

Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect Framework

DRAFT –Part 2: Partnership Charter – DRAFT 2.1

A. Introduction

This document summarizes how the various organizations, agencies, and individuals will work together to implement the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect.

This Partnership Charter includes:

- A brief summary of the history of the Appalachian Trail and the role of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in its creation, development, and management (See Part B: About the Appalachian Trail)
- The mission that the parties involved in the A.T. Mega-Transect intend to accomplish and the broad questions the program is meant to answer (See Part C: The Mission and Goals of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect)
- Basic tenets for working together (See Part D: Core Values of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect)
- A working description of how Partners can work together and what benefits they will derive from working together (See Part E: Partnership Agreement: What Membership Means)
- A process and mechanism for identifying environmental factors to be monitored, conducting monitoring, and managing and analyzing data (See Part F: Technical Environmental Monitoring Guidelines)
- A process for communicating among Partners, and for communicating results to the public (See Part G: Communicating among Partners and Communicating with the Public)

This agreement is not a legal document, but an agreement to work together towards a common goal.

B. About the Appalachian Trail and its Environment

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail: The Appalachian National Scenic Trail was the first National Scenic Trail designated by Congress in the National Trails System Act of 1968. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST) is a unit of the National Park Service (NPS), but it is unique in that it is cooperatively managed by the National Park Service, the USDA Forest Service (USFS), many state agencies and Trail clubs, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

The Trail itself is a long-distance footpath extending 2,175 miles from Maine to Georgia. It crosses 14 states, 6 National Park units, 8 National Forests, one National Wildlife Refuge, three Tennessee Valley Authority properties, one Smithsonian Institute property, and more than 60 state gameland, forest or park units. The Trail is thus protected along more than 99 percent of its course by federal or state ownership of land or rights-of-way: it has often been likened to an emerald necklace, with the Trail corridor of protected lands acting as the thread linking the park and forest emeralds together.

Formerly the Appalachian Trail Conference, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is a private, nonprofit, volunteer-based organization founded in 1925 to coordinate the completion of the Appalachian Trail as well as its continued maintenance. In 1984, the National Park Service and the USDA Forest Service delegated the majority of the management activities for the Trail to ATC through official cooperative agreements. Similar agreements exist with most of the state agencies along the Trail. ATC and its 30 member Trail-maintaining clubs currently protect and oversee the maintenance of the trail in close partnership with their state and federal agency partners. Annually, more than 5,000 volunteers contribute nearly 200,000 hours of labor on the Appalachian Trail. The system by which the federal, state and private partners share and coordinate responsibilities and resources is referred to as the A.T. Cooperative Management System.

The body of the Trail is provided by the lands it traverses, and its soul is in the living stewardship of the volunteers and partners of the Appalachian Trail Cooperative Management System.

-- Definition of the Appalachian Trail, from the "Appalachian Trail Management Principles" (1977)



Figure 1. Map of Appalachian National Scenic Trail, stretching from Maine to Georgia.

Environmental Context of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail: The vast Appalachian Mountain range stretches across the eastern portion of North America, in a north-south alignment from Alabama in the United States to New Brunswick in Canada. This ancient chain of mountains has been – and continues to be – a primary factor in the natural history of eastern North America. Its gradients in elevation, latitude, and moisture have allowed species to survive through dramatic changes in climate and landscapes. As a result, the Appalachian Mountains of today hold one of the richest assemblages of temperate zone species in the world, and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail contains one of the greatest levels of natural diversity of any unit of the National Park System.

The Appalachian Trail’s environmental story is not limited to its biological wonders. The Trail’s protected lands anchor the nation’s Eastern Forest block. Its 270,000-acre land base protects the headwaters of many rivers and streams in the eastern United States. In addition, the Trail is perfectly situated to gauge the air quality of the region by virtue of its location atop the Appalachian Mountains.

Threats to the environment of the Appalachian Trail – from development to recreational misuse, acid precipitation, exotic species, and climate change – represent threats to the health and well-being of many Americans who live in the 14 states through which the Trail passes. In essence, the Trail and its protected corridor provide a barometer to gauge changes in the environment that directly impact more than 120 million Americans.

Perhaps most important of all, the Appalachian Trail provides (by virtue of its iconic status and geographic expanse) an incredible opportunity to engage the American public in understanding changes in their environment. By carrying out sound science as part of a greater whole, engaging people in monitoring activities, and “telling the story” of the health of the environment along the Appalachian Trail, scientists and land managers can use the Trail to explain to people how changes to the environment impact them, in a context that really matters.

C. Mission and Goals of the “Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect”

Our mission is to establish the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect to monitor and understand changes in the environment so that we can effectively manage natural resources, foster an appreciation for nature and conservation, and “tell the story” of the health of the Appalachian Trail and surrounding lands to visitors, neighbors, and the American public.

The goals of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect are to:

- **Monitor** – Collect and synthesize existing and new data on key indicators of environmental health from agencies, organizations, researchers, and citizen scientists
- **Understand** – Transform data into knowledge about the status and trends through analysis, synthesis, and modeling, and

- **Inform and Engage** – Share this knowledge by engaging, educating, and involving decision makers, stakeholder organizations, and citizens in managing and protecting the A.T. environment to attain the goals of existing natural resource and environmental legislation and make sound decisions for positive change.

To achieve these goals, the Mega-Transect Partners will develop programs and projects, consistent with their respective missions, that collectively achieve the following objectives:

1. Adaptive Management and Science: Collecting and synthesizing information about environmental conditions and visitor experience on the Appalachian Trail will enable the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Appalachian Trail Park Office, and other Trail management partners to manage visitor use effectively and protect the Trail's wealth of natural resources.
2. Public Policy and Action: Issues such as air and water quality impact the health of all individuals, as well as the integrity of our landscapes and ecosystems. Solutions for many of these issues lie in the arena of public policy. By assembling a coherent data set at a continental scale, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Appalachian Trail Park Office, and other Trail management partners can better gauge the impact of public policies on the A.T. Furthermore, by sharing data with partners that can reach out to different constituencies, the partners can ensure that good scientific information is provided to government agencies, other organizations, and the American public in a way that can contribute positively to public dialogue about the environment.
3. Public Engagement and Education: By involving citizens in monitoring programs for this public resource and by "telling the story" of the health of the Appalachian Mountains, the program Partners will engage citizens in the protection of the environment of the Appalachian Trail, capture the imagination of the public, and ultimately raise environmental awareness.

D. Core Values of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect

1. Commitment: *We are individually and collectively committed to understanding and taking appropriate follow-up action to protect the environmental health of the Appalachian Trail.*
2. Volunteer Ethic and Citizen Engagement: *To the greatest extent possible, volunteers and citizens can and should be involved in environmental monitoring efforts along the Appalachian Trail. Hands-on participation is one of the best means of engaging, educating, and empowering citizens. It is also a core tradition of the Appalachian Trail, which was built and has been maintained and managed by private volunteer citizens for the past 80 years for the benefit of the American public.*
3. Partnership: *Our combined efforts will have more impact than our individual efforts. By working together, we can develop a comprehensive picture of the health of the Appalachian Mountains and communicate it effectively to the American public and*

- policy-makers. The A.T. has been managed and maintained for more than 80 years by a unique association of agency and non-governmental organizations working together as Partners in the Appalachian Trail Cooperative Management System. The Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect will continue this culture and tradition.
4. Open Access: *Our Partnership is based on a commitment to pool and share information and resources.* The Partners promote free and open access to data, information, and knowledge for conservation purposes. Partners commit to making their data available to other Partners, subject to the guidelines provided in the attached **Intellectual Property Rights Agreement**, which is intended to ensure that contributors have the full right to attribution for any use of their data or knowledge and the right to ensure that the integrity of their contribution is preserved. Users of data are expected to comply, in good faith, with the terms of use specified by the contributors.
 5. High Quality Data Gathering, Analysis, and Reporting: *Partners commit to collecting quality data.* Partners engaged in monitoring along the Appalachian Trail are encouraged to follow the standards outlined in the **Technical Environmental Monitoring Guidelines**. Data provided by any partner may be used for reporting to government agencies, other organizations, and to the American public. High quality data, regardless of source, are more desirable and are more supportive of the goals of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect program. The Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect management team reserves the right to determine which datasets are incorporated into any reports.
 6. Importance of Scale, Continuity, and Consistency: *We commit to work together to develop a common set of environmental indicators to the greatest extent possible.* The significance and power of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect is largely a result of the Trail's geographic expanse and proximity to a significant percentage of the American public. To the greatest extent possible, a minimum set of common environmental indicators should be monitored on all Appalachian Trail lands, regardless of ownership, so that data can be analyzed and reported on a continental mega-transect scale. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Appalachian Trail Park Office will facilitate acquisition of research permits from all land-managing agencies to assist in this effort.

E. Partnership Agreement: What Membership Means

The Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect is not a legal entity, but rather a Partnership of organizations and individuals. Members may focus their efforts on scientific endeavors, education, community involvement, or all of the above. Any organization can become a member Partner of the Mega-Transect, as follows.

1. Basic membership definitions

Potential members or "Partners" include all agencies, organizations, educational institutions, community groups, and individuals who are interested in monitoring,

analyzing and reporting data on any aspect of the environment along the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the National Park Service Appalachian Trail Park Office, the National Park Service Northeast Temperate Network, the USDA Forest Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey are the organizing Partners and the coordinating entities for the Program.

2. Membership benefits and privileges

All Partners enjoy the full range of privileges and responsibilities, further described below. Agencies, organizations, educational institutions, and individuals may apply for membership at no cost. All Partners will be expected to agree in writing to the Charter.

- All Partners will have access to Program reports and analysis via the NBII Portal for the Appalachian Trail.
- All Partners will have access to monitoring protocols.
- All Partners will be able to communicate directly with each other via the NBII Portal for the Appalachian Trail.
- All Partners will have access to a web-based, searchable directory of agencies, organizations, educational institutions, and individuals interested in monitoring the environment of the Appalachian Trail.
- All Partners will be able to access and exchange raw data with other Partners, as well as access and view data from selected external sources for the entire Appalachian Trail, subject to the Intellectual Property Rights Agreement, the Technical Framework, and any restrictions imposed by the original owner of the data.
- All Partners will have access to the data management and storage tools identified in the Technical Framework for the different environmental indicators. Such access and use will be negotiated and facilitated by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and Appalachian Trail Park Office.
- All Partners will be able to compete for funding for environmental monitoring projects provided by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. Partners will also be provided with information on grant opportunities from other sources. Partners pursuing funding for projects will be expected to agree to the Technical Framework for Monitoring and the Intellectual Property Rights Agreement.
- All Partners will be encouraged to share their findings to the public through publication in scientific journals, popular magazines, newsletters, and other publications, as appropriate.

3. Member responsibilities

All Partners agree to:

- Commit to the Goals and Core Values of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect as described in this Charter
- Comply with the Charter and the Intellectual Property Rights Agreement
- Identify a Program liaison and make the appropriate contact information available via the Appalachian Trail Environmental Monitoring Program directory
- Conduct their projects and monitoring activities with as much consistency as possible with the guidelines of the Technical Framework

Partners are encouraged to:

- Participate both in general Partnership activities and meetings as well as contribute, to the degree possible, substantial work towards the mission and goals of the Appalachian Mega-Transect
- Comply with the Technical Framework for Monitoring
- Submit their monitoring and/or education and outreach project to the Appalachian Trail MegaTransect coordinator within a year of joining the program. The monitoring project description should include the indicators and geographical breadth the Partner intends to cover. The coordinator will provide a template for submission of a monitoring and/or education and outreach project. The coordinator and the organizing Partners, as appropriate, will review the plan to evaluate any overlap with existing activities and opportunities for coordination.
- Provide annual reports on project status to the Mega-Transect Coordinating Team
- Decision-Making

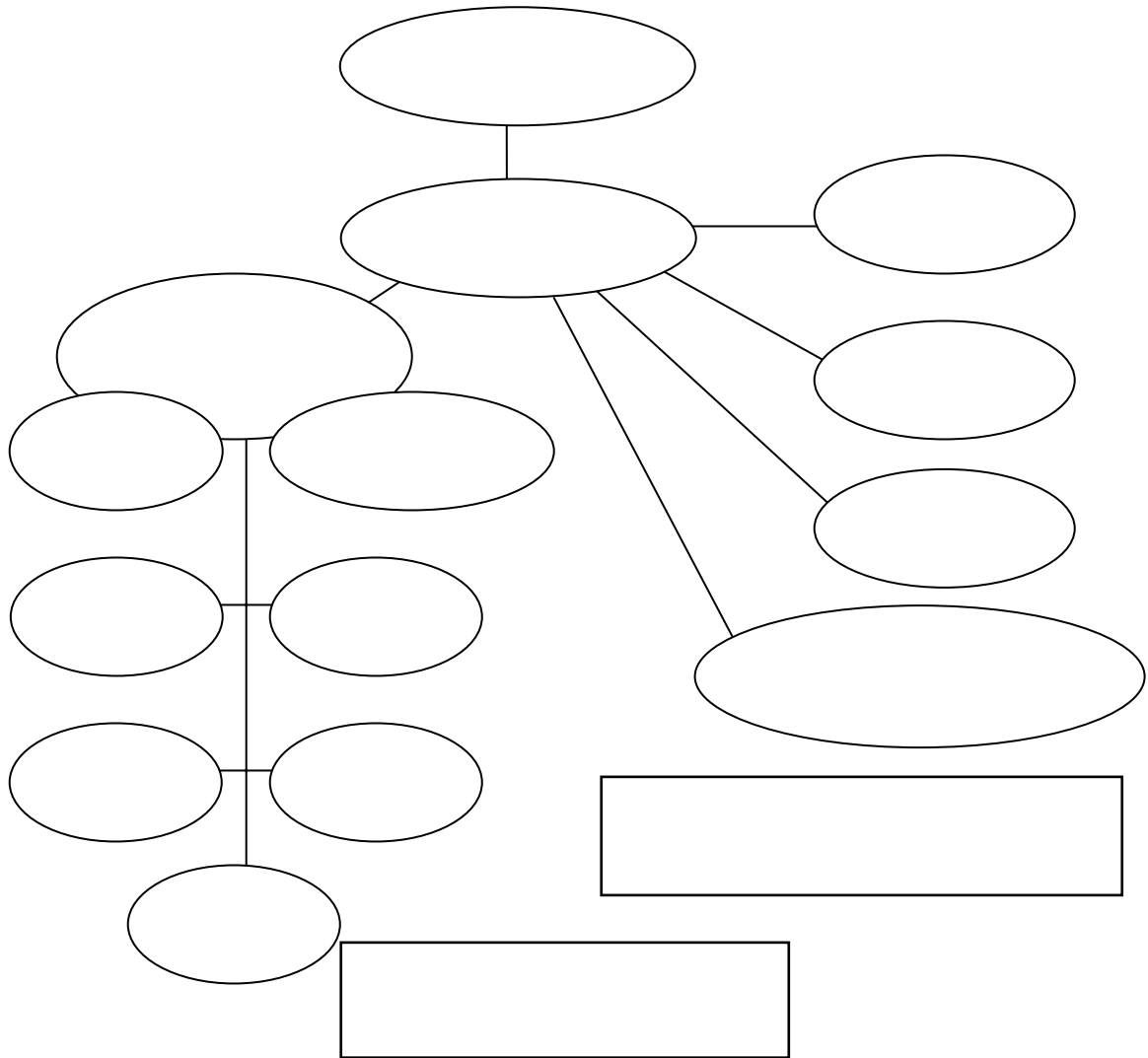
The basic structure for the AT Mega Transect is shown below. Decisions and recommendations of the Steering Committee, the Mega-Transect Coordination Team, Working Group Support Committee, and other committees and sub-committees will be by consensus to the greatest extent possible. In general, the leadership of each group will be responsible for reporting up, as well as reporting out to the other members of that group plus any other potentially interested parties.

Decisions will be made through a relatively informal process designed to build consensus and resolve conflicts at the lowest possible level. To that end:

- Decisions will be made at the field or local level, by discussion and negotiation among the involved parties, to the greatest extent possible. Project-specific agreements should be used to identify and resolve issues prior to project initiation.
- Decisions that cannot be resolved at the field or local level may be reviewed by a team assigned by the Mega Transect Coordination Team.

- Decisions that cannot be resolved by the Coordination Team may be referred to the Steering Committee for guidance.

Organizational Structure
of the Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect



F. Technical Guidelines for Monitoring

All Partners agree to follow, to the greatest extent possible, the attached Technical Environmental Monitoring Guidelines. Partners pursuing projects that are primarily intended for education or community engagement purposes will be requested to review and consider potential application of these guidelines. However, these Partners will not be required to follow the guidelines.

G. Communications among Partners and Communicating Results to the Public

1. Communications among Partners: Partners should make every effort to communicate freely with each other, subject to provisions of the Intellectual Property Rights Agreement. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Appalachian Trail Park Office, the Northeast Temperate Network, and the U.S. Geological Survey will facilitate frequent meetings among Partners that share common goals for monitoring, analyzing, and reporting on Trail-wide environmental indicators through the NBII Appalachian Trail Portal.
2. Involving Volunteers: The Appalachian Trail Mega-Transect Project will involve volunteers, citizens, and students in all phases of environmental monitoring, with the specific objective of engaging and educating people about the Appalachian Trail, science, and protection of the environment.
 - Protocols should be designed to the greatest extent possible to provide an active participatory role for volunteers, citizens, and students in data collection, data management, and data analysis.
 - Volunteer participation will be highlighted wherever possible in any public information that is disseminated about an environmental monitoring project.
3. Communicating Results: Data analysis and reporting should answer monitoring questions in a manner that is not only helpful to resource managers, but that aids the public in understanding the value of the natural resources of the Appalachian Trail and the threats to those resources.
 - Analysis and reporting of data should be done at an appropriate local, regional, or national scale, with a conscious effort to connect and make the data relevant to the public at a national scale.
 - Reports and supporting documentation, as appropriate, should be provided to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which will assume responsibility for working in Partnership with researchers to convey and explain the significance of the research to the public. Other organizations that focus on education and outreach may participate in this role as well.
4. Relationship with other Appalachian Trail programs: The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Appalachian Trail Park Office will, to the greatest extent possible, integrate and increase awareness of this program with its other programs such as trail assessments, corridor monitoring, and educational and outreach initiatives. In doing so, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy will encourage volunteers, citizens, and students to participate in monitoring activities and facilitate goals of educational institutions and citizen groups associated with the Trail.