



Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience

September 17, 2024

Statement in Support of Appalachian Trail Centennial Act (H.R. 9159)

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of American Hiking Society and the 59 million strong hiking community who enjoy the trails and green spaces across public lands and contribute to the outdoor recreation economy, we write in support of the committee's consideration of and further enhancements to the *Appalachian Trail Centennial Act (ATCA)*, H.R. 9159, which will support hikers, the National Trails System, and public lands.

With the Appalachian Trail celebrating its 100th Anniversary in 2025, now is the time to advance the development of National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHTs) by clarifying existing policy, recognizing "Designated Operational Partners," and providing experience-based guidance on how to further advance the National Trails System. ATCA will be a valuable tool for strengthening cooperative management, further securing the roles of volunteers and volunteer organizations who have leveraged minimal federal funding to contribute over \$835M to support the National Trails System over the last three decades.

ATCA will provide invaluable information on visitation and economic data for the National Trails System and identify ways to further develop the system to demonstrate its value as part of the outdoor recreation economy. The best way Congress can honor the 100-year legacy of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is by strengthening what has made the trail successful for the past century and seek to replicate this support for all National Scenic and Historic Trails.

Crucial to the hiking community, a well-managed Appalachian National Scenic Trail supported by an array of federal, state, local and nonprofit partners and using the best available data will ensure a continued world-class recreation experience for the approximately three million visitors each year. It can also enhance the experience of hikers who may have more options to enjoy the Trail in compatible ways, such as alternative camping sites and improved access.

We thank the subcommittee for holding this important hearing and urge consideration by the full committee and on the house floor. We encourage the committee to work with all nonprofit trail partners of the National Trails System to further strengthen this important piece of legislation.

Please contact Tyler Ray, Senior Director for Programs and Advocacy, tray@americanhiking.org with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tyler Ray".

Tyler Ray
Senior Director for Programs and Advocacy
American Hiking Society