



Appalachian National Scenic Trail

2015 Business Plan



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Business Planning in the National Park Service

The purpose of business planning in the National Park Service is to improve the ability of parks and programs to more clearly communicate their financial and operational status to principal stakeholders. A business plan answers such questions as: How does the park operate? What are its priorities over the next five years? How will it allocate resources to achieve its goals?

The business planning process accomplishes three main tasks. First, it presents a clear, detailed picture of the state of operations and priorities. Second, it provides analysis of funding sources and expenditures. Third, it outlines financial projections and specific strategies to marshal resources and direct them toward high-priority operational needs.

As a result, parks can more clearly communicate their financial situation to external audiences. Completing the business plan process not only enables the park to produce a powerful communication tool, but also provides management with baseline financial and operational knowledge for future decision making.



Above: Sunset from Roan Mountain in North Carolina.

Cover: View of Mt. Katahdin and the Penobscot River from Abol Bridge.

National Park Service Mission:

The National Park Service (NPS) preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and intrinsic values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

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Superintendent's Foreword

Before the National Trails System Act of 1968 and the establishment of the Appalachian Trail (AT) as a unit of the National Park System, then—Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall had this to say about the AT:

...None who has seen it has not marveled; none who has traveled it has not been moved.

The Appalachian Trail is first of all upon you as a physical experience... The Trail is also an historical experience—one realizes that it was crossed by Daniel Boone and used by pioneers. It is a poetic reminder of Whitman and Frost. It is a philosophical account suggestive of Emerson and Thoreau.

...The veneration and viability of the 2,000 miles of the AT as a national legacy to be nourished and kept alive for future generations must begin with appreciation and action.

These words still ring true today and such appreciation and action are reflected in this business plan.

At this juncture in the AT's history, it is an opportune time to not only re-affirm what is most important about the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, but also look forward and think about the future. The history of the AT is a collection of stories, as many as there are miles of trail, and as varied as the changing landscape from Georgia to Maine.

This Business Plan is informed by the Foundation Document that was launched in December 2013. The Foundation Document complements the Comprehensive Plan and updates our purpose and significance statements, identifies the Trail's fundamental resources and values, and establishes planning priorities and data needs.

Business Plans in the National Park Service (NPS) help build analyses, determine operational priorities, and develop strategies to more effectively leverage resources. This Business Plan aligns with our partner the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Strategic Plan, by developing an actionable and strategic operating plan for the next three to five years.

The AT is a symbol of personal action for a shared vision—the power of one and many. The foundation of stewardship success lies in collaborating with a myriad of partners—communities, states, federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and private citizens—in support of resource preservation and protection, education, outreach, visitor safety, and a quality experience for all.

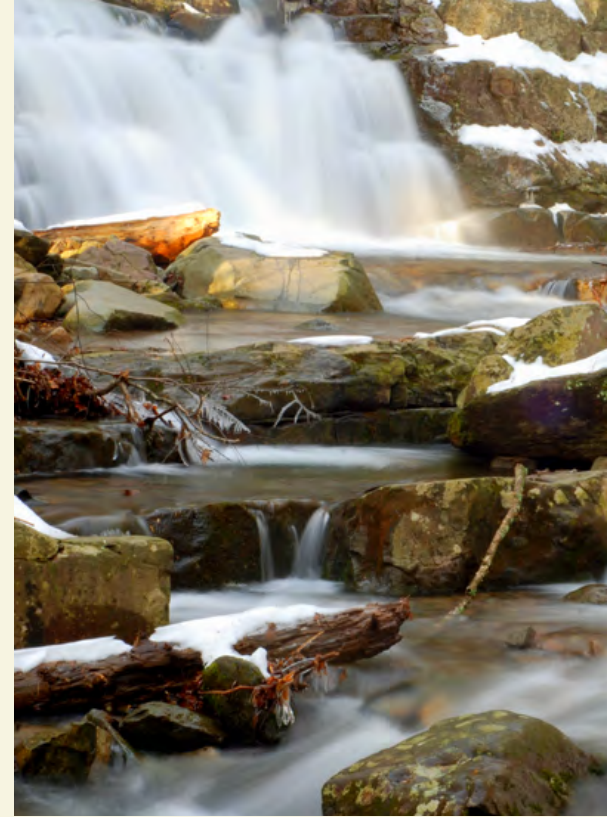
Working with our partners, the business plan process enabled us to envision the future and ask, "What is the next chapter for the AT?" We discussed how to assess existing operations and programs, build upon success, and establish new relationships and initiatives—with realistic fiscal planning and the prioritization of our objectives. This Business Plan will enable us to prepare for what is still to come. It identifies gaps between what we want to accomplish and the resources available and how we can better leverage and re-align those resources.

The collaborative environment that we have among the partners of the AT and the level of community engagement is a model in the NPS. Thank you for your dedication, assistance, and passion. The AT has the power of place, the power of people, and the power of partnership—and with your continued support, we have a bright future.



Wendy K. Janssen

Superintendent



Waterfall flows alongside the AT through Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

*None who has seen it
has not marveled; none
who has traveled it has
not been moved.*

—Former Secretary of the Interior
Stewart Udall



Geography

- 14 states including 88 counties
- Over 1,200 miles of NPS managed boundary
- Over 60 state parks, state forests, game lands, or wildlife management areas
- 8 national forests, 2 national wildlife refuges, and 6 NPS units
- Over 250,000 acres of protected land

Park Operations

- Over 1,000 vistas
- Over 400 parking areas
- Over 270 overnight shelters
- Over 200 maintained landscapes
- Over 700 road crossings
- Over 190 major power line or pipe-line crossings
- Over 30 railroad crossings

Cultural and Historic Resources

- 26 features listed on the National Register of Historic Places (entire trail eligible for listing)
- 3 National Historic Landmarks
- 8 historic districts

Natural Resources

- Over 600 identified rare, threatened, or endangered plant species sites
- 80 globally rare plant communities
- 25 wilderness areas
- 8 distinct ecoregions
- 8 National Natural Landmarks
- Over 460 stream crossings

The Appalachian Trail traverses 2,185 miles across 14 states, 6 other NPS units, 8 national forests, 2 national wildlife refuges, and 164 townships.

Orientation

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is one of the world's longest continuous footpaths, running roughly 2,185 miles up and down the eastern United States. The Appalachian Trail (commonly known as the AT or simply "The Trail") passes through fourteen states from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain in Georgia to its northern endpoint at Katahdin in Maine, roughly following the crest of the 480-million-year-old Appalachian mountain chain.

An estimated 2.5 million people from around the world visit the Trail via one of its hundreds of access points every year. These visitors range from day hikers and weekend campers to "thru-hikers," who attempt to walk the entire length of the trail in a single year.

The Nature and Purposes of the Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian Trail is a way, continuous from Katahdin in Maine to Springer Mountain in Georgia, for travel on foot through the wild, scenic, wooded, pastoral, and culturally significant landscapes of the Appalachian Mountains. It is a means of sojourning among these lands, such that the visitors may experience them by their own unaided efforts. The Trail is preserved for the conservation, public use, enjoyment, and appreciation of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural quality of the areas through which the trail passes. Purposeful in direction and concept, favoring the heights of land, and located for minimum reliance on construction for protecting the resource, the body of the Trail is provided by the lands it traverses, and its soul is the living stewardship of the volunteers and workers of the Appalachian Trail community.

—Appalachian National Scenic Trail Foundation Document
Revised from the Appalachian Trail Management Principles,
Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 1977

Key Themes: Highlights and Challenges

The Appalachian Trail is notable for its length, diverse management partnership, and complex web of land ownership and jurisdiction. These unique qualities pose a broad range of challenges and opportunities for the National Park Service's Appalachian National Scenic Trail office (hereafter referred to as "Appalachian NST").

1

A unique management partnership

The Appalachian Trail is a complex National Park Service unit, passing through 14 states, each with diverse jurisdictions, communities, and ecological characteristics. Successful management of a resource as vast and complex as the Appalachian Trail requires an equally broad assembly of partners. The Appalachian NST administers the Trail through partnerships, which include dozens of organizations ranging from local community volunteer organizations to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, a nation-wide nonprofit. While coordinating with such a wide array of partners presents a significant challenge, it also provides the Appalachian NST an opportunity to leverage its small staff and budget with a tremendous wealth of resources and expertise up and down the Trail. The ongoing success of the AT's cooperative governance system serves as a model for national trails and other National Park Service units.

2

A pivotal moment in Appalachian Trail management

This business plan comes at an auspicious time for the cooperative management of the Appalachian Trail. There are new leaders in place at both the Appalachian NST and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), bringing years of experience and fresh perspectives to the Trail. Both organizations have also invested in planning, with the Appalachian NST finalizing its Foundation Document (a fundamental guidance for planning and management, completed in consultation with the entire Appalachian Trail cooperative management partnership), and ATC finalizing its own five year strategic plan. The confluence of these factors creates an opportunity to shape the future of the cooperative management of the Appalachian Trail.

3

Opportunities to unlock new and sustainable financial resources

Meeting the management needs of the AT depends on leveraging resources from a wide variety of sources and partners. In the current federal funding climate, effective leverage over the next five years will be more important than ever. Making progress towards emerging strategic goals, such as engaging broader audiences and protecting and interpreting cultural resources, will require unlocking new sources of funding and expertise. To that end, the Appalachian NST is planning to take advantage of previously untapped federal funding opportunities. The Appalachian NST and Appalachian Trail Conservancy are also planning for collaborative fundraising, modeled after successful fundraising partnerships demonstrated elsewhere within the National Park Service, to build sustainable funding sources to support the cooperative management of the trail.

4

Volunteers are the soul of the Trail

From its volunteer-centered origins, the Appalachian Trail has earned the title “The People’s Trail.” Every year, thousands of volunteers donate hundreds of thousands of hours to the monitoring, maintenance, and management of the Trail. For the Appalachian NST and its cooperative management partners, empowering and enabling these volunteers is a core priority. The Appalachian NST and its partners provide resources, training, and guidance to support the work of volunteers. Understanding volunteer needs, allocating resources, strengthening communication, and coordinating long-term project planning among the 31 diverse trail-maintaining clubs is an ongoing challenge. Over the next five years, the Appalachian NST will continue to build its capacity to respond to and serve volunteer needs while striving to inspire stewardship in a future generation of passionate AT volunteers.

5

Leadership in data-driven management

The Appalachian NST has been a leader in data-supported management within the National Park Service since it became the first National Scenic Trail with a GIS (Geographic Information System) specialist on staff in 1998. The Appalachian NST and its partners use GIS software and sophisticated global positioning units to accurately map trail boundaries, assets, and maintenance needs. This strong foundation of expertise and raw data has also helped the Appalachian NST identify and target priority management zones for natural resources and places where potential development threatens the trail corridor. The Appalachian NST has also lent its data and mapping expertise to other park units, helping establish GIS programs and assemble core data, and assisting with the development of the Federal Interagency Trail Data Standards. Data-driven management is also a unique area of collaboration between the Appalachian NST and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which houses its own full time GIS employee in the Appalachian NST office, encouraging sharing of technical resources and expertise.

A hiker stands above the clouds at the Appalachian Trail’s northern terminus: the summit of Katahdin in Baxter State Park, Maine.

History and Evolution of Appalachian Trail Management

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail can trace its origins back to 1921, when regional planner and forester Benton MacKaye published "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning" in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*.



Dr. L.F. Schmeckebier applying the standard white paint blaze that marks length of the Appalachian Trail; Myron Avery (center), the first chairman of the Appalachian Trail Conference, beside the original Katahdin summit sign in 1933.

History and Evolution of Appalachian Trail Management

The original Trail was designed, constructed, and maintained in the 1920s and 1930s by an assortment of volunteer hiking clubs. The Civilian Conservation Corps, a Great Depression-era federal jobs program, helped complete and connect the original Appalachian Trail, which stretched unbroken from Georgia's Mt. Oglethorpe to Katahdin in Maine by 1937. In 1925, the Appalachian Trail Conference, a volunteer non-profit group, was established to unite all associated AT trail clubs. The Conference, now known as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, retains a critical role in the Appalachian Trail's complex and successful management partnership to this day.

The Appalachian Trail was recognized by the United States Congress in 1968 with the passage of the National Trails System Act, which established the AT as one of the first National Scenic Trails in the country. The 1968 Act gave the National Park Service (in consultation with the US Forest Service) the official authority to administer the Trail. The Act was amended in 1978 to provide additional resources for the acquisition of land to protect and preserve the Appalachian Trail corridor. The National Trails System Act also highlights the critical importance of volunteers to the establishment and ongoing protection of the Appalachian Trail and other national scenic trails, and aims to "encourage and assist volunteer citizen involvement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management."

*Early hikers register
along the trail.*

*The Appalachian Trail is conceived as
the backbone of a super reservation and
primeval recreation ground... its ultimate
purpose being to extend acquaintance
with the scenery and serve as a guide to
the understanding of nature.*

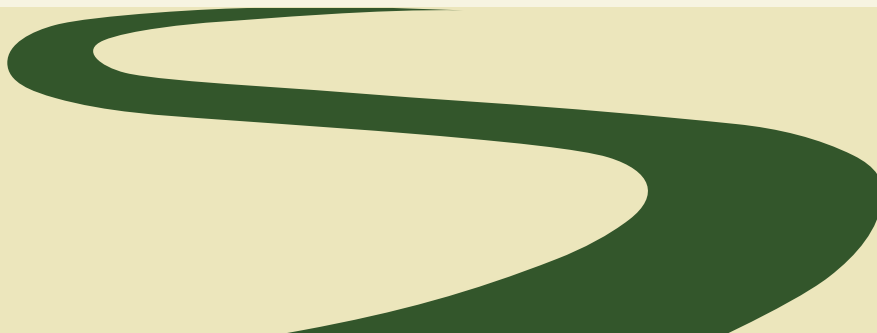
—Benton MacKaye

Land Ownership

Since a 1978 amendment to the National Trails System Act authorized funding for land acquisition to protect the Trail, the National Park Service, the US Forest Service (USFS), and many state agencies have collaborated to purchase and protect more than 250,000 acres of land along the trail. More than 99 percent of the Trail now lies within a protective corridor of land that averages approximately 1,000 feet in width, and negotiations to secure the remaining lands are in progress. The Appalachian NST's current land ownership on the AT consists

of 120,200 acres in nine states: Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia. Additionally, NPS has acquired and transferred approximately 23,000 acres of land to other land managers, including the US Forest Service. While NPS owns a significant portion of the Trail, the majority passes through lands not owned directly by the Appalachian NST. On those lands, the Trail is managed through agreements and extensive collaboration with a myriad of state and federal landowners.

Appalachian NST
manages nearly twice
as many miles of
hiking trails as any
other national park.



Visitors and Resources

The Appalachian Trail has become one of the best known and most beloved long distance hiking trails in the world. The AT is within a day's drive of over half of the United States population, and it provides a venue for everything from an afternoon stroll to a weekend getaway to a months-long backpacking adventure. While the Trail may be best known for the "thru-hiker" community, those hikers that traverse all 2,185 miles from Georgia to Maine, these visitors make up less than one percent of the estimated 2.5 million visitors in a given year. The vast majority of visitors come to the AT for a day, weekend, or section hike. People may also find themselves on an AT treadway while visiting one of the numerous popular state and national parks and forests through which the AT passes.



Beyond hiking, the AT provides access to diverse and important natural and cultural resources. The Trail passes through 20 US Fish and Wildlife Service ecoregions that are home to rich biodiversity, including many rare, threatened, and endangered species. Further, the Trail traverses unique cultural resources, including Civil War battlefields, historic monuments, and over 200 maintained landscapes including working agricultural land. The trail in its entirety is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and 26 features along the Appalachian Trail are currently listed on the Register across eight historic districts. The Appalachian NST is working to inventory, monitor, and protect these valuable resources.

*Left: Visitors gather at ATC headquarters for the African American History Hike.
Below: A moose stands at an AT trailhead in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.*




Tracking Visitors on the AT

The complexity and sheer size of the Appalachian Trail make it difficult to accurately count how many visitors it attracts. A visitor study conducted by University of Georgia researchers in 2007, estimated annual visitation that year at 1.9 million, with a 95 percent confidence interval of 1.2 million to 2.7 million.


Overview of Management Priorities

In the development of this business plan, the Appalachian NST identified categories for its prioritized goals and strategies. Many of these categories represent traditional operational priorities, while others focus on program areas in which the Appalachian NST plans to build capacity. The eight priority categories, around which many of the analyses and recommendations in this business plan are laid out, are:


Maintain Trail Assets

 Identifying, prioritizing, and addressing the maintenance needs of the Trail.


Manage Use

 Making the Trail available to a wide variety of users while ensuring visitor safety and managing impacts on other users, neighboring communities, and natural and cultural resources.


Conserve Priority Landscapes

 Identifying the highest priority landscapes along the AT corridor, and targeting them for special management and protection from external threats.


Protect Natural Resources

 Managing, preserving, and interpreting natural resources in the AT corridor, and increasing public awareness of the AT's value as a natural resource, reserve of biodiversity, and barometer of regional environmental health.


Protect Cultural Resources

 Inventorying, protecting, and interpreting the historic and cultural resources along the AT corridor.


Engage a Broader Audience

 Introducing new and diverse audiences to the AT and inspiring stewardship through innovative and cost-efficient educational programming, visitor services, and volunteer opportunities.

Strengthen Partnerships

 Bolstering the critical partnerships at the foundation of the management of the AT through formal agreements, increased face-to-face engagement, and mutual transparency.

Achieve Operational Excellence

 Improving support and administrative operations to guarantee that the Appalachian NST operates as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Further explanation of the Appalachian NST's work across these eight categories can be found on pages 24–39.

Much of the Trail passes through lush forests, such as this section across Thunder Ridge, VA.



The Appalachian NST is unusual among NPS units, as it is not organized around a traditional division structure. Instead, the Appalachian NST staff consists primarily of program managers, administrators, and support staff who work together to fill the National Park Service's role in the cooperative management of the Appalachian Trail. For example, there is a Natural Resources Manager on the Appalachian NST staff who collaborates with regional ATC staff, volunteers, and contractors to implement management and monitoring tasks along the length of the Trail. Similarly, the Appalachian NST has a two-person Facilities Maintenance team that works collaboratively with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, trail clubs, trail work crews, and other partners to assess the condition of trail assets and coordinate maintenance and repair efforts. The Appalachian NST also has staff responsible for law enforcement, who collaborate with local authorities up and down the Trail to address incidents as they arise and ensure visitor safety. Appalachian NST staff also have responsibility for managing special use permitting and environmental compliance.

The Appalachian NST staff is headquartered in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, near the mid-point of the AT and a short walk from the ATC headquarters. Currently, the Appalachian NST staffing model includes the following permanent, full-time positions:

General Management

- Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendent

Program

- Chief Ranger
- Environmental Protection Specialist
- Facilities Manager
- Facilities Management Systems Specialist
- Natural Resources Manager
- Park Ranger (Law Enforcement)

Administration and Program Support

- Management Assistant
- GIS/IT Specialist

Leveraging Shared NPS Resources

Appalachian NST draws on expertise and capacity from throughout the National Park Service to accomplish its goals with limited internal resources. Examples include:

- Administrative support and technical assistance and programmatic expertise from the Northeast Regional Office
- HR support from the Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO)
- Special Uses staff at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area
- Administrative and Cultural Resources staff from Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
- Support from the National Trails Lands Office to facilitate land acquisition within the AT corridor
- Environmental monitoring support from a dedicated Inventory and Monitoring coordinator based at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park
- Law enforcement, resource management, and interpretive support from the NPS units the trail traverses

The roles and responsibilities of Appalachian NST staff have evolved along with the AT management partnership over the years. Because the majority of the Appalachian NST's base budget supports personnel costs, aligning staff roles with management priorities is critical to efficiently allocating resources and achieving goals. Planning for staff turnover is also important, as vacancies can significantly impact the division of responsibilities among such a small staff. At the time of developing this business plan, Appalachian NST had three vacant positions: Facilities Manager, Environmental Protection Specialist, and Park Ranger (Law Enforcement).

Funding and Expenditures

Funding Sources

Appropriated Base Funding: The most reliable fund source for the Appalachian NST is base funding appropriated by Congress in the Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) appropriation. These funds cover the park's day-to-day operations. The Appalachian NST's appropriated base budget was \$1,538,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012. In FY 2013, automatic spending cuts imposed by the federal budget sequestration lowered the Appalachian NST's base budget by six percent, to \$1,445,000. Base funding rebounded to \$1,523,000 in FY 2014.

Project funding fluctuates significantly from year to year, and cannot be used for daily operating expenditures, such as funding full-time employees. However, these project funds are a critical component of the Appalachian NST's overall financial resources. The Appalachian NST uses project funds for trail maintenance and repair projects, natural resources protection, education, outreach, and many other key program areas. The majority of the Appalachian NST's project funding supports trail asset maintenance, and these funds are competed for at the regional level on a five-year planning basis. Unlike traditional parks that internally identify trail deficiencies, prioritize project requests, and plan and execute maintenance, the Appalachian NST completes each step in partnership with ATC and trail clubs. While it is a challenge to coordinate a five-year funding cycle with the numerous clubs and volunteers, the Appalachian NST depends on both the federal project funding and its partners for execution. On average over the last five years, project funding has represented 60 percent of the Appalachian NST's total budget. The significant jump in project funding shown in FY 2011 reflects funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), which contributed over \$2 million towards a project to protect hikers and motorists from unstable rock slide conditions near Palmerton, Pennsylvania.

Between 2005 and 2014, the Appalachian NST's ONPS base allocation has grown at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent. When adjusted for the effects of inflation, base funding has grown at an annualized rate of 1.4 percent. Funding growth has varied widely from year to year, and many of the increases were associated with new programs that brought along new responsibilities.

Project Funding: In addition to base funds, the Appalachian NST also has access to appropriated funds and fee allocations distributed on a competitive basis to fund projects where the greatest need is demonstrated. Depending on the type of funding, the Appalachian NST competes for resources either among the parks in the Northeast region, the National Scenic Trails system, or the entire National Park Service. Two of the project funding sources the Appalachian NST relies most heavily upon are cyclic maintenance funds and repair/rehabilitation funds.

Reimbursements: Relative to base and project funding, reimbursement revenues to the Appalachian NST are small, accounting for approximately five percent of total Appalachian NST funding between Fiscal Years 2010 and 2014. Reimbursements come from cost-recovery for services offered, usually in the form of Special Use Permit application fees, and other charges for events such as weddings, agricultural land use, and commercial filming. The Appalachian NST does not collect entrance fees, campground fees, concession fees, or other fees common to the National Park Service, as collection is often infeasible, and many of these revenue-generating activities are not appropriate to the mission of the Trail.

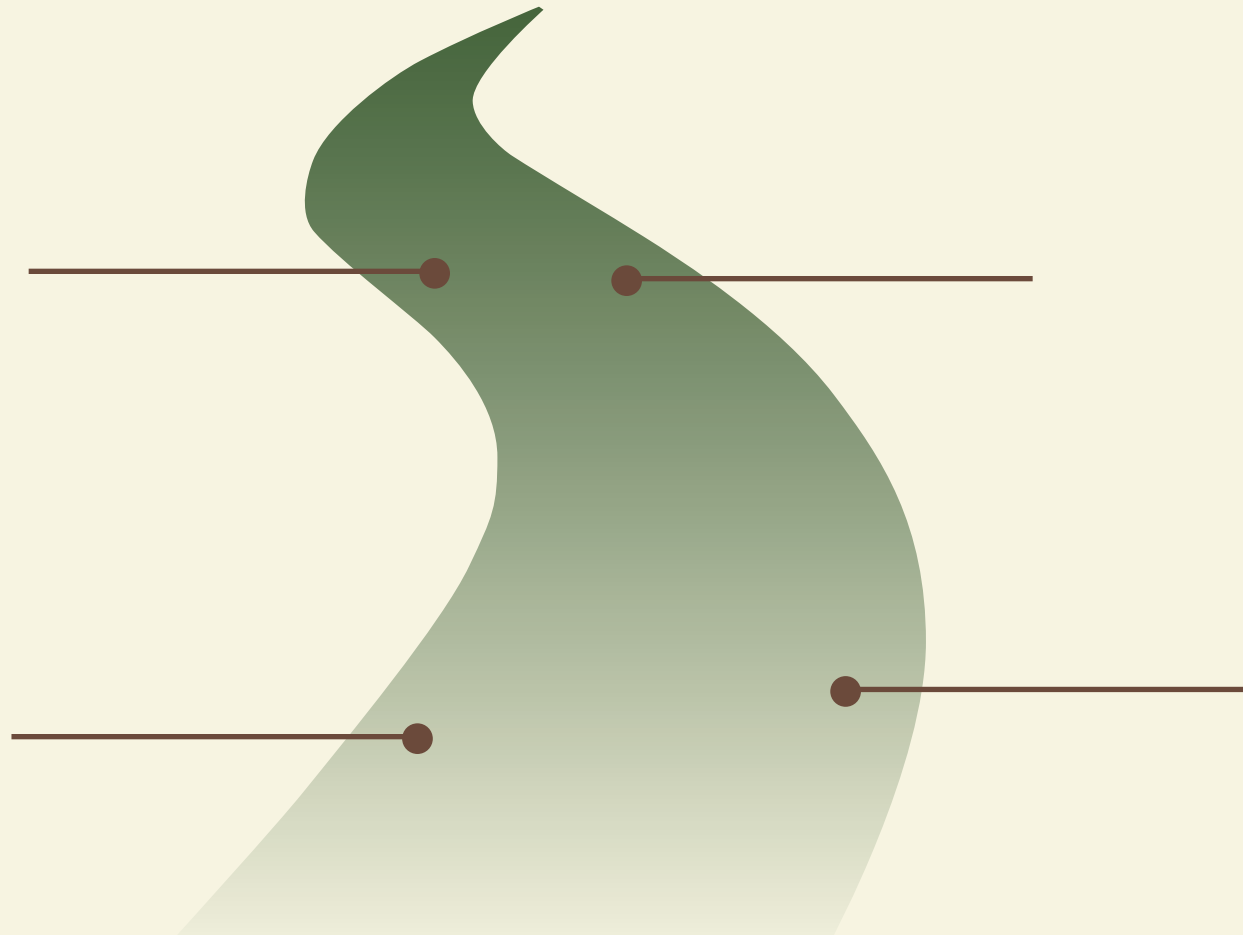
Types of Expenditures

Between FY 2010 and FY 2014, staffing costs (salary and benefits) have represented 33 percent of the Appalachian NST's total expenditures. However, the Appalachian NST supports its full-time staff out of its base budget, and salary and benefits account for 67 percent of total expenses against base funding in that same period.

The other significant expenditure class for the Appalachian NST is contracts and cooperative agreements with its partners, spending that is primarily directed to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Between FY 2010 and FY 2014, this spending represented 61 percent of Appalachian NST's total expenditures and 24 percent of base-funded expenditures. Taken together, staffing expense and contracts and cooperative agreements represent 94 percent of all expenditures between 2010 and 2014. This business plan refers to these two categories as "Principal Expenditures"—they are the categories of spending that represent the large majority of expenditures and must be most carefully allocated to management's key priorities. The remaining six percent of "Other" expenditures includes items such as travel, office supplies, equipment, and training.

Overview of Cooperative Management Structure

The Appalachian Trail passes through 14 states, six National Park Service units, eight national forests, two national wildlife refuges, 25 wilderness areas, over 60 state protected areas, 88 counties, 27 congressional districts, and 164 townships. Due to the vast amounts of land the Trail passes through, the diverse set of owners and stakeholders in those lands, and the Trail's rich history of management through volunteerism, the AT has been managed through extensive partnerships since its creation.



Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Founded as the Appalachian Trail Conference in 1925, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC's) work preserving and managing the Appalachian Trail significantly predates the National Park Service's involvement. Throughout the Trail's history, ATC has held a leadership role in defining policies and practices and has facilitated the construction, preservation, and maintenance of the Appalachian Trail. The ATC has grown to an organization of 45 full-time employees across five offices, with an annual budget of over \$6 million.

The cooperative relationship between the Appalachian NST and ATC is codified through agreements. An overarching cooperative agreement (most recently updated in 2014) identifies roles and responsibilities for the two organizations. Shorter-term task agreements provide financial resources for specific trail maintenance

and management projects on an annual basis. ATC leverages these task agreements with other funds, staff, and volunteer support to facilitate trail management activities.

ATC works directly with the 31 Trail Clubs to provide training, facilitation, and on-the-ground expertise for natural resources, education, trail asset maintenance, and other programming. The ATC headquarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia serve as the official visitor center (and unofficial mid-point) for the Trail, and its four regional offices serve as key points of contact for trail clubs, pertinent landowners, and other stakeholders. Both ATC and the Appalachian NST actively reach out to local and state governments to build cooperative management agreements, community pride and value of Trail resources, and protection against threats to the AT watershed and corridor.

Roles and Responsibilities between the Appalachian NST and Appalachian Trail Conservancy

The 1968 National Trails System Act directs the Department of Interior (and, by extension, the National Park Service) to coordinate and manage the administration of the Appalachian Trail. To legally formalize the critical role ATC plays in the management of the Trail, the Appalachian NST and ATC have come to an arrangement that divides responsibilities for management of the Appalachian Trail. This division of responsibilities is defined in the Cooperative Agreement between the Appalachian NST and ATC. This agreement gives ATC considerable responsibility for managing NPS owned land, but retains with NPS certain "non-delegated" responsibilities including:

- Law enforcement
- Land acquisition on behalf of the United States
- Boundary survey
- Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act



The ATC headquarters in Harpers Ferry also serves as the AT visitor center, and it is a tradition for thru-hikers to snap a photo in front of the sign on the front porch.

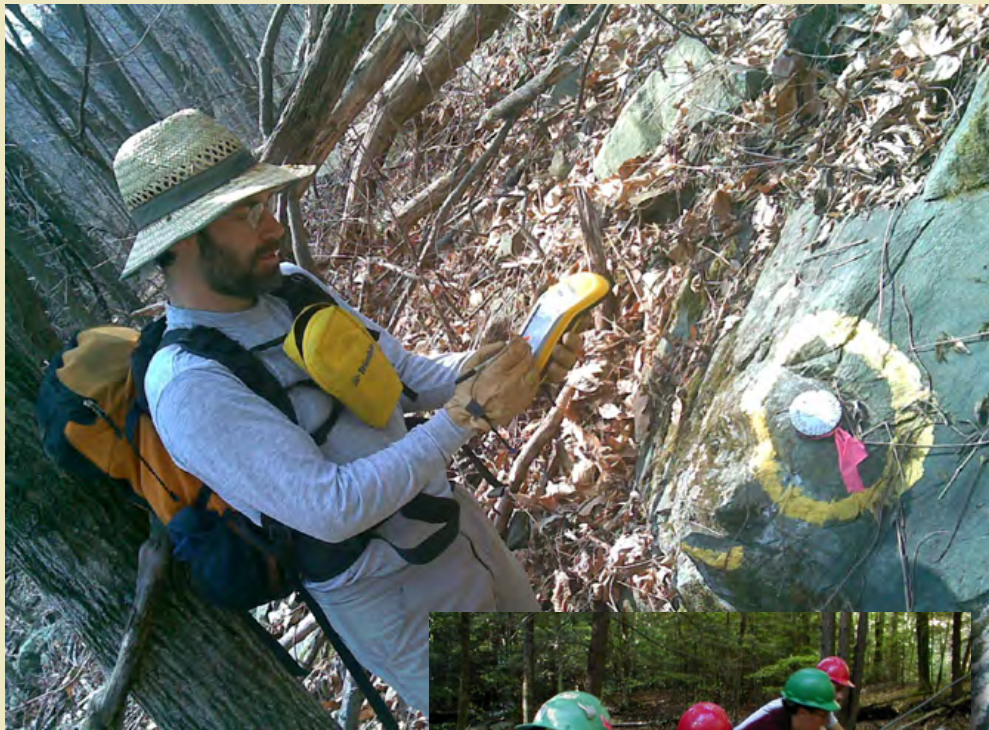
Key Management Partners

Highlight: NPS Funding to ATC

Between FY 2010 and FY 2014, Appalachian NST provided an average of \$1.4 million in funding to ATC each year. Excluding one-time ARRA funding directed to other partners in FY 2011, this represents 69 percent of Appalachian NST's spending on partner contracts and cooperative agreements.

While ATC receives the bulk of Appalachian NST's financial support to partners, the bulk of ATC revenues actually come from outside the Appalachian NST partnership. Task agreements with Appalachian NST represent approximately 22 percent of ATC's total revenues. ATC is able to supplement this funding with contributions (individual gifts and foundation grants), membership fees, and retail sales.

Overall, ATC revenues have increased approximately 40 percent between 2009 and 2013, and contributions and membership fees have seen marked increases (60 percent and 28 percent, respectively) over the same period. The Appalachian NST has maintained a relatively stable level of funding to ATC over that period. NPS financial support to ATC has come primarily from project funds. The amount for Appalachian NST's base funding directed towards ATC trended downward between FY 2010 and FY 2013, largely a function of the overall fiscal climate. Base-funded task agreements with ATC rebounded dramatically in FY 2014. This increase was partially the result of Appalachian NST's base appropriation being restored to pre-sequestration levels, and was compounded by the availability of additional base funding associated with temporary savings arising from staff vacancies.



Above: ATC staff and volunteers support trail asset assessments with GPS technologies. Right: Trail crew members work as a team to move heavy loads in Massachusetts.



Volunteers: The Soul of the Trail

Up and down the trail, volunteers play an integral role. Approximately 6,000 volunteers contributed 245,000 hours in 2013, ranking the Appalachian NST second in volunteer hours in the entire National Park Service. Using the \$22.55 average value of a volunteer hour calculated by the non-profit agency Independent Sector, volunteer hours contribute over \$5 million worth of value to the cooperative management of the Trail every year. Over half of the volunteer hours logged represent hands-on trail maintenance work.

Year after year, the Trail draws from a large pool of dedicated and experienced volunteers: 40 individual volunteers have given 50 or more years of service to the AT and hundreds have reached 25 or more years of service. Total volunteer hours are up 15 percent since 2010.

Key Management Partners

Trail Clubs

"Volunteers are the soul of the Appalachian Trail, and the treadway itself the body." This is a sentiment that is echoed frequently among the Appalachian Trail's cooperative management partners. Indeed, these partners invest a substantial amount of time and energy in empowering volunteers. The primary sources of these volunteers are the 31 trail-maintaining clubs, each of which is responsible for a distinct section of the AT. The 31 trail clubs are highly diverse in size and structure, trail miles managed, and institutional resources. Some clubs are large organizations with multi-million dollar budgets, paid staff, professional trail crews, and management responsibilities that stretch beyond the Appalachian Trail. Other clubs are much smaller in size and capacity, and rely entirely upon volunteers to manage and maintain their sections of the Trail.

The Appalachian NST works directly with trail clubs, associated trail crews, and through ATC to identify trail deficiencies and provide funds to address maintenance needs. The Appalachian NST also works directly with the trail clubs on natural resource management, compliance, corridor boundary monitoring, and community outreach and education programming. Clubs are the closest eyes and ears to the Trail within the cooperative management system, and their role is critical in reporting boundary encroachments, visitor incidents, and external development threats to the Trail.

Trail club involvement in the management of the AT is not limited to field work. Trail club representatives also are active in the cooperative governance structure, with representation on the Stewardship Council and Regional Partnership Committees that develop Trail management policy. Trail clubs also develop Local Management Plans to define policies and best practices for the sections of the Trail within their responsibility. ATC and the Appalachian NST host a biennial Volunteer Leadership Meeting to train club leaders on trends and opportunities such as recruitment and relevancy and to promote unity among the clubs and the cooperative management system.

Key Management Partners



United States Forest Service

Just under 1,000 miles of the Trail, nearly half of the total treadway, passes through eight National Forests: White Mountain, Green Mountain, George Washington, Jefferson, Cherokee, Pisgah, Nantahala, and Chattahoochee. It is therefore no surprise that the 1968 National Trails System Act specifically calls on the Secretary of Agriculture and, by extension, the United States Forest Service (USFS), to help with the management of the Appalachian Trail. The mission of the Forest Service is “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” To this end, the Forest Service works within the cooperative management partnership to ensure the AT is managed appropriately on its lands.

The majority of Forest Service-owned AT land is located in the Southern and Northernmost regions of the Trail, in USFS Region 8 in the South and Region 9 in the North. Within their forests, the USFS develops forest management plans that include specific prescriptions and a management zone for the AT. The USFS also works in management policy creation on a local and broader level with trail clubs, ATC, and the Appalachian NST. Two USFS representatives—one from Region 8 and one from Region 9—dedicate approximately 20 percent of their time to managing the Trail, and in the past Appalachian NST has paid a portion of the salary of USFS liaisons that worked out of Appalachian NST headquarters in Harpers Ferry. Currently, Appalachian NST provides annual funding to the USFS to support mowing on AT open areas in National Forests.

USFS employees within the national forests work closely with Trail Clubs and ATC regional offices to support day-to-day management needs, including incident response, wildland fires, and natural resources protection. In addition, USFS has served as a critical training partner for trail crew teams in need of specialized training and certification, such as sawyer trainer certifications for the safe use of chainsaws and other trail maintenance equipment. With funding stretched thin in both the National Park Service and US Forest Service, the cooperative management structure helps the Appalachian NST and the USFS to leverage sparse resources to meet their respective management mandates.

From top: ATC instructor Peter Jensen demonstrates chainsaw maintenance to Trail workers during an in-the-field re-certification course; trail crew members practice their chain saw skills during sawyer training.





Key Management Partners



National Park Service Units

The Appalachian Trail passes through six National Park Service units including Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Shenandoah National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, C&O Canal National Historical Park, and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. The parks generally manage the AT corridor under the same policies as other park lands. However, the NPS units do identify a management zone for the AT (usually 500 feet on either side of the treadway) within which they agree to consult Appalachian NST regarding changes to be made to the land.

The Appalachian NST liaises with the parks to assess and facilitate maintenance of trail assets and to collaborate and communicate to ensure visitor and natural resource protection. Appalachian NST staff works in close collaboration with law enforcement park rangers in all six National Park Service units to respond to incidents and help ensure visitor safety and protection. Appalachian NST has entered into formal agreements with all six National Park Service units to establish policies and practices and delegate responsibilities.

The Appalachian NST works closely with the other National Parks the Trail passes through, such as Shenandoah, to ensure a seamless visitor experience along the AT.

Key Management Partners

State and Local Cooperative Management Partners

The cooperative management structure is extensive, but it is far from a complete list of parties involved in managing and protecting the AT. Without realizing it, a hiker may cross several different land jurisdictions in a given hiking day, and with each landowner, relevant hiking and camping regulations may change. In addition, different landowners and proximities to major cities and/or roadways also influence vulnerability to external development threats. Therefore, the Appalachian NST and its cooperative management partners reach out to a wide range of additional partners, from the community level to national organizations.

The National Trails System Act of 1968 called on the National Park Service to convene an advisory council with representatives from each of the states, federal agencies, and other critical partners along the Appalachian Trail. The legislation called for this council, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail Advisory Council (ANSTAC), to serve for 20 years. Since the Council officially dissolved in 1988, the Appalachian NST has formalized its relationship with states and other partners through the signing of individual state-level agreements defining roles, responsibilities, and management goals for the wide variety of partners in a given state.

While maintaining partnerships across diverse jurisdictions is time-intensive for staff, it is recognized as critically important, particularly in garnering protection from energy and/or infrastructure development that threaten to interrupt the Trail corridor and viewshed. On a local level, the Appalachian Trail Communities program, led by ATC, builds pride and stewardship by recognizing communities for their support and connection to the AT. To date, 35 towns, counties, and communities have been designated as Appalachian Trail Communities, demonstrating pride in and commitment to the preservation of the AT corridor.

Celebrating AT Community designation in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania.



A New Jersey ridgerunner provides information to a hiker on the AT.

Ridgerunners: The Eyes and Ears of the Trail

In many national parks, visitors can rely on uniformed park rangers to share information, provide advice, and answer questions. However, it would be impossible for the Appalachian NST to adequately staff the entire length of the Trail with rangers. Fortunately, the Appalachian Trail has “ridgerunners”—seasonal employees of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), trail clubs, and states who patrol busy sections of the trail during the high season. While they have no law enforcement authority or formal interpretive training, ridgerunners provide a great deal of education and assistance to trail visitors, and help protect natural resources by informing hikers of minimum impact hiking and camping techniques. In addition, they relay messages to and from law enforcement or emergency services as needed, such as hiker injuries or notices of suspicious persons on the Trail. ATC, trail-maintaining clubs, and other AT cooperative management partners hire approximately 30 ridgerunners every year.

The collaborative nature of the cooperative management system enables the Appalachian NST to leverage its small staff and resources toward the administration of the 2,185-mile trail itself, and 250,000 acres of corridor lands. The Appalachian Trail is longer than the combined total trail miles in any park in the NPS system. By leveraging resources and aligning goals of the many AT land-owners, and through extensive cooperative management Trail-wide, the Appalachian NST is able to administer its extensive acreage on a budget one-tenth the size of NPS units with comparable acreage. The Appalachian NST leverages trail club, volunteer, state and federal land ownership, and Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) field presence to manage its estimated 2.5 million visitors per year with comparatively modest base funding. In fact, among the 42 NPS units with annual visitation in the one to three million range, Appalachian NST has the third-lowest base funding per visitor. Even using the conservative lower bound for the visitation estimate—1.2 million visitors per year—the Appalachian NST still has the fifth lowest base funding per visitor among this peer group.

The unique nature of the AT's partnership structure allows the Appalachian NST to leverage an average of \$4.82 in total additional value for every federal dollar provided to ATC between 2011 and 2013. This leverage factor is driven by additional program spending supported by ATC's outside fundraising efforts, along with volunteer contributions. The chart above shows the cumulative size of that multiplier effect: between 2011 and 2013, \$4.2 million in total NPS program funding to ATC was matched by an additional \$4.2 million in dedicated ATC program funding from other sources, and over \$16 million worth of volunteer time.

While this figure is impressive, it is only part of the picture. It does not include the additional financial resources that trail clubs and other state and federal agencies contribute to the management of the Trail.



A trail crew shows off their mud and team spirit while working on Bear Mountain, New York.

Saddleback Mountain in Maine.



Categorizing the Appalachian National Scenic Trail's Roles and Responsibilities

Due to its relatively small staff size, the Appalachian NST does not divide its staff and program areas into the division structure of traditional national park units. To better analyze its responsibilities and tasks, and track the allocation of its resources, the Appalachian NST categorized its current functions and priorities for the three to five year business planning process. These categories are a useful way to understand where the Appalachian NST currently focuses its principal expenditures (staffing costs, as well as contracts and cooperative agreements), and where it plans to dedicate resources and build programmatic capacity moving forward.

The two biggest categories of principal expenditures for the Appalachian NST are (1) Maintain Trail Assets and (2) Manage Use, both of which are driven by substantial spending on contracts and cooperative agreements with ATC and other partners. The largest portion of staff time, however, is spent on operational and administrative tasks and partnership-building.



Maintain Trail Assets

Maintaining the Appalachian Trail's 2,185 miles of trail and more than 260 overnight shelters, 400 parking areas, 1,200 miles of NPS-managed boundary, 200 maintained landscapes, and other built assets is a complex challenge for the managing partnership. The first step is to regularly assess conditions up and down the trail and identify deficiencies in need of repair or attention. The Appalachian NST coordinates the trail condition assessment in close partnership with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), trail clubs, volunteers, and land managers, with the goal of assessing 20 percent of the trail in any given year. Looking forward, the Appalachian NST plans to improve its boundary assessment processes to better account for the costs and value of maintaining those assets, and plans to develop a maintained landscape inventory and assessment methodology.

The Appalachian NST and its partners use the data from trail condition assessments to prioritize and plan maintenance and trail construction projects, and, when appropriate, apply for National Park Service project funding. Trail crews made of volunteers and professionals alike work to complete trail maintenance projects every year. Clubs and ATC staff identify deficiencies and project funding needs. These needs drive the Appalachian NST's proposals for appropriate project funding from the Northeast Region or other federal funding sources.

Working within the National Park Service's five-year project funding cycle is a continual challenge for the Appalachian NST, ATC, and the trail clubs. It is difficult to keep track of the constantly changing condition of the trail, as well as the maintenance and repair work done by a wide variety of trail crews every year. Identifying, prioritizing, and funding critical maintenance requires careful coordination with the ATC's regional offices and with trail club leadership. The Appalachian NST's Facilities Manager position was recently vacated, providing both the opportunity for a fresh perspective and the challenge of replacing a well-known National Park Service liaison to the ATC, trail clubs, and other partners.

The Appalachian NST's reliance on project funding for trail maintenance projects also makes the NPS Northeast Regional Office an important partner. The Appalachian NST was originally organized under the National Park Service's Washington DC office (WASO), and was officially moved to the Northeast Region in 2010. As a result, the Appalachian NST now competes with other parks in the region for limited project funding. This new organizational structure makes it critically important that the maintenance needs of the Trail are accurately tracked, conveyed, and prioritized among other needs across the region. The Appalachian NST and its partners are in the process of evaluating the trail asset condition assessment processes with the goal of improving its processes to increase efficiency and better meet the needs of its partners and the Northeast Region.

In FY 2014, 45 percent of the Appalachian NST's total principal spending (staff expenses, contracts, and cooperative agreements) was dedicated to maintaining trail assets. The majority of these expenses took the form of contracts and cooperative agreements to ATC and other partners to support projects such as trail construction and maintenance, relocating the trail to more suitable and sustainable routes, and building or improving shelters. In addition to providing financial support to its partners, the Appalachian NST staffs two full-time employees focused on facilities maintenance—a Facilities Manager and a Facilities Management Systems Specialist. Maintaining the trail also critically relies on significant GIS support from the Appalachian NST and extensive ATC and trail club involvement in the field.

Konnarock Trail Crew repairs a roof on the Thomas Knob Shelter in Virginia.

Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- **Partnership with the Olmsted Center for Maintained Landscapes:** Through the acquisition of land to protect the AT corridor and experience, the Appalachian NST now owns approximately 120,200 acres of land, some of which includes “open areas” or “maintained landscapes.” The National Park Service’s Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation is assisting the Appalachian NST to identify, evaluate, and develop management plans for these landscapes so the Appalachian Trail cooperative governance partners may strategically and effectively manage these landscapes. With additional support from the Northeast Regional Office, this maintained landscape initiative is yet another example of leadership in data-driven and collaborative management.
- **Palmerton Zinc Pile Superfund Site:** Occasionally, significant sources of funding permit Appalachian NST to execute large-scale trail asset improvement projects. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in clean-up funds from the Palmerton Zinc Pile Superfund Site are being applied to re-vegetate over 3,000 acres of land surrounding the AT on Blue Mountain in Pennsylvania over several years. Appalachian NST uses contracts to achieve such large-scale restoration projects.



From top: Appalachian NST Project Coordinator David Reus works on site at the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site remediation which includes restoration of vegetation along the Appalachian Trail; Konnarock Trail Crew builds wooden stairs near McAfee Knob in Virginia.

Manage Use

The Appalachian Trail's estimated 2.5 million annual visitors are at the heart of the Appalachian NST's mission. Appalachian NST staff work to ensure that visitors are safe and enjoy their Trail experience: park rangers are instrumental in coordinating law enforcement and emergency response up and down the Trail in partnership with a wide network of law enforcement agencies and other first responders. The Appalachian NST also works with ATC and other partners to coordinate and manage permitting for group, commercial, and other special park uses, seeking to make the Trail available for the widest possible variety of use while preserving the visitor experience and protecting the Trail and the surrounding landscape from impairment.

The Appalachian NST manages use through a combination of dedicated staff positions, contracts, volunteers, and other agency liaisons. Law enforcement is one of the "non-delegated" responsibilities that the National Park Service cannot defer to its non-profit and volunteer partners, and for this reason its staffing model includes two full-time law enforcement staff (a Chief Ranger and a Field Ranger). Of course, two park rangers are not expected to actively police a 2,185 mile trail, so the Appalachian NST's rangers rely on partnerships with local law enforcement to support protection of AT visitors. Other NPS law enforcement units, state and local police departments, and US Forest Service law enforcement units are examples of local agencies that the Appalachian NST's law enforcement rangers work with to address incidents or safety issues. Ridgerunners—volunteers who inform visitors of use policies and best practices and report issues to appropriate authorities—are also critical partners. The Appalachian NST utilizes these field-based support units as well as an "incident management group" consisting of representatives from the Appalachian NST, ATC, and other key partners to manage a wide spectrum of visitor and resource protection concerns.



Top: Boundary monuments mark the edges of the AT corridor, and are regularly monitored by club members to ensure the corridor is well-marked and free of encroachments.

Right: Ridgerunners clean a firepit and campsite to set a good example and ensure impacts are limited for future visitors.



*Pecks Corner Shelter provides refuge to weary
AT hikers after a long day on the trail.*

Manage Use

Special use permitting is another responsibility for which the National Park Service has ultimate authority, though ATC is able to provide significant implementation support through Task Agreement delegation. The Appalachian NST issues approximately 40 agricultural special use permits which allow farmers to utilize NPS land for an annual fee. In addition, the Appalachian NST issues permits for other special uses, including special events, commercial filming, and photography. ATC facilitates application processing, permit monitoring, and other administrative and field duties, as outlined in annual task agreements. Like all National Park Service units, the Appalachian NST is expected to charge a fee to special use permit applicants to recover the costs of administering the permits. The wide range of uses and jurisdictions up and down the Trail makes it challenging for the Appalachian NST to streamline special use policies and processes to efficiently support cost recovery practices Trail-wide.

Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- The Appalachian NST received \$300,000 in project funding over FY 2015–FY 2017 for a multi-phase project to reduce visitor impacts and enhance the sustainability of AT resources. The project will evaluate current resource conditions, study visitor impacts on the trail and natural resources, and develop best management practices and sustainable trail design and construction guidelines to share with the trail clubs.
- Appalachian NST park rangers helped convene a task force to manage increased use at Bulls Bridge, a popular day use area near the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut. The Bulls Bridge Task Force includes community members, representatives of the local power company, NPS rangers, ATC and Appalachian Mountain Club volunteers and staff, as well as Connecticut State Police and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection staff. The task force has worked to educate visitors, rehabilitate and protect natural resources, and ensure visitor safety at Bulls Bridge.

Conserve Priority Landscapes

The Appalachian NST and the AT cooperative management partners have dedicated decades of work to protecting the Trail corridor. By routing the trail through existing public lands, securing easements, and acquiring land where appropriate, the partnership has successfully protected over 99 percent of the Appalachian Trail footpath itself.

With virtually all of the footpath now on public and protected land, the Appalachian NST and its partners have turned their attention to conserving and protecting the iconic scenic landscapes the trail traverses. The Appalachian NST's work on priority landscapes includes protecting the trail corridor (which is approximately 1,000 feet wide on average), its irreplaceable cultural and natural resources, and its viewshed (the iconic vistas and overlooks that define much of the trail ridge) from threats such as new development and infrastructure. Additionally, the Appalachian NST looks to protect the continuous nature of the Trail corridor and healthy ecosystems throughout.

Protecting the AT corridor and viewshed is a significant challenge due to its length and common proximity to densely populated areas and areas targeted for development. The AT already features more than 700 road crossings, 190-plus major power line or pipeline crossings, and over 30 railroad crossings. The Trail is within a day's drive to over half of the United States population and passes through 164 townships. The area within five miles of the Trail encompasses over nine million acres of land; the area within 20 miles encompasses over 35 million acres; and the area within 50 miles encompasses over 86 million acres. Though terrain, vegetation, and air quality affect viewsheds, an uninterrupted view in Maine, for example, permits an individual to see up to 70 miles away.

Viewsheds along the Trail vary significantly in terms of expanse and vulnerability, and proactive protection against external development threats is difficult due to the unpredictable nature of such development plans. Reacting to unplanned external threats necessarily diverts staff attention from other critical activities. Compliance paperwork and environmental impact assessments require significant staff time, and such work often cannot be delegated to partners.

An AT hiker takes in the view from the iconic McAfee Knob in Virginia.



A hiker enjoys the fall scenery from Chairback Mountain in Maine.





A view of a powerline from the AT treadway in New Jersey demonstrates the potential impact of infrastructure on the hiker experience.

Conserve Priority Landscapes



Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- **Call to Action Initiatives:** The National Park Service has identified Servicewide “Call to Action” priorities and strategies as part of its upcoming Centennial celebration. Through participation in these initiatives, the Appalachian NST has the opportunity to invest in partnerships to facilitate strategies such as viewshed and air quality protection and more proactive planning for large landscape conservation. The Appalachian NST is hoping to be named as one of the five geographic regions identified in the Scaling Up initiative, which targets iconic large landscapes for conservation. The Appalachian NST has been chosen as one of 22 NPS units to participate in the Enjoy the View initiative, targeted at protecting treasured viewsheds and air quality.

Protect Natural Resources

From lush temperate rainforests in the south to delicate alpine zones in the north, the Appalachian Trail corridor is home to rich and varied natural resources. In addition to hosting a wide diversity of plant and animal species, the sheer size of the Appalachian Trail provides a unique opportunity for researchers and visitors alike to appreciate truly landscape-scale ecosystems. Natural resource protection work for the Appalachian NST and its partners includes identifying high priority natural resource management zones, inventorying and tracking rare, threatened, and endangered plant species in the trail corridor, monitoring and managing invasive plants, and monitoring seasonal changes in plant and animal life cycles. Likewise, law enforcement works with partners to respond to reports of natural resource damage and encroachment onto AT corridor and other lands.

Historically, the Appalachian NST has issued Task Agreements from its base budget to support ATC regional and seasonal staff work inventorying and managing invasive, rare, threatened, and endangered species. This work includes partnering with National Park Service exotic plant management teams (EPMTs) to treat high priority invasive species areas with herbicide as appropriate. However, when overall base funding is cut, as it was during the 2013 budget sequester, these resource inventory and management initiatives are at risk of being curtailed.

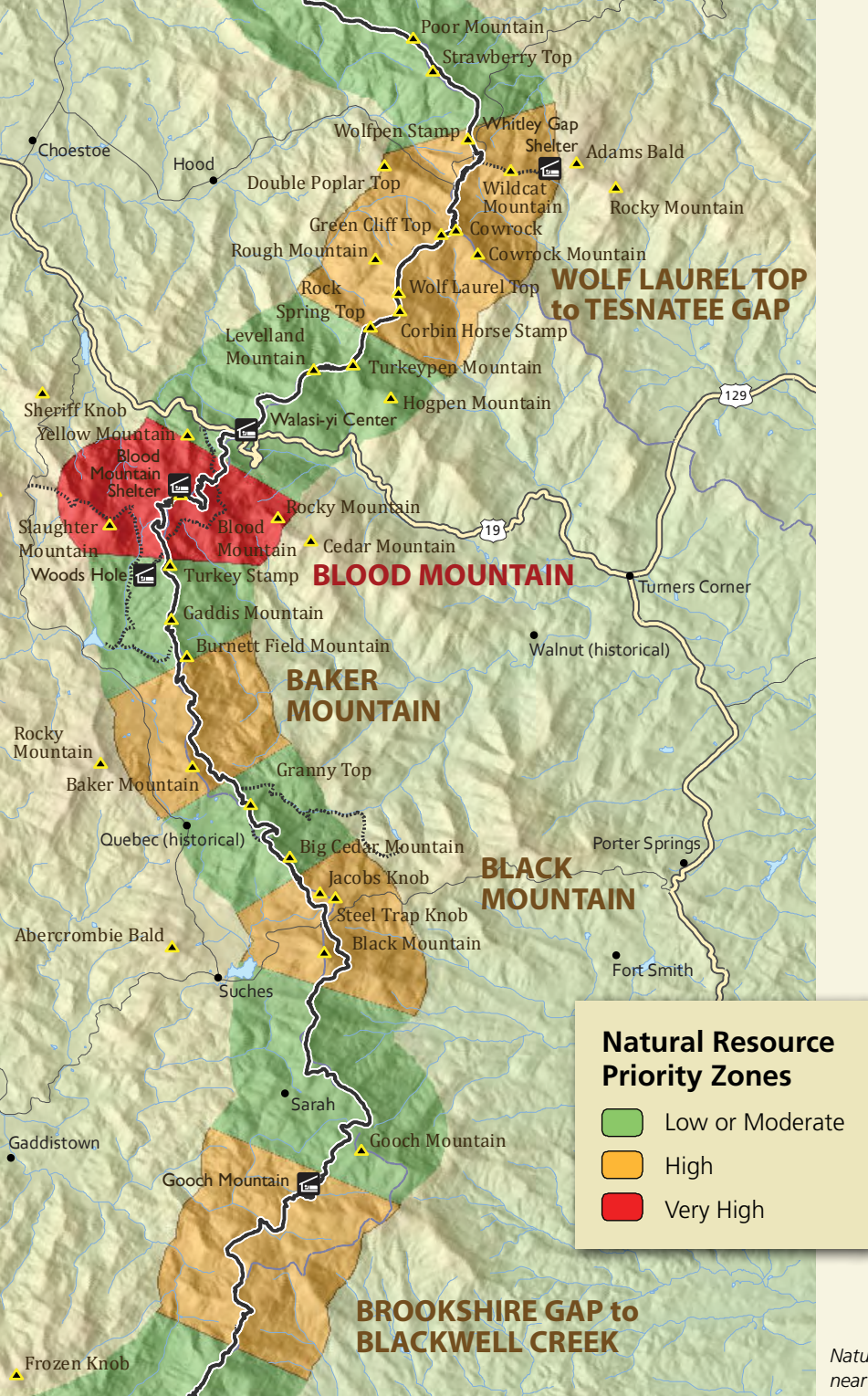


Upper: Appalachian Mountain Club Berkshire Chapter monitor Robert Snyder examines a patch of Rand's goldenrod for distinguishing features. Lower: red-bellied woodpecker. Left: Gray's lily (Lilium grayii) is a stunning example of the rare plant species found along the AT.

Protect Natural Resources

Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- Research and data collection on the Trail's natural resources is extensive, and it is undertaken not only by the cooperative management partnership to support data-driven natural resources management, but also by external researchers and institutions that value the Trail as a protected corridor and barometer for broader ecosystem health. Recent natural resource research and data collection achievements led by Appalachian NST include:
 - » Inventory of more than 4,000 locations of invasive plants on the AT corridor using volunteer and professional staff time and GPS technology.
 - » Received \$67,000 from the NPS Climate Change Response Program to develop a network of phenology monitoring sites with land management partners. Phenology, the study of the natural patterns and cycles of plant and animal life, is just one of the active fields of scientific research along the trail. Other topics being studied on the AT include tick-borne disease and migratory raptors.



Natural resource management areas near Blood Mountain, Georgia.

Protect Cultural Resources

In addition to unique natural and environmental qualities, the Appalachian Trail corridor is home to significant cultural and historical resources, including 26 features currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and eight Historic Districts. The Trail passes near diverse resources, from Civil War battlegrounds to Civilian Conservation Corps structures. These cultural and historical resources have not traditionally been one of the Appalachian NST's management priorities. However, the Appalachian NST has identified the protection and interpretation of these resources as a priority in the next 3–5 years. The Appalachian NST is currently working with its partners to catalog its cultural and historical assets, and to designate the entire trail on the National Register of Historic Places. This is part of the Appalachian NST's ongoing effort to protect and interpret the AT as a "journey through American heritage."

The Appalachian NST's cultural resource programming is still under development, as reflected by the relatively low levels of investment in this category during Fiscal Year 2014. Over the next five years, the Appalachian NST plans to build capacity to support additional cultural resources protection, management, and interpretation through both NPS project funding and other partner funding sources. Neither the Appalachian NST nor the Appalachian Trail Conservancy currently have a cultural resource specialist on staff, which makes identifying potential staff resources and funding for cultural resources a particularly high priority. The Appalachian NST is also looking to take full advantage of resources and expertise from the NPS Northeast Regional Office, NPS Washington Office, and partner parks such as Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. It is also possible that new cultural resources programming could draw interest and support from new partners, bringing applicable expertise and new Trail user constituencies.



The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in Pennsylvania is an Appalachian NST-owned historic structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Hikers explore the Michaux Prisoner of War Camp adjacent to the AT in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania.

Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- The Appalachian NST has recently launched an effort to complete Multiple Property Documentation, the first step towards getting the Appalachian Trail corridor listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Over the next five years the Appalachian NST and its partners will work state-by-state towards listing the entire AT on the NRHP.

The AT passes directly through Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, an important site that draws substantial visitation to the area and increasing local use of the surrounding portion of the Trail.



Engage a Broader Audience

Making the Appalachian Trail accessible to the broadest cross section of visitors from the United States and overseas is a key priority for the Appalachian NST. With a management structure dependent on volunteer support, it is critical to reach out to the next generation of Trail stewards. To that end, the Appalachian NST plans to build education and outreach programming over the next five years that targets key groups including families and veterans, in order to build AT relevancy among a population that is representative of the rich diversity of the United States.

The Appalachian Trail passes through approximately 170 school districts on its journey from Georgia to Maine. However, neither the Appalachian NST nor the ATC staff an education/interpretation/outreach specialist, so these initiatives fall to other staff as collateral duties. Creating “A Trail to Every Classroom,” now a national professional development model, has helped the Appalachian NST reach youth without employing full-time education and interpretation staff. Partnering with experienced youth outreach organizations, such as the Student Conservation Association and Groundworks USA, further engages diverse youth audiences with the Appalachian NST.

Moving forward, the Appalachian NST plans to complete a long-term plan to strategize its education, interpretation, and outreach efforts and funding. Whereas project funding may be useful to seed a program, sustainable funding sources are needed to support education initiatives in the long term. Both ATC and the Appalachian NST recognize relevancy as a key strategic priority for the next five years, and the organizations together are seeking increased capacity and new partners to engage the next generation of AT volunteers and visitors.



ATC's John Odell teaches a church group about invasive kudzu prior to removing vines from trees at Mill Ridge in North Carolina.



Students learn how to use GPS technology as part of the Trail to Every Classroom program in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Students displaying a Trail to Every Classroom project from Bear Mountain State Park.



Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- A Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) program, created in 2006, is the Appalachian NST's and ATC's primary educational outreach initiative currently to engage students in Trail curriculum-based activities from Georgia to Maine. The Appalachian NST applied for and received over \$250,000 in NPS project funding between 2009 and 2013 for these efforts. The program has trained 330 K–12 educators in how to use the Trail as an educational resource, reaching a total of over 30,000 students to date. New TTEC workshops for alumni and new cohorts of teachers were successfully launched in 2014.
- For over 15 years Appalachian NST has been promoting stewardship values among youth through trail maintenance. Appalachian NST regularly provides funding to Maine Conservation Corps, Vermont Youth Corps, and Greenagers for these organizations to engage youth in 6–8 weeks of trail work. Organizations that specialize in youth outreach help Appalachian NST reach its goal of engaging a broader audience by bringing new constituencies to the AT.

Strengthen Partnerships

The Appalachian NST dedicates considerable effort to building and maintaining the complex network of partnerships at the core of the Appalachian Trail cooperative management structure (see pages 14–21). The National Park Service works with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and other partners to execute state-level agreements that formalize the commitment to the Trail shared by local governments, law enforcement agencies, trail clubs, and other organizations. The Appalachian NST also works to identify new management partners, and provide training and resources to help improve the overall cooperative management of the Trail. Developing agreements may take several years, and the duration of the agreements ranges significantly. Maintaining agreements requires careful planning, regular communication, and significant staff time and travel.

The Strengthen Partnerships category accounts for seven percent of the Appalachian NST's principal expenditures in 2014. The majority of that spending is for staff time spent negotiating, convening, and codifying partnerships. In the case of the New York State Agreement, it took two years to arrive at a mutually acceptable document. Therefore, thinking strategically with partners about an effective legal and communication structure is critical.



Regional ATC Director Karen Lutz speaks at the signing of the New York State Agreement in June of 2014 with representation from various state officials, local trail clubs, and NPS leaders, including (from left to right): Appalachian NST Superintendent Wendy Janssen; NPS Northeast Regional Director Michael Caldwell; Executive Deputy Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Andy Beers; and Palisades Interstate Park Commission Executive Director Jim Hall.



Local elementary school students at the Buena Vista AT Community designation ceremony.

Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- **State Agreements:** The Connecticut State Agreement was renewed in 2012 for a period of ten years. Recognizing the launch of the National Register effort, the Appalachian NST included the State Historic Preservation Office as a new party to the agreement. This agreement was then used as template for the renewal of the New York State Agreement signed in 2014.
- **Appalachian Trail Community™ program:** The Appalachian Trail Community program works to recognize and formalize the relationship between the Appalachian Trail and the dozens of communities it passes near (or, in some cases, straight through). The program, which is coordinated by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and supported in part by the National Park Service's Challenge Cost Share Program, was launched in 2010. Since then, 35 towns, counties, and communities from Millinocket, Maine to Ellijay/Gilmer County, Georgia have been designated as official AT Communities.

Achieve Operational Excellence

The Appalachian NST's primary administrative operations include the writing, oversight, and tracking of task agreements and other contracts and cooperative agreements; satisfying reporting and other regional and national NPS requirements; managing staff and programming; budgeting; and other support operations including human resources, payroll, and IT.

The Appalachian NST is accountable to the Northeast Region and WASO, and it must effectively work within internal systems and meet reporting requirements. When organizational restructuring shifted the Appalachian NST to the Northeast Regional Office in 2010, administrative demands and procedures also changed, requiring more Appalachian NST staff time to adjust to the new requirements. The Appalachian NST's small staff also strives to be as responsive as possible to its partners, particularly volunteers in the field. The Appalachian NST continues to look for opportunities to streamline communications and administrative tasks, align budget cycles and reporting metrics, and leverage resources internally and within the management partnership.



The Appalachian NST involved a wide range of management partners in the formulation of its Foundation Document.

Unlike other priority categories for which the Appalachian NST is seeking to build capacity and resources, success in operational excellence will decrease resources invested. This is because more efficient operations free staff time to be spent in other priority areas. Better accounting for staff time and resource allocation will help the Appalachian NST identify opportunities to improve its operations and resource allocation to achieve operational excellence.



GIS Specialist Matthew Robinson provides training to ATC field staff in trail condition assessment data collection in Virginia.

Recent Accomplishments/Successes

- **Foundation Document:** With the shift to the Northeast Region and changes in the management team, the Appalachian NST has undergone several strategic planning processes in the past two years, including the development of a Foundation Document. The development of this document was highly collaborative, and it will serve as the basis for the Appalachian NST's long-term strategic planning for the next 10–15 years.
- **GIS Program:** Appalachian NST's GIS program has provided useful tools and insightful maps and graphics to support data-driven trail management since the program's inception in 1998. Natural resources inventory and monitoring data is evaluated in GIS to generate priority zones along the Trail. All trail condition assessment data is likewise entered into GIS to generate maps that pinpoint the location of assets and deficiencies. GIS even supports special use permitting operations by providing coordinate-based maps to Appalachian NST and agriculture permittees. The demands for GIS analysis and map generation exceeds the current staff capacity, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) recently hired a GIS Specialist to work alongside the Appalachian NST GIS specialist. The GIS program is a model for data-driven leadership and a prime example of ATC and Appalachian NST's highly collaborative partnership.

Five-Year Strategic Goals

The Appalachian NST has undergone several strategic planning efforts recently, and this business plan will serve as a focused complement to previous long-range planning efforts,

including the Foundation Document. The following are five-year targeted outcomes, strategies, and activities, organized into the priority operating categories defined on page 10.



Maintain Trail Assets

Outcome:

Maintenance needs for trail assets are consistently and efficiently identified, funded, and addressed.

Measures:

- 100% of reports from ATC for NPS-funded trail maintenance projects have Facility Management Software System (FMSS) deficiency numbers, photographs, and volunteer hours associated with completed projects
- Trail clubs and maintenance crews provide regular reports containing basic information about non-NPS funded projects along the Trail
- NPS project funding for trail projects never falls below 90% of 2013 baseline, and grows to 110% of baseline by 2019
- At least 20% of NPS project funding is assigned to trail sections in the 80th percentile of Facility Condition Index (FCI) score

Strategies:

Evaluate current status and future needs for trail, boundary, and maintained landscapes management programs and develop or update management plans and funding strategies by 2019

Develop and implement a plan to close the reporting loop by better capturing information about completed trail maintenance projects

Use sustainable trail design and optimal location reviews where appropriate to improve trail conditions for visitor experience and safety as well as resource protection

Allocate scarce trail maintenance resources to maximize impact on trail condition and strengthen key partnerships

3–5 Year Activities:

- Complete Park Asset Management Plan (PAMP)
- Evaluate Trail Condition Assessment methodology, and implement recommendations to maximize efficiency and accuracy of deficiency identification
- Complete maintained landscape inventory and management plan, including a plan for regularly assessing condition of maintained landscapes
- Develop a boundary maintenance funding strategy
- Define reporting criteria for NPS-funded trail maintenance projects, including requirements that they include the original deficiency numbers, maintenance projects addressed, total volunteer hours, and photographs
- Develop and distribute guidelines for gathering basic information about non-NPS funded projects (location, date, action taken) on high impact, high priority projects (trail relocations, shelter construction, major bridges)
- Develop sustainable trail design study and develop training/recommendations as determined necessary by study results
- Where appropriate, conduct optimal location reviews for potential trail relocation
- Adjust internal FMSS trail asset structure as needed to achieve higher resolution and meaningful changes in values of FCI scores
- Develop strategy with ATC to build capacity in high maintenance-need areas (i.e. working with current trail clubs, contracting work, adapting ATC trail crews to better respond to deficiencies)



Manage Use

Outcome:

The Trail is available to a wide variety of users while ensuring visitor safety and managing impacts on other users, neighboring communities, and natural and cultural resources. Law enforcement and visitor resource protection complies with servicewide and regional standards and requirements.

Measures:

- High priority incidents/incident backlog is kept to targeted level
- Management zones are identified and appropriate action plans created
- All existing special use activities categorized and inventoried

Strategies:

Effectively manage incidents to ensure visitor safety and a quality experience

Standardize special use policies to manage impacts and recover costs

Better understand visitor use patterns and needs to support a safe and quality experience

3–5 Year Activities:

- Document and record incidents (boundary encroachment, law enforcement, medical, search and rescue) within NPS central database when necessary
- Develop a safety strategy including defined roles and responsibilities, communication standards, and metrics
- Respond to incidents appropriately according to urgency and priority, within cooperative management system and relevant state/park general agreements
- Support ATC as needed in expansion of voluntary group registration and thru-hiker registration to entire trail
- Identify high impact/incident/risk priority areas to target policy creation and field messaging, building on existing priority zone inventories
- Implement adjustments to agricultural permitting fees to achieve cost recovery and ensure up-to-date permits
- Engage NPS Northeast Regional Special Use Coordinator, ATC, and other partners to inventory existing special use activities currently permitted on or near the AT
- Develop Wayfinding Plan and implement recommendations as funds are available
- Identify need for additional visitor use studies, then seek funding for visitor use management plan



Conserve Priority Landscapes

Outcome:

Highest priority landscapes on AT corridor are identified and targeted for special management and protection from external threats, to conserve significant resources, and support a quality visitor experience.

Measures:

- Priority landscapes of significant value and at particular risk due to use patterns and development potential identified along the Trail corridor
- New partnerships created and collaborative strategies are developed for protecting identified priority landscapes from external threats

Strategies:

3–5 Year Activities:

Identify priority landscapes in order to proactively address external threats

- Build on High Priority Conservation Areas list and current visitor use data
- Develop priority landscape criteria that include landscape quality, uniqueness, vulnerability to external threats, and use levels

Address external threats proactively

- Identify key partners and decision makers in priority landscapes (state siting councils, for example)
- Develop a protection strategy with identified partners based on aligned goals and utilizing a range of measures including signed agreements, direct ownership, easements, or land transfers
- Align goals with partners such as land trusts, private landowners, and state agencies, and leverage joint funding

Participate in Servicewide initiatives for protecting landscapes

- Participate in A Call to Action “Scaling Up” and develop a scenic and landscape-level protection and response strategy
- Participate in A Call to Action “Enjoy the View” to develop a viewshed and air quality analysis and create viewshed cooperatives



Protect Natural Resources

Outcome:

Improved management and protection of natural resources in the AT corridor, and increased public awareness of the AT’s value as a natural resource, hotspot of biodiversity, and barometer of regional environmental health through education and interpretation activities and volunteer involvement.

Measures:

- \$100,000 in total NPS project funding secured for invasive species control and restoration efforts by 2019
- ATC leads 12 environmental monitoring and management workshops per year (three per region)
- 100% of invasive species high priority zones are inventoried and 200 acres of invasive plant infestations treated by 2019
- Three stories published in Appalachian Trail Journeys and other ATC media outlets per year as prescribed by Task Agreements
- An average of 75 environmental monitors volunteer per year between 2015 and 2019

Strategies:

3–5 Year Activities:

Improve efficacy of invasive and rare species monitoring and management activities

- Develop metrics for tracking the success of invasive species management efforts
- Develop management plans for priority treatment and restoration projects
- Develop a fund allocation strategy that targets resource management activities where the Appalachian NST has jurisdiction

Increase relevancy, awareness, and fundability of natural resource protection on the AT

- Support ongoing academic efforts to use the Trail as an indicator for ecosystem-scale climate change impacts, including phenology research
- Increase natural resource storytelling through ATC, NPS, and others by providing useful reports, stories, and data, and by establishing metrics/expectations for publicizing natural resource activities
- Strengthen existing and build new partnerships for natural resource activities. Target botanical, horticultural, and gardening clubs as potential new partners, and strengthen partnerships with larger organizations such as NatureServe to achieve shared goals
- Continue growth of volunteer participants in natural resource monitoring activities and management to an average of 75 volunteer monitors per year

Five-Year Strategic Goals



Protect Cultural Resources

Outcome:

The Appalachian NST completes an inventory of and achieves recognition for the AT's value as a historic and cultural landscape, and obtains resources for protecting and interpreting its cultural resources.

Measures:

- Secure \$230,000 in NPS project funding for completion of National Register listings for all 14 states
- New NPS funding or shared resources from another NPS unit secured for managing, protecting, and interpreting cultural resources on the AT

Strategies:

Build capacity in Appalachian NST and ATC for cultural resources program

3–5 Year Activities:

- Target NPS project funds for cultural resources management to fund shared, contract, or temporary positions to manage inventory and develop management and interpretation strategies
- Find opportunities for federal agency training in cultural resources management (e.g., Section 106 training) for key Appalachian NST and ATC staff/volunteers, including the Teaching with Historic Places program

Identify cultural resources in AT corridor

- Seek funding to support inventory and monitoring of the AT's cultural resources, including Multiple Property Documentation, Historic Resources Study, Archival Study, and Archeological Overview and Assessment
- Meet biennially with State Historic Preservation Offices as required and to provide resource updates, discuss projects, and address any issues/concerns
- Work with the Northeast Regional Office to develop a List of Classified Structures



Engage a Broader Audience

Outcome:

Introduce new and diverse audiences to the Appalachian Trail and inspire stewardship through innovative and cost-efficient education programming, visitor services, and volunteer opportunities.

Measures:

- 100,000 youth reached through education programming over five year period
- Long Range Interpretation and Education Plan, or a new planning model (for example, Stewardship Framework) for education and interpretation funded and completed

Strategies:

Partner with ATC and new partners to develop a suite of new educational offerings at a variety of cost and resource intensities

3–5 Year Activities:

- Identify and cultivate education partners by targeting current partners and established relevant outdoor education organizations, including:
 - » Appalachian Trail Communities
 - » Trail clubs
 - » Other National Park Service units and national forests
 - » Other government programs, including other "...to Every Classroom" programs
 - » Other nonprofits
- Engage outreach partners or external evaluators to assess effectiveness in reaching new and more diverse audiences

Develop a strategic plan for interpretation and education programming

- Review various planning models to determine best fit for the Appalachian NST
- Secure funding for a Long-Range Interpretation and Education Plan or other planning model
- Identify target audiences for AT education programs
- Develop complementary media and messaging with partners, including trailhead signage, outreach materials, and electronic outreach
- Seek NPS funding to develop Community Outreach Plan
- Seek NPS funding to develop Youth Engagement Strategy

Cultivate new volunteers and volunteer leaders by reaching out to effective urban/youth outreach organizations and recruiting volunteers from current AT visitor constituencies

- Engage more youth, families, and veterans as volunteers
- Identify Appalachian NST or ATC point-people for the other current constituencies and partners:
 - » Thru-hikers
 - » 21st Century Conservation Corps
 - » Groundwork USA
 - » Youth Conservation Corps
 - » Student Conservation Association
- Include requirements and methods for tracking volunteer numbers and demographics in all task agreements with partners that involve volunteer participation



Strengthen Partnerships

Outcome:

The critical partnerships at the foundation of the management of the AT are bolstered by formal agreements, increased face-to-face engagement, and mutual transparency.

Measures:

- Formal agreements entered into or renewed at the state level (five agreements by 2019) and with other National Park Service units (four agreements by 2019)
- Regional partnership meetings and other cooperative governance meetings take place according to defined schedules
- Volunteer leadership meetings and land managers meetings proceed biennially

Strategies:

3–5 Year Activities:

Explore opportunities to support ATC's fundraising efforts

- Better communicate the leverage and efficiency of the AT management partnership to potential funders
- Establish a collaborative strategy based on best practices obtained through meetings with representatives of successful NPS/Non-profit fundraising initiatives such as "Trails Forever"

Continue to formalize and strengthen relationships with key partners

- Finalize list of five states to target for new or revised state-level agreements, convene stakeholders, and draft new agreements where necessary
- Target which NPS units to pursue new or revised agreements with, revisit existing agreements where appropriate, and draft new agreements where needed
- Support ATC in bringing Trail Communities into regional partnership meetings
- Determine appropriate meeting structure and schedule to maintain regular contact with state representatives

Encourage transparency and efficiency in relationship between the Appalachian NST and trail clubs

- Better define and communicate roles and responsibilities of cooperative management partners for clarity and communication
- Provide more opportunities for volunteer leadership and development, including assisting trail clubs and ATC with succession planning materials and strategies and biennial volunteer leadership summits
- Implement more clear reporting requirements for projects that received federal funding, including tracking deficiencies addressed and volunteer hours



Achieve Operational Excellence

Outcome:

Support and administrative operations are improved to better align budget planning and accounting processes within the Appalachian NST and among its partners, and to reduce administrative inefficiencies that drive staff time and resources away from programmatic priorities. Foster a diverse and well-trained staff that works collaboratively and safely.

Measures:

- Resource and staff time allocation is tracked and reviewed on an annual basis to understand how resources are being spent
- ATC and Appalachian NST staff report improvement in quality of and compliance with Task Agreement metrics, timing, and reporting

Strategies:

3–5 Year Activities:

Improve and streamline Appalachian NST budget process internally and among its agency and non-profit partners

- Fully utilize NPS financial systems for staff time accounting, task agreement expense tracking, and asset value tracking
- Better align accounting structure, including financial cycles and cost categorization where feasible, between the Appalachian NST and ATC to help both partners better plan and account for activities

Address administrative inefficiencies where possible to limit staff time spent away from key position responsibilities

- Better account for staff time allocation to better understand where resources are currently spent and where improvements may be made
- Identify efficiencies in IT support and capitalize on shared support services where possible
- Streamline special use permit inquiry processes to filter requests, share pertinent information and policies, and obtain relevant decision-making information for the identified appropriate Appalachian NST staff person

Leverage lessons learned and best management practices for emerging Appalachian NST initiatives from others in the national trails and parks system (such as Chesapeake Bay's large landscape initiative)

- Fully engage with other National Scenic Trail system staff via conference attendance
- Use regularly scheduled meetings and sharing technology to stay engaged with other park units

Support a well-trained staff through continued learning and professional development opportunities

- Ensure that all new employees complete NPS Fundamentals training
- Support individual employee education and professional development goals

Potential Appropriated Base Budget Scenarios

The federal budgeting and appropriations process introduces substantial uncertainty into any national park's financial forecasts. This has proven particularly true in recent years, which have brought sequestration and other budget cuts, a government shut-down, hiring freezes, and a series of continuing resolutions. In light of this increasingly volatile fiscal climate, this business plan analyzes three potential base funding scenarios. These scenarios represent the Appalachian NST's internal estimates, and are used for planning purposes only. Actual future funding levels will depend on Congressional appropriations.

- 1) Base funding levels remaining nominally flat
- 2) Base funding decreasing by two percent in FY 2016
- 3) Base funding decreasing by five percent in FY 2016

In addition to outlining potential future funding scenarios, the chart below projects forward Appalachian NST's operating costs. Personnel costs, representing salary and benefit commitments to full-time permanent employees, make up the bulk of projected spending. After filling three critical vacancies in FY 2015, these projections do not assume any additional hiring. Nevertheless, personnel costs grow approximately

2.7 percent each year. This growth is the result of regular salary step increases that take place with good performance, as well as across-the-board federal pay increases mandated by the President or Congress, and the rising costs of health care and other benefits.

Under scenarios with flat or reduced base funding, these growing personnel costs threaten to curtail the amount that the Appalachian NST can allocate to other programs and needs. With flat funding, personnel costs, which accounted for 67 percent of the Appalachian NST's base budget between 2010 and 2014, would grow to consume 88 percent of the total base budget by 2019. Under more pessimistic scenarios, this figure could grow as high as 92 percent.

The large majority of Appalachian NST's non-personnel spending is on cooperative agreements and contracts with key partners, primarily the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Adjusting these spending levels is management's main source of budget flexibility. As staffing costs rise without commensurate funding increases, this critical financial support of partners will necessarily be squeezed. In FY 2014, Appalachian NST had \$555,000 of base funding to direct towards partners and other non-personnel costs. In a flat funding scenario, this figure falls to \$190,000 by FY 2019. If base funding levels decrease further, this figure could fall as low as \$113,000.

Potential Appropriated Base Budget Scenarios

Programmatic Impacts

Steady growth in personnel costs and a constrained federal funding environment will severely decrease the Appalachian NST's ability to support partner programming at traditional levels out of base funding. Sequestration in FY 2013 already demonstrated this impact, as Appalachian NST cut base-funded task agreements to ATC by over \$100,000, in order to absorb a six percent decrease in base funding.

The pressure placed on contract and cooperative agreement spending by an eroding base budget would not be spread evenly among program priorities. For instance, Maintaining Trail Assets is traditionally supported with project funding, and therefore less exposed to the risks associated with base budget fluctuations. Other areas, such as Protecting Natural Resources and Strengthening Partnerships, would be in greater jeopardy, as these depend more heavily on base funding to support the work of partners like ATC.

In anticipation of potential pressure on base-funded contracts and cooperative agreements in the future, ATC, the Appalachian NST and other partners should explore potential efficiencies or other funding sources for program categories that have historically relied on base funding, such as:

Program category	Types of contract/cooperative agreement work historically supported by base funding	Potential new resources or efficiencies
Protect Natural Resources	Base-funded task agreements support field work throughout ATC's regional offices, including seasonal monitoring of rare, threatened, and endangered plant species and invasive species management	Improve funding requests through the National Park Service's Project Management Information System (PMIS) for natural resource monitoring and management; support non-profit partners in development of materials to successfully fundraise for natural resource programming
Strengthen Partnerships	Base-funded task agreements provide for volunteer coordination and support. The agreements fund ATC staff time for facilitating communication, training, and coordination between the 31 trail clubs' volunteers and Appalachian NST	Identify desired outcomes and activities for volunteer coordination within ATC and other partners, write narrowly-tailored task agreements for those specific outcomes. Seek opportunities for collaborative external fundraising
Maintain Trail Assets	Base-funded task agreements support trail and boundary condition assessments that provide core data for Trail management	Build full trail assessment costs into cyclic PMIS funding requests; build a trail maintenance endowment with non-profit partner
Engage a Broader Audience	Base-funded task agreements support educational programming and youth outreach, most notably the Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) program.	Develop new educational products and services across a broad range of cost levels; identify new partners and funding sources for education outcomes
Manage Use	Base funding supports visitor services provided by ATC—activities that include visitor education and safety. Appalachian NST is not equipped with a visitor center or other public-facing staff, and so must rely heavily on ATC staff to ensure positive experiences for AT visitors.	Identify opportunities for other collaborative fundraising with ATC
Protect Cultural Resources	Base-funded contracts supported some of Appalachian NST's initial cultural resource documentation work. Managing and interpreting these resources will create additional sustainable funding needs moving forward.	Pursue competitive funding for cultural resource inventory, tap into other NPS expertise

Strategies for Operational and Financial Efficiency

There are steps the Appalachian NST can take to ameliorate the impacts of stagnant or eroding base funding on programmatic outcomes. The Appalachian NST can look to reduce costs and increase ef-

ficiencies to maximize the impact of its full-time staff and it can also look to increase available funding through federal sources, and support of fundraising activities by its management partners.

In order to reduce costs and/or increase available staff time, the Appalachian NST may:

Ensure staffing models match strategic needs

- With a staff of only ten full-time equivalent employees, turnover and hiring lead-time can contribute to significant re-shuffling of roles and responsibilities. Therefore, it is critical that the Appalachian NST plan ahead for staffing scenarios to ensure capacity meets management priorities. In the future, the Appalachian NST could consider making adjustments to the staffing model, including redefining roles and responsibilities and utilizing shared services, to help maximize cost-effectiveness. As the management needs and goals of the Trail evolve, strategic staffing is critical to successful leverage of the Appalachian's limited human resources.

Where feasible, minimize staff time spent on administrative and support services

- **Increase shared services.** Particularly in functions such as IT, taking advantage of shared support can be less costly than assigning those tasks to full-time staff. Decreasing time spent on support services should result in increased staff capacity to meet programmatic goals and responsibilities.
- **Take advantage of NPS regional and national offices.** The WASO and NERO offices have significant experience and human resources that the Appalachian NST may utilize toward achieving its five-year goals. Some of the areas where regional staff can help the Appalachian NST include external threat management, environmental impact assessments, cultural resource programming, and facility maintenance tracking and planning.

Improve internal accounting to better track staff, contract, and cooperative agreement expenses

- More comprehensive budgeting and accounting, including staff time planning and tracking, will help the Appalachian NST ensure it is allocating scarce resources to its highest priorities. The nature of the Trail and the Appalachian NST's small staff make it unique, and its accounting systems have historically lacked the structure of traditional parks. For example, the Appalachian NST's current accounting and budgeting regime considers all base-funded expenditures as administrative, and does not provide any further accounting as to which program areas staff time and other expenses are supporting. By taking advantage of existing NPS standards and tools, the Appalachian NST can account for its expenditures in greater detail and align spending to categories with its program and/or priority areas. It may extend such accounting codes to its contracts and other spending.

Streamline Special Use Permit management

- The Appalachian NST may work to streamline its processes by inventorying pertinent policies, better communicating requirements and regulations to potential permittees through its website, and directing requests to decision-makers efficiently. Accounting for time and documenting processes will shed light on actual resources allocated, which will help the Appalachian NST find opportunities for cost efficiencies.

Write contracts and cooperative agreements that include specific metrics to meet management objectives

- Task Agreements to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy are an important management tool for the Appalachian NST, and it is critical those agreements include clear, measurable goals and metrics. While the federal budget cycle and uncertainties present planning challenges for both parties, improvements can be made. Where viable, Task Agreement metrics should be task and goal-oriented to increase clarity for all parties and streamline reporting.

In order to increase funding, the Appalachian NST may:

Build off best practices from collaborative fundraising initiatives by other park units and non-profit partners

- ⊕ Explore Trails Forever. “Trails Forever” is a brand utilized successfully by several other national parks and non-profit partners to build an endowment that supports trail maintenance activities in perpetuity. The Appalachian NST and ATC should continue to reach out to these parks to learn best practices for the successful development of an Appalachian NST Trails Forever campaign.
- ⊕ Participate in Centennial Initiatives. As the National Park Service prepares to celebrate its 100th birthday in 2016, there are significant opportunities to participate in a variety of Centennial-related programs and initiatives. The Appalachian NST could work with ATC and other partners to encourage Centennial events in trail communities. The Appalachian NST could also partner with other parks and National Scenic Trails to launch Centennial Challenges for visitors and volunteers on the Trail.

Unlock project funding for emerging initiatives

- ⊕ Inventory cultural resources in the AT corridor. In launching a cultural and historical resources initiative, the Appalachian NST is building its eligibility for relevant project funding from the Northeast Region. These sources may help fund program development such as interpretation curriculum, training, and other needs in the next five years and beyond.

- ⊕ Fund and create a Long Range Interpretation and Education Plan. An interpretation plan will help the Appalachian NST better understand and communicate its goals in this program area, and attract appropriate funds in the future. By working with the region to ensure that program goals are eligible and competitive for funds, the Appalachian NST can position itself to seed the growth of education programming.

Ensure cost recovery in Special Use Permits (SUP)

- ⊕ In order to achieve cost recovery, the Appalachian NST must first better understand its current costs. Preliminary analysis based on rough approximations of staff time invested in issuing and monitoring agricultural use permits has indicated that the aggregate costs incurred by ATC and the Appalachian NST in managing those permits may exceed current fees by as much as \$10,000 per year. More diligently accounting for staff time spent in SUP management can allow the Appalachian NST to adjust management practices, or adjust permit fees where necessary and appropriate, to more fully recover costs.

Better utilize NPS software systems

- ⊕ The Appalachian NST can improve the competitiveness of its PMIS project proposals by working with the region to adjust internal scores and organization of assets in the FMSS system. For example, the Appalachian NST can more accurately track the Current Replacement Value (CRV) of trail assets to provide a clearer picture of the condition of the Trail, and make a more compelling case for funding trail maintenance projects with regional repair and rehabilitation funds.

Sunset at Chestnut Knob Shelter in Virginia.



Conclusion



Sunset over Spy Rock in the George Washington National Forest, Virginia.

The strength of the cooperative management system has provided for an impressive history of volunteer-driven preservation and promotion of the Appalachian Trail. Moving forward, the Appalachian NST will focus on improving its current cooperative governance processes to foster partner satisfaction, operational excellence, and sustainable funding. The Appalachian NST also plans to lay the groundwork to build program capacity in cultural resources management and

interpretation, education and outreach. To this end, the Appalachian NST will look to unlock new federal funding sources and leverage NPS expertise to build internal capacity, as well as support ATC in its fundraising initiatives. Engaging current and new partners and audiences will ensure a vibrant and diverse visitor and volunteer population and continue the outstanding tradition of volunteer leadership and collaborative management of the Appalachian Trail.

This plan is the result of the hard work, dedication, and investment of many park employees and partners who contributed their time, energy, and ideas to the business planning process.

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*Rhododendrons in bloom
along the AT Treadway.*



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A maintained landscape offers a panoramic view at Max Patch in North Carolina.