

**Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study  
Act of 2024 (H.R. 8403, S. 4352)**

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106 Sandpiper Circle  
Kingsport, TN 37663  
January 27, 2024

The Honorable Thom Tillis  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

In reference to: Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Act

Dear Senator Tillis:

Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club (TEHCC) is one of the 31 clubs designated to maintain the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST or simply the A.T.) with a 134 mile section primarily along the North Carolina/Tennessee border in the Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests. The club volunteers provided roughly 7,300 hours during the fiscal year ending September 2023.

***The purpose of this letter is to request your support as a cosponsor of a Senate bill for the designation of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) as a National Scenic Trail.*** The equivalent House Bill is #3683. The rest of this message is to show you how TEHCC decided that the BMT should have the National Scenic Trail designation.

The Benton MacKaye Trail traverses roughly 82 miles in Georgia and 206 miles in NC/TN, between Springer Mountain, GA (also southern terminus of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail) and Big Creek, NC. Along the way, hikers of the path enjoy outdoor delights of the Southern Appalachia such as cascading streams, waterfalls, abundant wildflowers, rhododendron, and crossing Mount Sterling. This long-distance hiking trail was declared to be finished in 2005 by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA), a group of 900+ volunteers organized in 1980 to formally provide maintenance in partnership with the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Nantahala, and Cherokee national forests in GA/NC/TN and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. 95% of the route is on public lands with just 15 miles as short road walks or on private land. Being a more remote experience than its sister A.T., the BMT does not have any shelters, just primitive campsites which can be a more sustainable choice for the ongoing management.

There are currently eleven National Scenic Trails including the original Appalachian and Pacific Crest designation in 1968 National Trails System Act. The newest additions to this list in 2009 are the Arizona, New England, and Pacific Northwest. BMT fits into the pattern of these trails.

The Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail would highlight this option to the A.T. for hikers to be able to complete a 288-mile challenge while relocating some foot traffic from the heavily used southern end of the Appalachian NST. The more remote experience is keeping with the original vision for the 1968 National Trail Act of getting the public into natural settings.

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is already maintaining the trail to US Forest Service standards for over 40 years and has the membership of 900 strong to continue in the capacity to not increase burden on the NPS and USFS resources.

In conclusion, TEHCC views the National Scenic Trail designation for the Benton MacKaye Trail as close to a ready state of addition as one could possibly get given the established history, usage, and active support network of volunteer maintainers.

The club will also be reaching out to our Tennessee Senators Blackburn and Hagerty.

Sincerely,

*Vic Hasler*

Appalachian Trail Committee Chair  
Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club

Copies to:

Andrew Downs and Sandri Marra of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Ken Cissna of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association

**Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association  
10 Benning St., PMB 224  
West Lebanon, NH 03784**



Mr. Dennis R. Newton  
244 E. Eufaula St.  
Ozark, AL 36360-0922

March 6, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association has voted unanimously to express our strong support for designating the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail. This trail passes through the largest contiguous wilderness east of the Mississippi deserving the title National Scenic Trail.

Our Association was established over 40 years ago to foster the long-distance hiking experience. We have almost 2000 active members who have documented and have collectively hiked millions of miles. We conduct training for hikers interested in learning the skills which enable successful long hikes on trails in the Appalachian Region. As the result of the popularity of the Appalachian Trail which has created overuse of that trail, our Association promotes alternative hiking trails in the Appalachian region because they are better wilderness experiences where hikers can truly find solitude on their journey. The Benton MacKaye Trail Association oversees a trail comparable to the Appalachian Trail and is superior to it in its remote wilderness access. Many of our members have Thru-Hiked the Benton MacKaye Trail telling others about its fabulous environments.

The Benton MacKaye Trail deserves a National Scenic Trail designation to protect the areas through which it passes from the continuing pressures of development and misuse. Long Distance Hiking is a form of environmental eco-tourism and many of the towns which support this trail derive income from the hikers resupplying in their local stores. The 288 miles of this trail are some of the most sensitive wilderness environments east of the Mississippi. We need to make this a National Scenic Trail.

We ask that you give this your highest level of support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis R. Newton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dennis R. Newton  
President, Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association



**M A I N S P R I N G**  
CONSERVATION TRUST

557 East Main Street | Franklin, NC 28734  
P.O. Box 1148 | Franklin, NC 28744  
828.524.2711 | mainspringconserves.org

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Ken Murphy

Dear Congressman Edwards,

I am writing on behalf of Mainspring Conservation Trust to express my enthusiastic support for the designation of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) as a National Scenic Trail. As a member of the conservation community, we are keenly aware of the significance of national, regional, and local public access to land and all that it provides. The BMT traverses some of the most scenic and rare places in the Southern Appalachians and provides access to extremely remote wilderness areas that are otherwise difficult to access. Combined with extraordinary beauty and natural heritage, this region has incredible cultural resources making it significant not only on a national but also a global scale.

Mainspring has witnessed first-hand the benefits of the Appalachian Trail national designation, both to conservation and to the economies of the many 'Trail Towns' it meanders along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains. Though shorter and more remote than the AT, designation of the BMT as a National Scenic Trail would undoubtedly lead to increases in tourism in Tier I counties in the far western portion of the state, as well as increased recognition of the special places it provides access to.

As usership of public outdoor spaces continues to increase, so does the importance of the protection and maintenance of these places for future generations. Approximately 15 miles (5%) of the trail is on private lands and portions of its viewshed remain unprotected. Designation of the BMT as a National Scenic Trail would provide access to increased public funding and leverage of private funding for land conservation and trail maintenance, ensuring this incredible trail is available for people to enjoy for generations to come.

Mainspring strongly recommends the BMT be designated as a National Scenic Trail - a designation that it clearly deserves and one that is long overdue.

Sincerely,

Jordan M. Smith, Executive Director

Stewards of the Southern Blue Ridge

Representative Chuck Edwards  
1505 Longworth House Office  
Washington, DC 20515

June 13, 2023

200 North Grove Street  
Suite 121  
Hendersonville, NC 28792

To Whom It May Concern,

As a chamber of commerce and welcome center much of our role in the region is to welcome tourists and promote Western North Carolina, especially regarding outdoorism. We receive frequent requests for information on hiking, camping, and water related activities. We often recommend the Benton MacKaye Trail as it offers so many options for all levels of hikers and sightseers. This trail is always appreciated, and we recognize the effort it takes to maintain it for everyone to enjoy.

Our chamber fully supports the Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail Act, which would designate a 287-mile trail linking Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina as a National Scenic Trail. This amazing trail links our region and states for residents and visitors alike. We recognize the economic and social impact this trail provides and strongly believe it should be designated a scenic trail.

We hope you will lend your support to this endeavor introduced by Congressman Steve Cohen of Tennessee and supported by many state lawmakers in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia.

Respectfully,

Sherry Raines, Executive Director Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce  
805 US Hwy 64 West, Murphy, NC 28906  
828-837-2242



PO Box 279 | Maggie Valley NC 28751 | 828.926.1686 | [www.MaggieValley.org](http://www.MaggieValley.org)

June 15, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter serves as the Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce's support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's desire to achieve National Scenic Trail status.

Hiking has become a major attraction for Maggie Valley and the surrounding area. This designation will provide a draw for visitors, especially those who come to hike the Appalachian Trail. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is another huge draw for our visitors as well as Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests. With a third of the trail lying in wilderness areas where vehicular access and motorized tools are prohibited, this trail should provide peace and solitude for the hikers.

Maggie Valley is dependent on our tourism for the economic health of our beautiful mountain town. We welcome this spectacular, natural resource and beautiful recreational opportunity.

In closing, the Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce is glad to give support for the Benton MacKaye Trail to be designated as a National Scenic Trail.

Sincerely,

Teresa D. Smith  
Executive Director



400 West Summit Hill Drive, Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

February 13, 2023

Benton MacKaye Trail Association

To Whom It May Concern:

**SUPPORT FOR RECOGNITION OF THE BENTON MACKAYE TRAIL AS A NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL**

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is pleased to support the designation of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) as the 12<sup>th</sup> National Scenic Trail.

Most of the BMT route between the Stairway to Heaven and the point at which the BMT enters the Great Smoky Mountains National Park after crossing Fontana Dam is on TVA property, including a portion which crosses Fontana Village. Considering the aspects of conservation, protection of natural resources, and economics a National Scenic Trail designation would benefit local communities as well as the thousands of hikers who use the BMT every year. Scenic vistas, spectacular waterfalls, and bubbling streams highlight the hikers' journey as they enjoy the wide array of wildflowers in the spring, the emerald-green forest of summer, the colorful fall leaves, and an exquisite winter wonderland.

- Local communities near the trail will enjoy an economic boost.
- Hikers and their families will patronize local campgrounds, restaurants, lodging, shuttles, outdoor retailers, etc.
- The trail is complete. All but 15 miles of the trail is on federal land and the National Scenic Trail designation would enhance BMT Association's efforts to preserve, protect, and defend the breathtaking natural landscapes that encompass the BMT.

TVA is delighted to support this designation. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Deanna Thompson at [dbthompson@tva.gov](mailto:dbthompson@tva.gov) or 828-837-4007.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ella C. Guinn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ella C. Guinn  
Manager, Recreation  
Recreation and Shoreline Management  
Natural Resources



To Whom it May Concern:

The Chattanooga Hiking Club (CHC) would like to communicate our support for the designation of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) as a National Scenic Trail (NST). The CHC is a group of hiking enthusiasts primarily from Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Our club has approximately 200 members and was formed in 1989 to facilitate, promote and enjoy hiking on the myriad of trails in and around the Chattanooga area. Most of our outings are within an hour or two drive from Chattanooga and we have often ventured to designated sections of the BMT. Several members are also members of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) and we have often joined with the BMTA on trail maintenance workdays in the Chattanooga vicinity.

We have enjoyed the nearby BMT and the many opportunities it offers for recreation and taking in the scenic beauty of the surrounding area. The trail is well maintained and winds along the ridges, mountains, and streams in the states of Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. It is a short drive from multiple metropolitan areas and draws visitors and hikers of all ages from the country to the trail and the many nearby small communities it traverses. In our opinion, designating the Benton MacKaye as an NST would serve to increase its overall status and ensure the ongoing opportunities it offers to many residents and visitors that venture into the great outdoors.

The BMT has much to offer to residents and visitors. The CHC enjoys and supports availability and access to wilderness and beautiful areas, which we believe deserve to be protected and maintained. In closing, the CHC Board wishes to confirm our support for the initiative to designate the BMT as an NST.

Sincerely,

Stormy McGauley  
President, Chattanooga Hiking Club



P.O. Box 654  
ATLANTA, GA 30301

(404) 634-6495

Senator Tillis  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

November 27, 2023

Dear Senator Tillis,

I am writing to advise you that the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club fully endorses and supports the request of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association to have the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) designated as a National Scenic Trail.

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club is designated to manage and maintain the Georgia section of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST). Springer Mountain serves as the southern terminus of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and serves as the start of the Benton MacKaye Trail. These two long-distance hiking trails are then interwoven and intersect several times in the first seven miles of the BMT before separating. These first several miles are a heavily utilized section of both the ANST and the BMT affording outstanding hiking opportunities to the public.

Designating the Benton MacKaye Trail, which traverses through several designated wilderness areas, as a National Scenic Trail adds additional protections to this trail, which in turn can provide further protections to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Further, designation as a National Scenic Trail preserves the primitive nature of the Benton MacKaye Trail ensuring that it remains a premier hiking trail in the Southern Appalachians for future generations of outdoor recreationists.

Sincerely,

Lynne R. Beeson  
President  
Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

Good Day,

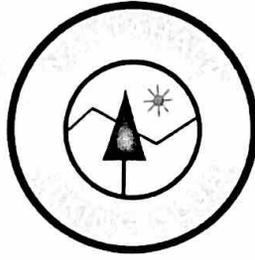
I am writing to share with you that the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club fully endorses the request of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association to have the Benton MacKaye Trail designated as a National Scenic Trail.

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club is the designated entity to manage and maintain the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. This trail and the Benton MacKaye Trail intersect several times and run concurrently for a short distance.

The naming of the Benton MacKaye Trail, which runs for several miles through designated wilderness, as a National Scenic Trail would add an element of protection to this trail, ensuring that it remain one of the premier primitive hiking trails in the southern Appalachians.

Sincerely,

Don Converse  
President  
Georgia Appalachian Trail Club



Senator Tillis:

I am writing on behalf of the Nantahala Hiking Club in support of the Benton MacKaye Trail's designation as a National Scenic Trail. As one of the 30 maintaining club of the Appalachian Trail, we are keenly aware of the value to the American public of hiking trails. The Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) offers striking ridgeline views, mountain stream crossings loaded with native trout, pleasantly secluded forest pathways that wind through six Wilderness Areas as well as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Approximately 95% of the 288-mile-long trail is on public lands managed by either the US Forest Service or the National Park Service. Only 15 miles currently remain on private land or as short road walks. National Scenic Trail status for the BMT would provide additional protection for the natural landscapes that encompass the trail – at the same time it would be a boon to local economies.

The Nantahala Hiking Club's founder, Reverend Rufus Morgan once said, "Keep ever clear the open trails that lead to the mountaintops." He knew that there was nothing more life changing to one's soul than hiking atop a mountain and viewing God's creation. As a club, we place high value on the endeavor of nature and a hike through its wonder.

For these reasons, the Nantahala Hiking Club, located in Franklin, NC, highly recommends that the BMT be designated as a National Scenic Trail, so that its beauty can be preserved for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victor Treutel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

*Victor Treutel*

President – Nantahala Hiking Club

173 Carl Slagle Road

Franklin, NC 28734



## Smoky Mountains Hiking Club

P O Box 51592 Knoxville, TN 37950-1592

Exploring the Smokies Since 1924

October 7, 2023

Senator Thom Tillis

113 Dirksen Senate office Building

Washington, D.C 20510

Dear Senator Tillis,

The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club would like to reiterate our *strong* support for the designation of the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail. We sent our first letter of support for this effort on February 8, 2022, followed by a second letter on February 5, 2023. Our Club is 100 years old, and consists of over 850 members who hike the Smokies, Nantahala and Cherokee NF, and many other areas in east TN and beyond. In addition, our Club members, since its founding, have been involved in the creation and maintenance of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail which runs through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (72 miles) as well as in the Nantahala National Forest (30 miles). We are very familiar with, and cherish these wild places, and contribute thousands of volunteer hours to the maintenance of the 102 miles of A.T. for which we are responsible.

Protecting the 288 miles of BMT as a National Scenic Trail would help protect it from encroaching development threats and raise its profile as a beautiful and biodiverse trail. People seek outdoor spaces more than ever, and bring economic benefit to the areas these trails traverse. Wild places cannot be replaced; they must be protected.

The Board of Directors of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club has voted unanimously (again), on behalf of the Club, to support the National Scenic Trail designation for the Benton MacKaye Trail. We ask that you give this issue your strongest support.

Sincerely,

Ken Wise

President, Smoky Mountains Hiking Club

cc: Sandi Marra, Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Monroe County Department of Tourism



225 Cherohala Skyway • Tellico Plains, TN 37385

February 3, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I write on behalf of the Monroe County Tourism Department in support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association seeking to achieve National Scenic Trail status. We strongly support this effort in elevating the status of the Benton MacKaye Trail in order to have a greater appeal to potential visitors. We believe the Benton MacKaye Trail meets all of the qualifications for being designated as a National Scenic Trail.

As a county Tourism Department, we want to provide a unique and unforgettable experience to our visitors. We believe that the achievement of having the Benton MacKaye Trail recognized as a National Scenic Trail will assist us in having the ability to market more widely to those who have a hiking interest during their travels. This would further allow us to increase the overall tourism impact in Monroe County.

In Tellico Plains alone, it is estimated that the Cherohala Skyway National Scenic Byway sees around 3 million visitors annually. Many of these visitors have an interest in hiking the trails in our area. These visitors contribute greatly to the \$47.25 million in direct visitor spending that occurs in Monroe County on an annual basis. We have the traffic and the means to ensure that the Benton MacKaye Trail would be very successful as a National Scenic Trail.

To conclude, I would like to restate my support for the Benton MacKaye Trail Association to receive National Scenic Trail status. If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, please do not hesitate to contact me using the information found below.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Blaina Tallent Best". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Blaina Tallent Best**

*Director of Monroe County Tourism*

Phone: 423.836.6976

Email: [blaina.best@monroetn.com](mailto:blaina.best@monroetn.com)

# MITCH INGRAM

— MONROE COUNTY MAYOR —

February 6, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

As the Mayor of Monroe County, I would like to express my support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association seeking to achieve National Scenic Trail status. I strongly support this because I believe obtaining National Scenic Trail status will have a positive impact on our local economy due to the increase in visitors we could potentially receive.

Tourism is big business in Monroe County. Even throughout the pandemic, tourism has continued to be strong due to our outdoor resources, the Benton MacKaye Trail being one of them. On average, visitors in Monroe County spend \$129,106 in daily expenditures. Due to this, the County Commission and I understand that Tourism is among our top three industries in our county. We value tourism and would be honored to see the Benton MacKaye Trail receive National Scenic Trail status.

In conclusion, I would like to restate my support for the Benton MacKaye Trail Association to receive National Scenic Trail status. If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank You,



**Mitch Ingram**  
*Monroe County Mayor*  
Phone: 423.442.3981  
Email: [mitch.ingram@monroetn.com](mailto:mitch.ingram@monroetn.com)

# **Robert M. Hatcher**

## **County Executive**

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February 16, 2023

To whom it may concern,

As the Executive of Polk County, I would like to express my support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association seeking to achieve National Scenic Trail status. I strongly support this because I believe obtaining National Scenic Trail status will have a positive impact on our local economy due to the increase in visitors we could potentially receive.

Tourism is big business in Polk County. The outdoor resources are rich in our County, including the Benton MacKaye Trail being one of them. We value tourism and would be honored to see the Benton MacKaye Trail gain National Scenic Trail status.

In conclusion, I would like to issue my support for the Benton MacKaye Trail Association to receive National Scenic Trail status. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank You,



Robert Hatcher

Polk County Executive

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## **Polk County Government**

Tel 423-338-4527  
Fax 423-338-4558

P.O. Box 128  
6239 Hwy. 411  
Benton, TN 37307

Email  
roberthatcher06@yahoo.com





FANNIN COUNTY  
CHAMBER & CVB

May 12, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter serves as the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce's support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's desire to achieve National Scenic Trail status for the almost 300-mile trail stretching from Georgia to the top of the Smokey Mountains. Fannin County has 106,000 acres of National Forest, which includes the Benton MacKaye Trail terminus. The Fannin County Chamber of Commerce operates three visitor centers strategically placed to be easily accessible to visitors. On an average year we receive over 20,000 visitors to the centers alone. Most are looking for information pertaining to outdoor recreation. The Chamber offers digital and print instructions detailing hiking access points and map guides. As the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Fannin County and the City of Blue Ridge, Georgia, we strongly support this effort and are excited about the possibilities it may bring.

Per the results from the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce's annual survey done in the fall of each year, approximately 50% of our visitors are here enjoying hiking. In 2013, Fannin County received designation as a Trail Town by Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) and the Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition. Our partnership with BMTA is invaluable, and we are thankful for the efforts in achieving National Scenic Trail status.

Currently, Fannin County is home to over 2,200 short term rental cabins, 280 hotel rooms, and over 250 RV spots and we know from research and surveys that hiking and outdoor recreation is one top reasons for visiting our area. Our community is thriving because of tourism for the economic stability and growth depends on it. Over 700 businesses in our chamber are directly impacted by tourism. We see this designation as a win for our community and region, our businesses, our DMO, our Chamber and most certainly our visitors.

In conclusion, the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce excitedly supports the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's efforts to have the trail recognized as a National Scenic Trail. If you have any questions, please reach out.

Sincerely,

Christie Gribble, President  
Fannin County Chamber and Welcome Center  
706-632-5680

[president@blueridgemountains.com](mailto:president@blueridgemountains.com)



April 19, 2023

To whom it may concern,

I am writing today on behalf of National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) in support of a National Scenic Trail designation for the Benton MacKaye Trail. NPCA is a national, non-partisan organization with 1.6 million members and supporters. That includes 697 members in Georgia's 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, 851 members in Tennessee's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District, and 1933 members in North Carolina's 11<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. NPCA's mission is to protect and enhance America's national parks for current and future generations.

NPCA's primary nexus of interest lies in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where the Benton MacKaye Trail wanders for 93 miles in and out of cove forests, along the shore of Fontana Lake, past rushing rivers and across high peaks like Mt Sterling. The trail is a magnificent resource for the recreating public.

As the organization's Southern Appalachian Director, I am uniquely qualified to speak to the many values found along the Benton MacKaye Trail. In addition to hiking approximately 268 of the trail's 288 miles, I previously served as a member of the board of directors of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. In addition, as the former Director of Tennessee Wild (2008-2013), I have spent considerable time leading dozens of outings on the trail in the Big Frog, Little Frog, Upper Bald River and Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness areas in Tennessee's Cherokee National Forest.

In addition, having walked the entire Appalachian National Scenic Trail in 2000, I can say with certainty that the Benton MacKaye Trail rises to the level of that significant national designation.

The Benton MacKaye Trail is an important recreational resource as it is close to several urban centers including Atlanta, Chattanooga, Knoxville and Nashville. In addition, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is within a day's drive for half of the population of the United States.

The biodiversity found along the Benton MacKaye Trail is nearly unparalleled in the temperate world. Whether we are talking birds, mammals, amphibian, reptiles, or tree species, the trail provides opportunities for solitude, wildlife watching, and appreciating the diverse ecosystems that the trail passes through.

**Southeast Regional Office**  
775 Haywood Road, Suite A  
Asheville, NC 28806  
P 828.545.1401 | [jhunter@npca.org](mailto:jhunter@npca.org)



## GILMER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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**Hubert Parker, Post 1 Commissioner**  
**Karleen Ferguson, Post 2 Commissioner**

**Edwina Daman, County Clerk**  
**Sandi Holden, Finance Officer**  
**David Clark, County Attorney**

January 28, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I am very excited to hear that the Benton MacKaye Trail is being considered for Congressional approval to be a designated National Scenic Trail. It is certainly a treasure to those who traverse it and get the opportunity to experience the beauty of the ridgeline views, streams, wildflowers and trees of these forests nestled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

My community, Gilmer County, is particularly proud that the southern terminus of the Benton MacKaye and the Benton MacKaye Memorial find it's home here in our county on Springer Mountain. This trail is used for both recreational use by our citizens, and the thousands of adventure seekers that come from all over the world to experience it annually, as well as for solitude and to find peace in this world of confusion and turmoil. Nature has a way of calming the soul and the number of those seeking this peace has tripled since the arrival of Covid and has opened the eyes and souls of many living in near by cities within a day drive of the trail.

As an elected official who understands only too well the costs of building new recreational facilities and parks it makes economical sense to protect this trail that has already been built by giving it the National Scenic Trail designation that would allow hikers and those seeking that experience in nature to enjoy for many generations to come. This designation would also protect the natural environment of rare flowers, trees and wildlife along the trail. It will also honor Benton MacKaye, the master mind behind the world renowned Appalachian Trail and who helped pioneer the idea of land preservation for recreation and conservation purposes. It sure makes sense to honor his forethought and the great work he did during his lifetime.

I do appreciate your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

Karleen Ferguson

Karleen P. Ferguson  
Post 2 Commissioner  
Gilmer County Board of Commissioners



April 12, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter is on behalf of the Board of Directors for the Gilmer County Chamber in support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's desire to achieve National Scenic Trail status for the almost 300-mile trail stretching from Georgia to the top of the Smoky Mountains.

As the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Gilmer County and the cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay, Georgia, we strongly support this effort and are excited about the ability to further market Gilmer County as a setting-off point for the Appalachian and Benton MacKaye Trails. We are confident this designation will attract additional visitors to Gilmer County.

Currently, Gilmer County is home to over 1800 short term rental cabins, small hotels and RV spots and we know from research that we fund (Arrivalist and AirDnA for example) that hiking is always in the top three reasons for visiting our area. Our community is completely dependent on tourism for the economic health of Gilmer County. Over 700 businesses in our chamber are very cognizant of that fact and our board has voted in favor of supporting this designation. We see this as a win for our community, our businesses, our DMO, our Chamber and most certainly our visitors.

As acting DMO for our area, we would invest a great deal more into marketing Gilmer County as a hiker's destination if this designation came to fruition. With a budget of nearly 2.1 million to market Gilmer County in 2023, we could be a key player in ensuring the trail is supported and the public is aware of this amazing asset.

In conclusion, the Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce overwhelmingly supports the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's drive to have the trail recognized as a National Scenic Trail. If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, you may reach me at the number listed below.

Respectfully,

*Ronald P Cheslock*

Ronald P Cheslock, Tourism Director  
Gilmer Chamber and Welcome Center



August 28, 2022

Representative Chuck Fleischmann  
462 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Fleischmann:

I am writing on behalf of the Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association in support of HB #7884, the Benton MacKaye Trail Act. We strongly support this effort in advancing the status of the Benton MacKaye Trail in order to have a greater appeal to potential visitors.

As a non-profit organization that promotes the historical and cultural tourism in the Tennessee Overhill region, comprised of McMinn, Monroe and Polk counties, we feel the Benton MacKaye Trail is nationally significant in our country's history and is worthy of this special designation. The trail's scenic beauty, along with the numerous cultural and historic assets along the way, makes it a jewel of southeast Tennessee. National Scenic Trail designation will increase interest in and visitation to museums and historic sites within the region.

We believe that the achievement of having the Benton MacKaye Trail recognized as a National Scenic Trail will naturally attract more outdoor enthusiasts to the Overhill region. This will, in turn increase the overall tourism impact in our Overhill counties.

The Tennessee Overhill region is estimated to have 4 million visitors annually. The region is home to the Cherokee National Forest, Cherohala Skyway National Scenic Byway, the Ocoee Scenic Byway, the Ocoee, Hiwassee and Tellico Rivers, and hundreds of miles of hiking and biking trails. Visitors to our area are generally outdoor enthusiasts. These visitors contribute greatly to the over \$118 million in direct visitor spending that occurs in the Overhill counties on an annual basis.

In summary, I would like to restate my support for HB #7884, the Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail Act. I would also like to thank you for introducing this bill. If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, please do not hesitate to contact me using the information found below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrian Lambert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Adrian Lambert  
Executive Director  
Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association



February 9, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter is on behalf of Discover Copper Basin, a 501(c)(3) for the enhancement and improvement of the Copper Basin region. We are in support of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's desire to achieve National Scenic Trail for the Benton MacKaye Trail. We strongly support this effort and look forward to the opportunity it will provide to attract additional visitors to historic Copper Basin area, which includes the cities of Ducktown and Copperhill in Tennessee, and McCaysville, Georgia.

A National Scenic Trail will complement the National Scenic Byway through the Ocoee Gorge and serve as an additional motivator for people to not only visit our area but to stay, make a vacation out of it and not just a day trip. The Ocoee River attracts a significant number of visitors annually, and we want to encourage those visitors to see the other resources and attractions in the region. We feel the presence of a National Scenic Trail nearby would increase the overall impact of tourism in the Copper Basin area. Increased tourism would result in increased sales tax revenues for both Tennessee and Georgia.

In conclusion, the Discover Copper Basin 501(c)(3) is in full support of having the Benton MacKaye Trail recognized as a National Scenic Trail. If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, you may reach one of our officers at the numbers listed below.

Patrick Keenan, [pkeenan@buckbaldbrewing.com](mailto:pkeenan@buckbaldbrewing.com)

Jackie Rogers, [Jackie.Rogers@tn.gov](mailto:Jackie.Rogers@tn.gov)

Sincerely,

*Discover Copper Basin*

*A 501(c)(3) for the revitalization and promotion of the Copper Basin District*

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*President - Patrick Keenan      Secretary - Shannon Marren      Treasurer - Jackie Rogers*  
<https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverCopperBasin>

*The Copper Basin Development Committee will identify, embrace, plan, and execute projects and/or events consistent with the Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan for the Copper Basin. Our partnerships will include, but will not be limited to, the Polk County and Fannin County Chambers of Commerce, as well as the Merchants and Citizens of the Copper Basin Community.*

Chattanooga Area Regional Council of Governments  
Southeast Tennessee Development District



February 27, 2023  
Amy Anderson  
Tourism Coordinator – SETTA  
1000 Riverfront Parkway  
Chattanooga, TN 37402

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to express my full and committed support to the designation of the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail. As a representative of sustainable tourism in Southeast Tennessee, I feel that this designation further protects the natural assets that draw visitors and keep locals in Southeast Tennessee. There is no trail that beats the beauty of the waterfalls, wildflowers, scenic views, ever-changing forest foliage, and tranquil peace of the Benton MacKaye. It truly represents the best of Southeast Tennessee, along with the Hiwassee Blueway running right alongside.

Becoming a National Scenic Trail would not only bring attention to this gem, but would bring an economic boost to local transitional, at-risk, and distressed communities. Hikers will patronize local business and support the healthy growth of our area in a way that puts an emphasis on small business and locally owned destinations.

I know how extensively the Benton MacKaye Trail Association worked to create, maintain, and protect this trail for the last 40+ years. Their stewardship has been incredible and the designation would support them in this mission.

I urgently ask your support and help to have the Benton MacKaye Trail designated a National Scenic Trail. Please help us keep this treasure protected for many more generations and travels to come.

Sincerely,

**Amy E. Anderson**  
**Tourism Coordinator**  
**Southeast Tennessee Development District**  
**1000 Riverfront Parkway**  
**Chattanooga, TN 37402**  
**423.424.4222 - office**  
**423.827.3137 - cell**  
[aanderson@sedev.org](mailto:aanderson@sedev.org)



Zpacks  
West Melbourne, FL  
March 9, 2023



Re:

To Whom It May Concern:

Zpacks offers its full support to the effort to designate the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) a National Scenic Trail. Receiving recognition as the 12th trail in the system is long over due as its beauty and splendor have been delighting hikers in the Southeast since the 80s. It's a trail that many of our customers and ambassadors hold dear and one that I had the pleasure of hiking along myself last weekend.

Over the past few years, Zpacks has provided the BMT with financial support as part of our Giving Back Together campaign. We accept customer donations to trails of significance, and then match, double match, or as is the case this year, triple match their contributions. This shared commitment between our customers and our company demonstrate our community's support of trails like the Benton MacKaye.

Being designated a National Scenic Trail would allow the Benton MacKaye Trail Association the opportunity to maintain and create a world class trail infrastructure. Not only would such an infrastructure allow easier access for hikers to reach and enjoy the breathtaking views, amazing waterfalls, and beautiful forests, it would also be an economic boom for the communities in and around the trails.

A National Scenic Trail designation and the financial support behind it, would increase visibility for the trail. The newfound attention would attract hikers from near and far and those adventurers and their families would stay at local campgrounds and hotels, eat in local restaurants, and shop in local retailer establishments, etc; strengthening local economies and providing new opportunities for those living in the shadow of the trail.

This key designation would allow the BMTA to preserve, protect, improve, and maintain this important trail through the Southeast as it meanders from Georgia into Tennessee and on to North Carolina. We ask that you also support this initiative and make the BMT our country's 12th National Scenic Trail.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email.

Sincerely,  
Matt Favero

Director, Marketing  
Matt@zpacks.com  
Zpacks  
www.zpacks.com