

June 19, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madame Speaker:

I am writing on behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) to voice support for the goals of the American Clean Energy and Security Act (H.R. 2454).

The ATC is a private, nonprofit, educational organization founded in 1925 to coordinate the efforts by both public agencies and private individuals and organizations to design, construct, maintain and conserve the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST), a unit of the National Park System.

ATC has a membership base of approximately 40,000 individuals. It is also a federation of 30 hiking and outing organizations (with a combined membership of more than 180,000), each of which maintains and manages a segment of the ANST. More than 6,000 dedicated volunteers contribute approximately 200,000 hours of labor along the trail each year.

Our mission is to conserve the natural lands, pristine waters, and forested and pastoral landscapes that surround and border the ANST—our nation's first and foremost national scenic trail. The trail is a continuous, 2,178-mile footpath extending across 14 states from Maine to Georgia.

ATC recognizes the threats posed by climate change, including adverse impacts to the natural and cultural resources of the ANST and its millions of annual visitors. We are committed to supporting appropriate state and Federal carbon-reducing policies and regulations. The goals set for carbon emission reduction in H.R. 2454 are ambitious, but necessary, if we are to limit the damage that climate change would do both in the U.S. and globally.

We are particularly pleased to see the commitment in H.R. 2454 to safeguarding natural resources from climate change. Climate scientists tell us that, given past greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is already occurring and greater impacts are inevitable. As a society we must help communities and natural resources survive and even thrive with those changes. Both scientific studies and anecdotal evidence indicate that climate change is already impacting the ANST. The composition of forests along the ANST is changing, with boreal forests disappearing and temperate forests replacing them. This will increase the threat of extinction for some of the more than 300 rare and endangered plant and animal species that live along the trail. We support the provisions of H.R. 2454 that will provide for carefully planned and adequately funded "Natural Resource Adaptation Programs" that could reduce or eliminate this threat. We look forward to the opportunity to participate in the development of the Natural Resources Climate Change Adaptation Strategy called for in Section 476 of the bill.

Join the Journey™

The ANST and the 250,000 acres of protected lands that border it provide a unique natural habitat corridor in the eastern U.S. The ATC has taken advantage of the trail's north-south alignment across 14 eastern states and worked with scores of scientists and about a dozen universities and federal agencies to develop a host of scientific studies under a unique project called the Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transect environmental-monitoring program.

The MEGA-Transect studies should be able to provide some of the information needed for the Habitat and Corridors Information System (HCIS) envisioned in Section 481 of the bill. Our only concern with this section is that it could be interpreted as limiting participation in the development of the HCIS to states and Indian tribes. Other entities, such as ATC, have valuable information to provide. We would appreciate modification of this section to invite all parties with relevant information to participate in the development of the HCIS.

While we recognize that building the energy system envisioned in H.R. 2454 will require new electric-transmission lines and alternative-fuel pipelines, we are concerned about the potential impact of these new facilities on areas of outstanding natural beauty or historical importance. Title I, Subtitle F of H.R. 2454, Transmission Planning, lays out a comprehensive plan for improving the national electricity grid, starting with the establishment of national electricity grid planning principles. We believe that those principles should include protection of areas of outstanding natural beauty or historical importance, and use of existing transmission corridors to the extent practicable. We would welcome inclusion of such language in the bill.

H.R. 2454 is a complex bill and ATC does not have the expertise to comment on the details of many of its provisions. We are, however, encouraged by the goal-setting approach that appears many times in the bill. In particular, we support the bill's goal of improving the energy productivity of the U.S. by 2.5 percent per year by 2012 and maintaining that rate to 2030. This is more than double the historic average for energy productivity improvement and would save significant amounts of energy while maintaining U.S. economic development. Experience has shown that energy conservation is often the cheapest way of meeting rising demand for energy services.

We realize that H.R. 2454 will change and evolve before it is signed into law. We hope you and your colleagues in Congress will pay careful attention to the goals of this bill and protect them as you make the changes necessary to respond to the conflicting needs of U.S. society. A thoughtful, comprehensive national approach to climate change that considers both control of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to the climate change that we will inevitably experience is essential and timely. We commend the House for its serious approach to this problem, and hope that it and the Senate will move quickly toward final action on this bill.

Sincerely,



David N. Startzell
Executive Director

cc: Representative Henry Waxman
Representative Edward Markey