

Karen Lutz's Report to KTA Spring Council Meeting
8 April, 2017
Ligonier Camp and Conference Center

New Hire Sara Haxby – ATC's extremely competent Mid-Atlantic Office manager and Outreach Coordinator, Kelly McGinley, moved on in January. The job description has been reworked and with the blessing of KTA's executive Director, Sara Haxby has begun work as our Senior Office and Visitor Center Manager. My thanks to Joe Neville for his gracious support of this transition and for training Sara so well – she's been a quick study and is a great fit on our team!

Regional Partnership Committee – Highlights

- **Volunteer Service Agreements** Volunteers working on the A.T. have long enjoyed the benefit of injury and tort claim protection through the National Park Service while working on the A.T. through the "Volunteers in Parks or VIP" program. This coverage was afforded to volunteers regardless of whether or not they were working on NPS, state or other jurisdiction. There are some changes and updates being considered. Most significantly, identifying who the "Supervisor of Record" will be. The "Supervisor of Record" is the person responsible for ensuring that volunteers have received proper training and have the right equipment for the task at hand. Some think ATC should fill that role, while others advocate that it belongs with the individual club or perhaps agency. We'll be working this out and welcome KTA's input.
- **PA clubs decision on VISTA** (formerly ATC Biennial) – A task force to evaluate the future of ATC's biennial meetings has been working for some time to craft a plan for the future of the biennial, acknowledging that many clubs simply don't have the capacity to coordinate and sponsor such a large complex event. The task force came up with a proposed schedule with the PA clubs (excepting PATC North Chapter) first in line to host 2020. The decision was put to a vote at the recent Regional Partnership Committee meeting. Resulting in 5 clubs in favor, 5 clubs against and 2 abstaining (NY-NJTC and PATC) and the motion failed. Unless another club or group of clubs step forward, the biennial at Colby College in Waterville Maine (Aug 4-11) will be the last of the regular biennials which have taken place since 1979

Hike the Hill – ATC participates with other national scenic and historic organizations in an annual advocacy event called Hike the Hill, wherein staff and volunteers make appointments and visit with Congressmen and women and senators to advise them on matters of importance to the National Trail System. This year's focus was on permanent re-authorization for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, cumulative impacts from the proliferation of pipelines and funding for deferred maintenance of A.T. assets. My 19 appointments during the week included time with the offices of both Senators Toomey and Casey and Congressmen Dent (PA-15) Cartwright (PA-17) and Shuster (PA-9). I hope clubs might consider visiting their legislative offices in their districts and we should think about a similar effort with our state legislators.

Pipelines – Michele Miller on our staff leads the efforts on "external threats" including pipelines, powerlines, cell towers etc. With north central PA as round zero for Marcellus Shale, we've seen our share of pipeline proposals that potentially impact the A.T. experience. Michele is working with NPS and AMC-DV to minimize and mitigate impact from the PennEast pipeline near Blue Mt Ski Area and the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline near Swatara State Park. Both on these are new lines, not upgrades to existing lines.

Lyme Disease and Tick-Borne Illnesses: ATC reminds all of our volunteers of the increasing prevalence of tick borne diseases. While most trail folks are now well aware of Lyme Disease, several other tick borne illnesses are being reported more frequently. These include babesiosis, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis (transmitted by the Lone Star Tick). We're beginning to hear of volunteers treated for Lyme, who also test positive for these other illnesses.

Visitor Use – The A.T. continues to see increasing use to the extent that some of us question the Trail's sustainability, even with expert volunteer trail builders and maintainers. We constantly are challenged to keep the trail as the intended primitive footpath is was conceived to be, while recognizing the need to harden certain areas to prevent environmental and experiential damage.

One tool that ATC launched last year is a voluntary registration system for potential through hikers. The online system is designed to allow hikers to see how many others plan to begin there hike at a certain point on a given day. Categories include NOBO from Amicalola State Park, NOBO from Springer Mt., Flip Flop NOBO from Harpers Ferry, Flip Flop "Other than" Harpers Ferry, and SOBO from Katahdin. As of Wednesday, 3303 potential hikers had voluntarily registered, already up 200 from 2016 when the system was launched. The next goal is a *voluntary* registration system for shelters and camp sites, called "A.T. Camp"

Landscape Level Projects

- Kittatinny Coalition – Brooks Mountcastle co-leads this effort with PA Audubon. The coalition includes state agencies, conservation organizations (e.g. Hawk Mt Sanctuary) land trusts, academic institutions and others working together to protect and preserve the Kittatinny Ridge which the A.T. follows from the Darlington Shelter in Cumberland County to the Delaware Water Gap. The Coalition has been working on projects such as developing "Return on Environment" studies with an economist to monetize the value of protecting open space. This is sometimes referred to as "EcoSystem Services". The group is also conducting "Bird the Ridge" hikes with A.T. clubs, including Aves en la Kittatinny a special event hike aimed at offering an A.T. experience to Spanish speakers.
- South Mountain Partnership – Katie Hess spearheads a DCNR partnership working toward protecting and promoting the working landscape of the South Mountain Conservation Landscape that includes York, Adams, Franklin and Cumberland Counties.
- PA American Water – Using mitigation/compensation funds for loss of A.T. values from the construction of the Susquehanna Roseland powerline, the Conservation Fund acquired 1300 acres near Wind Gap PA. This is the first of a phased acquisition of the 4600 acre property that will become part of the Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Transfer of the property into public ownership to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be celebrated at an event at Kirkridge Retreat at 1:00 PM on 24 April.

ATC's Boiling Springs Visitor Center – Sara wanted me to mention that we are still seeking volunteers on weekends to staff the visitor center!

Upcoming Events

- **PA Hiking Week** May 25 - June 2 We encourage KTA clubs to promote their trails can help to disperse the traffic on the A.T. in Pennsylvania.
- **National Trails Day** June 3
- **ATC Biennial** Waterville Maine Aug 4-11
- **Family Hiking Day/ National Public Lands Day** Sept 30