



## Information for Prospective Principle Investigators (PIs) of Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transect projects

### **Overview**

Interested in becoming one of the scientists planning and conducting studies that are part of the A.T. MEGA-Transect? We actively encourage investigators working in any and all disciplines related to our overall mission and goals to join the growing network of university and government agency scientists who focus some of their research attention on the lands and resources surrounding the Appalachian Trail (A.T.). The A.T. MEGA-Transect, the 2,176 mile-long trail and the more than 250,000 contiguous acres of permanently protected natural area surrounding it, combine to create a unique research laboratory focused on this internationally known recreation resource. Its north-south orientation, relatively high elevation and the large number of diverse ecosystems through which it traverses further enhance its potential for both basic and applied study from the perspectives of a large number of scientific disciplines.

In addition to being a unique research laboratory in its own right, there is a growing body of scientific knowledge available about these A.T. lands and resources. Researchers involved in A.T. MEGA-Transect studies are committed to sharing their data when it can contribute to other important investigations. As this long term project expands, more and more scientific synergies will become possible. We encourage investigators to consider it as a potential site for new studies or as a possible location for expanding existing lines of research.

While the A.T. MEGA-Transect program offers great potential for collaboration and synergism, it is not currently a source of research funding. All MEGA-Transect studies are funded through outside sources arranged by the Principle Investigators (PIs) or their agencies. However, the ATC and its member clubs have proven to be strong partners in providing volunteer citizen-scientists and other support to PIs. The support of ATC, the National Park Service Appalachian Trail Park Office and other partners has also been helpful in assisting PIs find and secure funding for efforts related to the MEGA-Transect.

### **Preparing Research Proposals**

If you are considering preparing a proposal for research related to the A.T. or the lands along it we ask that you get in touch with one of the contacts listed below as early as possible, ideally while you are conceptualizing your study. They can answer questions about the process and help identify ways your interests can best fit in with other studies completed, in progress, or planned. The evolving program of A.T. MEGA-Transect research and investigators is loosely organized into various "working groups" as described in the proceedings of the 2006 symposium (available in pdf form on the previous page of this website). Many of the members of these working groups are available for consultation and some as potential collaborators if you desire.

## **Special Considerations When Preparing Proposals**

### *Involving and Budgeting for Volunteer Citizen Scientists*

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and its 30 member clubs have a combined membership of over 100,000, thousands of whom are active and dedicated volunteers on behalf of the Appalachian Trail and the lands surrounding it. One advantage of conducting research as part of the A.T. MEGA-Transect is the possibility of engaging volunteer citizen-scientists in the research process. This has most often been the case in terms of data collection but is not limited to that depending on the nature of the study.

Engaging properly trained citizen-scientists can lead to significant cost savings and has the added benefit of building community understanding and support for issues related to the study objectives. However, citizen-science volunteers are often not free. Recruiting and coordinating needed volunteers can involve substantial time for ATC staff and others, particularly when a large number of volunteers are involved or needed for extended periods of time. It is important for PIs to talk with one of the A.T. MEGA-Transect contacts listed below early in the process of conceptualizing and planning their research to ensure that a sufficient number of adequately skilled volunteers are available in the correct locations. Depending on the number of needed volunteers, your proposal budget may need to include money to offset expenses for ATC and its clubs.

### *Research Permitting*

All data collection for research conducted on federal lands such as National Parks and National Forests requires advance permitting. Obtaining the necessary “Scientific Research and Collecting Permits” is not a difficult or complex process, but PIs must plan for the necessary time and effort when they are considering the timeframes of studies they are proposing. This is particularly important because the Appalachian National Scenic Trail also crosses lands administered by other National Parks and National Forests and is itself a unit of the National Park System. The permitting process does take time and should be initiated far in advance of when field work is planned. As a guide, you should plan on submitting an application at least 6 weeks ahead of anticipated field work for most projects. For projects that may be more intensive, may cause some resource disturbance, or are otherwise more complicated you should pre-coordinate your plans with one of the listed contacts as soon as possible to determine whether additional permit review time will be required.

### **Contacts:**

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