



ATC Policy on Recreational User Fees

Adopted November 1, 2014 by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy Board of Directors

The unrestricted and unregimented experience for which the Trail is managed stands in direct contrast to the imposition of individual Recreation User Fees for hiking or camping. The 1981 Appalachian Trail *Comprehensive Plan* said it best: "Hiker regulations will be kept as unrestrictive as possible, and should be developed only to the extent they are proven necessary to protect the physical trail, its environment, and the interests of adjacent landowners" (Part II, Paragraph 6b) a footnote states, "In certain high-use areas along the Trail, the need for regulation has been demonstrated, and the managing partner will give these areas special attention." Over the subsequent 33-plus years, the vast volunteer contribution to the construction, maintenance, and administration of the A.T. has made Recreation User Fees largely unnecessary.

Before new Recreation User Fees are considered, the current volunteer-driven management system must be shown to be inadequately addressing significant impacts occurring to the cultural, natural, or experiential resources of the Appalachian Trail. If such is the case, Recreation User Fees will be the last consideration among all reasonable alternatives. Fee systems that leverage the existence of the Appalachian Trail for purposes not directly related to improving the Trail's resources or the visitor experience should be avoided. If fees are collected, the land manager should share financial information (amount collected and how expended) annually with other managing partners. The ATC strongly encourages any agency, state or federal unit to include the Conservancy and the relevant Appalachian Trail clubs in any discussions to justify any proposed fee, and in planning how fees are expended.

[Note: This policy does not pertain to Special Use Permit fees charged to outfitter-guide operations and other Special Uses.]

Statement of Policy

ATC is generally opposed to charging mandatory Recreation User Fees for hiking or for the use of campsites or shelters along the Appalachian Trail.

- 1) New fee proposals shall be discussed in advance by the A.T. management partnership – the land managing agencies, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and Appalachian Trail Clubs – well in advance of proposed implementation. Proposals should enjoy a broad consensus of support from that partnership. Before a fee system is implemented, other alternatives must be first identified, researched, considered, and shown to be inadequate.
- 2) If fees are charged, they shall:
 - a. Demonstrably and directly benefit the A.T. hiker at the affected location and/or remediate cultural or natural resource impacts at the affected location;
 - b. Be structured to maintain the highest level of freedom, spontaneity and maintaining the A.T. Experience for Trail users. See the ATC's 1997 Policy on the A.T. Experience and Non-Hiking Recreational Uses of Trail Lands for reference;
 - c. Be structured to include non-fee alternatives. For example, this may be in the form of a regulation allowing camping in undesignated, dispersed campsites, a "work for stay" policy at a fee site, or provision of non-fee overnight sites within a reasonable journey from the fee site; and
 - d. Be periodically reviewed and evaluated by A.T. management partners and the fee eliminated when it is no longer needed.