

Smoky Mountain **news**

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OUTDOORS LATEST

Bill seeks National Scenic Trail designation for Benton MacKaye Trail

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 08, 2022



An autumn view extends from Lookout Rock on the Benton MacKaye Trail. BMTA photo

A bipartisan bill seeking to designate the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail has been introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives following a push from the Benton MacKaye Trail Association that launched last year to award the 288-mile trail that prestigious designation.

“The inherent qualities of the BMT make it worthy of such a designation,” said Ken Cissna, BMTA president. “The trail’s emerald-green forests, stunning vistas, rippling streams and rushing waterfalls exemplify the spectacular beauty found in

the Southern Appalachian Mountains. If the bill passes, the BMT will be able to offer even better recreational opportunities to the tens of thousands of day hikers, backpackers and long-distance hikers who take advantage of the BMT each year.”

H.R. 7884 was introduced May 27 by Tennessee Democrat Steve Cohen and is cosponsored by three other members of the Tennessee delegation — Republicans Scott DesJarlais and Chuck Fleischmann and Democrat Jim Cooper. It has been referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources.

The National Scenic Trail designation is reserved for trails that epitomize the stunning natural beauty of America’s wildly varied landscapes and offer outstanding recreational opportunities. Only 11 trails hold the honor, including the Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail and Continental Divide Trail.

The BMT crosses three states (Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina) and passes through three national forests (Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala), six Wilderness Areas and 93 miles of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The trail was first conceived in 1980, and today 95% of the route is only public lands, with just 15 miles on private land or road walks. In fiscal year 2021, BMTA volunteers donated 8,000 hours to trail maintenance.