

Draft Land Protection Policy

Program Mission

The mission of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy Land Protection program, also known as the Land Trust program, is to conserve the Appalachian Trail, the A.T. visitor experience and the value of the A.T. as a wildlife and migration corridor. The program focuses on the protection of the Trail corridor and surrounding lands and features critical to the visitor's experience of the Trail, as well as the promotion of compatible land uses near the Trail.

Best Practices and Standards

In 2006, the ATC Board of Directors adopted the Land Trust Standards and Practices published by the Land Trust Alliance in 2004, acknowledged that the Standards and Practices represent ethical and technical guidelines for the operations of a land trust, and committed to making continual progress toward implementation of these standards and practices.

Program Means

To accomplish its purposes, the land protection program will establish priority areas for protection work based on:

- 1) The relative importance of unprotected areas to the Trail experience, as defined through GIS modeling and ground-truthing
- 2) Identified gaps affecting the integrity of the A.T. corridor as a wildlife and migration corridor
- 3) Feasibility and leverage in different areas, including existing and potential partnerships and coalitions
- 4) Level of threat in different areas, including residential, commercial or energy developments.

ATC will select and use the means best suited to achieve protection in targeted areas. In so doing the ATC will leverage its resources by exploiting the synergies among various programs, and by seeking partnerships with like-minded organizations whenever possible.

Volunteers can play significant roles in ATC land-protection efforts—as advocates within their own communities and in other trail-side communities for A.T.-compatible land-use planning and zoning practices; as an early-warning mechanism of potential incompatible development near the A.T.; as ambassadors for A.T. land-conservation efforts; as liaisons to landowners who have or may be interested in conserving their lands or interests in lands; and as monitors of ATC- or publicly-owned properties. ATC will seek to communicate opportunities for volunteer engagement in its land-conservation work through a variety of means and also will seek to provide necessary training, where appropriate, provided such engagement can be accomplished safely, efficiently and in a manner consistent with ATC legal, fiduciary and procedural obligations.

The ATC Land Trust relies heavily on local information and relationships in advancing its Land Protection Program. Trail Clubs can assist the Program by:

- designating one or more individuals to serve as the club's liaison to the land trust
- helping to raise awareness of the A.T., the Conservancy and the importance of the Trail as a recreational and natural resource within local communities and governance bodies
- helping to identify lands outside the Trail corridor that have a tangible and important connection to the Trail and hikers' experience (such as viewsheds, side trails and water sources)
- helping to identify funding prospects and other resources to support protection work
- assisting in other ways, depending on the interests and strengths of the club and its members.

The ATC's Land Protection program works to protect the trail experience for future generations of hikers to enjoy through the following means:

- 1) Building alliances and coalitions with other conservation partners
- 2) Promoting compatible land uses through advocacy for planning and zoning legislation, tools and ordinances that help protect the A.T. experience,
- 3) Promoting compatible land uses and development as well as additional protection through community outreach and green infrastructure planning,
- 4) Seeking and accepting donations of fee or easement interests on critical tracts, directly or through partners
- 5) Seeking to acquire fee or easement interests on critical tracts, directly or through partners

Criteria for seeking and accepting property interests

In land protection activities ATC takes the role of convener and coordinator and is always the holder of last resort for both easements and fee properties. ATC primarily works through partners including federal and state agencies as well as local, regional or national land trusts. In addition, ATC may accept direct stewardship responsibility only for:

#1 Properties that lie directly across the Trail or are adjacent to the trail corridor, and

#2 Properties that provide access to the Trail (i.e., secure side trails...) or offer other needed trail amenities (parking lots, etc.).

The justification is as follows:

#1 ATC is best equipped to deal with a contiguous land base centered around the corridor.

#2 Considering the large number of existing land trusts, it is very likely that some other organization can be found to hold easements on lands farther away from the trail corridor.

ATC recognizes that specific parcels important in preserving the trail experience as defined by the criteria below may not fulfill the conditions outlined above for direct stewardship: in those cases ATC will exert all possible efforts to find and work with local

or agency partners to protect these properties. In cases where no local or agency partners can be found to hold the interests, ATC may consider taking on these interests provided that:

- the benefit to the trail experience is unarguably demonstrable and considerable
- ATC is capable of stewarding and enforcing the interest; resources will come with the interest and the responsibilities being accepted are reasonable and within ATC's means and capacities.

The following criteria should guide decisions as to whether specific parcels are of interest to ATC, and as such should be pursued either directly if above conditions are met, or through partners and possibly co-held (i.e., part of the "partnershed" or Appalachian Trail Countryside).

The parcel:

- 1) Is in a priority area as defined by ATC's GIS modeling
- 2) Is contiguous to the trail corridor
- 3) Is contiguous to other protected lands – the parcel will have a landscape level impact
- 4) Contains the viewshed – visible from the trail
- 5) Is vulnerable to development pressures
- 6) Is of significant size: the bigger the natural area protected the better (though size is relative in different regions).
- 7) Is adjacent to Wilderness or remote areas that the Trail passes through
- 8) Contains important conservation or ecological values
 - a. Protects water resources important to the trail
 - b. Would protect landscapes of historical significance or documented cultural resources
 - c. Is wooded, in traditional agricultural use or similar natural state

As these criteria reflect the conservation values of importance to ATC, all easements involving ATC in the future should contain language specifically addressing these values. Conversely, ATC should not be responsible for monitoring activities and conservation values and that are not of direct import and consequence to our stated priorities and criteria.

In addition to these conservation criteria and to the assessment of other potential holders, ATC through its Land Transaction Review Committee will consider its stewardship responsibility and resources available when considering taking additional land interests. When accepting any additional interest, ATC must calculate the long-term cost of stewardship and secure the necessary resources in its Monitoring Fund. In all instances, ATC will seek to consolidate the A.T. land base by transferring interests to the regional A.T. land holding agency, whether it be state or federal. Any transaction involving land interests, including acceptance of a gift, acquisition, sale, transfer or donation, must be recommended by the Land Transaction Review Committee and approved by the Board.

Land Acquisition Fund

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy maintains a Land Acquisition Fund specifically to assist with acquisition of important property interests. The Land Acquisition Fund is often used to assist partners, both federal, state and non-profit, in their efforts to protect properties that are important to the A.T. experience. The Land Acquisition Fund may be used to help cover pre-acquisition expenses including surveys, appraisals and legal fees, but may not be used to cover ATC staff time. Any disbursements from the Land Acquisition Fund must be recommended by the Land Transaction Review Committee and approved by the Board.

Monitoring Fund

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy maintains a Monitoring Fund to provide for the long-term stewardship and defense of its property interests, both fee and easement. The Monitoring Fund is primarily meant as a legal defense fund, but can be used in exceptional circumstances to cover monitoring costs including travel and supplies, but not ATC staff time.