



June 5, 2020

Dear Members of the United States Senate,

I write today on behalf of the members, volunteers, and supporters of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) to request passage of S. 3422, the Great American Outdoors Act, without amendment. This piece of legislation addresses two critical conservation priorities: permanent full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and addressing the United States' approximate \$20 billion deferred maintenance needs with the establishment of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (Restoration Fund). This legislation, once enacted, will provide critical assistance for rural economic development throughout the United States. It will provide support for millions of outdoor recreators who find their haven hiking, canoeing, hunting, fishing, and camping as well as preserve the incredible viewsheds and habitats of our nation.

The ATC was founded in 1925 to coordinate the building of what is now the 2,193-mile Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T. or Trail), which obtained Congressional designation as the first component of the National Trails System in 1968. Today, the ATC cooperatively manages the A.T. with the necessary participation of 31 Trail Maintaining Clubs, four federal agencies, and 14 state governments.

A "linear park," and unit of the National Park System, the A.T. traverses eight National Forests (the Chattahoochee, Nantahala, Cherokee, Pisgah, Jefferson, George Washington, Green Mountain, and White Mountain), six other National Park System units (Great Smoky Mountain, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Shenandoah, Harpers Ferry Historic Park, Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Park, the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area) and two National Wildlife Refuges (Cherry Valley and Great Thicket). These coordinate units all have needs, as does the protected A.T. and its surrounding Corridor.

Our nation's public lands are in a deferred maintenance crisis. Currently, the National Park Service (NPS) has an estimated deferred maintenance backlog of approximately \$12.5 billion dollars. Pressing maintenance work along the A.T.—including deferred maintenance work—is apparent along the Trail in every state. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has the next largest backlog, estimated at approximately \$5.2 billion. Whether on NPS, USFS, other federal, or state land, it is A.T. Club members and ATC employees who are responsible for making sure the Trail and its surroundings are cared for and prepared for recreators of all kinds who find their way onto the Trail.

The cyclical maintenance of a public land unit includes everything from keeping roads paved to campsites clear of snags and A.T. treadway in walkable condition. Given the decreasing federal appropriations and increasing visitor use, these needs can quickly become deferred for years, posing a hazard for those visiting the unit as well as those who may live nearby. Regarding the A.T. in particular, no Park or Forest Service

employee maintains the Trail or its environs—those responsibilities, pursuant to the National Trails System Act and a cooperative agreement with the NPS, fall to ATC and the Maintaining Clubs. As we continue to promote outdoor recreation and rural economic development, keeping pace with public land maintenance needs is essential.

The most recent, now years' old, estimates show that the A.T. claims more than \$20 million of the total federal lands backlog to address infrastructure needs. This includes funding for maintaining the Trail itself, roads, parking areas, bridges, water systems, and structures like Trail shelters. Much of this work is needed on the USFS lands through which the Trail passes, given that approximately 1,015 miles of the Trail (approximately 40%) is on USFS land, we are so grateful that the co-sponsors have included funding for the Forest Service in the Great American Outdoors Act.

In addition to the \$9.5 billion that would become available through the Restoration Fund (including \$1.425 billion for the USFS), the Great American Outdoors Act would enable the disbursement of at least \$900 million through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) every year. The LWCF is the most important funding opportunities for state and local governments to develop or enhance local recreational units. For the A.T., LWCF is generally used to acquire land adjacent to the Trail to secure a natural, scenic Trail experience or to relocate sections of Trail to more secluded and scenic natural areas.

With the passage of the John D. Dingell Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act in March 2019, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was made permanent. However, the Act did not guarantee full funding for LWCF, instead leaving Congress to decide how much money the Fund receives every year. Instead of 'accumulating,' more than \$22 billion dollars earmarked for the Fund, those dollars were not appropriated for conservation work and were diverted through the years to the "general fund," shortchanging outdoor recreation, conservation of critical habitat, and the preservation of our most important cultural and historical sites – the purpose of LWCF. What we see today, with resilient habitat shrinking, overcrowding in many public land units and a citizenry clamoring for outdoor space, makes LWCF more important than ever.

During the Trail's first century, LWCF has greatly benefitted the A.T. in adding open space around the Trail to create a 250,000-acre greenway that traverses 14 states, from Maine to Georgia. The A.T. Landscape connects significant public lands in the eastern United States and protects scenic vistas, wildlife habitats, forests, meadows, wetlands, farmlands and areas of historic significance. LWCF almost never works on its own; rather, it is the glue that binds together many streams of private and public funding. Often, it provides just enough to get a target tract over the fundraising hump. If not for the LWCF, the Appalachian Trail as we know it would not exist today. In order to appropriately conserve the Congressionally designated values of the A.T. as well as ensure the availability of venues for outdoor recreational in urban, suburban, and rural environments, the LWCF must be fully funded.

For these reasons and many more, we urge you to support the S. 3244, the Great American Outdoors Act, and oppose any amendments on the floor. If you have any

questions, please reach out to ATC Director of Federal Policy and Legislation Brendan Mysliwiec at [bmysliwiec@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:bmysliwiec@appalachiantrail.org). Thank you.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sandra Marra".

Sandra Marra  
President and CEO  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy