



Appalachian Trail Park Office: Update October 2009

The Appalachian Trail Park Office of the National Park Service (NPS-ATPO) has a dual role in the cooperative management system of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.). They are the federal office responsible for the overall administration of the entire trail, and they are the federal land-managing agency partner for more than 80,000 acres of lands acquired by the NPS specifically for the protection of the A.T. since 1978 from Virginia to Maine. ATPO is located in Harpers Ferry, WV.

Big Picture Agency Issues – The Department of the Interior is now lead by Secretary Ken Salazar, a Cabinet level position. (NPS is a bureau within the DOI). Secretary Salazar's three main priorities are energy independence, treasured landscapes, and encouraging young people's interests in the outdoors and America's natural and cultural resources. In addition, Jon Jarvis, a 30 year veteran of the NPS, has been confirmed as the 18th Director of the National Park Service. Jarvis was most recently the Regional Director of the NPS Pacific-west Region responsible for 54 National Parks. Director Jarvis' brother, Destry Jarvis serves on the ATC Board of Directors.

Although both the House and Senate have passed FY 2010 budget bills for DOI agencies, the bills still need to go to conference before being finalized. In the interim, the NPS will continue to operate after Oct 1 under a temporary authorization (Continuing Resolution) for the first part of the fiscal year.

America's Best Idea, a new film by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, has now be released and is showing on local PBS stations nationwide. The film series features a comprehensive story about the National Park System and interest is high to capitalize on public outreach opportunities.

Energy – As America strives to meet its seemingly insatiable appetite for more energy, transmission of electricity from generation sources (traditional or alternative) to load centers where the demand is high represents the single greatest threat to the preservation of a primitive outdoor recreation experience on the A.T. Currently, electric transmission companies have formally announced their intent to construct three major powerlines that would cross the Appalachian Trail in the mid-Atlantic region.

It is incumbent upon A.T. managers to become more pro-active in comprehensively identifying potentially acceptable crossing locations, as well treasured landscape areas where crossings should never even be proposed. There is no time to waste in doing this.

It is time to become strategic and innovative in identifying meaningful mitigation for the impacts that the A.T. is inevitably going to incur. Additionally, major pipeline projects have been constructed and are continuing to be monitored by trail clubs. Wind energy projects are also proposed in the northeast. Cumulative impacts of all these projects are potentially devastating to the overall A.T. experience.

ATPO Staffing – ATPO currently has a staff of eight, with one additional shared position and one current vacancy. Changes since the last update include:

Eric Barron is now on board as the A.T. field ranger and will have trail-wide responsibilities.

Although originally slated to be stationed in Boiling Springs, Ranger Barron will be operating out of the ATPO Harpers Ferry office.

Pete Irvine, A.T. US Forest Service Liaison, has moved on to serve in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests Supervisor's office in Roanoke. Unfortunately, the position will not be refilled, but some of the work will be handled out of the USFS Atlanta office by Ann Christensen.

Kent Schwarzkopf, ATPO's Natural Resource Specialist, has transferred to Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico. Casey Reese has been shouldering Kent's work until the position can be advertised and filled, likely within the next three months.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) – \$750 million will be invested in the national park system under the ARRA legislation under President Obama's recovery plan. Of that, ATPO was successful in securing \$789,000 in funding for trail rehabilitation projects. These projects are slated to get off the ground by early 2010. In addition, ATPO is working towards gaining an additional \$7.5 million to address rock fall hazards at the Palmerton Superfund Site in Pennsylvania.

Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) – This successful education/outreach program is finishing up its fourth 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 and 2009. Club volunteers, and staffers of NPS, USFS, State Agencies, and others have served as presenters and resources for teachers. By the end of 2009, we will have trained 175 teachers and community partners, and engaged approximately 7,000 students. Our goal is to engage 225 teachers and 10,000 students by 2010.

Ranger Activities– Addressing numerous boundary encroachments and ATV activities continue to be a major focus for the law enforcement program. In addition, there were responses to trail incidents such as lost hikers, suspicious activities, and wildfires. Various film and other special use permit requests continue to be received and addressed. Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) have been renewed with Shenandoah National Park and are in progress for Great Smoky Mountains N.P.

The Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transect and environmental monitoring– The initial Centennial Challenge funded work on this program has been completed resulting in the development of a draft Business Plan, completed by Roger Moore, professor of outdoor recreation at North Carolina State University, and former member of ATC's Board of Directors. The Business Plan outlines a path forward for generating additional funding requests to advance the goals of the MEGA-Transect program. Work is progressing on fifteen projects; most notable is the new NASA Decision Support system that will integrate satellite imagery with on-the-ground field measurements, and a USGS-led project to assess the recovery rates of soils impacted by acid deposition at high elevations.

Trail Assessments – 2008 saw the conclusion of the 5-year ATPO, ATC, and Club effort to collect, utilizing GPS technology, a comprehensive inventory and condition assessment of more than 2,175 miles of trail and 1,000 associated features including shelters, campsites, privies, parking lots, and signs. 10,009 deficiencies were identified trail-wide. In 2009, the goal of completing 20% of the trail each year continued. Trail Assessment data for '07 and '08 will be processed and distributed back to Clubs in the coming months.

Capital Plans – As in the past five years, ATPO will distribute Club Capital Plans to ATC Regional Offices for updates this fall. The Capital Plan is used by Clubs and ATC to request trail project funding from ATPO, including ATC Crew projects. The updates will include information on completed projects, updating projects already listed, and adding new projects. In addition, the Capital Plan will be used to schedule trail environmental compliance work. Trail-wide, there are currently 989 projects included in the Plan totaling more than \$11M in ATPO funding requests.

Resource Management Plan – Work on a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the A.T. was recently finalized. The document is now available on the ATPO website at <http://www.nps.gov/appa/naturescience/index.htm>.

Partner Satisfaction Survey – ATPO has developed a Partner Satisfaction Survey as part of our required accountability goals. We expect to distribute the survey and ask for your honest feedback sometime in 2010.