



20 March 2018

Dear Board, Stewardship Council, and Advisory Circle Members and ATC Staff:

Three months into my position as the CEO/President of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, I am (finally) sitting down to report on our successes over the last three months.

Quite frankly, the past 12 weeks have been a whirlwind of getting to know the ATC staff at Harpers Ferry and in the regional offices; meeting with important allies and partners; getting acquainted with ATC's stalwart donors; nurturing new relationships with prospective supporters; handling several public speaking opportunities; and making the rounds to our federal partners, members of Congress and appointees in the current Administration.

In this report you will find a streamlined bullet-point list of *some* of the accomplishments ATC has achieved within a short period of time, along with a report from Laura Belleville, Vice President of Conservation and Trail Management Programs, which focuses on our impressive conservation programs and our achievements in managing the A.T.

This seems as good a time as any to take a moment to acknowledge ATC's exceptional and hard-working staff. In my time here, it has been gratifying to witness staff enthusiasm to evaluate what works and demonstrated willingness to explore new ways of executing our very important mission.

I am grateful for everyone's all-out efforts. As many of you know, I often point out that whenever a new leader comes into an organization, there is opportunity to refresh and reboot. My invitation to staff has been to take this moment to examine effectiveness, to make bold recommendations, and to make certain we are ready for the big successes ahead. And wow! The responses have been extraordinary. Thank you.

Right now, building the profile of the A.T. is one of my highest priorities as is restoring a healthy budget. Developing our message on the importance of the A.T. is essential as is inviting new members and donors, foundations and corporations to be part of our success. The two go hand in hand with the work we do. To the ATC Board, Advisory Circle and Staff, I thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suzanne Dixon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Suzanne Dixon
President & CEO

Progress & Accomplishments
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
January – March 2018

Overall Strategic Direction

- Identified three keywords to provide a contemporary description of ATC's Mission: **Educate, Protect, and Empower**. Full descriptions can be found at www.appalachiantrail.org/home/about-us
- Established overall direction to always talk about the importance of the A.T. corridor as one of the most important open-space land features in the eastern United States, with directives to tie in the human element of ATC's volunteers, the communities the Trail supports and, of course, the myriad of recreational users.
- Evaluated the workings of senior leadership to establish goals and guidelines for improving our work as a team. Adopted the RACI model to improve team coordination, a matrix that defines Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed roles.
- Developed 2018 action plans for each department.

Outreach by ATC CEO and Staff to Partners & Allies

- Presented a multi-media case study of ATC's landscape conservation program to the National Park Foundation's Friends Alliance. ATC was one of three organizations that gave presentations, out of nearly 150 attending NPS-affiliated organizations.
- Met with several trail clubs.
- Scheduled and conducted one-on-one meetings with DOI appointees.
- Scheduled a series of important meetings with varying departments of the National Park Service including the Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance program, the Heritage Area program, the International Travel division, Partnership program, lands and realty NPS staff, and NPS staff working on energy issues. Also met with U.S. Forest Service staff, national and regional levels.
- Made the rounds to important ally organizations to meet with executive leadership, including: The Trust for Public Lands, The Open Space Institute, The Public Lands Alliance, NatureServe, National Park Foundation, The Conservation Fund, Blue Ridge Parkway, the Garden Club of America, and others.
- Met with dozens of congressional members and federal agency leaders during Hike the Hill week. (See below.)

Advocacy & Government Relations

- Conducted over 50 meetings with members of Congress and federal agency leaders, joined by regional directors and conservation staff, 10 Next Generation Advisory Council members and principals from Monument Policy during Hike the Hill.
- Continue to promote reauthorization and funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), appropriations to address deferred maintenance, wildfire disaster funding, conservation programs that engage veterans and young Americans, and the Pipeline Fairness and Transparency Act (important to siting natural gas pipelines.)
- Developed state-by-state fact sheets with strong infographics promoting the economic benefits of the A.T. and volunteer contributions. Prepared customized maps for members with the A.T. in their districts.
- Continue to cultivate the A.T. Caucus. Approximately 20 House members have joined.
- Upcoming caucus cultivation plans include hosting a breakfast meeting, a congressional staff field trip to Harpers Ferry and hiking a part of the A.T., and organizing a photo exhibit to be staged this Fall on Capitol Hill.

Marketing & Communications

- Produced and launched a one-minute introductory video that is being used on ATC's homepage and in public presentations.
- Also launched two *My AT Story* videos, which had been in the works, including:
 - a video which features the A.T. Community of Damascus, Virginia and
 - a video on our landscape conservation initiative which features Sandi Marra and Ron Tipton.
- Finalized the 2018 Marketing and Communications plan, with focus on strengthening and leveraging ATC's brand, educating the empowering the public to be good stewards, connecting and engaging more people, and increasing internal synergy among ATC's departments.
- In addition, ATC was quoted in *E&E News*, an important Hill-focused publication, on our stance regarding natural gas pipelines, and ATC's meetings during Hike the Hill were mentioned in *Politico*.
- **OF NOTE: the *My AT Story* campaign has generated 365,000 views.**

Publications & Sales

- Established a retail relationship with Amazon to sell selected merchandise. Retail sales went live March 7th.

- Improved retail processes for midlevel trade customers to order merchandise. Improvements include: electronic order forms, a special-access page on the store website and a referral page for local consumers.
- Revised the central Virginia and Massachusetts-Connecticut guide maps.

Development

- ATC's CEO and staff met one-on-one with current major donors and several perspective funders including the Doris Duke Foundation, Pew Charitable Trust, and National Park Foundation
- A new funder to ATC has committed to fund a photo exhibit on Capitol Hill.
- ATC was featured in *Philanthropy Insider* regarding a gift from the Volgenau Foundation.
- Mark Saari assumed the interim director position of Membership and Development following Tiffany Lawrence's departure, co-leading with Suzanne. ATC is recruiting a Vice President of Development and a Major Gifts Officer as Marie Uehling retires this week.
- Additionally, Roseann Abdu assumed the position of department operations manager.
- Currently conducted an analysis of development protocols.

Operations

- Opened an office in D.C., within the Wilderness Society offices in a wing that supports other conservation groups including the Lands Conservation Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Outdoor Heritage, etc.
- Executed and installed a much-needed new security system at Harpers Ferry HQs.
- Researched and developed a plan to maximize use of the upper floor at Harpers Ferry HQs.
- NetSuite and Charity Engine are undergoing scrutiny for the functionality and staff will be provided additional training.

Human Resources

- Implemented a successful transition to ADP for Payroll & HR and will continue to roll out additional modules
- Completed Open Enrollment for 2018. An increase in health insurance was kept to a minimum average of 5%
- Transitioned to a new Benefit Broker
- Completed the 403(b) Census, Plan Review & Compliance for 2017.

Conservation Report from Laura Belleview

January – March 2018

Effective Stewardship

- The *thru hiking* season has kicked off. ATC is working to make Amicalola Falls State Park (AFSP) the "preferred" starting point for Georgia Northbound (NOBO) thru-hikers. So far 92% of thru-hike registrants on A.T. CAMP are indicating an AFSP start.
- *Thru-hike* registrations are down 2%, YTD for 2018 from the record 2017 registration. On-Trail counts will help confirm if that is a decrease in NOBOs or a decrease in registrations. Deep South staff continue to offer off-Trail "How to Hike the A.T." workshops and on-Trail "How to Hike the A.T." 3-day courses, which are self-supporting.
- The 2018 Ridgerunner season began with training in late January with Boots on the ground February 15 in GA and March 1 in the Smokies.
- ATC is working with Georgia Appalachian Trail Ambassadors, Georgia Ridgerunners are also offering twice daily "Start Well" workshops at AFSP, through the end of the RR season. The workshops are open to all hikers but focus on providing essential info to NOBOs to both help them have a successful hike and attempt to assure they leave the A.T. better than they find it.
- The design of the Damascus Trail Center continues to progress. We have arrived at a design for the building and are working on exhibit design. Plans were shared at the recent Southern Partnership Meeting.
- ATC has developed a full inventory of identified hazard trees at overnight night sites in Maine in a shareable online database. Assessments have identified 1,112 trees that need follow-up with 349 rated to be removed and 763 rated to be monitored.

Proactive Protection

- Mountain Valley Pipeline. Virginia staff is monitoring the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) right-of-way clearing. ATC has decided not to join a lawsuit against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) or the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) based on three strategic considerations:
 - ATC has more value in the ultimate outcome of the MVP siting if we retain our access to federal partners. As a plaintiff, our dialogue would undoubtedly be curtailed.
 - ATC continued work on energy siting policy – our work with the current Administration and congressional members – would likely be restricted.
 - The likelihood of winning this lawsuit is slim, and the financial and social costs of engaging in a lawsuit are steep.
- Mountain Valley Pipeline. Meanwhile, National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106) consultation for MVP continues under a Programmatic Agreement. APPA and ATC have proposed revegetation of the pipeline ROW on non-forest lands in view from key Trail vistas and a minor relocation to move the Trail off Pocahontas Road.

- ATC v. Lower Towamensing Township zoning appeal - County Court decision. ATC, supported by the Appalachian Mountain Club, filed a lawsuit regarding a zoning permit for a development adjacent to the trail because ATC was denied party status at the zoning hearing. Carbon County Court of Common Pleas ruled that the ATC was properly denied party status in the matter by the Zoning Hearing Board of Lower Towamensing Township and, therefore, had no right to appeal the decision favoring Blue Mountain Resort's project. The court determined that A.T. interests were adequately represented by the NPS staff who participated in the hearing. ATC is evaluating an appeal of this decision given that it may set precedence for future cases.
- Landscape Conservation Partnership. Dennis hired Anne Baker to help coordinate communications for the Landscape Conservation Partnership. He is also developing criteria for a grants program with Volgenau funding that will support land acquisition and capacity building in priority areas. He is also preparing to host a Partnership Steering Committee meeting in early May.
- Science and Stewardship Conference. Planning is underway.
- Golden Winged Warbler Habitat. Improvements in Tennessee are nearly complete.
- Habitat Planning & Invasive Species. Planning is underway to address emerald ash borer and other 2018 habitat management priorities.
- Story Map. Work is underway with NatureServe and ESRI (GIS technology) to produce a data-driven map of the A.T. corridor to support landscape conservation efforts.

Engaged Partners

- Partnership Meetings. Four Regional Partnership Committee meetings are underway. Each meeting includes an A.T. Community Summit. Attendance at all meetings is strong.
- A.T. Community Designation. The Vernon, NJ A.T. Community designation ceremony is planned for April 29th.
- Volunteer Development. Leanna Joyner, director of Volunteer Relations, has been developing an approach to update our database. She also continues to work with APPA towards updated Volunteer Services Agreements. She is also planning for the Volunteer Leadership Meeting in August. Leanna is also working with APPA as NPS releases new sawyer program guidance. She is working to ensure all volunteers are aware of developments and proactively addressing concerns.
- Youth Crews. ATC is coordinating all NPS funding for five A.T. youth crews in 2018.

Broader Relevancy

- Education. Julie Judkins supported a Forest for Every Classroom workshop with 19 teachers and partners in northern Georgia.
- Next Generation. Next Gen council members have participated in several ATC organized events and meetings including Hike the Hill and Regional Partnership Committee meetings.
- Training. Ridgerunner training in the south included a successful diversity, equity, and inclusion session this year. ATC staff are discussing ways to incorporate it in other regional trainings.

- Affinity Groups: Over half of the 6 pilot groups have committed volunteer leads, and we are developing communication strategies and onboarding materials. Leads will be invited to participate in the Volunteer Leadership Meeting this August.

Operational Excellence

- Facilities Funding. Working with ATC and club facility leaders, APPA recently submitted funding requests for the FY20 annual Capital Plan for facilities related project needs. NPS funding managers have recommended over \$2.6 million dollars for consideration at the Washington Office level for approval. If approved, this would be a \$1.2 million increase from the current FY18 approved facility project funding level.
- NPS Funding. ATC is processing 2018 NPS funding agreements with plans to submit early in what is not a lengthened review process.