

# Legislation introduced for trail designation

## From staff reports

Bipartisan legislation (Senate Bill S. 4352) was introduced in the Senate by U.S. Sens. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) and Thom Tillis (R-NC). The bill authorizes a feasibility study of the Benton MacKaye Trail, with the goal of designating the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

A companion bill, H.R. 8403, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Steve Cohen (D-TN), Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN), Chuck Edwards (R-NC), Scott DesJarlais (R-TN), Lucy McBath (D-GA) and Nikema Williams (D-GA).

“We are grateful to Senators Warnock and Tillis and Representatives Cohen, Fleischmann, Edwards, DesJarlais, McBath and Williams for recognizing the BMT’s value as a national treasure,” said



Photo courtesy of Rick Harris

Efforts to get the Benton MacKaye Trail designated as a National Scenic Trail are moving along nicely. The trail winds through much of Graham County and includes views such as this one from near Tapoco Lodge.

Benton MacKaye Trail Association President Bob Cowdrick. “We thank them for their continued support for our quest to have the BMT designated an NST.”

These bills include the requirement for a feasibility study which analyzes a trail’s “long-distance

trail viability.” The federal agency conducting the study evaluates whether the proposed National Scenic Trail has scenic, historic, natural and cultural features that qualify it for scenic trail designation. Equally important, this evaluation also considers

the ability of the nonprofit trail organization to sustainably manage and maintain the trail as well as the strength of its partnership with the federal agency administering the trail.

“The BMTA Board is confident the feasibility study will find the BMT

meets or exceeds the criteria included in the study and is worthy of the designation,” said Cowdrick. “Given that ... The trail is known for its emerald-green forests, crystal clear streams, cascading waterfalls and exquisite panoramic views. The trail was completed in 2005. The BMTA has constructed/maintained the trail for 40 years and the association has and will continue to work closely with both the National Forest Service and the National Park Service” ... Our credentials for NST designation are impeccable,” said Cowdrick.

Nestled in the Southern Appalachians, the 288-mile-long trail offers day hikers and long-distance hikers a unique opportunity to experience a journey that winds its way through three states (Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina). The trail passes

through three National Forests (the Chattahoochee-Oconee, the Cherokee and the Nantahala National Forests) and crosses six wilderness areas. The route includes 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest trail in the park.

Ninety-five percent of the trail is on land managed by either the Forest Service or the National Park Service – just 15 miles of the trail remain on public roads/private lands so new land acquisition will be limited and will be on a willing seller basis.

Landmarks in or around the trail in the vicinity of Graham County and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park include treks to the Hangover, Tunnel on the Road to Nowhere and the Lakeshore Trail.

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