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This picture of Upper Bald River Falls was taken by Kathy Williams. A portion of the Benton MacKaye Trail is located in Monroe County.

Bills introduced in Congress to make Benton MacKaye Trail a National Scenic Trail

Submitted material

Legislation to study the feasibility of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) to become a National Scenic Trail was reintroduced in Congress by State Reps. Chuck Fleischmann, Steve Cohen, Chuck Edwards and Lucy McBath; and Senators Thom Tillis, Raphael Warnock and Ted Budd.

The Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study Act of 2025 would direct the U.S. Forest Service to advance the process for formally designating the BMT as the country's 12th National Scenic Trail.

"The BMT, which was completed in 2005, provides an exceptional opportunity for tens

of thousands of people to get outdoors each year and experience the stunning beauty of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The legislation is a critical step forward in the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's (BMTA) quest to have the BMT designated a National Scenic Trail. The designation would help protect our storied outdoor heritage for future generations, support local economies, and provide a wide array of recreation opportunities for everyone from day hikers to thru hikers, solo trekkers to families," said BMTA President Bob Cowdick.

Nestled in the Southern Appalachians, the 288-mile-long BMT 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 (GSMNP), making it the longest trail in the GSMNP. Ninety-five percent of the BMT is on land managed by either the Forest Service or the National Park Service — just 15 miles of the trail remains on public roads/private lands. New land acquisition will be limited and will be on a willing seller

basis.

At festivals, on sponsored hikes and at other events, the association's 855 members spread the word about the BMT as they educate the public about hiking, camping and a wilderness experience in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and instill a sound conservation ethic.

A portion of the BMT is in Monroe County's backyard. Landmarks in or around the trail in Monroe County include treks along the Hiwassee River, as well as hikes to Whigg Meadow. Upper Bald River Falls features day hikes and backpacking excursions.

For more information about the BMT or BMTA, contact Joy Forehand at jforehand@bmta.org