



Photo courtesy of Rob Burgess

This view from the Mount Sterling Fire Tower is just one of many hikers can enjoy on the Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail. A new act to designate the path as a National Scenic Trail has been introduced.

‘Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail Act’ introduced

From staff reports

Reps. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.); Chuck Fleischmann (R-Tenn.); Chuck Edwards (R-N.C.); Scott DesJarlais (R-Tenn.); Lucy McBath (D-Ga.); and David Scott (D-Ga.) are co-sponsors of a bipartisan



Rep. Edwards

House Bill which – if approved by Congress and signed by the President – will designate the Benton MacKaye

Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

Cohen announced the introduction of the bipartisan Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail Act in his May 25 press release.

The prestigious designation is reserved for trails that epitomize the stunning, natural 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.

“We are grateful to Representatives Steve Cohen, Chuck Fleischmann, Chuck Edwards, Scott DesJarlais, Lucy McBath and David Scott for co-sponsoring the legislation in the House proposing the BMT be designated a National Scenic Trail!” said Ken Cissna, President of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. “The inherent qualities of the BMT make it worthy of such a designation. 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 every year.

“We’ve been working on this for about two years. A bill was introduced in the House last year. The bill achieved substantial bipartisan support in Congress but was not passed. This year’s a whole new ballgame. 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 Benton MacKaye Trail crosses three states (Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina); passes through three National Forests (the Chattahoochee-Oconee, the Cherokee and the Nantahala); and traverses six wilderness areas, as well as 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Since its inception in 1980, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association 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 percent of the route is on public lands, managed by

either the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service.

Over the last fiscal year, the association’s all-volunteer work force put in almost 8,000 hours maintaining the trail.

The association’s 872 members volunteer in ways other than trail maintenance as well. They are leaders for the association’s hikes that are open to the public. At regional festivals and other events, volunteers staff the association’s 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.

Hikers in Robbinsville and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park love the treks to the hangover, tunnel on the Road to Nowhere and the Lakeshore Trail.

If you would like more information on the Benton MacKaye Trail – or its association – contact Joy Forehand, Benton MacKaye Trail Association Communications Director, jwfbga@gmail.com.