

ATC Policy on Pipeline Crossings of the Appalachian Trail

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 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

This policy is intended to complement and expand upon ATC's Roads and Utilities Policy, adopted by ATC's Board of Managers in 2000, which is hereby incorporated by reference (see <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/docs/trail-management-policies/roads-and-utilities-2000.pdf?sfvrsn=2>), by providing a more in-depth response to the specific issues raised by the proliferation of proposed pipeline crossings of the A.T.

ATC will participate, and encourage A.T.-maintaining clubs, individual members, agency partners, and natural resource conservation organizations to participate, in public-review procedures for all pipelines proposed to cross the A.T. landscape.

It is the policy of ATC to oppose pipeline crossings of Appalachian Trail corridor lands, conservation easements that it manages, or adjacent lands that could have an adverse impact on A.T. resources, unless they meet all of the following criteria:

1. The proposed pipeline is demonstrated to be the only prudent and feasible alternative to meet an overriding public need, based on a thorough and detailed analysis of alternatives, including, but not limited to:
 - energy conservation and demand-side management;
 - use of renewable energy;
 - increasing the capacity of existing pipelines; and
 - modification of the pipeline route to reduce its impact.

The thorough analysis of alternatives should be conducted by the lead federal or state agency responsible for environmental compliance, and must include consultation with the NPS, any affected A.T. land-managing agencies (e.g., the Forest Service), and ATC, in conjunction with A.T.-maintaining clubs.

2. The proposed pipeline crosses the A.T. landscape at a point already subject to significant impact, such as an existing pipeline, road, or power-line crossing, provided that the existing crossing is in an acceptable location as defined by ATC's [Roads and Utilities Policy](#).

3. The pipeline proposal includes use of best practices to minimize its impact on the A.T., including:
 - crossing the A.T. landscape only once using the shortest feasible path;
 - using construction techniques that minimize disturbance to A.T. landscapes, *e.g.* horizontal directional drilling (HDD);
 - eliminating or minimizing the width of cleared area for the pipeline;
 - narrowing the cleared area after installation;
 - eliminating or minimizing new roads and other infrastructure within the A.T. landscape;
 - designing compressor and pumping stations to eliminate or minimize visual, light, and noise impacts;
 - taking all feasible steps to minimize landscape fragmentation;
 - developing a plan with and approved by the applicable agency partner for restoring the A.T. landscape to its prior condition when the pipeline is abandoned;
 - providing a bond or escrow account to pay for the cost of restoration when the pipeline is abandoned.

4. The proposed pipeline does not cross an area unsuitable for such development, including:
 - Wilderness Areas and wilderness study areas;
 - National Recreation Areas, National Natural Landmarks, and Wild and Scenic Rivers, or lands with equivalent levels of state protection;
 - old growth forests and habitat for rare species or exemplary natural communities;
 - unbroken blocks of forest that can provide habitats for interior forest species, such as black-throated blue warblers, salamanders, and many other flora and fauna that require a forest habitat;
 - alpine zones, balds, and wetlands;
 - cultural resource sites or National Historic Landmarks;
 - unique or important ecological or recreational sites identified by state, regional, or township land-use plans;
 - highly used and popular sections of the A.T.; and
 - Trail-related facilities, such as shelters and campsites.

5. Pipeline authorizations¹ include mitigation for any loss of the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational values of the A.T. ATC's goal is to ensure that there is no net loss of these values. The Conservancy will encourage land-managing agencies to set permit requirements that achieve this outcome.

Examples of mitigation include:

- habitat restoration
- acquisition of additional conservation land
- removal of other developments and restoration of the landscape; and
- protection of land through conservation easements.

To the extent possible, mitigation should be on-site or adjacent to the area of impact, unless it is clear that a greater benefit would be derived from activities at a more distant location. Land acquisition should be in the vicinity of the area of impact and within the A.T. landscape.

6. Pipeline authorizations include using best practices to reduce the impacts of maintenance on the aesthetic values of the A.T. Such techniques include:

¹ Pipeline authorizing agencies include the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for interstate natural gas pipelines, other federal agencies for liquids pipelines, and state agencies for intrastate liquids and natural gas pipelines. The terms used for authorization documents vary with agency; FERC's is a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity.

- hand-clearing of vegetation;
- “feathering” of vegetation along the edges of the right-of-way;
- leaving low-growing vegetation;
- minimizing the use of herbicides;
- when herbicides are used, posting proper warnings at trailheads about their nature and the timing of their application; and
- preventing the introduction of invasive or exotic species, and controlling such species, should they occur.

ATC will encourage A.T.-maintaining clubs and agency partners to communicate to pipeline companies concerns associated with clearing rights-of-way that cross the A.T. landscape.

7. Pipeline authorizations clearly acknowledge the pipeline owner and operator’s affirmative duty to protect the environment and ensure the health and safety of A.T. users and the communities in the vicinity of the Trail. These duties include, but are not limited to:

- protecting against fire, explosion, or release of toxic substances;
- avoiding damage to, or contamination of, the environment, including soil, vegetation, animal life, surface water, and groundwater;
- protecting cultural and historic artifacts; and
- retaining liability for any negative impacts or damages resulting from the pipeline.

ATC will encourage pipeline-authorizing agencies to include specific references to these responsibilities in their authorizations.

8. All pipeline authorizations include best practices for minimizing methane emission that can contribute to climate change.