



Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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PRESS RELEASE

Benton MacKaye Trail Feasibility Study Passed Out of Senate Agriculture Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association celebrated the successful passage of the *Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study Act of 2025* ([S. 1376](#)) out of the Senate Agriculture Committee. This is a critical step towards permanent protection for the 288-mile Benton MacKaye Trail. The bill, sponsored by Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC), Raphael Warnock (D-GA) and Ted Budd (R-NC), passed committee with strong bipartisan support and now heads to the full Senate for consideration.

“We are grateful for the leadership from Senators Tillis, Warnock and Budd on advancing legislation to protect the Benton MacKaye Trail and set it on the path to becoming our country’s 12th National Scenic Trail. A National Scenic Trail designation will ensure this trail is protected for future generations and remains a premier recreation destination for hikers while expanding its positive economic impact on nearby communities,” said Bob Cowdrick, President of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. “This is a major step forward for the BMTA and everyone who cherishes the beauty, solitude, and challenge the trail offers. The study will evaluate the trail’s scenic, natural, and recreational value, which tens-of-thousands of hikers already enjoy every year.”

Stretching from Springer Mountain, Georgia, through Tennessee and North Carolina, the Benton MacKaye Trail showcases some of the most diverse forests and scenic landscapes in the Southern Appalachians. Nearly one-third of the trail lies within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest continuous trail within the park. It connects numerous wilderness areas including the Cohutta, Big Frog and Joyce-Kilmer/Slickrock Wildernesses. Beyond its natural beauty, the trail also provides vital economic benefits to surrounding rural communities – Blue Ridge, Chattanooga and Bryson City. It also draws visitors from major metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Knoxville, Charlotte, and Nashville. Local outfitters, guides, restaurants, and lodging providers benefit from steady tourism, and the trail’s recognition as a National Scenic Trail would further boost these economic opportunities. According to local development organizations the Benton MacKaye Trail serves as an economic pillar for nearby towns strengthening rural economies while preserving their natural and cultural heritage

As the bill moves forward, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association urges both the House and Senate to continue working in a bipartisan manner to enact this important legislation. The Association believes this designation will ensure the long-term protection of the trail’s exceptional landscapes while supporting the outdoor recreation economy that sustains surrounding communities.