

Appalachian Trail Park Office (NPS-ATPO) Update

October 24, 2005

In keeping with the recommendations from the ATC-ATPO Strategic Planning Report, ATPO is maintaining and continuing its traditional Trail responsibilities; and is moving into new efforts in environmental monitoring and community engagement.

Environmental Monitoring: ATPO is working with the National Park Service's Northeast Temperate Network Inventory and Monitoring Program on several fronts. A report on the *Vital Signs of the Appalachian Trail* will be published next month. The report will document the current condition of 10 key natural resource values along the Trail, including air quality, vegetation, invasive species, birds, and impacts associated with visitor use. ATPO and the NPS Inventory and Monitoring Program also will collaborate with NatureServe to develop integrated databases for threatened and endangered species occurrences and vegetation.

Forest Health Monitoring: ATPO worked with ATC, the USDA Forest Service, several academic institutions, and a group of volunteer citizen scientists to complete a pilot project establishing several environmental monitoring plots on ATPO lands using the USFS Forest Health Monitoring protocol. A report of this effort is under development. If a decision is made to expand this project in order to assess forest health along the AT, 2006 will be an outreach year to develop additional partnerships.

Community Engagement and Service-Learning: ATPO, in concert with ATC, is interested in strengthening relationships with communities, groups, and schools along the trail. Together, we are developing a web-based "Junior Ranger" youth program for the AT. ATC recently received a National Park Foundation grant for this effort. ATPO is also working with the public middle school in Harpers Ferry, WV, on a pilot project developing a service-learning curriculum for sixth-graders, focused on building the AT into their curriculum. Efforts to develop regional frameworks for outreach to gateway communities are also underway. Rita Hennessy of ATPO is leading these efforts.

Condition Assessments and Facility Management: Trail Condition Assessments continue to be conducted annually, with the goal of inventorying and determining the condition of 20% of the A.T. each year. Condition Assessments are done by ATC staff in close coordination with each club and agency partner. GPS technology is utilized to streamline the process, which is required in order to compete for NPS funding for projects.

A Trail-wide database is under development that will eventually provide clubs with access to the inventory and condition assessment information. In the interim, the information collected each year will be compiled and distributed to clubs as soon as feasible. This will include a table of all the identified trail problems and a map showing the location of those problems.

Fire Management Plan: The ANST Fire Management Plan has been completed. The FMP only applies to lands administered by the Appalachian Trail Park Office, and is available for viewing at www.nps.gov/appa.

Trailwide Visitor Count: Work will begin in 2006 on the first-ever trailwide visitor count study. The study will be coordinated by ATPO, conducted by USFS recreation researchers, and is expected to take two years to complete.

Resource Management Plan: ATPO and ATC are nearing completion of a draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Appalachian Trail, which will be distributed for public comment in December 2005. When completed, the RMP will serve to identify the most urgent and highest priority work in the resource management arena.

Cultural Resource Inventories: ATPO is working with ATC and the National Park Service's Olmsted Center for Cultural Resources, based in Boston, on a pilot study to determine whether the National Park Service's Cultural Landscape Inventory methodology would work for a park unit as diverse and long as the A.T. In addition to looking at several issues on a Trail-wide scale, the study will test the CLI methodology on a 22-mile long section of the A.T. between Tyngham and South Egremont, Mass.

Project Planning and Environmental Compliance: ATPO and the entire National Park Service have transitioned to a new electronic system for tracking project planning and environmental reviews called the *Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) System*. Although we have entered all ongoing projects on the Trail into the new system, we also will continue to release the *Appalachian Trail Park Office Schedule of Environmental Reviews*.

Please remember – if you are planning to relocate a section of the A.T. footpath, or build a new shelter, bridge, or parking lot on Appalachian Trail Park Office lands – to contact the ATC regional office and schedule a field review and environmental compliance review.

NPS Policy Changes: NPS has revised Director's Order #21 on Donations and Fundraising, and is currently accepting public comments on the proposed changes until December 1. (*available at nps.gov/policy/DOrders/DO21draft.html*) NPS is also updating the overall policies that guide NPS management, with public comments accepted through January 19, 2006. (*available at nps.gov/policy/mp/index2006.htm*) Both of these revised policy documents impact the AT, and your review and comments are encouraged.

North Shore Road: ATPO has continued to participate in the preparation of the North Shore Road Environmental Impact Statement, which is being developed to analyze and disclose the environmental impacts of constructing a 32-mile long road along the north shore of Fontana Dam in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This issue was the subject of an article in the most recent AT Journeys magazine. The draft EIS is scheduled for release in December 2005.

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*for information about the A.T., visit the website of the
Appalachian Trail Conservancy - appalachiantrail.org*
