

Discussion points for RPC

I'd like to spend the next hour or so in a bit of a philosophical realm.

Each of you has been elected (or at least “recruited”) by your club to represent them in this RPC body. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of your role here. Hopefully, you've been chosen because you represent the best leadership and bring the best vision from your club to the A.T. partnership. You now play a critical new role and while it is very important that the views of your individual club are both voiced, and perhaps even more importantly, *heard*, it is also critically vital that you understand the deep cultural history of this partnership, and your role in protecting the A.T. as we move into the next era of Trail management.

So we're not here today to talk about chain saw training requirements. We're not here to talk about what we call the “clipping and blazing stuff”. While those routine maintenance tasks remain vitally important to the wellbeing of the Trail, this body is charged with headier pursuits. This committee is tasked with shaping the philosophical essence of the A.T. experience in the mid-Atlantic region. Beyond that considerable undertaking, you are responsible for conveying that to your club. At times, that won't be easy. But together, we'll do this by drawing on existing policy and other documentation developed by your predecessors, and by careful deliberation and consideration about protecting the primitive character of the A.T. amidst an ever changing world.

One thing that especially important to me is that you each leave here with a better understanding of the connectedness of the Trail, and how the decisions that your individual club makes, impacts both the experience and the expectations of our users. Why are these two things, experience and expectations important? Because they influence behavior, and visitor's behavior impacts both the social and physical resources that *are* the A.T. Frequently I have asked clubs why they made a decision to do some project in a certain way. And almost as frequently the answer has been, “That's what the hikers want.” I would suggest to you that our job is not to give hikers what they *want*, but rather what they *need*, and there can be a huge difference between the two. I would suggest that our job is to protect the resource rather than provide amenities to comfort to Trail users. Our job is to enhance, or at least allow our visitors to experience and connect with the natural world. A new book just hit the stores entitled “Last Child in the Woods”. In an era where Attention Deficit Disorder is rampant, it coins a new malady, suggesting that youngsters now suffer from “Nature Deficit Disorder.” Are your club's decisions curbing or contributing to the condition both in kids and their parents and grandparents?

In order to help focus this morning's discussion, I spent a little time trying to figure out how to make the topic real, relevant, and something to which everybody could readily relate. I want to talk about the subtle and sometimes not so subtle decisions that clubs make that can inadvertently or quite deliberately have a significant impact on the ways that hikers experience the Trail.

I'm going to offer some images with no text. Some of which will undoubtedly be very familiar to you. I'm going to run through them relatively quickly, leaving just a few seconds for you to do a little "gut check" of any visceral reaction you have to the image, and ask you make a mental note of your reaction. I'll then go back and repeat the exercise, and ask for some comments and discussion about your thoughts and feelings.

<PowerPoint Presentation>

While there is pretty clear policy direction related to shelters, there isn't necessarily a right and wrong answer to any of this. Those of you who are fairly familiar with the region probably recognized that I picked on all clubs. Lets get some feedback with just a few ground rules. Everybody's opinion is valid and we need to respect views, even if we differ in opinions. Which I'm sure we will...

Here we go again.