

Smoky Mountain **news**

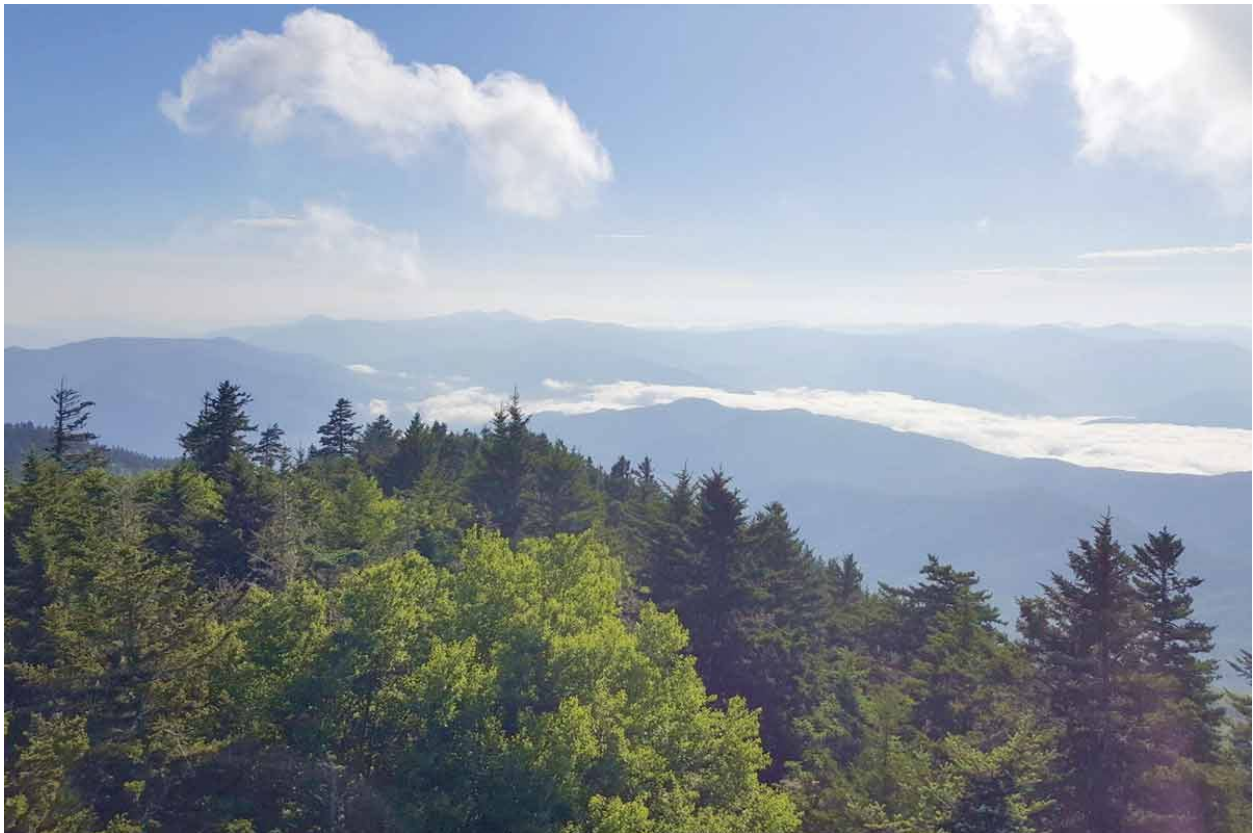
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Bill seeks National Scenic Trail status for Benton MacKaye Trail

WRITTEN BY [SMN STAFF](#)

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A sweeping view spreads from an observation tower along the Benton MacKaye Trail. Rob Burgess photo

A bipartisan bill seeking to designate the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail has been introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives as the Benton MacKaye Trail Association continues a push it began in 2021 to bestow the prestigious designation upon the 288-mile trail.

The Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail Act, or H.R.3683, is co-sponsored by six representatives from each of the three states through which the trail passes — Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia — including Rep. Chuck Edwards.

The prestigious designation is reserved for trails that epitomize the stunning beauty of America's wide array of natural landscapes. The trails also offer outstanding recreational opportunities. Only 11 trails have received this honor, including the Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide Trail.

A similar bill was introduced in the House last year but did not pass. However, Benton MacKaye Trail Association President Ken Cissna is optimistic about this go-around. The bill was introduced May 25 and referred to the Committee on Natural Resources.

"This year's a whole new ballgame," he said. "The outpouring of public support has been fantastic and we're making steady progress — the House bill is just the first step."

Known for its beauty and peaceful seclusion, the 288-mile trail passes through three National Forests (the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala) and traverses six Wilderness Areas as well as 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

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Since its inception in 1980, the BMTA first constructed and now has maintained the trail for 43 years. The route was completed in 2005. Today, just 15 miles remain on private land or as short road walks – 95% of the route is on public lands managed by either the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service. In fiscal year 2022, BMTA's volunteers contributed nearly 8,000 hours to trail maintenance.

For more information, contact BMTA Communications Director contact Joy Forehand at jwfbrga@gmail.com.

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