

Outdoor Life



Photo/David Meeks

View from the Benton MacKaye Trail at Hangover, looking northwest toward the southern end of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Benton MacKaye Trail legislation reintroduced

Group seeks designation for National Scenic Trail

Legislation to study the feasibility of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) to become a National Scenic Trail was reintroduced in Congress by Reps. Chuck Fleischmann, Steve Cohen, Chuck Edwards and Lucy McBath; and Sens. 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 Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) as our 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," said Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) President Bob Cowdrick. "The legislation is a critical step forward in the BMTA's 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."

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, 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 remain on public roads/private lands. New land acquisition will be limited and will be on a willing seller basis.

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