

April 15, 2010

**2010 Southern Partnership Meeting  
April 9-11, 2010  
Mountain Lake Hotel, Pembroke, VA**

Lenny Bernstein

**Background**

When it reorganized in 2005, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) divided into four regions (New England, Mid-Atlantic, Virginia, and the Deep South). The trail maintaining Clubs and their agency partners in each region formed a Regional Partnership Committee (RPC), which was charged with providing two-way communication between trail maintaining clubs, ATC's Stewardship Council (SC), and its Board of Directors. The SC was charged with assuring that ATC is carrying out its core mission of protecting the A.T. and recommending policies to achieve that mission. Since 2005, the SC's role has expanded to cover ATC's outreach efforts.

CMC is a member of the Deep South RPC, along with the four other ATC clubs in Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee. Our RPC meets twice a year, by itself in the Fall, and in a joint meeting with the Virginia RPC, known as the Southern Partnership Meeting (SPM), in the Spring. As part of the SPM, the Deep South RPC has its own meeting.

CMC has two RPC representatives, currently Lenny Bernstein and Don Walton. Don was unable to attend the 2010 SPM.

**Action Items for CMC from the 2010 SPM**

- The Virginia clubs will host the 2011 ATC Biennial Meeting and are asking for volunteers from other regions to lead hikes and help with other aspects of the meeting. This request will be put in the eNews. Virginia has developed a five minutes PowerPoint slide show introducing the meeting and distributed discs with copies at the SPM. Les Love has agreed to my showing this slide show during the social hour at CMC's Spring Picnic on April 24.
- The Forest Service is in the early stages of developing a new planning rule that will govern the way each of the 155 National Forests develops its management plans and is collecting public input on the content of the rule. This input will be used in the development of a draft rule, which will be made available for public comment. Since CMC's Conservation Committee has commented on Forest Service plans in the past, it may wish to review the

information that the Forest Service has made available on the web ([www.fs.fed.us/r8/planning/planningrule.php](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/planning/planningrule.php)) on its planning process.

- Bill Hodge of Tennessee Wild, an organization dedicated to protecting the wilderness areas in the Cherokee National Forest, discussed their plans to expand their activities to a broader set of southern wilderness areas. He hopes to hold a meeting on wilderness trail maintenance in Asheville in July, and would like participation from local trail maintaining clubs. CMC should consider whether it wishes to participate in this activity. I gave Hodge my card and will forward any information I get about Tennessee Wild's plans.

### **Information Items**

- Bob Almand, Chair of the ATC Board of Directors, gave a brief report on the state of ATC. Key points were:
  - ATC had a balanced budget for 2009 and projects a balanced budget for 2010. It is in better financial shape in 2010 and is in the process of filling some of the critical staff positions that have been vacant for lack of funds. A regional director for New England and an education specialist have been hired, and ATC expects to hire a Director for Marketing and Communications by year-end.
  - The Appalachian Trail Park Office (ATPO) is requesting about \$15 million in land and water conservation funds for 2011; \$6 million of these funds are for another payment on the Rocky Fork tract which adjoins the section of the A.T. that CMC maintains. Plans are underway to relocate the A.T. into this tract. This will be a major project for CMC's maintenance crews.
- Pam Underhill, Superintendent of the ATPO, reported on her office's activities.
  - She distributed copies of the National Park Conservation Association's State of the Park report on the A.T. This report can be found on the web at [www.npca.org/stateoftheparks/appalachian](http://www.npca.org/stateoftheparks/appalachian). The report highlights concerns such as the impact that energy development could have on the Trail, but goes on to complement the unique relationship that exists between the ATC and the ATPO, and recommends that we "celebrate the Appalachian Trail's remarkable private support."
  - She also distributed a one-page statement about the new "Guns in the Park" law. It reiterates that the law allows guns to be carried in national parks if local law allows them to be carried in adjacent lands. However, the law does not permit use of guns on national park land. The summary also points out the complexity of applying this law to the A.T., which passes through 14 states and a myriad of jurisdictions. I couldn't find Pam's one-pager on the web, but the firearms information on the ATPO website

<http://www.nps.gov/appa/parkmgmt/firearms-information.htm> contains the same information.

- In 2011, the ATC and ATPO will cooperate on a soil sampling project to measure acid deposition along the A.T. This project is part of a larger ATC effort called the MEGA-Transect that is aimed at developing long-term data on the environmental condition of the A.T.
  - Congress designated six new wilderness areas along the A.T. in the Washington/Jefferson National Forest in Virginia.
  - The Stimulus Bill included \$7.5 million to stabilize the rock slope along the A.T. at the Superfund site in Pennsylvania. This is the least attractive spot on the A.T. The ATPO also received \$800,000 for a variety of small projects.
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- Julie Judkins and John Odell of ATC's Southern Regional Office presented a summary of the work they have been doing to control invasive exotic plants on the A.T. in our area. CMC as an organization has not been involved in this effort, though some of our members have worked with Julie and John on inventorying and removing these pests.
  - Craig Miles, founder of AT Servants, a Christian organization serving the A.T. and thru hikers, presented an introduction to his organization. He thinks many of his members would like to volunteer on the A.T. ATC has asked them to volunteer through ATC's volunteer data base. CMC would be informed about any volunteers in our area and would have to decide how best to use them.
  - Chainsaw certification – The Forest Service summarized the policy it adopted in August 2009. I assume that CMC is aware of this policy.
  - Southern Terminus of the A.T. – The Pinhoti Trail is a 240-mile trail in Georgia and Alabama that connects to the Benton-MacKaye Trail 70 miles north of the A.T.'s current end at Springer Mountain. Using these two trails it would be possible to add 310 miles to an A.T. hike and extend it into Central Alabama. A group in Alabama has proposed moving the southern end of the A.T. to Alabama. Georgia ATC is vigorously opposed to such a move, and after considering their arguments, ATC's Stewardship Council recommended that the ATC Board of Directors adopt a resolution reaffirming Springer Mountain as the southern end of the A.T. The Board will consider this resolution at its May meeting.
  - Trail Maintainers' Advisory Forum – In response to complaints from some trail maintainers that with ATC's new organization they no longer had a voice in the management of the Conservancy, a proposal was developed to create a Trail Maintainers' Advisory Forum that would give representatives of the trail maintaining community more direct input to the Stewardship Council. The Deep South RPC voted in favor of this proposal, but the Virginia

and Mid-Atlantic RPCs were opposed to it – Virginia thought it unnecessary and Mid-Atlantic thought it would duplicate the function of the RPC. Since two of the four RPCs opposed the Forum it will not be formed. Another way will have to be found to address the complaints from trail maintainers.

- Listing the A.T. on the National Register of National Historic Sites – For several years ATC has been discussing whether it should attempt to have the A.T. listed as a National Historic Site. The benefit of such listing is that it would provide an additional level of protection for the A.T. The cost of such listing is that it could add another layer to the already complex procedures for obtaining approval for any modification of the Trail. There does not seem to be a general answer to the question of whether the benefits of listing outweigh the costs. Since listing is actually state-by-state, ATC is considering running a pilot program with listing in just one state. However, that option is not well-developed and it is likely to be some time before any decision is made.
- ATC has initiated a review of the strategic plan it developed as part of its 2005 reorganization. The RPCs will be asked to provide input later this year. I will keep CMC informed on this effort.
- Youth Summit – I attended an hour long discussion of youth involvement with the A.T. held after dinner on April 9. It was an exchange of ideas, not meant to generate decisions. It also was a chance for ATC to discuss the training program (Youth Summit) to be held on June 28-July 2 in New Hampshire. CMC will be represented at the Youth Summit by Jan Onan. I was disappointed in this discussion as it seemed to go over the same concerns I've heard every time the topic has been discussed.
- Konnerock – I did not attend the meeting on scheduling work for the Konnerock trail crew, but was assured that there was enough crew time to accommodate all requests for work.
- At the Deep South RPC meeting Morgan Sommerville reviewed ATC's land acquisition priorities in the Deep South, and his office's budget, staffing and strategic plan. Morgan anticipates a flat budget for 2011 and does not expect to be able to hire the additional staff envisioned in his strategic plan. The plan will be revised in the Fall to reflect budget realities.
- The Deep South RPC complained about the lack of communication from the Stewardship Council (SC) to the RPCs. Each RPC has a SC representative and that person is the main conduit for communications. I am the Deep South's representative on the SC and write a summary after each SC meeting. While the RPC members were appreciative of these summaries, they wanted something more formal from the SC.

- 5400 North Carolina A.T. license plates are currently in use and the program is generating over \$100,000 per year for ATC (\$20/plate). \$25,000 of these funds is given out each year in grants, about \$40,000 is set aside for land acquisition, and the balance is used to support ATC's Southern Regional Office.
- Future Meetings – The Fall Deep South RPC meeting will be held in Unicoi County, TN on October 2. The 2011 SPM will be held in North Carolina next May at a site to be picked by ATC Staff. In conjunction with the 2011 SPM meeting, the Deep South RPC will hold a Club Presidents' meeting to provide Club Presidents or their representatives with more information about ATC and give them a chance to interact with ATC Staff and each other. More information on the Club Presidents' meeting will be made available after the Fall RPC meeting.