



BY JORDAN BOWMAN, ATC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Advocating for a Protected Trail

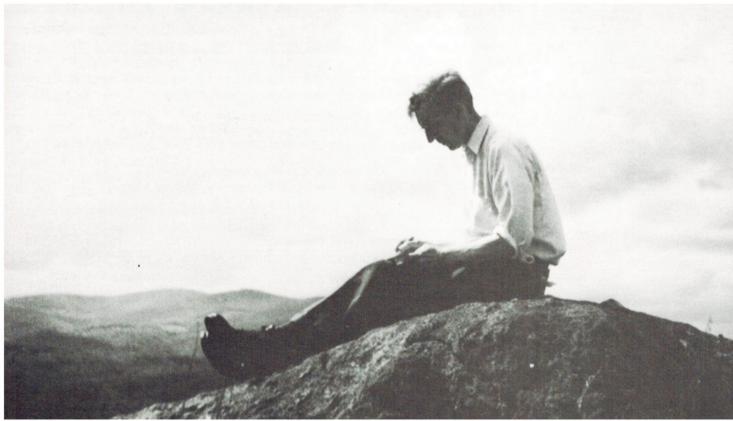
APRIL 16, 2020

The term “advocate” has different meanings for different people. An advocate can help fund a cause, can spread the word about important upcoming decisions, can urge friends, neighbors, and elected officials to take action, and can volunteer time to help protect something they love.

Advocacy is one of the primary roles of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and the Appalachian Trail itself only exists and remains protected because of thousands of dedicated individuals advocating for the work of the ATC and its partners.

In our upcoming Spring 2020 edition of A.T. Journeys magazine, we go in-depth about the ATC’s role in advocating for the Trail throughout its nearly 100-year history. Since the publishing of Benton MacKaye’s inspirational article envisioning an interconnected footpath stretching from Maine to Georgia, the ATC has coordinated the building and maintaining of the footpath, recruited new generations of Trail protectors, and informed hikers and nature enthusiasts on how to be an effective voice for the Trail. We have worked with governments at the local, state and federal levels on a wide range of issues, from supporting the growth of local recreation economies, to helping develop more effective oversight for infrastructure development in the Trail corridor, to landmark legislation like the National Trails System Act of 1968 establishing the A.T. as a unit of the National Park System.

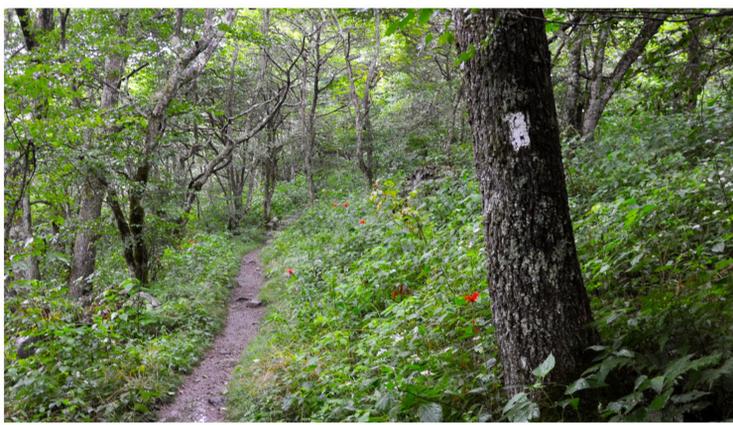
None of this would have happened without the persistence of thousands of advocates invested in protecting the Trail’s future.



Benton MacKaye’s vision of an interconnected Appalachian Trail would not have become a reality without the help of thousands of dedicated advocates.

And over the past few weeks, the ATC has advocated for the Trail, its visitors and its communities in a way it has never had to before. As the world continues to grapple with COVID-19, a threat that we are still working to understand and protect against, the ATC has taken action to help ensure the health and safety of all Trail users, Trailside communities, volunteers and ATC staff.

Due to the highly contagious nature of this virus, the ATC asked everyone to postpone visiting the Trail, including our volunteers maintaining the Trail, in order to help prevent further spreading COVID-19 on the A.T. and in nearby gateway communities. This was not a decision we made easily — a key part of managing a public trust resource like the A.T. is ensuring it remains open and accessible to the public. Yet after thorough analysis and hours of discussion with our staff, Trail Maintaining Clubs, agency partners and adjacent Trail communities, we understood asking visitors to stay home was the only way we could best advocate for the health and safety of all.



The ATC has advocated for the Trail, its visitors and its communities in a way it has never had to before as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

We also took action to make sure Congress was aware of the deep economic impacts the coronavirus pandemic would have on gateway A.T. communities. In mid-March, we submitted a letter to the Appropriations Committees in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives urging them to take special consideration of the Trailside communities reliant on outdoor recreation dollars in any upcoming stimulus packages. Working closely with its partners, the ATC has also been engaging with the White House, U.S. Departments of the Interior and of Agriculture, Members of the U.S. House and Members of the U.S. Senate, encouraging them to provide much-needed support to these communities — support which will help them recover from the economic hardships caused by the pandemic and help them re-engage with the Trail and its visitors.

Finally, we pledge to keep our audiences as up to date as possible on the status of the A.T. and the lands it travels through, as the situation is constantly changing. We encourage everyone to visit appalachiantrail.org/covid-19 for the most recent news and closures on the Trail. We will also continue to notify you via email about any major updates and, someday soon, when it has been determined that we can all take a walk in the woods together again without worry.

Until that day — and long after — we will continue to advocate for the Trail and its communities of hikers, nature lovers and dreamers. We hope that you will join us in that mission.

To learn more about the ATC’s advocacy for the A.T., please read our upcoming Spring issue of A.T. Journeys magazine. Not a subscriber? All ATC members receive quarterly issues of A.T. Journeys. Join today: appalachiantrail.org/join.

Help us protect the A.T. legacy of volunteerism and Trail protection — your donation today helps ensure future generations can experience a closer walk with nature.

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The Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) organization. Our CFC number: 12230. Our Tax ID number: 526046689.

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