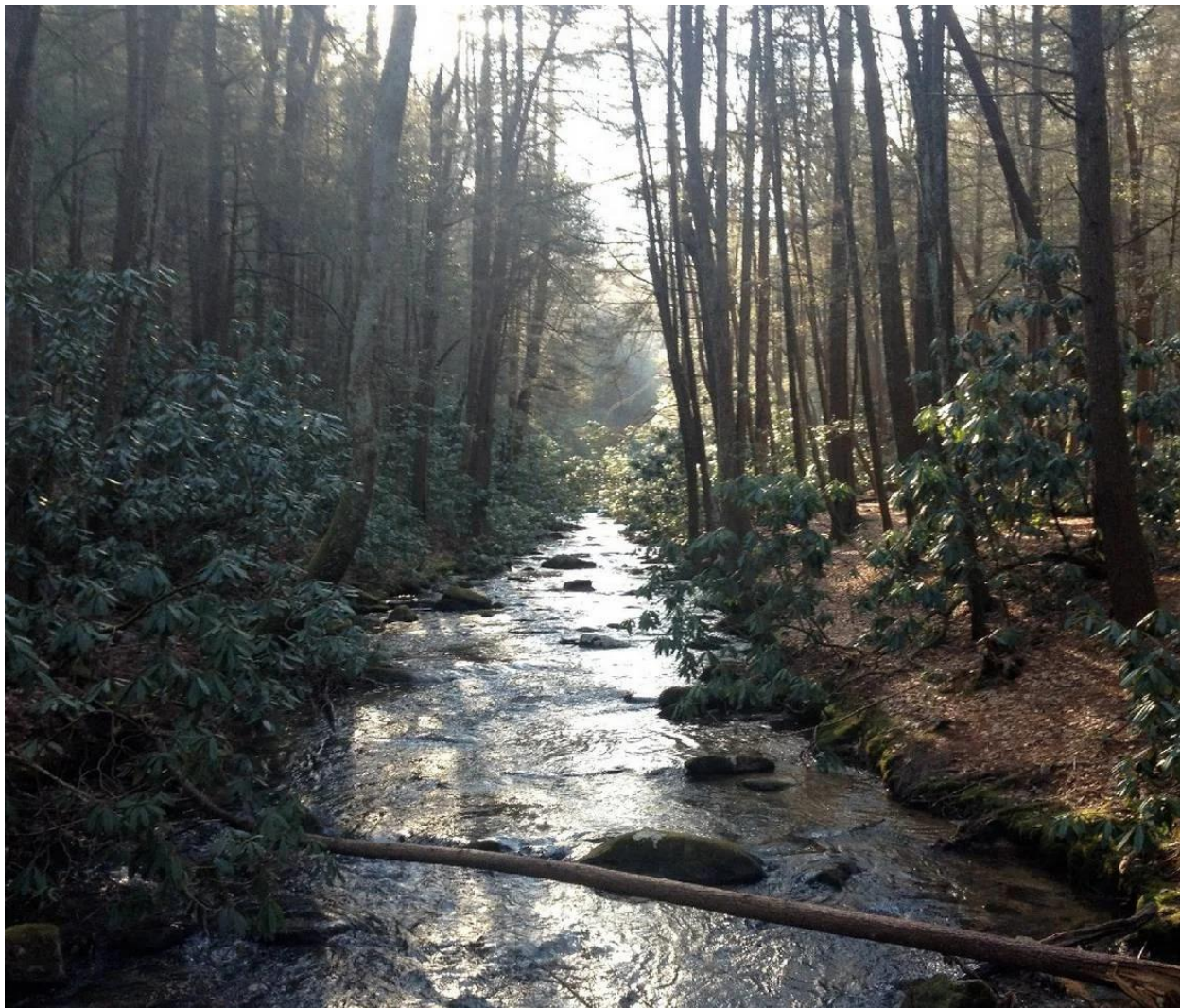


**Ledger-Enquirer**

**Georgia federal lawmakers backing Benton MacKaye Trail as new National Scenic Trail**

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U.S. Sens. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., and Thom Tillis, R-N.C., introduced legislation Thursday to launch a feasibility study aimed at designating the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

The Benton MacKaye Trail, named in honor of a 20th century forester and conservationist, runs for 280 miles from Springer Mountain in the North Georgia

mountains into Tennessee and North Carolina. It is considered a sister trail to southern portions of the better known Appalachian Trail.

“More than simply initiating a new federal walking path through our natural environment, this bill is an investment in our nation’s forests and green spaces, a bridge connecting communities, and a powerful catalyst for our rural economies,” Warnock said.

“By preserving the natural beauty of our landscapes, we help protect the planet for future generations to enjoy.”

The trail has been protected and maintained by a volunteer association since 1980. Completion of the proposed feasibility study would allow Congress to add it to the National Trails System, improving mobility for hikers and more leisurely walkers through the mountainous three-state region.

A companion bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives Thursday by cosponsors including Reps. Lucy McBath, D-Marietta, and Nikema Williams, D-Atlanta.