drained soils, and/or rocky treadways that can accommodate heavy use?
5. Does a particular group have good leadership and internal control to ensure responsible use?
6. Is the proposed use likely to conflict with popular use areas?
7. Does Trail-club literature request large groups to contact the club prior to going out on the Trail?

Action Plan—No action plan is necessary.

CHAPTER 3 (C)

Public Information, Education, and Outreach Programs

Although it was built and maintained privately at first, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail was always intended for use by the broad spectrum of the public and is now located almost entirely on public lands.

As stewards of the Trail, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Trail-maintaining clubs, and agency partners seek to make others aware of the Trail and its possible attractions for them, promote access to the A.T. for all, and motivate users to treat the Trail, its resources, and other users properly for the greater enjoyment of all. At the same time, greater awareness and use of the Trail increases the number of potential Trail club members (including a new generation of maintainers and managers) and ATC. Good community relations are an asset in corridor monitoring and land protection, as well as a means of strengthening the local organization with new talents for managing the diversity of activities now associated with the Trail project. Public information, or public relations, always supports some other purpose of the organization.

Trail users obviously want and need information about the Trail. The news media (and commercial publishers of travel and recreation books and other materials) are also interested—many will publish hike and work-trip notices; most are always interested in the type of “good-news,” local volunteer work that is the mainstay of A.T. club activities. Regular contact is also perhaps an organization’s best insurance against irresponsible reporting in times of crisis, minor or major.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—ATC has an obligation as a nonprofit organization and as a cooperative management partner to provide full, factual, and unbiased information about the Trail as a national public resource. In fulfilling this obligation, a series of 11 official guides to the A.T. are published by ATC and three of the Trail clubs, supplemented by an annual summary of mileages between important points (the *Appalachian Trail Data Book*); a magazine for members; technical manuals for maintainers; promotional and educational brochures for the Trail user; and other books, posters, maps, and related merchandise. These materials, obviously, are intended for direct communication with users, potential users, and supporters.

ATC also engages in and encourages indirect communication through the news and educational media, the commercial publishing industry, and the entertainment business. In its day-to-day promotional activities, ATC seeks to leave a positive impression of both itself and the maintaining clubs and encourages media contacts with them. In emergencies affecting the Trail and its reputation, ATC also serves as the media liaison for the A.T. community.

ATC is reaching out beyond its traditional audiences to engage new volunteers in environmental monitoring through the A.T. MEGA-Transect and other programs, and to encourage future Trail users, volunteers, and supporters through a place-based educational program known as a [Trail to Every Classroom](#) as well as through [community partnerships](#) being nurtured along the Trail. ATC’s [volunteer clearinghouse](#) provides an online opportunity for Trail clubs to reach out to potential volunteers by posting work trips and other projects.

NPS Policy—The Park Service will provide timely and accurate information to the public and news media in accordance with applicable laws, departmental policy, and director’s orders. The NPS A.T. Park Office regularly makes itself available to the news media as the spokesperson for the federal interest in the Trail and underwrites a limited number of publications (brochures and maps) of interest to the

recreation-minded public at large. In addition, the NPS A.T. Park Office takes part in and provides a large portion of the funding for the NPS Junior Ranger program, which develops educational activities for youth, and the Trail to Every Classroom program that helps teachers use the A.T. as a resource both within and outside of their classrooms.

Considerations for Planning

Inventory—Basic elements of a Trail club public-information program might include a brochure, a means of responding to requests for information, and a list of news-media outlets within 50 miles of its Trail section. Agency partners, ATC, and appropriate legislators (federal, state, and local) should be added to the list for distribution of news releases. This inventory also should identify the person(s) within the club responsible for each public-relations activity. A basic “press list” for the area may be obtained from ATC, but local officials and other important persons who would be interested in Trail club activities should be added. *Any* club activity involving the Trail has the makings of a potential news release, from a relocation opening to the receipt of a grant.

Even if a Trail club does not currently sponsor outreach, education, or interpretation programs, an inventory of desirable sites for small-group hikes, particularly those suitable for novices and intermediate hikers, is a good first step towards a future program. Club representatives interested in outreach and educational programs may find that agency partners and ATC are able to provide technical or financial support.

Setting Trail Club Policy—Trail clubs should determine how best to inform and educate the public about their organizations and the Trail, and should develop strategies to recruit new members and volunteers. Consider whether the club should have its own brochure, whether its Web site is effective, and whether the club should have an active membership-recruitment program. One person should be identified as the spokesperson to the media for the organization. Club policy also should explain how to respond to requests for information. If appropriate, the Trail club should highlight its existing or potential role in Trail outreach and education programs.

Action Plan—The Trail club needs to recruit a club member or committee of members to assume responsibility for the execution of each of the elements of its program: developing a brochure, maintaining the club’s Web site, developing a press list, writing and distributing news releases when appropriate, responding to information requests, and maintaining informative ties with community leaders. If the Trail club has undertaken an education or outreach program, club members will need to assume roles in organizing programs, creating displays, attending community events, or developing guided hikes and activities.

CHAPTER 3 (D)

Ridgerunner and Caretaker Programs

ATC actively supports a number of ridgerunner and caretaker programs as cost-effective, educational, and preventative approaches to the protection of the Trail, its resources, and its users. In addition, many Trail clubs use [ridgerunner and caretaker programs](#) as part of their regular Trail-maintenance and management efforts. They can range from a few volunteers who provide basic information to hikers along the Trail to summer-long or full-time paid individuals who monitor and manage most aspects of a high-use site or Trail section.

Most often, ridgerunners and caretakers are paid employees who are hired in a cooperative effort by the local Trail club, a state or federal agency, and ATC. Each ridgerunner program operates differently, but all share the same basic objective—to educate Trail visitors and hikers. Occasionally, they may be asked by land-managing or other agencies to provide search-and-rescue support.

Ridgerunners spend most of their time out on the Trail doing a variety of tasks, the most important of which is providing information to hikers. Ridgerunners also provide the Trail club with a presence on their Trail section, helping to heighten hiker awareness of local programs and policies and acting as a deterrent to vandalism and resource abuse.

Caretakers generally manage overnight sites. Their duties may include collecting overnight-use fees, dispensing information, doing small Trail-work projects, discouraging destructive or disruptive uses, minimizing resource damage, or operating composting toilets. In some cases, they “rove” or move between two or more sites on a regular basis.

The primary mission of the ridgerunners (mobile) and caretakers (stationary at campsites and shelters) is to educate hikers, to help them practice Leave-No-Trace minimum-impact camping techniques (see [Appendix J](#)) and understand and adhere to local regulations; and to ensure that problems are solved before they become critical. They enhance the experience of novice hikers, while reducing the potential for problems.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—ATC has no formal policy regarding the use of ridgerunners or caretakers; however, ATC is generally supportive of programs that inform and educate the public about appropriate use of the Trail. Ridgerunners or caretakers may be appropriate for specific situations where the need for an on-site presence exists. Most ridgerunner positions are club positions, but ATC may be able to assist with providing backpacking equipment, uniforms, first-aid supplies, and communications (cellular phones or radios). ATC holds an annual training course for A.T. ridgerunners. Anyone acting in a volunteer ridgerunner or caretaker capacity should be included in either the Volunteers in Parks (VIP) or Volunteers in Forests (VIF) program (see [Appendix K](#)) or provided with private liability insurance.

ATC has developed informal criteria for evaluating the need for ridgerunners or caretakers on sections of the Trail that may be helpful to Trail clubs considering whether or not to start a ridgerunner or caretaker program:

1. How much day and overnight use does the area receive?
2. Is there a history of vandalism, partying, or other people-problems that have affected hikers' perceptions about security on the A.T.?

3. Is there a history of abuse or overuse of the Trail and its facilities in this area that has affected visitors' enjoyment of the Trail or the A.T.'s reputation with the public or with land managers?
4. Is the area particularly sensitive or vulnerable because of its climate, soils, vegetation, topography, elevation, or weather?
5. Is there adequate financial support for the program from both the club and the agency partner?
6. Are there public-relations concerns with regard to local communities?
7. Is the club and/or agency prepared to provide adequate supervision, field support services, and emergency-response personnel in support of the ridgerunner or caretaker?

NPS Policy—Although the NPS has no formal policy with respect to ridgerunners and caretakers, the agency strongly supports the public-education and other objectives of the A.T. ridgerunner and caretaker program, which are similar to backcountry ranger programs in other national park units.

Considerations for Planning

Inventory—No inventory is necessary for ridgerunner or caretaker programs. However, information from Trail registers on areas with high levels of use and information about specific problems from monitoring reports, Trail assessments, and other sources may be helpful in determining if and where a caretaker or ridgerunner is needed.

Setting Trail Club Policy—A ridgerunner or caretaker program should be focused on addressing a specific problem or problems that can be solved best by an on-site presence. A Trail club policy statement should indicate why the ridgerunner or caretaker is needed and what general responsibilities he or she will have.

Action Plan—Several questions should be addressed in a Trail club's action plan if a caretaker or ridgerunner program is implemented, including:

1. Will the position be volunteer or paid?
2. What will be the source of funds for expenses and/or wages?
3. What responsibilities should be included in the ridgerunner's or caretaker's job description? What will be the scope of the caretaker or ridgerunner duties?
4. Who will provide local supervision, training, and day-to-day field support for the ridgerunners or caretakers?
5. What accommodations, tools, and/or support are needed to allow the caretaker or ridgerunner to perform his or her duties effectively?
6. Will the position(s) be seasonal, weekends only, or for a specific event?
7. If it is a seasonal program, what are the starting and ending dates?
8. When will a ridgerunner or caretaker be likely to make the most visitor contacts?
9. When is a ridgerunner or caretaker most needed to act as a deterrent to inappropriate use?
10. What type of information will the ridgerunner or caretaker provide to Trail users?

CHAPTER 3 (E)

Trail Signs

Traditionally, ATC has encouraged the use of simple directional signs, in addition to blazing, to help hikers find their way and locate side trails, shelters, and drinking-water supplies. Informational and regulatory signs are used to inform hikers, Trail neighbors, and potential trespassers about restrictions that apply on the Appalachian Trail and corridor lands. Good planning can ensure that a sign system conveys the necessary information in a pleasing, unobtrusive manner.

“Sign pollution,” in which there are more signs than necessary to direct and inform hikers and other users of the Trail lands should be avoided. Trailhead signs, which are usually appropriate at major trailheads, can convey a significant amount of information to users without causing sign pollution. The other extreme also may cause problems: too few signs leave hikers and others inadequately informed.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—ATC provides guidance on planning and establishing a sign system for the footpath in *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance*. ATC also has a booklet entitled [Planning and Building an Appalachian Trailhead Bulletin Board](#), which provides detailed guidance and plans for designing and constructing a Trailhead bulletin board.

The NPS delegation of management responsibility for A.T. corridor lands has necessitated regulatory signs to advise hikers, Trail neighbors and others about permitted and prohibited uses. Standard signs bearing basic user information and restrictions to aid Trail clubs in protecting corridor lands are available from ATC and may be ordered at no charge to the Trail-maintaining clubs from ATC’s *Appalachian Trail Corridor Management Signs* catalog ([Appendix N](#)). Many of the signs are suitable for use on other lands as well, provided the local Trail-maintaining club and agency partner agree that the signs are appropriate.

The following guidelines for developing or posting signs on Appalachian Trail lands were endorsed by ATC’s Trail and Land Management Committee in March 1995:

1. Identify the club’s needs for signs as part of the Trail-assessment or local management-planning process. It is important to consider alternative methods for conveying information, such as brochures, registers, or personal contacts.
2. Be certain that signs containing the National Park Service’s official arrowhead symbol are placed only on National Park Service lands.
3. Comply with state and local legal requirements for posting property.
4. Locate signs conspicuously, but not too conspicuously. Signs directed at Trail users will be less prone to vandalism if placed on the Trail, but just out of sight of roads. Signs that convey messages to others will be most effective if posted along roads and at other potential points of entry.
5. Avoid “sign pollution” by using only the minimum needed to do the job. If you need to convey more than one or two messages, consider using a Trailhead signboard or small “birdhouse” to post signs on.
6. Monitor signs regularly for damage, disappearance, and effectiveness. It helps to have a master sign list and inventory, so that signs can be replaced when needed.
7. If you need to develop additional signs, consider the following:
 - a) Your greeting should be friendly but authoritative.
 - b) Identify the Trail club and land-managing agency where appropriate.

- c) State prohibitions or restrictions in a positive way.
- d) Include names and phone numbers of emergency contacts where appropriate.
- e) Use international symbols where appropriate.
- f) The wording of regulatory signs or the use of the symbol of any land-managing agency *needs to be approved by* the land-managing agency.
- g) Posting of specific prohibitions, such as NO HUNTING or NO HORSES, requires a reference to the pertinent regulation to be properly enforced.

NPS Policy—The A.T. Park Office should be consulted about major signs at road intersections and trailheads that identify the Appalachian National Scenic Trail to the general public. That office has approved the wording of signs listed in ATC’s *Appalachian Trail Corridor Management Signs* catalog ([Appendix N](#)).

The National Park Service has developed extensive sign standards that are usually applied within existing national parks. Signs should be limited to the minimum necessary to provide information, warning, and regulatory needs and avoid confusion and visual intrusion. However, the agency also has endorsed the use of club directional signs along some sections of the Trail. Trail-maintaining clubs with Trail sections within units of the National Park system need to work with park managers to ensure a high-quality system within park boundaries that adequately serves A.T. users (section 9.2.3 of 2006 NPS [Management Policies](#)).

In designated wilderness areas on National Park Service lands, only necessary signs intended for visitor safety, such as route direction and distances, should be posted. When signs are posted, they should be minimal in size and be compatible with the surrounding area (section 6.3.10.4 of 2006 NPS [Management Policies](#)).

Considerations for Planning

Inventory—Many Trail clubs maintain an inventory of existing signs along the footpath of the Appalachian Trail. A master list can be developed or updated during a “walk-through” or Trail assessment.

Setting Trail Club Policy—The Trail club should indicate the general situations that require signs and the standards that the club will apply for their design, construction, and use. Regulations regarding wording and use of agency logos should be discussed with the land-managing agency prior to developing or posting signs.

Action Plan—Many Trail clubs already have individuals or sign committees in place who are familiar with existing needs and who maintain a list of signs that are needed. This list should be included in the local management plan and updated as part of the annual work plan. At Trailheads, posted information such as regulations and education material should be accurate and concise, and attractively displayed on some form of bulletin board. Bulletin boards should be checked at least annually.

CHAPTER 3 (F)

Minimum Impact Backcountry Use

The Appalachian Trail is a popular place to visit, with millions of visitors to the Trail each year. Most of this is day use or short-term overnight use, but the sheer volume of users creates many management challenges. Impacts on the Trail environment are often evident along high-use sections of the A.T. Litter, refuse, unsanitary conditions, trampling, bootleg campsites, fire rings, damaged trees, and shortcutting at switchbacks are resource impacts frequently reported by ridgerunners and Trail maintainers. Hikers also affect each others' backcountry experience—as the number of people seeking a primitive backcountry experience increases, the potential for solitude decreases.

Managers of backcountry and wilderness areas across the United States increasingly rely on visitor education to reduce the impact of visitors on backcountry and wilderness resources. This “soft approach” to educating visitors has largely replaced the more heavy-handed visitor-control methods of the 1960s and 1970s.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—In 1998, the ATC Board adopted the following policy on minimum-impact backcountry use:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy actively supports the Leave No Trace (LNT) philosophy as a means of reducing the impact of A.T. visitors on the Trail environment. The Conservancy will work with [the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics], Trail-maintaining clubs, and agency partners to develop programs, brochures, signs, and other materials that convey the LNT message to Appalachian Trail users. Where appropriate, ATC guidebooks, maps, and other publications, will carry a Leave No Trace message.

Although ATC believes that communications with hikers should occur primarily through guidebooks and other literature distributed off the Trail, ATC encourages ridgerunners, caretakers, and volunteer and professional A.T. managers and maintainers to follow LNT guidelines while on the Trail and to take every opportunity to educate others.

ATC in particular supports efforts to develop and disseminate materials that are directed at inexperienced or novice backpackers and hikers, in that the behaviors and actions of those Trail visitors are likely to have a disproportionate impact upon the Trail environment.

ATC has basic [Leave-No-Trace](#) information on its Web site and in its visitor centers, and includes LNT materials at outreach events and activities whenever possible. ATC's booklet, [Step by Step—An Introduction to Hiking the Appalachian Trail](#), lists the LNT principles and integrates minimum-impact considerations throughout the text. The booklet can be downloaded from the ATC Web site or will be mailed on request. Trailhead signs with A.T.-specific LNT guidance are available to Trail clubs upon request (see [Appendix N](#)) and LNT practices for shelters are provided in ATC's guidance for locating and designing overnight sites ([Appendix L](#)). ATC also has [suggestions for providing Trail Magic](#) that incorporate Leave-No-Trace principles.

NPS Policy—The National Park Service is an official partner of the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. The National Park Service requires all visitors to designated wilderness areas to apply Leave-No-

Trace principles. Backcountry areas not officially designated as wilderness do not require the same standard, although NPS pledges to “identify acceptable limits of impacts, monitor backcountry use levels and resource conditions, and take prompt corrective action when unacceptable impacts occur” (section 8.2.2.4 of 2006 NPS [Management Policies](#)).

Considerations in Planning

Inventory—No inventory is necessary.

Setting Trail Club Policy—Some Trail clubs have developed brochures for Trail users that contain minimum-impact information. The Trail club’s local management plan should include a statement of policy endorsing the Leave-No-Trace ethic for the A.T. and its users.

Action Plan—Club representatives should consider how to incorporate Leave-No-Trace principles and practices into their education and outreach programs, including posting a minimum-impact message (see [Appendix N](#)) on Trailhead signboards.

CHAPTER 3 (G)

Advertising in the A.T. Corridor

Hostels, shuttle services, restaurants, and other services that cater to hikers have “advertised” in some fashion for years. Many of these businesses are noted in the *A.T. Thru-Hikers’ Companion* (published by ATC, with authorship rights held by the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association) and other such guides that are updated annually. Advertisements and signs are sometimes posted in the Trail corridor. Shelter registers often contain entries describing the services offered in nearby towns. It has become more common to find business cards for nearby businesses in shelters or attached to Trailhead signs.

ATC and its partners have responded by clarifying direction regarding advertising on A.T. corridor lands. In line with the position stated in the [A.T. Comprehensive Plan](#) and long-standing NPS and USFS policies that prohibit advertising for commercial enterprises located outside park or forest boundaries, advertisements found on Trail corridor lands should be removed with prior notification to partner agencies.

The services provided to hikers by commercial businesses are valuable, and reliance on some of those services (such as hostels) have always been accepted as part of the Trail experience. In Maine, for example, the Trail originally passed a number of sporting camps that were considered part of the overnight accommodation system of the A.T. in the late 1930s and 1940s. Long-distance hikers in particular should be able to access information about services available in nearby communities. Appropriate ways of disseminating this information without affecting the natural and remote character of the A.T. must be found.

Existing Policy

ATC Policy—In 2001 the ATC Board adopted the following policy on advertising in the A.T. corridor:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy places a high value on maintaining the natural character of the Appalachian Trail corridor and is well-aware that small changes that diminish that character can cumulatively alter the Trail environment to the point where the A.T. is no longer a simple footpath passing through a natural setting. Those principles are embodied in numerous ATC policies.

At the same time, ATC recognizes that many A.T. hikers value the services (*e.g.*, lodging, restaurants, outfitters, and shuttles) that are available in many communities along the Trail. Those services may be commercial in nature or offered by Trail enthusiasts acting on their own initiatives, who provide free or for-cost assistance to hikers. Both commercial businesses and Trail enthusiasts make significant contributions to the over-all experience of hiking the A.T. and are important to many hikers, especially long-distance hikers.

Both the National Park Service and Forest Service prohibit advertising on federal lands. ATC and the clubs should take steps to ensure that those longstanding prohibitions in federal regulations are clearly disseminated, implemented, and understood by hikers, Trail neighbors, and affected area businesses or individuals.

In order to maintain the natural character of the A.T. corridor, it is the policy of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy that advertising is incompatible with the Trail and should not take place within the A.T. corridor. Furthermore, ATC and the clubs should urge the

adoption of regulations prohibiting on-site advertising by states and municipalities that control Trail lands where such regulations do not now exist. If necessary, the availability of hiker services outside of the Trail corridor should be publicized through other means, such as publications and Trailhead signs.

For the purposes of this policy, advertising is defined as posting materials, such as signs, notes, or business cards, or distributing flyers, brochures, or similar materials designed to call specific services, both commercial and noncommercial, to the attention of hikers. Materials that promote membership in ATC or Trail-maintaining clubs or participation in volunteer Trail-management activities and materials that recognize the donations of commercial or noncommercial entities for the A.T. are not included in this definition.

NPS Policy—Commercial notices or advertisements generally will not be displayed, posted, or distributed on the federally owned or federally controlled land, water, or airspace of a park (section 9.3.5 of the 2006 NPS [Management Policies](#)).

Considerations for Planning

Inventory—No inventory is necessary.

Setting Trail Club Policy—In developing a policy on advertising, Trail clubs should emphasize the need to keep advertisements out of the Trail corridor, and identify strategies to this end. Strategies could include lobbying for the adoption of municipal and/or state regulations restricting advertising on Trail lands, providing alternative advertising solutions to local service providers, and any other means deemed appropriate by individual clubs.

Action Plan—Trail clubs may develop action plans to implement the strategies identified in their policy.