



Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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PRESS RELEASE

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) Board of Directors announced they are seeking Congressional approval for the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) to be designated a National Scenic Trail. To date, only 11 long-distance trails have received the prestigious designation. These trails epitomize the splendor, diversity and historical significance found in the wide array of the American landscape.

With its glorious ridgeline views and the innumerable crossings of mountain streams, the almost 300-mile-long BMT comes by its reputation for beauty honestly. Nestled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the BMT has some of the most varied and abundant wildflowers of any temperate climate forest in the world – and — the variety of tree species is second to none. Whether it's the creek-side trilliums in the spring, the reddish orange of the fall sugar maples at the higher elevations or the unmatched 360-degree views in the winter, the BMT is a visual treat any time of the year -- it truly is an awesome hike!

The BMT traverses 82 miles in Georgia and 206 miles in Tennessee/North Carolina. This includes the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests as well as 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest trail in the Smokies. Also known for its remoteness, a third of the trail lies in Wilderness areas where vehicular access and motorized tools are prohibited. Here, the hiker finds true peace and solitude.

The BMT is named for visionary forester, Benton MacKaye, who was known for his advocacy for the Appalachian Trail (AT). The route for the BMT closely resembles MacKaye's proposed southern spur route that would extend the AT into north-central Georgia. Currently, the southern termini for both trails reside on Springer Mountain in Georgia.

"This year marks the 100-year anniversary of Benton MacKaye's treatise, 'An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning.' That essay was the initial blueprint for the AT," said BMTA President Ken Cissna. "I think Benton MacKaye would have been pleased with the trail today," Cissna continued. "The striking vistas, rushing waterfalls, the iconic Swinging Bridge and the pleasantly secluded forest pathways that wind through six Wilderness Areas as well as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (which is managed as wilderness), make the Benton MacKaye Trail a perfect candidate for designation as a National Scenic Trail!"

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association was founded in 1980. When the trail crossed the border into Tennessee in 1987, BMTA celebrated the completion of 93 miles of trail. The grand opening for the entire trail was held in 2005. Today, approximately 95% of the route is on public lands managed by either the US Forest Service or the National Park Service. Only 15 miles currently remain on private land or as short road walks.

“The BMTA’s all-volunteer work force first constructed and now maintains the BMT,” said Cissna. “In fiscal 2021, BMTA volunteers turned in almost 8,000 hours maintaining the trail. And, in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Zeta, BMTA volunteers removed over 300 blowdowns in just three weeks!”

BMTA’s 740 members are active volunteers in other endeavors as well. They are hike leaders for BMTA’s hikes that are open to the public. At regional festivals and other events, volunteers staff the BMTA Information Tent to educate the public about hiking, camping and a Wilderness experience in the Southern Appalachian Mountains – and -- to instill a sound conservation ethic.

To learn more about the Benton MacKaye Trail Association and/or volunteering, go to the BMTA website, bmta.org or contact BMTA Vice President Joy Forehand, jwfbnga@gmail.com.