

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Dear AHS Supporters,

What a year 2020 was, full of challenges, yet also full of bright steps toward a better future. With your help, American Hiking was able to safely navigate a difficult year for small nonprofits and small businesses, coming out the other end strong.

American Hiking kicked off 2020 with another successful Hike the Hill® advocacy week in Washington, D.C., bringing together our 3rd class of NextGen Trail Leaders, and testifying before Congress. On the Hill, over 120 organizations and advocates fought for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the protection of trails and public lands. This year also witnessed the passage of one of the most important pieces of legislation for hikers in decades: The Great American Outdoors Act. This Act injects \$900 Million per year into conservation efforts, addresses long-standing public

lands maintenance needs, and improves recreational access for the communities that need it most. American Hiking also made sure that you had the tools necessary to make your voice heard in the 2020 Congressional and Presidential elections through our non-partisan Vote Public Lands campaign. Nationwide over the year, American Hiking supporters sent in nearly 4,000 individual messages to Congress, and our advocacy efforts reached more than 2.5 Million people. You are making your voice heard, and it's working.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged American Hiking. We had to cancel a number of Alternative Break trips, most Volunteer Vacation trips, and all in-person advocacy and trail work National Trails Day® events, which meant that trail service came to a temporary halt. Luckily, we were

able to successfully activate an extraordinary Alternative Break scholarship trip before the pandemic hit, awarded to Oakland University in Rochester, MI, who worked to preserve natural and cultural treasures in Mammoth Cave National Park, KY. If there are any silver linings to the pandemic, one may be that more people found a love of the outdoors and hiking as respite, bringing more strong advocates into the fold. Of course, the outdoors as a means of healing further highlights how important it is to fight for all to have safe, welcoming access to natural spaces.

This past year also witnessed a nationwide reckoning with another, much longer-running pandemic—systemic racism—and American Hiking turned inwardly as well to examine its unintended part in perpetuating racism and to set to work on an active role in combating it. You can read

more about our journey toward achieving justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in all we do [here](#).

We hope that this note finds you and yours healthy and hopeful. American Hiking is confident that, with your continued support, 2021 will see ever-increasing gains on our 2020 accomplishments and ever more creative nimbleness in our ability to connect the 44 Million-strong hiking community to what matters most, even during a pandemic.

Happy Hiking,



K E Van Waes

Kathryn (Kate) Van Waes
Executive Director
(she/her/hers)



Bradley Ellis, Esq.

Bradley J. Ellis,
Esq., Board Chair
(he/him/his)

2020 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY WINS

- ▶ [Great American Outdoors Act](#) signed into law.
- ▶ Executive Director, Kate Van Waes, [testified](#) before Congress on behalf of AHS and the trails community for trails and public lands funding.
- ▶ 120+ hikers, trail organizations, and public lands advocates participated in [Hike the Hill®](#) and witnessed the Senate pass the Great American Outdoors Act. Participants advocated for legislation that would better address justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, including the Transit to Trails and Outdoors for All Acts, and called for increased funding for trails.
- ▶ Inclusion of Recreational Trails Program, Outdoors for All Act, and increased funding for public lands in transportation legislation passed by the House of Representatives.
- ▶ Submitted [comments](#) to the Department of the Interior on proposed changes to electric bicycle use policy across public lands.

3,871 MESSAGES
from AHS Followers
Sent to Congress



2.5 MILLION +
People Reached
Through Advocacy

PASSAGE OF THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT: THE BIGGEST RECREATION AND CONSERVATION LEGISLATION IN 50 YEARS

In August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), one of the most impactful pieces of conservation and outdoor recreation legislation in decades, became law. For years, American Hiking and the hiking community advocated for full and permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and a comprehensive solution for addressing public lands' maintenance needs.

Together, we worked to address the public lands maintenance backlog and secure permanent conservation funding to expand access to the outdoors for all hikers, in local communities, parks, forests, and wildlife refuges across the country.

The entire outdoor and conservation community came together and made their voices heard in this collective effort.

American Hiking mobilized the hiking and trails community through hundreds of congressional visits during Hike the Hill®, sending thousands of messages to Congress, and activating our nearly 400,000 social media followers and the more than 44 million people who hike each year in the US.

American Hiking and a small coalition were instrumental in securing an inclusive public lands maintenance solution that included the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Education (the National Park Service was already included). Now that GAOA is law, we will work to ensure it is implemented to create new and improved hiking trails, expand equitable outdoor access, and conserve the public lands and open spaces we all love.



WHAT THE GAOA MEANS FOR HIKERS

- ▶ \$900 million in dedicated funding each year for conservation, including new trails and open spaces.
- ▶ More equitable access for communities that need it most.
- ▶ Improved recreation access at trails, campgrounds, visitor centers, and other sites by fixing long-standing maintenance needs.

2020 NEXTGEN TRAIL LEADERS

The 2020 class of NextGen Trail Leaders brought together passionate advocates in the outdoor community to speak out to elected officials and engage the millions-strong hiking community on the need to protect public lands and build more inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities. Trail

Leaders received first-hand advocacy experience at Hike the Hill®, shared their voice on social media, received professional development support, and joined in to educate the public through our #VotePublicLands campaign!



Lila Leatherman
(they/them)
@lilaleatherman



Atieno Ouma
(she/her)
@Cocoswagburgers



Janelle Paciencia
(she/her/ella)
@janelle_takesphotos



David Taft
(he/him)
@taftstagram



Lauren Wong
(she/her)
@yourwongandonly



In 2020, AHS relaunched our #VotePublicLands nonpartisan voter education and engagement effort providing members, supporters, partners, and the public access to easy-to-use resources to register to vote, check registration status, and request an absentee ballot/vote by mail. We also provided easy-to-digest educational materials on the vital public lands issues for which AHS advocated in 2020. NextGen Trail Leaders and others helped spread the word across social media and encourage the hiking community to make their voice heard by voting.



ALTERNATIVE BREAK



The Alternative Break program, a series of week-long trail service trips designed specifically for college students to give back during their spring break, kicked off in February. While the pandemic required American Hiking to cancel the majority of our scheduled on-the-ground stewardship events in 2020, we were able to activate four different university groups to dedicate their spring break to improve public lands.

A first time participant in the Alternative Break program, Oakland University, was awarded the 2020 Alternative Break Scholarship, which helps break down access barriers

to outdoor service work by providing monetary and gear support to schools interested in volunteering. Oakland University helped staff at Mammoth Cave National Park preserve the natural and cultural resources above and below ground for present and future generations' enjoyment.



"I'll never forget sitting around the campfire the last night of our ASB and going around the circle doing reflections for the week with the park manager and his wife. It was so special for everyone, and it really colored-in the picture of what we were doing down there."
- 2020 AB Volunteer

"One of my favorite memories was taking a before and after picture of our work and seeing how much progress we had made—it really showed the difference our work had made."
- 2020 AB Volunteer

NATIONAL TRAILS DAY®

Saturday, June 6, 2020, marked the 28th annual National Trails Day® (NTD), a day that historically brings together trail enthusiasts from around the nation to experience and support trails and hiking in communities across the country. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide social justice protests in public spaces and online, we

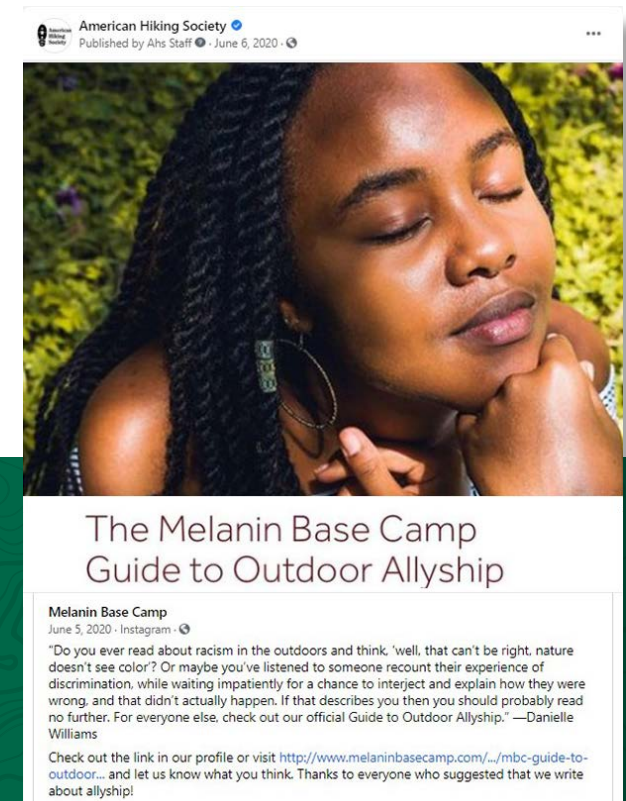
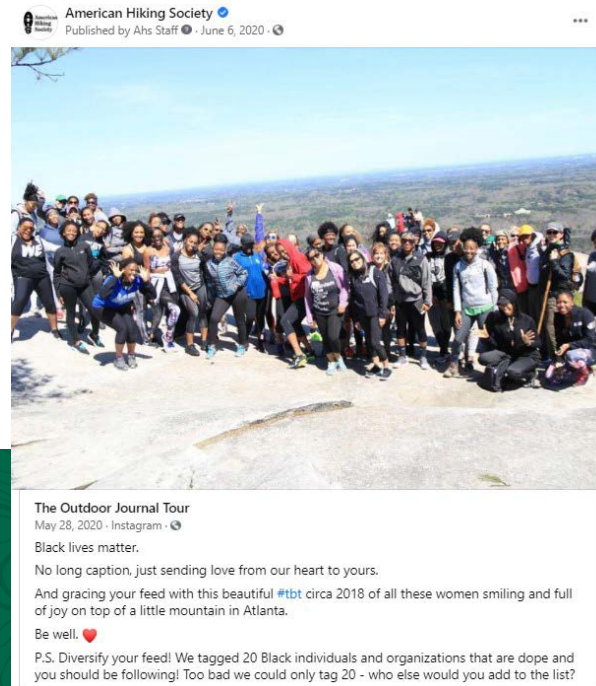
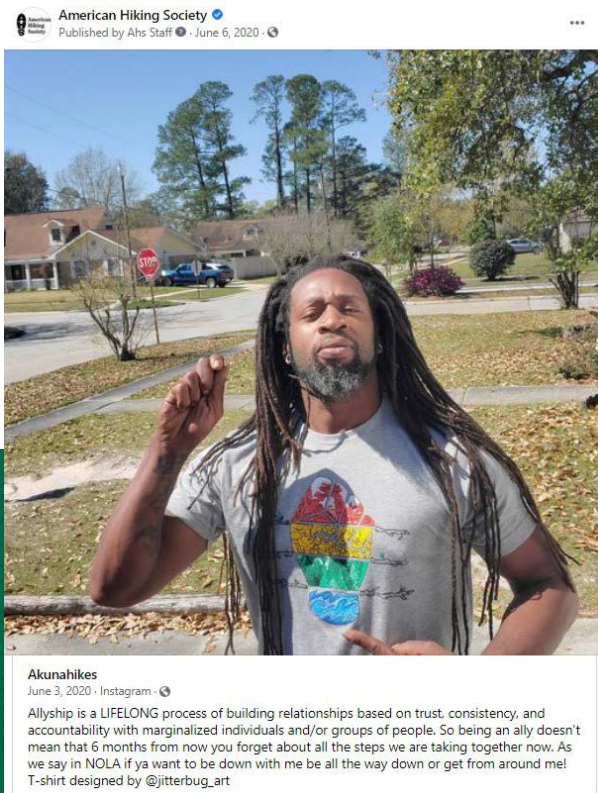
reoriented the messaging and outreach for National Trails Day® to reflect the nation's current state.

With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading across the country and federal, state, and local governments closing public spaces and limiting public gatherings, AHS, in consultation with NTD partners, decided to transform NTD into a virtual event and implemented a national pledge to promote trail advocacy, stewardship, and volunteerism objectives.

Immediately before and continuing through NTD, social justice protests took place across the country. Recognizing the gravity of the moment, we realized our NTD plans needed to evolve. In consultation with our closest partners, we suspended the promotion of National Trails Day® 2020 to not take space from the significant discussions and protests around racism in America.

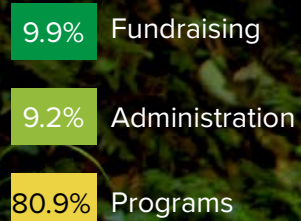
On National Trails Day® we took allyship actions, including: amplifying Black voices and organizations in the outdoor

community (a sampling of the posts is below); sharing resources on [racism in the outdoors](#) that linked back to publications and content authored by Black outdoor enthusiasts; and urged our supporters to call on Congress to pass legislation that provides equitable access to quality natural spaces for ALL, including the Transit to Trails Act and the Outdoors for All Act.



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Expenses



Income



*Includes in-kind donations.

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Special Thanks To Our Contributors

The individuals listed on this page generously contributed \$500 or more in 2020 and are therefore included as members of the American Hiking Society Leadership Council. AHS gratefully acknowledges their commitment to empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience.

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8403 Colesville Rd., Suite 1100
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Info@AmericanHiking.org
AmericanHiking.org
1-800-972-8608

Thank you to our supporters

Founded in 1976, American Hiking Society is the only national nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience. We thank each and every one of our members for their dedication to our mission.

Thank You to Our 2020 Corporate Sponsors and Agency Partners

