

POLICY ON IMPACTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE VICINITY OF THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

Issue: The impact of development on lands in the vicinity of the Appalachian Trail.

Background: The Board of Managers has adopted or amended policies that address the impacts of development within the Appalachian Trail viewshed on several occasions since the late 1980s. Those policies have proven useful as new proposals for utility rights-of-way, highways, telecommunications facilities, wind turbines, ski lifts and trails, and other impacts have been advanced for locations on or near the Trail. The AEP powerline and Route 58 projects in southwest Virginia are perhaps the best examples. More recently, a large natural-gas pipeline has been proposed for the same region, and a large gravel mine began operating below Hump Mountain in western North Carolina.

In April 2000, the Board adopted a policy that addressed the impacts of roads and utility developments. Originally, the draft policy was intended to cover all linear and site impacts. However, in working on later drafts, it became clear that a distinction had to be made between certain types of public facilities (such as roads and utility corridors) and other developments, such as ski areas, quarries, landfills, housing, and commercial construction, etc. The Board was advised that the Trail and Land Management Committee (TLC) would draft a policy to address those types of developments.

Recent Actions: That policy was published in the summer 2001 issue of *The Register*. About a half-dozen comments were received before the deadline. The recommendations included clarifying that the policy applies to all lands in the vicinity of the Trail corridor, relaxing the rigid nature of the language to reflect practical realities, clarifying mitigation measures, and specifically addressing auditory impacts caused by development near the Trail. The TLC Committee revised the draft, shared it at the mid-Atlantic and New England regional management committee meetings and made further modifications. Subsequent changes have been made to better reflect the mission and methods of the ATC Land Trust, in order to have a unified policy that represents the goals of all ATC programs involved in protecting the Trail experience. This policy is now called "Policy on Impacts of Development in the Vicinity of the Appalachian Trail."

The Trail and Land Management Committee recommended adopting the USDA Forest Service's standard, the scenery management system, and seeking scenic integrity levels of "very high," and "high" as those terms are used in the scenery management system. (The older nomenclature is "retention" and "partial retention," from the preceding USFS direction, called the "visual management system." The older nomenclature was used recently in the commission decisions in the Putnam Mine case. See Southern Region Updates). Finally, the committee recommended full recognition of aural or auditory impacts on the "soundscape" of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail as that is defined in National Park Service policy.

On November 17, 2001, the Board adopted the following:

Policy on Impacts of Development in the Vicinity of the Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC) seeks to preserve and protect the scenic, cultural, historical, and natural resources of the Appalachian Trail and features in the surrounding environment that contribute to the Appalachian Trail experience, as defined by the National Trails System Act, the *Comprehensive Plan for the Protection, Management, Development, and Use of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail*, and ATC policy. To that end, ATC seeks to avoid, minimize, or eliminate the visual and aural impacts upon those resources caused by development within the A.T. corridor and on adjacent lands in the vicinity of the corridor and will support any and all measures that do so. Developments that are considered incompatible with the purposes and scenic values of the Appalachian Trail and covered by this policy include ski lifts

and trails, all buildings, observation towers, golf courses, subdivisions, and mineral or gravel extraction operations, etc. ATC's *Policy on Roads and Utility Developments* separately addresses public and administrative roads; powerlines; pipelines; communications lines, towers, and related utility buildings; wind-energy facilities; aircraft beacons; and roads and utilities serving these facilities. Those developments also are considered incompatible with the Appalachian Trail.

The goal of this policy is to ensure that there is no net loss to the recreational and conservation values or the quality of the recreation experience provided by the Appalachian Trail as a result of development. ATC recognizes that its ability to influence specific development proposals may be limited, making this goal difficult to achieve.

The Conference opposes development on mountaintops, ridgelines, and other visible areas in the foreground and middle-ground distance zones as seen from the Appalachian Trail, unless the visual impacts to the Appalachian Trail can be satisfactorily prevented or mitigated. Potential visual impacts will be assessed using the USDA Forest Service's scenery management system, as described in *Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management*, Agriculture Handbook Number 701, 1995.

The Conference may also use the ATC Land Trust's Land Protection Criteria (LPC) as an objective means of weighing the relative merits of protecting areas or specific properties near the Trail through easements, purchase, community outreach and planning, or other means. The LPC can be used to proactively identify high-priority areas that are threatened by incompatible development, to reactively become engaged in new projects that arise due to external threats, and to work toward the protection of areas to prevent or avoid adverse development.

Further, the Conference opposes development that will result in aural impacts to the Appalachian Trail that cannot be prevented or mitigated. ATC will use *NPS Management Policies 2001*, 4.9, *Soundscape Management*, as guidance when addressing potential aural impacts.

Any developments covered by this policy within the viewshed and soundscape of the Trail should meet all of the following criteria:

1. Any new impacts associated with the proposed development should coincide with existing major impacts to the Trail experience.
2. No linear facilities associated with development subject to this policy should be permitted to physically cross the Appalachian Trail or be located within the Appalachian Trail corridor or management area unless a reserved right for such a crossing already exists.
3. Visual impacts in the foreground should meet or exceed a scenic integrity objective of "very high integrity," and those in the middle-ground should meet or exceed a scenic integrity objective of "high scenic integrity." In terms of aural impacts, ATC will seek to preserve, to the maximum extent possible, the existing natural soundscape of the ANST.
4. At a minimum, any proposed development should avoid impacts to the following elements of the Appalachian Trail experience: (a) wilderness or wilderness study areas; (b) National Park Service natural areas; (c) Forest Service scenic areas, semiprimitive nonmotorized areas, or designated backcountry areas; (d) natural-heritage sites; (e) cultural-resource sites; (f) Trail-related facilities, such as shelters and campsites; and (g) alpine zones, balds, wetlands, and riparian zones.

ATC will encourage agency partners and local and regional planning jurisdictions to incorporate those

criteria into agency, local, and regional plans and regulations and work with its member clubs to do likewise.

ATC will participate, and encourage Trail-maintaining clubs and agency partners to participate, as early as possible in public review processes for all development proposals with the potential to result in significant visual or aural impacts on the viewshed or soundscape of the Appalachian Trail.

In cases where development proposed in the vicinity of the A.T. will take place, any adverse impacts should be sufficiently mitigated to meet the goal of this policy. Mitigation should occur on site.

For development proposed in the vicinity of the Trail, ATC will request local, state, or federal regulatory bodies to include in any authorization necessary mitigation to reduce or eliminate the impacts of such facilities on the Appalachian Trail, including a stipulation prohibiting development of new facilities, or any changes to existing facilities, without prior notification of, and consultation with, the organizations and agencies responsible for management of the Appalachian Trail. Furthermore, such stipulations should include requirements for removal of development intrusions when their useful lives have passed and define the methods and required reimbursement of costs for this removal and related rehabilitation of affected lands.

ATC recognizes that certain existing developments along the Trail have important cultural value and should be preserved. In general, those developments would be recognized by inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Examples include fire towers and structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Citation: *Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management*, Agriculture Handbook Number 701, December 1995. This handbook supercedes AH-462, National Forest Landscape Management, Volume 2, Chapter 1, The Visual Management System, issued April 1974.

Attachment: *NPS Management Policies 2001*, 4.9, *Soundscape Management*

Appalachian Trail Conference policies are intended to guide the ATC Board of Managers and staff and to inform Trail clubs, agency partners, and the general public of ATC's position on matters concerning the Appalachian Trail.

ATC policies are compiled into a loose-leaf notebook known as the Local Management Planning Guide (LMPG), last updated in 1997. The LMPG is available from the Appalachian Trail Conference free of charge to Trail-club and government-agency partners and for a copying fee to others. The Conference hopes to publish the LMPG on its website in 2002.

The Appalachian Trail Conference
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