

# Push for trail designation reaches House Subcommittee

## From staff reports

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is another step closer towards achieving its goal of having the Benton MacKaye Trail designated as a National Scenic Trail.

On July 24, a hearing was held before the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands for H.R. 8403 – a bipartisan bill in the House of Representatives calling for a feasibility study of the trail, with the goal of designating it as a National Scenic Trail.

Testifying before the committee was former Benton MacKaye Trail Association President Ken Cissna.

The hearing was an extremely-important step in the legislative process towards the eventual passage of H.R. 8403.

The bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 15,

by Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), Chuck Fleischmann (R-Tenn.), Chuck Edwards (R-N.C.), Scott DesJarlais (R-Tenn.), Lucy McBath (D-Ga.) and Nikema Williams (D-Ga.).

Known for its beauty and peaceful seclusion, the 288-mile trail crosses Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina; passes through the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala National forests; and traverses six wilderness areas.

Ninety-three miles of the trail are in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, while 95 percent of the trail is on protected federal land – either national forest or national park.

The trail already is a key economic pillar in rural communities.

Day hikers and backpackers contribute to local economies, where they purchase food, outdoor



Former Benton MacKaye Trail Association President Ken Cissna testified before the House Subcommittee on July 24, regarding a bill that hopes to get the 288-mile stretch a special designation.

supplies and lodging.

The designation would boost the trail’s popularity. Even more outdoor enthusiasts will view the trail as a must-do trek, resulting

in a substantial increase in economic activity.

Moreover, the designation would enhance the association’s efforts to make sure the trail that mean-

ders through the Southern Appalachian Mountains is available for future generations to enjoy – a goal expressed in the association’s motto: “...leaving a footpath for generations to follow.”

H.R. 8403 includes a one-year deadline for completing the feasibility study, a timeline Cissna believes to be both realistic and reasonable.

In addition, the Benton MacKaye Trail’s qualifications for the designation include:

- The trail is widely recognized for its historical roots and diverse natural beauty (panoramic vistas, cascading waterfalls and crystal-clear streams);

- It was fully completed 20 years ago;

- The trail has a strong volunteer non-profit organization that has managed and maintained the popular trail for almost 45 years;

- The all-volunteer work force turns in 8,000 maintenance hours annually.

Given these qualifications, Cissna believes the trail meets or exceeds the requirements for a trail to be designated a National Scenic Trail. He is confident the feasibility study will agree.

“The Benton MacKaye Trail is a vital natural and economic resource that warrants national recognition and protection,” Cissna said to the committee. “Its historical significance, economic impact, and the numerous benefits it provides to communities and individuals make a compelling case for its designation as a National Scenic Trail.”

“I urge the committee to support this designation, ensuring the long-term protection of the Benton MacKaye Trail as a cherished part of our national heritage.”