



March 19, 2020

Chairman Richard Shelby
U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20510

Chairman Nita Lowey
U.S. House Committee on
Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Kay Granger
U.S. House Committee on
Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Lowey and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger,

On behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), our members and volunteers, we respectfully urge that Congress consider the needs of rural communities that are going to be hit hard by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these communities are in the early stages of building small businesses focused on serving the outdoor recreation community. Many Trail-related businesses will not survive the impact of travel restrictions and attempts to limit the spread of COVID-19. Economic stimulus legislation under development now in Congress needs to generate the necessary income and workforce development for rural communities to recover quickly.

For perspective, the Bureau of Economic Analysis released a report last year that states outdoor recreation accounts for 2.2 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, supports 5.2 million American jobs, and contributes, nationally, \$778 billion in economic output. The ATC fears that without stimulus funds, we will see many of these operations close with great impact to rural communities. Outdoor recreation is rural economic development.

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, measuring roughly 2,193 miles in length. The Trail travels through 14 states (and 88 counties) along the crests and valleys of the Appalachian Mountain Range, from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain, Georgia, to the northern terminus at Katahdin, Maine. This region of the U.S. is rich in scenic, cultural, and historic resources, and offers habitat for numerous unique species. The Trail traverses six other units of the National Park System, eight National Forests, and 74 parcels of state forest, park, and

game land, enabling these communities to link to a national network as they utilize public lands as economic engines.

The ATC's first and foremost responsibility is to ensure the proper management and maintenance of the A.T. and access to some of the most significant recreation lands in the eastern United States. This is possible only through a cooperative management system involving 31 maintaining clubs, 6,000 volunteers, and federal and state land management agencies. The National Park Service (NPS) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) infrastructure, such as shelters, roads, connector trails, and bridges are essential access points for the Trail.

Currently, the deferred maintenance needs of our nation's public lands are immense—more than \$20 billion when the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Education are included. The most recent, and outdated, estimates show 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. This estimate does not include the total needs of the units the Trail intersects, such as Great Smoky National Park, the most-visited National Park in the nation. ATC, like many National Trails non-profit partners, works closely with several Service Corps and employs crews that are well-positioned to address the shovel-ready deferred maintenance projects. These organizations hire numerous staff from local communities that work to enhance the outdoor recreation resources their communities rely on to draw in tourism dollars.

The needs of rural gateway communities are not unlike the needs of communities without direct access to public lands. However, the ability of gateway communities to draw people to local, state, and federal public land units provides an incredible opportunity to get people out and working again as well as attract those who, for safety's sake, had to stay away. Many communities along National Trails also serve as vital partners to provide public land interpretation and education and have invested in infrastructure aimed at reaching diverse visitors to their regions.

As Congress formulates additional stimulus legislation, we urge it to address impacts to rural, outdoor-related business by:

- Making funding available to hire staff members and local contractors who will address deferred maintenance-related assets on public lands;
- Making funding available for outdoor recreation/conservation stewardship-related capital construction in public land gateway communities, including visitor centers, roads, and bridges;
- Supporting the certification and training for those engaging in conservation stewardship career development via public land agencies and their management partners;
- Promoting the recovery of place-based tourism, particularly related to outdoor recreation;

Outdoor recreation is rural economic development. Providing for the proper care and stewardship of our conserved lands and resources is essential to securing the long-term viability of the communities along National Trails. Responding to the current pandemic and resulting economic crisis will require the federal, state, and local governments to think outside of the box and pull as many levers as possible to get Americans working again and to revive our dynamic outdoor recreation and rural economies.

If you have any questions, please contact ATC's Director of Federal Policy and Legislation, Brendan Mysliwiec, at bmysliwiec@appalachiantrail.org or 207-370-0450. Thank you.

Signed,



Sandra Marra
President and CEO
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

CC: U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt
Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue
U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Lisa
Murkowski
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Ranking Member Joe
Manchin, III
ANST U.S. Senate Delegation
U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Ranking Member Rob Bishop
U.S. House ANST Caucus
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Vicki Christiansen
Deputy Director of the National Park Service Vela