

NPS Appalachian Trail Park Office (ATPO) Update - March 2008

Most of you are familiar with the “delegation agreement” between the National Park Service and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. What you may not realize is that this agreement, which is one of the cornerstones of the A.T. cooperative management system, is an entirely unique and novel arrangement within the National Park Service. This agreement, first drafted and signed by the Secretary of the Interior and the Chair of the Appalachian Trail Conference in 1984, was renewed in 2005 for another ten-year term. This agreement delegates management and maintenance responsibilities for the Appalachian Trail to ATC and the Trail Clubs, withholding only five functions that cannot be legally delegated by the National Park Service. Those functions, which are carried out by the NPS Appalachian Trail Park Office (ATPO), are: federal land acquisition, exterior corridor boundary survey, law enforcement, issuance of permits and authorizations for use of public lands, and compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other laws pertaining to protection of cultural and natural resources. Here are a few highlights for these five program areas, as well as programs where we work hand-in-hand with ATC:

Land Protection and Exterior Corridor Boundary Survey – Between 1979 and 2005 the National Park Service completed boundary surveys on 1,373.64 miles at a cost of \$9,254,610. Funding for this work came out of the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund monies appropriated for A.T. land acquisition. As the longest, skinniest unit of our national park system, with more miles of boundary than any other unit, we recognized the importance of investing in this work. Sally Naser will report on the challenge of maintaining our boundaries and protecting this investment. A NPS land protection progress report as of January 2008 is included. There remain in the NPS program 63 tracts involving 3,937 acres and 6.5 miles of Trail.

Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) – This successful education/outreach program is entering its third year. It was begun as a pilot in 2006, brought to scale in 2007, and expanded from 3 to 4 teams of teachers in 2008. At the end of the second year, we have trained 75 teachers and community partners and engaged approximately 1,500 students. Our goal is to engage 5000 students by 2010.

Ranger Activities, Incident Management, Wildfire Management, and Law Enforcement – On the personnel front, Todd Remaley has been offered and accepted the position of ANST Chief Ranger. We will move quickly to fill the field ranger position being vacated by Todd and return to full capacity of two law enforcement rangers in the ATPO. The AT community has gained a new tool to assist with encroachment problems. Five remote surveillance cameras have been purchased for use in documenting trespass at known encroachment sites. It is our intention to make these cameras available for use by agency partners and club volunteers through the regional ATC offices. A sampling of current case work includes:

- Investigation of the use of a metal detector and digging at Fox Gap, MD. A license plate and vehicle description from the reporting party, a hiker, has led to identification of a suspect. The investigation continues with Ranger Josh Cunningham, C&O Canal, in the lead.
- A law enforcement surveillance operation of the Keys Gap parking area last weekend resulted in the arrest of one individual. Upon trying to stop the suspect a three state chase, by vehicle and by foot, involving state and local officers ensued. The suspect faces several misdemeanor and felony charges in this case, and has several outstanding prior arrest warrants. The operation was a joint effort involving Harpers Ferry, C&O Canal and ATPO Rangers. The investigation is on-going with further arrests possible. (One of the new cameras was used in this case.)

- A suspect has been identified in the theft of dead and down timber from ATPO lands near Blue Ride Summit, PA. Washington township officers reported the theft and have provided assistance with the investigation. The case remains open.

Chain Saw and Crosscut Saw Training and Certification MOU – Providing high quality, effective chain saw and crosscut saw safety training and certification opportunities which meet agency legal obligations is a priority program. Efforts are currently underway to renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ATC, NPS, and USFS which provides the framework for this program. The current 5-year MOU expires in April. Efforts are also underway to develop a standardized agenda for a One-Day-Recertification-Option for sawyers who are certified. This option will be provided along with the current 2-day Recertification Course. Certified sawyers may elect either option, recognizing that recertification is not guaranteed under either option, and that it may be more difficult to obtain recertification in the one-day-option, particularly for sawyers who only cut occasionally. We hope to be able to begin offering the one-day-option course in April. Sawyer certifications are valid for no longer than three years, at which time recertification is necessary.

The Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transect and environmental monitoring– In March 2008, ATC, with assistance from the Appalachian Trail Park Office and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), published *The Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transect: Engaging Volunteers in Environmental Monitoring from Maine to Georgia*. A limited number of copies will be distributed over the coming weeks to key state and federal policy makers, funders, universities, Trail club representatives, and other stakeholders. The publication also will be available on ATC’s website at www.appalachiantrail.org. ATPO, in partnership with ATC, USGS, the USDA Forest Service, the NPS Northeast Temperate Network, and many other organizations, is poised to launch the Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transect, a program that would use the A.T. as a continental-scale field laboratory for monitoring the health of the Appalachian Mountains, this year.

Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site – Work at the Palmerton Zinc Superfund site in PA continues on three fronts: remediation of the threats to human and environmental health, compensation for damages to natural resources and the enjoyment of those resources, and mitigation of potential hazards associated with the rock slide. As part of this year’s remedial work, a four-mile section of the Appalachian Trail will be temporarily relocated so that remedial work, including application of a seed and mulch mixture across hundreds of acres of state and federal land and construction of “resource islands” on another 70 acres of state and federal land, can begin in 2009.

Black Nubble Wind Farm – The Appalachian Trail Park Office, along with ATC and many other organizations, agencies, and individuals, submitted extensive comments on the revised proposal by Maine Mountain Power for a wind farm consisting of eighteen 408-foot towers on Black Nubble, a prominent feature of the viewshed from Saddleback, the Horn, Saddleback Junior, and several other prominent viewpoints in the western Maine mountains. In January 2008, the ME Land Use Regulations Commission voted to have their staff prepare a denial decision document, and on March 5th the Commissioners voted to deny the Black Nubble Wind Farm application. Their decision was based upon a number of factors, including the impact that the proposed project would have had on views from the spectacular trek on the A.T. across the Western Maine Mountains.

Condition Assessments and Facility Management – For the past 4 years, ATC, ATPO, and clubs have been conducting Trail Assessments with the goal of completing the entire length of the Trail by the end of 2008. There remain approximately 745 miles to assess (284 NERO, 146 MARO, 107 VARO, and 165 SORO), more than has been done before in any one year. Completing the full

assessment is necessary to ensure continued NPS project funding. Although the FY'08 NPS funds have not yet been finalized, approximately \$1.2M is anticipated to be allocated directly to A.T. trail projects.

Structures Demolitions – Efforts are ongoing to remove incidentally-acquired structures on the former Mussina tract (NPS 307-21) in New Jersey, and restore the site to a natural appearance. This work is funded by NPS-ATPO and overseen by ATC-MARO. Additional structure removal/site restoration projects are currently on hold as NPS-ATPO works to resolve some recent, internal NPS conflicting direction about this type of work.

Resource Management Plan – Work on a draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the A.T. by ATPO resource management staff members Casey Reese, Kent Schwarzkopf, and Don Owen has been delayed due to other priorities. When completed, the RMP will serve to identify the most urgent and highest priority work in the resource management arena. All maps for the RMP have been completed and are available for review.

New Proposals for Major Transmission Powerlines, Pipelines, and Other Developments – New proposals for major powerlines and pipelines continue to surface. Major electric transmission companies have formally announced their intent to construct three major powerlines that would cross the Appalachian Trail in the mid-Atlantic region: the 500 kV Dominion Allegheny line, which would cross the Trail in northern Virginia; the 765 AEP line, which would cross the Appalachian Trail in Maryland, and the 500 kV PPL line, which would cross the Trail in northern New Jersey or eastern Pennsylvania. In addition, four pipeline projects also have been proposed that would cross the Appalachian Trail in the mid-Atlantic region. ATPO staff have taken an active role in review of two hydroelectric power facilities (one in northwestern Connecticut and one in central Virginia), which are currently being evaluated through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hydro relicensing process. ATPO staff also have reviewed proposals for seven different cellular towers or communications facilities in the last 12 months.

Nomination of the AT to the National Register of Historic Places – In December 2007, Appalachian Trail Park Office and ATC staff met with representatives from the Pennsylvania Museum Commission, which houses the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office, to discuss the potential eligibility of the Appalachian Trail for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Museum Commission staff indicated that a “Keeper Designation” may be possible for the entire Trail, and are planning a meeting/hike on the Trail with ATPO and ATC staff and Susquehanna A.T. Club volunteers to explore the issue further (as well as conduct a field evaluation of the Earl Shaffer Shelter to determine its potential eligibility for the National Register).

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