

The AT Landscape for the 21st Century: Trail to Towns

Session 1D – Hunt Club

2017 RCP Network Gathering

Speakers: Peter McKinley, Bryan Wentzell

Moderators: Dennis Shaffer, Simon Rucker

Overview – Dennis Shaffer, Appalachian Trail Conservancy

- The Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership is a partnership across the entire range of the A.T. led by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC)
- Last year, many partners in New England came together to submit a pre-proposal for the NRCS RCPP grant - these partners formed the Northern A.T. Landscape Partnership (NATLP), a subset of the ATLP
 - The pre-proposal was unsuccessful, but the partners are still coming together. Earlier this fall, we had a meeting about applying for the next round of funding.
 - We discussed whether we should be thinking about organizing around more than just an RCPP application?
 - At the meeting earlier this fall, we discussed coming up with a draft values statement, which we will distribute here.
- The ATC and the entire ATLP has a goal of identifying priority focus areas across the entire trail. There are a few in New England, but it doesn't mean that we only need to work in those areas. We can look at regional focus areas.
- We also had a lot of encouragement to not get too sucked into the planning and organizing. We want to make sure there is tangible work happening on the ground.
- ATC designates official “A.T. Communities.” This started as indicating that the towns provide services for hikers coming in through the area and there would be a sign when you come into the town saying it’s an official A.T. Community.
 - We’re now working on strengthening connections to these communities – focusing not only on the trail looking to the communities, but the communities looking to the trail. Trying to encourage towns to include A.T. in their planning.

Examples of Current Projects – Simon Rucker, Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust and High Peaks Initiative

- We want to demonstrate that this is not just the start of a project—we have ongoing, on-the-ground projects that are multi-purpose and cross-sector. We also tie local and community projects back to the A.T.
- Here are several examples of successful projects – look at the projects and think of your own!
- Redington Forest
 - Cooperative project – TPL, High Peaks Initiative, Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, and other partners
 - The project area is adjacent to the Appalachian Trail Area. There is a lot going on in this area – and it’s not all just about hikers. In this area, there are a lot of users

and purposes – ATV, hunters, fishers, hikers, ecological reserve area, etc. and the whole area is in the A.T. viewshed

- A.T. values are important to us and might not be to others, but all of the values are protected in the same area
- White Cap Mountain – this project is closing today!
 - In the hundred mile wilderness
 - Forest Legacy Project with 3 phases
 - There are lots of different things happening in the project – snowmobile trails, official AT side trail, campsites, rare natural community sites
 - By designating this as an A.T. project, it scores higher on Forest Legacy and state funding – even though it also covers many other values
- Hudson Farm, Hanover, NH
 - TPL project
 - Not a wilderness project, but a local project.
 - Hanover became an A.T. Community and the Municipal Open Space Plan highlights protection of the A.T.
 - The town manager was a leader, and the Hanover Conservancy was the local organizer
 - Had a partnership of local organizations and larger A.T. leaders
 - NPS worked on this project and ATC took on management role
 - By including the A.T., there was access to federal funding that otherwise wouldn't have been available. Including the A.T. also helped bring in local congressional support.
- Hottle-Fahey Forest
 - Western MA
 - 370 acres, close to town and state land in the area

Now we want to hear from you – what are your questions about this initiative? How could your partnerships be involved?

- Specific question about Gulf Hagas: There's an inaccessible side trail to the A.T. that's on the map but can't actually be reached.
 - They are aware of this - the conservation easement is owned by a timber company who has no obligation to maintain trails or roads.
 - This is now becoming a focus of the partnership: Now that we have property conserved – how do we follow up? How do we address road conditions? Need to follow up conservation with recreation.
 - We need local partners! We are moving toward focusing this.
- How far can you be from the trail and still access funding related to the A.T.? (because most trails here abut the federal corridor around the A.T.)
 - It's on a case-by-case basis
 - In Redington Forest, the area does not actually touch the corridor, but it was part of a contiguous landscape and there were people eyeing potential side trails.

- We usually work bordering the corridor or within a mile. However, it's on a case-by-case basis. There are some projects that are 2-3 miles from the trail, but it's an official A.T. Community and they approached the partnership.
- We've tried to avoid defining hard boundaries to what land is included in the A.T. Landscape Partnership. We've roughly included HUC10 watersheds as part of the corridor, which averages 5-10 miles.
- So it varies, and depends on how you frame the question. You can make the case for varying projects, which is why we haven't defined a hard boundary.
- How were priority focus areas defined for the A.T. Landscape Partnership?
 - Considered both threats and opportunities
- What is the role of partnerships in connecting these opportunities to towns and communities? Towns are interested in connecting rural towns to recreation projects in terms of economic development?
 - Kingfield, ME for example – someone was working on a land donation, and they asked A.T. Landscape Partnership for assistance. It's land that connects to a school, connects to ATV trails and parking lot. We're working with that community because it's an A.T. Community
- ALPINE (Academics for Land Protection in New England) is also working to bring the universities and colleges into land conservation in New England, and are interested in working with the A.T.
- High Peaks Alliance has also created a footpath connecting mountains, trails, and communities. It went beyond the A.T., uses multi-use areas but is primarily a walking trail, and has economic benefits as well
- The footpath itself from Georgia to Maine is almost entirely protected within a tight corridor. But the broader landscape beyond it encompasses so many different communities and people with different values. It's both a challenge and a beauty to balance those different interests.

Northern A.T. Landscape Partnership Values and Data – Peter McKinley, The Wilderness Society

We'll now focus on the Northern AT Landscape Partnership

- At the NATLP meeting several weeks ago, we talked about creating more maps. We didn't want to repeat mapping and we wanted to frame our mapping in terms of a range of values.
 - We have defined these values in a draft values document being distributed now.
- Not everyone will thru-hike, and there are so many different values derived from the landscape around the trail – and these things require large landscapes beyond the protected corridor
 - This broader realm includes working forests
- We convened a GIS team to compile existing datasets and package them – we don't want to spend a long time creating new maps, we want to use what we have
- We've connected each of the six values from the draft document to different GIS data layers. The values are:
 - Viewsheds

- Forestlands and Farms
- Natural Resources
- Recreation and Public Access
- Communities, Connections, and Human Health
- Historic and Cultural Sites
- Examples of data used by The Wilderness Society at the scale of the entire AT:
 - Index of Ecological Integrity, and a subset of the best un-impacted large patches
 - Species richness – under climate change, species richness may move north and require corridors
 - GAP analysis and identifying where areas are already protected
 - Creating an online tool along the entire extent to look at different values – can parse it out by any segment or maintaining club area to identify priority areas
- Questions and Discussion:
- How important is the ecological integrity that surrounds the A.T.?
 - The integrity of the trail is part of a greater corridor. It's within a landscape that is more intact and in more resilient areas than surrounding areas. It's in an above-average connectivity area.
- Could there be a collaborative public map effort for hikers to identify their favorite viewsheds, areas, etc?
 - In the high peaks area, we are working on an “atlas” of the A.T. landscape and looking at the range of values.
 - Through social media, we could do a web-based platform along the entire trail
- Does the League of Conservation Voters take interest in this database?
 - Could be a good avenue to pursue

Feedback on the NATLP Draft Values Document

Looking at the last page of the values document, we would like to get thoughts about the 'buckets' of values we've identified. Have we captured values well? Are there things we should change?

- As part of the “Recreation and Public Access,” are we looking to spread the impact of high usage – can we encourage people to use side trails so the use gets spread out? The A.T. is the iconic feature, but there are many many other special places. We want to educate people about other opportunities.
- For context: At the last meeting, there was a discussion about whether to continue having the AT as the organizing feature.
 - Are we focusing on the landscape or the trail itself?
 - There are important values beyond the AT, but the prevailing thinking was that we would still use the A.T. as a focal point.
- The values listed mirror specific values that Benton MacKaye identified back in the 1920s.
 - MacKaye identified 4 features: the trail, feature camps, community camps, food and forest camps. He envisioned a realm that included communities and economic values.
 - So this is nothing new - Benton MacKaye's thinking included all of these values.

- He laid this all out in an article titled “An Appalachian Trail, A Project in Regional Planning” in October 1921
- The trail was there before the big national parks and protected areas that it goes through. So there’s a long history of creating a cultural support system and large public space projects around the trail.
- His vision is still very relevant today
- Under community connections and human health – we should also include economic data for towns. This data is often correlated with public health but is important to look at.
 - High Peaks Initiative is looking at doing an economic impact analysis in a small areas. We want data on how much these projects actually do boost local economies.
 - We should also include existing data on income levels, etc.

Examples from Maine Mountain Collaborative – Bryan Wentzell, Maine Mountain Collaborative

- We can use conservation as a tool to achieve economic and other goals
- Maine Mountain Collaborative is a new entity: a coalition of statewide, regional, and national organizations seeking to accelerate and innovate land conservation.
- The group came together 4 years ago..
- Three key factors motivated the creation of this partnership:
 - Public funding is decreasing
 - Land sales are going to start going up in this area in the near future because of land investors selling
 - New science and data is coming out that is showing a bright spotlight on this area in terms of climate resiliency on a national scale
- The Maine Mountain Collaborative can serve as an “R&D lab” for land conservation – the collaborative can absorb risk for projects that individual organizations couldn't take on themselves
- This wild landscape is sandwiched between the largest metro regions in the U.S. and Canada. The land is mostly private and unprotected – there’s no plan around it, it’s just been preserved as an ‘accident’ of history
- This area actually has importance on a national and global scale
 - Looking at Temperate Mixed Forest worldwide – the northern Appalachian Acadian ecosystem is one of the largest intact temperate mixed forest areas in the world!
- The collaborative produced a report explaining why this region is so special and important and is producing a video to spotlight this area
- Received a transaction fund grant from Jesse B. Cox and have protected 3,000 acres so far, aiming for 6-8,000 acres
- One project is the Exemplary Forestry Initiative:
 - Combine private investment with philanthropy
 - Encourage management with “exemplary forestry standards” developed by the New England Forestry Foundation

- Would have a specific type of conservation easement that would require maintaining specific stocking levels before commercial harvesting can continue
- Led by Jerry Bley (Creative Conservation) and Alec Giffen (NEFF)
- Working with several partners and trying to figure out a system
- Questions: How is NEFF structuring exemplary forestry standards as compared to existing standards (FSC/SFI)?
 - Trying to simplify them and come up with a one-page guideline for sustainability

Discussion and Conclusion

- We try to operate with both lenses of how projects can benefit the trail and the communities.
- On the ground, look for local projects that can be attached to this larger vision and national landscape – that is a successful strategy for getting funding.
- Feel free to email any panelists about specific or low-level project questions. They are happy to help answer questions about what is possible and what partnerships can ask for. Find contact info in the attendee list in the gathering folders.
- NATLP is in the process of developing an RCPP pre-proposal and would like to have more people involved, so feel free to reach out.
- The challenge in putting forth a new RCPP pre-proposal is to have a big vision but to also have **tangible projects in the queue**. We need to be able to show that we have projects available as match.
 - So we're looking for projects that are in the process of moving forward. The projects need to speak to specific NRCS values.
 - **If you have any projects in the works over the next few years, we want to hear from you.**