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Partnership Protects Missing Pieces of White Mountain Trails

CONCORD, N.H. – Members of the state's Congressional delegation joined representatives of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) on Monday to celebrate the recent protection of key trails in the National Forest. Senator Judd Gregg and Congressman Charles Bass recognized the success of the three organizations, which recently formed the White Mountain Trail Protection Partnership to ensure continued public access to popular trails.

Like placing the final piece of a very difficult puzzle, the Partnership is credited with the recent protection of the Red Ridge and Moat Mountain trails in Bartlett, New Hampshire, near North Conway and the Piper Trail, which leads up to the top of Mt. Chocorua. All three trails are among the WMNF's most popular trails.

The process of protecting the trails included federal funds from the Land Water Conservation Fund. Over the past several years, up to \$3 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund have been appropriated to protect trails in the WMNF as a result of the leadership of Senator Gregg and Congressman Bass. As well, Senator Gregg and Congressman Bass have also supported funding for land conservation projects such as the Pond of Safety, Bretton Woods and Lake Tarleton that also protect trails.

The Partnership's research found that over 89 trails in the WMNF alone may become inaccessible to the public if a portion of the trail is fragmented through changing ownership. That figure represents nearly a quarter of all trails in the WMNF.

Senator Gregg stated, "The White Mountain National Forest is home to some of the most beautiful forest land and best hiking in the entire nation. Today, I am pleased to join the Partnership in recognizing the initial success of the program and highlighting the need for continued collaborative efforts to guarantee public access to the National Forest for generations to come. Accessibility to this tremendous environmental resource is part of what makes New Hampshire and the White Mountains such a magnificent public treasure, and I would like to applaud the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Trust for Public Land, the WMNF, the private landowners and the local communities for working together to identify acquisition priorities and moving forward to complete these first two key trailhead protection projects."

"The White Mountain National Forest is an important natural resource that contributes to New Hampshire's great quality of life and supports much of our economy," said Congressman Charles Bass. "The projects we celebrate today will help ensure continued access to this New Hampshire treasure. I will continue my efforts in the House to provide federal funding to assist state and local efforts to preserve and protect this important natural resource for recreation and enjoyment today and in the future."

Members of the Partnership were uniquely vital to the success of the protection of the trails. AMC Executive Director Andrew Falender commended the members of the partnership for recent conservation successes. "Without the combined efforts of Senator Gregg, Congressman Bass, the WMNF, TPL, and, especially, private landowners, it is likely that people would lose access to many trails in the long run. This project is particularly important to the AMC, because it meshes well with our mission of encouraging outdoor recreation while also protecting the places that provide for unique outdoor experiences."

WMNF Forest Supervisor Tom Wagner highlighted the importance of voluntary participation on the part of landowners to protect all 400 trails in the WMNF. "We were able to accomplish the acquisitions we're celebrating today because private landowners and local towns were willing to work with us. They recognized the historic value of providing access to these trails, and I commend them for their participation. We wouldn't be here today if not for them."

"The White Mountains attract more than 6 million visitors each year, supplying the economic engine for the region's tourism economy and also providing critical habitat for wildlife," said TPL's Northern New England Field Office Director David Houghton. "As New Hampshire continues to lose roughly 13,000 acres of forestland to development each year, popular trails in the region are threatened with disruption and loss of public access. As a member of the Trail Protection Partnership, the Trust for Public Land is committed to helping to protect these trails and trailheads for the enjoyment of future generations." Since 1987, TPL has helped protect more than 20,000 acres in the White Mountains, including 450 acres at Bretton Woods, 857 acres around Glen House at the base of Mount Washington, and 5,000 acres around Lakes Tarleton and Armington in the Upper Valley.

Historically, a variety of arrangements, ranging from informal permission to legally established rights-of-way, have ensured public access across private property within or abutting the WMNF. "Despite this long tradition, informal arrangements are proving no longer sufficient to protect public access over the long term. Sale, development, and the changing tenure of private landowners threaten trails that are only accessed from private lands," said AMC Deputy Director Walter Graff.

In November 2001, 60 acres in Albany, New Hampshire were purchased by the WMNF. Referred to as the Davies property, this parcel included the trailhead for the Piper Trail, which leads to the summit of Mt. Chocorua, one of the most popular summits in the White Mountains, and provides connections to many other trails including the Nickerson Ledge and the Champney Falls trails. The property was purchased for \$385,000 through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

“The Forest Service, TPL and AMC were great to work with in making this transaction happen. The White Mountain National Forest has taken good care of the Piper Trail, including major reconstruction last year,” said landowner Stephen Davies. “I was happy to put the portion of the trail that was on my land into Forest Service management, including a portion I sold to them entirely and a portion on which we established a right-of-way. I’m also pleased to see that the land behind my property is now protected forever and has become a part of the National Forest.”

In May 2002, the WMNF purchased 325 acres in Bartlett, New Hampshire that includes portions of the Moat Mountain (north) and Red Ridge trails that form an extremely popular loop hike to the summit of North Moat Mountain and its many panoramic views of the Mt. Washington Valley. Known as the Lucy Brook property, the land is entirely surrounded by the WMNF and the Echo Lake-Cathedral Ledge State Park. Funding for the \$360,000 purchase also came through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

In the future, the AMC, TPL and the WMNF hope to continue the trend of working with private landowners and local towns to protect trails through the Trail Protection Partnership. For more information, please contact AMC Director of Trails and Riverways Stewardship Heather Clish at (617) 523-0655 ext. 380.

Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the United States. With more than 93,000 members in the Northeast and beyond, the nonprofit AMC promotes the protection, enjoyment, and wise use of the mountains, rivers and trails of the Appalachian region. For more information, go to www.outdoors.org.

The Trust for Public Land is a national conservation organization dedicated to conserving land for people to enjoy as parks and open space. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 1.2 million acres nationwide, including nearly 30,000 acres in New Hampshire. Currently, TPL is playing a lead role in the effort to protect 171,500 acres surrounding the headwaters of the Connecticut River in Pittsburgh, Clarksville, and Stewartstown. For more information, visit www.tpl.org.

The White Mountain National Forest belongs to the American people, and is managed by the Forest Service for all users, within the limits of sustaining ecosystems and their natural resources. Public land is both our heritage, and a special trust for future generations.

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