

Appalachian Trail Maintainers Committee

Smoky Mountains Hiking Club



June 2020

A.T. Maintainers remain on stand-down in Smokies and Nantahala

Policies and procedures for return-to-work by A.T. volunteers continue to be in active planning, by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Nantahala National Forest and Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

From Christine Hoyer, Backcountry Management Specialist in the GSMNP:

"Greetings A.T. Maintainers -

I hope this finds you all safe, sound and healthy. I wanted to reach out to remind you that at this time all volunteer work within the boundaries of Great Smoky Mountains National Park is suspended. No volunteer work is authorized - none at all - no volunteer agreements are active - not in the front country or the backcountry. This was not a decision the park made lightly.

I know you want to get out there and I appreciate your desire to serve the A.T., however, it is critical that you respect this and do not go out on the trail until we again resume the volunteer program. The cooperative management system works so well because we respect each other as partners and honor the guidance from all sides.

I will be in touch directly once the situation changes. In the meantime, feel free to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns."(christine_hoyer@nps.gov)

And from the ATC:

"The Adaptive Recovery Task Force is developing a "decision tree" that could be applied along the length of the Trail out of respect for local conditions,

as well as the refinement and integration of safe protocols and Job Hazard Analysis tools for work in the time of COVID-19. In the meantime, ATC and land managers appreciate the continued participation and patience of volunteers in stand-down mode until at least early June when an approach is clear on how to resume volunteer activities with harm-reduction practices in place."



In the meantime, representatives of this committee (ATMC) are participating in regular conference calls with the GSMNP "tiered" approach to Park re-opening, including volunteer activities. We are also participating in regular conference calls with the ATC regarding maintainer return-to-work planning. It is hard to think about the Trail, shelters and privies we care for, remaining un-tended even as hikers are using those resources. However, the provisions regarding maintainers under our Volunteer Service Agreements and Memorandums of Understanding require specific planning. We are grateful for your patience during this extremely unusual time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spence log emplacement project

We are working with the ATC and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation to apply for an extension on the grant under which we built the new privy at Spence Field, and dropped locust logs for Trail rehab north and south of Spence. Hopefully we will receive an extension for a year. When we are able to work on this project again, it is **very important** to document **any** work you do related to surveying, prep, and of course building, to meet the hours requirement in the grant. Thank you in advance.





Franklin LaFond Awarded Appalachian Trail Conservancy Deep South Region Club Volunteer-of-the-Year Award!

June 6th is [#NationalTrailsDay](#) and while we won't be gathering together in person, we still want to celebrate and protect trails and access to quality green spaces.

Take the [#PublicLandsProtector](#) Pledge and you will be entered to win one of five prize packages of gear. The sooner you take the pledge the more chances you have to win!

bit.ly/trails-day



We want to extend a HUGE congratulations to Franklin LaFond, for winning the ATC Deep South Region Club Volunteer-of-the-Year Award! This is a prestigious honor, recognizing both the quality and quantity a volunteer's commitment to the A.T. over time. We would have preferred to announce this in person at an ATMC meeting, but of course have not been able to due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here is the nomination, submitted on behalf of the SMHC BOD by Taylor Weatherbee.

"Franklin's love of the A.T. started in 1997 when he thru hiked the A.T. He then returned to a professional career, but his love of the Trail and its people continued to grow. He continued hiking when he could, section-hiking the Trail from 1998-2001. His contributions to the Trail began when he joined the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club in 1998. During those early years, Franklin learned about trail construction and maintenance, and the nuances that go into building rock and log structures.

Franklin moved to the Knoxville area and joined the SMHC in February 2009. He has put all of his training to use not just on his own 3.1 mile adopted section of the A.T., but also helping and mentoring other maintainers with their sections of the A.T.

Franklin is always willing to step in wherever needed. He has been involved with the construction of 12 backcountry moldering privies, 2 shelter remodels, airlift operation support, construction work at the Soak Ash Facility that supports the seasonal crews and Ridgerunners, leading volunteer group crews, blowdown removal, trail assessments, summer trail crew support, trail relocation planning, trail structure construction, general treadway rehab, and Fontana lakeshore cleanup. Franklin not only does the work, he teaches others to do it as well, always adhering to the maintenance standards for the A.T.

In June of 2014, Franklin was asked to be a Co-manager in the Nantahala National Forest (NNF) to oversee the 30 miles of the A.T. These miles of the A.T. were in need of some major rehabilitation. As

Hazard Tree Mitigation Work at the Overnight Sites on the A.T. Completed

In February and March, Wildwood Consulting, LLC did a great job to safely remove identified hazard trees around A.T. shelters and at CS113, with funds from a grant received by the ATC. All work was completed without damaging any structures! Trees were left where they fell, to become habitat over time, unless they were in the immediate area of a shelter or privy. There will be a visual effect of course from this work, but safety around the shelters and CS113 will be greatly improved.

a result of Franklin's leadership, several group work trips were arranged and maintainers started working as a team instead of a group of individuals to address these concerns. The NNF trail miles have had a major turn around and Franklin continues to focus on making these miles even better.

Since February 2, 2009, Franklin has accumulated more than 3,000 work hours and 900 travel hours for a total of over 4,000 hours dedicated to the A.T. These hours speak for themselves, but to summarize Franklin's additional contributions, he:

- Serves as the SMHC's representative to the ATC Deep South Regional Partnership Committee since the Fall of 2014 and currently serves as the SORO RPC Chair.

- Serves on the ATC Stewardship Council on the PCRC and Youth & Diversity Committees.

- Volunteered with the TEHCC/MRATC Hard Core crew for 18 years.

- Assisted Nantahala Hiking Club with coordinating volunteer crews to repair damaged treadway in damaged areas after the fires of late 2016.

- Assisted GATC with blowdown removal after Hurricane Irma in 2017.

- Continues to build partnerships with organizations across the country to help promote conservation and to teach trail building techniques.

- Led the efforts to collect and document trail assessment inventory as part of an ATC wide initiative and maintain the information in an electronic format.

- Serves as the Conservation Committee Chair, regularly informing the Board about conservation and environmental issues that affect the A.T. and the National Park and National Forest, with suggested actions to take.

From the perspective of the Appalachian Maintainers Committee and Board of Directors of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Franklin is consistently a forward and logical thinker, a strategic planner, and a tremendous knowledge

resource; we rely on his knowledge and opinions. He is always eager to learn new skills and techniques and apply them to improve the A.T.

In summary, we can think of no other person who exemplifies the "initiative, effectiveness and dedication" to the A.T. which this Award recognizes. Franklin puts in the hard work, the hours, the leadership, the planning, and yet still takes delight in the Trail and its community. This is obvious whether he is leading a work team, teaching new skills, or simply stopping to give an A.T. hiker enthusiastic words of encouragement, and share in their stories."

We wanted to publish all of this, so you know the extent of Franklin's work and dedication to the A.T., including so much of what we manage. Please congratulate him if you have a chance. Thank you Franklin!

