

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL EXPERIENCE AND NONHIKING RECREATIONAL USES OF TRAIL CORRIDOR LANDS

(As adopted by the Board, 4/19/97)

The Appalachian Trail is, first and foremost, a footpath open to any and all who travel on foot. Its sole purpose as a recreational resource is to provide an opportunity for “travel on foot through the wild, scenic, wooded, pastoral, and culturally significant lands of the Appalachian Mountains.” Except in isolated instances where historically recognized nonconforming uses are allowed by legislative authority, the footpath of the Trail should not be used for any other purpose. This policy is intended to provide a framework within which other recreational uses will be evaluated. The Appalachian Trail Conference may develop additional policy direction for specific uses as needed.

The lands acquired and managed for the Appalachian Trail, and lands designated within the A.T. management zone, not only protect the footpath itself, but provide primary protection of the Trail experience. The Trail experience, as used in this context, is intended to represent the sum of opportunities that are available for those walking the Appalachian Trail to interact with the wild, scenic, pastoral, cultural, and natural elements of the environment of the Appalachian Trail, unfettered and unimpeded by competing sights or sounds and in as direct and intimate a manner as possible. Integral to this Trail experience are:

- opportunities for observation, contemplation, enjoyment, and exploration of the natural world;
- a sense of remoteness and detachment from civilization;
- opportunities to experience solitude; freedom; personal accomplishment; self-reliance; and self-discovery;
- a sense of being on the height of the land;
- opportunities to experience the cultural, historical, and pastoral elements of the surrounding countryside;
- a feeling of being part of the natural environment; and
- opportunities for travel on foot, including opportunities for long-distance hiking.

Other recreational uses of these lands may be compatible if they do not require any modification of design and construction standards for the Trail footpath or Trail facilities; cause damage to the treadway or Trail facilities; require an engine or motor; or adversely impact the Trail experience or the cultural, natural, or scenic resources of the Trail.

Some recreational uses may affect the Trail experience because of an inherent conflict between different user groups' expectations in a specific environment. Some might affect the Trail simply because they result in increased use of Trail lands. Other uses might affect the opportunities for solitude and reflection that certain sections of the Trail provide. The potential for conflict between other uses and the Trail's sole recreational purpose increases as the users' sense of remoteness and distance from the developed environment increases. While some activities may be appropriate along a rural or pastoral section of the Trail where other aspects of civilization are clearly evident, they may be entirely inappropriate in a designated wilderness, primitive area, or other remote area, where they may affect the experience significantly for

people who have hiked to that location. Trail maintaining clubs and agency partners should apply these guidelines as they develop use-specific policies and address proposals for nonhiking recreational use of Trail corridor lands.