

POLICY ON ROADS AND UTILITY DEVELOPMENTS

(As adopted by the Board, April 2000)

The Appalachian Trail Conference seeks to preserve and protect the scenic, cultural, and natural resources of the Appalachian Trail and the Appalachian Trail experience, as defined by the National Trails System Act and ATC policy. To this end, ATC seeks to avoid, minimize, or eliminate the visual, aural, and experiential impacts of roads and utility developments upon those resources 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 include public and administrative roads; powerlines; pipelines; communications lines, towers, and buildings; wind-energy facilities; aircraft beacons; and roads and utilities serving these facilities.

It is the policy of ATC to oppose construction of any facilities of those types on Appalachian Trail corridor lands or those facilities on adjacent lands that could have an adverse impact on the viewshed of the Trail, unless they meet all of the following criteria:

- 1) The proposed development represents the only prudent and feasible alternative to meet an over-riding public need, as demonstrated in a thorough and detailed analysis of alternatives.
- 2) Any new impacts associated with the proposed development shall coincide with existing major impacts to the Trail experience.
- 3) Any proposed development of linear facilities shall be limited to a single crossing of the Appalachian Trail corridor.
- 4) Any adverse impacts of a proposed development shall be sufficiently mitigated so as to result in no net loss of recreational values or the quality of the recreation experience provided by the Appalachian Trail. To the extent practicable, mitigation shall occur on site.
- 5) The proposed development shall avoid, at a minimum: (a) wilderness or wilderness study areas; (b) National Park Service natural areas; (c) Forest Service semiprimitive nonmotorized 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, and wetlands.

ATC will work with agency partners to incorporate those criteria into agency plans and regulations and encourages its member clubs to do likewise.

During the planning and regulatory-review processes, ATC, Trail-maintaining clubs, and agencies should make every effort to avoid impacts that would impair the natural, scenic, social, or cultural values and resources of the Appalachian Trail.

The following areas may be considered for developments under this policy, provided no other reasonable alternatives exist and mitigation sufficient to achieve a “no-net-loss” condition has been incorporated into the proposal:

- Areas where the A.T. crosses an existing state or federal highway;

- Areas crossed by the A.T. that are already developed;
- Sites with an existing facility;
- Areas where Trail values, such as a sense of remoteness, would not be compromised.

ATC will participate, and encourage A.T.-maintaining clubs and agency partners to participate, in public-review processes for all road-and-utility development proposals located within the viewshed of the Appalachian Trail.

Following construction, impacted areas will be restored to the extent feasible. Restoration measures include installation of permanent erosion control and planting of native vegetation. Measures to avoid additional impacts, such as use of access routes by motorized vehicles, will be taken as necessary.

The developments covered by this policy are divided into two categories: linear (roads and all utility corridors) and site (communications towers and structures, wind-energy facilities, and aircraft beacons). In addition to the general policy direction provided above, more specific direction for the two types of development follows:

Linear Developments

A “no-net-loss” approach should be established as the minimum threshold for approval of any linear facilities that cross the Appalachian Trail. In other words, if it is determined that it is in the public interest for a project to cross the Appalachian Trail, then sufficient mitigation must be incorporated into the proposed project so that there is no net loss of Trail values or quality of Trail experience. Any analysis of the impacts of such a proposal must analyze the cumulative impact of similar linear facilities upon Trail resources and Trail values, including the sense of remoteness and connection to the primeval environment of the Appalachian Mountains that the Trail presently provides.

At points where utility corridors intersect Appalachian Trail lands, ATC advocates the use of utility right-of-way maintenance techniques that reduce the impacts of said maintenance on the aesthetic values of the Appalachian Trail. Such techniques include hand-clearing of vegetation, “feathering” of vegetation along the edges of the right-of-way, leaving low-growing vegetation, and avoiding the use of herbicides. ATC encourages A.T.-maintaining clubs and agency partners to contact utility companies to advise them of concerns associated with clearing right-of-way corridors that intersect the Appalachian Trail corridor.

ATC also supports efforts to establish procedures for utility companies and public agencies to provide notice to Trail clubs at least 30 days in advance of maintenance operations by agency, company, or contract crews, in order that on-site concerns may be addressed.

Signs should be placed on the exterior boundary of Appalachian Trail lands indicating that the responsible utility company and the local Trail club/ATC should be contacted for further information prior to clearing the utility right-of-way behind the signs. A generic ATC sign to this effect should be developed and offered to Trail clubs responsible for sections of the Trail that cross public lands acquired for the Trail. ATC also should collect and disseminate information to

Trail-maintaining clubs and agency partners regarding utility corridor maintenance practices that protect Trail resource values.

Site Developments

The Conference opposes facility 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, aural and experiential impacts to the Appalachian Trail can be satisfactorily mitigated on-site. (Foreground and middle ground will be determined using the USDA Forest Service's Scenery Management System, as described in *Landscape Aesthetics, Agriculture Handbook Number 701*).

The Conference will recommend that governmental agencies take steps to encourage shared use of existing communications facilities, development of multiuser facilities, and removal of structures that are no longer needed, as solutions to the problem of proliferating communications towers and other structures dotting the landscape.

For proposed facilities within one mile of the Trail, ATC will request local, state, or federal regulatory bodies to include in any authorization a condition 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.