ATC Policy on Unmanned Aircraft

Adopted May 9, 2015 by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Introductory Remarks Applicable to All Appalachian Trail Conservancy Policies
The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail clubs and public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian Trail National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, the A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the USDI National Park Service and its close working partnership with the USDA Forest Service and other agencies. ATC’s mission is: “To preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail—ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow and for centuries to come.” ATC’s Trail management and conservation policies are meant to provide guidance for (a) dissemination to the public; (b) use and implementation by the ATC and the A.T. maintaining clubs; and (c) recommendations for land-managing and other agencies. It is the agencies who work within their defined procedures to propose, administer, and enforce public policy. ATC policies are recommendations developed to support appropriate, coordinated Trailwide management.

ATC Policy Statement
In response to increased incidents involving unmanned aircraft (known as unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs, unmanned aircraft systems, UAS, or drones) operating within sight and sound of Appalachian Trail visitors—and consistent with new National Park Service restrictions in 36CFR 1.5(a)(1), prohibiting the “launching, landing or operating from or on lands and waters administered by the National Park Service within the boundaries of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail”—it is the policy of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy that the operation of unmanned aircraft on or over the Appalachian Trail is incompatible with efforts to maintain a high-quality visitor experience and protect wildlife along the whole of the Appalachian Trail and its associated corridor lands. Except where necessary for approved administrative, scientific, or emergency uses, as authorized by the land managing agency, ATC opposes the use of unmanned aircraft launched from, or operating over, lands or waters within the boundaries of the NPS Appalachian Trail corridor or other lands that are administered for the Appalachian Trail.

To supplement the existing permanent prohibition in federally designated Wilderness areas and current prohibition in interim APPA regulations [36CFR 1.5(a)(1)], ATC encourages its federal, state, and municipal partners to make permanent any existing prohibitions on UAV operations proximate to all segments of the Trail and to institute new prohibitions where there are none present. Further, the Conservancy recommends that the NPS, USFS, and other agency partners carefully monitor the FAA’s developing UAS policy and where appropriate, encourage the FAA to develop policies to limit such operations over the entire Appalachian Trail and its associated corridor lands.