ATC Policy on Military Maneuvers

Adopted by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in November 1989

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy recognizes and endorses the valuable assistance provided by units of the armed forces during search-and-rescue missions along the Appalachian Trail, the use of military aircraft to airlift materials for shelter construction projects in remote areas, and other actions undertaken by military personnel at the request of a club or agency partner for the benefit or management of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. This statement of policy is not intended to discourage these mutually beneficial cooperative activities, which have significantly enhanced the management capabilities of the Appalachian Trail management partners.

The physical impacts of military training exercises, including ground disturbances created by infantry training exercises and the noise disturbances created by both ground and aerial training exercises, can significantly detract from the experience of hiking the Appalachian Trail and may also create safety hazards for hikers. It is the policy of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy that military maneuvers should not be permitted on, or in the low-altitude air space above, Appalachian Trail corridor lands, except in unusual circumstances.

Low-level over flights, particularly repeated over flights, intrude on the quiet and solitude that have always been considered essential to the A.T. experience. Consistent with Federal Aviation Administration recommendations for flights over national park units, a minimum floor of 2,000 feet above ground level should be required for all aircraft, including military aircraft, for the entire length of the Appalachian Trail.

ATC and the Trail-maintaining clubs should be consulted during any formal or informal consideration of a proposal for military-training exercises on A.T. lands. ATC will assist agencies to the extent possible in identifying alternative locations for conducting military training exercises. If an authorization is under consideration for military training use of the Appalachian Trail or Appalachian Trail lands, ATC would urge its land-managing partners to issue authorizations only when a determination has been made by the appropriate agency officials that the training exercises are essential for national defense and that it is not feasible to conduct the exercises at any other location. If a special-use permit is issued by a land-managing agency for any military training exercise on the Appalachian Trail or Appalachian Trail lands, the permit at a minimum should state that:

1. No ground disturbance (including construction of bunkers, foxholes, tent platforms, etc.) and mechanized or motorized use should not be permitted (and is prohibited in “wilderness” and “wilderness study” areas);

2. Activities authorized under the permit must not interfere with hikers on the Trail;

3. All reasonable efforts will be made to notify hikers and other users of Trail corridor lands that such activities are occurring;

4. No weapons should be used or be visible to observers;
5. No activities may be conducted which put any hikers or other civilians at risk or in fear of their safety;

6. No activities may be conducted which would exceed the limits for group use set forth in the ATC group-use policy (“Groups spending one or more nights on the Trail should not exceed 10 in the same organization and day-use groups should not exceed 25 in the same organization unless clubs otherwise designate in their local-management plans”);

7. No explosive materials will be permitted;

8. No activities should be permitted near shelters or other Trail facilities; and,

9. The Trail club and ATC should be notified by the land-managing agency at least 48 hours in advance of any pending activity.