

Karen Lutz's Comments to the Mid-Atlantic Partnership Committee
8 March, 2008
Unitarian Universalists Church
Boiling Springs, PA

Bear Mt – Bob S.

Palmerton – Bob S.

Rt 517 Parking Lot - Some of you will recall the years of effort that went into the Pochuck boardwalk in northern NJ some years back. This mile long boardwalk is a unique and extraordinary stretch of the A.T. and was something of a challenge to bring to fruition. I bring this to the RPC to demonstrate the importance of community engagement especially with elected officials and community leaders.

During the boardwalk construction process, there was a small but very vocal and very well connected group of neighbors who vehemently fought the idea of a trailhead parking lot to allow safe easy access to the boardwalk. Since then, the boardwalk has become an enormously popular destination for locals, who may not be interested or able to visit the Trail in a more remote area.

The A.T. community has continued to advocate for a parking lot, and has made significant inroads with the Town of Vernon and Sussex County, both of whom are now on board as full partners who are willing to commit significant resources to match ATC/NPS funds for the construction of the trailhead parking lot.

Rt 944 – Things continue to move forward with the proposed pedestrian underpass across PA Rt 944 in Cumberland County. The engineering firm hired by ATC has wrapped up their design work on time and on budget and we are waiting for PennDOT to program construction funds already committed to the project, the timing of which we expect to hear about any day now. PA DCNR provided funds for the design and engineering and PennDOT will provide \$1.2 million for construction. We expect to celebrate completion of the underpass with a ribbon cutting in the fall.

PA A.T. Act – As a result of the Alpine Rose country club for sports car enthusiasts debacle, the A.T. community in PA has been working with PA State Representative Bob Freeman who has introduced HB 1281 “The PA A.T. Act” which will strengthen a similar act passed by the legislature in the Commonwealth back in 1978. The Act requires municipalities to protect the A.T. and enact zoning to that affect, even if the remainder of the municipality has no zoning. Moreover, it provides technical support from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Department of Community and Economic Development.

The bill has soared through the House of Representatives, and was sent to the Senate's Energy and Environment Committee, Chaired by Senator Mary Jo White. Although we expected a difficult battle to get the bill through Senator White's committee and onto the Senate floor, her committee approved the bill with bipartisan support and it now appears destined for a full senate vote, though such action has yet to be scheduled. Interestingly, we have received significant editorial support from papers across the state including the Scranton Times Tribune, The Allentown Morning Call, The Harrisburg patriot News, and the Chambersburg Public Opinion. It is critically important that members of your PA Trail clubs and others in your circles contact your state senators and ask them to support the passage of HB1281.

South Mountain Conservation Landscape Initiative – I personally have been spending a great deal of time participating in a DCNR-led initiative that involves more than a dozen county municipal planners, state agencies, and non-governmental conservation organizations. The group's mission is to develop and implement strategies to protect the South Mt, which is the ridge that the A.T. follows from Boiling Springs to the Maryland line. It includes a land base that spans Cumberland, York, Adams and Franklin Counties. This high power focus group meets regularly and has tremendous support from DCNR's Bureau of Conservation and Recreation. Other key conservation organizations active in South Mountain Conservation Landscape Initiative include the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy, PA Office of the Nature Conservancy, Farm and Natural Land Trust of York County and the Land Conservancy of Adams County.

The partners are working on acquiring or otherwise protecting thousands of acres that are significant to the A.T. Last fall, a select group of committee members hosted DCNR Secretary Michael DiBerardinis and our own ATPO Park Manager Pam Underhill. The days activities included a four mile hike on the A.T. and a dinner of homemade local cuisine served around campfire at a cabin near Pine Grove Furnace State Park. The Secretary and his staff are now very much aware and very supportive of the A.T.

PA and VA License Plates – ATC is in the multi-year process of getting license plates approved in each of the 14 Trail states. The purpose of the tag program is twofold. First to get ATC's name more recognized by the public, but also to generate revenue for worthy Trail related initiatives in the states. The North Carolina tag has been on the road for over a year and over \$100,000 of revenue for the A.T. has been raised in NC. The Virginia legislature approved a bill for a tag in that state this past week, and ATC is in the process of pre-registering requests to meet the 350 minimum by mid-summer. If you know anyone in VA who would like an A.T. plate, have them visit ATC's website. A design contest to determine what the tag will look like will be announced soon. A bill to create a PA plate has been drafted but is temporarily tabled by a completely unrelated vehicle code moratorium surrounding the tolling of Interstate 80.

Hike The Hill – The American Hiking Society sponsors an annual advocacy event where Trail advocates from across the nation visit with federal legislators to brief them and seek support for their trails and projects. This year, ATC sent a full contingent from the four regions and headquarters. I personally visited the DC offices of: New Jersey’s Senator Frank Lautenberg and Representative Scott Garrett, PA senator Bob Casey and Representatives Tim Holden and Todd Platts, Maryland Senator Ben Cardin, and Virginia Senators John Warner and Jim Webb and Representative Frank Wolf. I also participated in meetings with the Deputy Secretary of NPS.

As noted, this is an annual event and my intention is to continue to participate and elevate ATC’s profile with our federal legislators. If any Trail club volunteers are interested in participating, I welcome you to join me. In the event that you choose not to participate in the Hike the Hill week in DC, we can still visit the legislator’s local offices.

Trail to Every Classroom – The Trail to Every Classroom (or TTEC) program is a professional development program for teachers that involve both place-based education and service learning. A weeklong training is scheduled at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV, a spring local workshop at Lebanon Valley College and Hawk Mt Sanctuary, and a fall local workshop at the Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC). This program has been wildly successful, especially in the mid-Atlantic region. This year we will be engaging some new partners who are very enthused about the program. Both PA DCNR and Lebanon Valley College in Annville have “Joined the TTEC Journey”. This year we are concentrating recruitment efforts in PA and NJ and program managers will be reviewing applications and selecting teams of teachers from the region next week. Once these decisions have been made, we will be asking Trail clubs from those areas to help serve as local Trail resources. I know for sure that we’ll be looking to BMECC for some help, and when the teams have been picked, we may be calling you.

MARO Staff Workplans