Celebrating Land Conservation with Elected Officials

AMC took on a greater leadership role in the national Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition in 2017, welcoming Amy Lindholm to AMC’s staff, who serves as the LWCF Coalition Manager and Northeast Regional Coordinator. Across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, as well as in Washington, D.C., AMC was a leader in defending funding for programs such as the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

AMC participated in a number of Washington, D.C. advocate fly-ins in 2017, bringing conservation leaders from land trusts, local economic development organizations, and board members from colleague organizations to meet with our policy makers in Washington. In August, AMC organized a site visit to Grafton Notch State Park with Congressman Bruce Poliquin and Bethel area advocates. Grafton Notch State Park is one of Maine’s first (and most iconic) Forest Legacy projects and an important driver of the local outdoor recreation economy.

Every year we work to get elected officials out on our public lands and trails. In 2017, in the Mid-Atlantic AMC hosted hikes and site visits with several House members, including Reps. Meehan and Costello from Pennsylvania, Rep. Faso from New York and Rep. Esty from Connecticut. We were pleased to host Rep. Esty and our Connecticut partners on the Appalachian Trail near Falls Village in May, 2017.

Loving our Mountains to Death

AMC Research and Lodging staff participated on a task force in 2017 that includes the White Mountain National Forest, NH State Parks, NH Department of Transportation, Plymouth State University, local chambers of commerce, and other partners to address the burgeoning problem of illegal and unsafe roadside parking along the I-93 Parkway in Franconia Notch State Park during many days in the summer, and overuse of the popular but fragile alpine Franconia Ridge. Alternative options for hiker parking are being studied in advance of the State of NH implementing a parking ban in 2018 along the Franconia Notch I-93 Parkway roadside. AMC is concurrently studying the impacts of overuse on the fragile Franconia Ridge alpine ecosystem and how and where to improve trail management techniques. However, the problem of trailhead parking and overuse are not confined to Franconia Notch; this phenomenon is apparent and widespread across the WMNF and beyond.
DOI National Monuments Review

In spring 2017, President Trump issued an Executive Order calling for review of 27 national monuments across the country. Unfortunately, the new Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument was included in that review process. AMC launched a campaign to collect comments from our members and supporters and were able to submit more than 500 comments to the DOI review. AMC has also been closely tracking efforts to alter the Antiquities Act and have submitted formal testimony to the House Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee on that issue.

AMC Secures Funding for Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Advocacy

Given AMC’s core work in supporting public lands, we are thrilled to announce that AMC received a $25,000 grant from the Conservation Alliance to support an advocacy campaign to protect and promote the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. This funding will be used to engage the public and AMC’s constituent base in the development of the management plan for the new monument. We anticipate working closely with the Maine Chapter to organize trips to the monument, working at the staff level to provide support to the NPS as they develop their plan, and supporting ongoing coalition building in Maine to bring as many supporters into the process as possible. We are eager to get started on this important work!

New Bridges, Trails and Fish Passage Projects on our Maine Woods Lands

On our Maine Woods lands in 2017 we completed five fish passage projects by replacing old culverts with bridges, opening up 4.72 miles of stream habitat to brook trout. We also completed several major trail projects including a new trail to the summit of Baker Mountain; built our longest single span bridge to-date at 66 feet as part of the Hinckley Ski/Bike Trail; built over 8 miles of new ski trails; and completed major upgrades to over 16 miles of roads. Our forests were productive as well as we harvested 8,000 cords of wood on our three tracts of land.

Maine Legislative Happenings

AMC’s Maine staff had a productive year building legislative relationships and monitoring priority issues during the 128th Maine Legislative Session. AMC tracks legislation related to Maine’s natural resources, access to recreation opportunities, conservation and forestry policy, and energy siting. In January, AMC held our first ever legislative reception in Augusta to introduce Maine policy makers to the Maine Woods Initiative, and to the full suite of our policy work in Maine. Kaitlyn Bernard, Dan Rinard, Steve Tatko, and Jenny Ward represented AMC’s Maine staff at the event and spoke with over 60 legislators about our facilities, community partnerships, and policy priorities. These relationships will create a strong foundation for AMC’s legislative work into 2018 and beyond.

AMC’s primary legislative issue this session was LD 901 - "An Act To Amend the Laws Governing the Determination of a Wind Energy Development’s Effect on the Scenic Character of Maine’s Special Places". This bill was a collaborative effort between AMC and the Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) to strengthen the permitting process for wind energy development by requiring proposals within 15 miles of the Appalachian Trail, Baxter State Park, and Acadia National Park to conduct a Visual Impact Assessment.
AMC’s Dave Publicover provided expert testimony at the bill’s public hearing in March and worked with Maine Policy Manager Kaitlyn Bernard to keep Legislative leadership and our colleague organizations informed on the bill’s merits and progress. Ultimately, our bill was amended in committee to a much weaker VIA requirement within 8 miles. The amended bill passed through the House & Senate initially but was vetoed by Governor LePage. The Legislature failed to override Governor LePage’s veto so the bill was killed. This was a preferable outcome to passing a weaker proposal and sets us up well for another Legislative attempt in the 129th Maine Legislative Session in 2019.

**Joining the Fight for Clean Water**

AMC has joined the fight to protect provisions of the Clean Water Act (CWA) that are threatened by current administrative actions. The Waters of the United States (WOTUS) regulations - finalized in 2015 - extended federal CWA protections to headwater streams and contiguous wetlands. These resources define the landscape throughout the Appalachian Mountains and are critical for fishing, recreation, and wildlife.

AMC has opposed efforts by the EPA to strip away the 2015 WOTUS rule and substitute less protective language, opening smaller streams and wetlands to pollution and development. We have submitted comments to the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers, posted alerts on the AMC blog site, spoken out at media events and alerted the AMC membership about opportunities to advocate for clean water. This fight continues, and AMC will continue to work toward strong protections for all water resources.

**6 Years of Great Maine Outdoor Weekend Fun**

AMC celebrated the 6th year of the biannual Great Maine Outdoor Weekend with another winter and fall series in 2018. Over the course of the program’s history more than 1,000 events have been held across the state and more than 75,000 people have participated. We are eager to continue this great program in 2018 with a new twist – a full week of Great Maine Outdoor Weekend events will be promoted in both February and September 2018.

**Susquehanna-Roseland & LWCF Funding help add 1,300 new acres to Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge**

AMC joined partners to celebrate the protection of 1,300 acres surrounding the Appalachian Trail as part of Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Pennsylvania abutting the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. $2.2 million was made available through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with millions more committed through the settlement agreement from the Susquehanna-Roseland powerline project that began operation in 2015. AMC has advocated for establishing the Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge for over 10 years, and has worked with partners to help secure funds through LWCF for nearly as long. As a party to litigation over the Susquehanna-Roseland powerline project which crosses the Delaware Water Gap, the application of a portion of the $66 million settlement to protect the first substantial piece property in Cherry Valley is exciting. Another 3,300 acres are available for sale and awaiting future funding from LWCF and other sources.
Trails

Banner Year in Volunteer Trails

In 2017, AMC hosted volunteer trails programs across our region, as well as 2 crews in Costa Rica and 2 crews in St. John, VI. In NH’s North Country alone, 750 volunteers contributed more than 18,000 hours of stewardship! AMC’s professional crew constructed a new bridge and boardwalk along the Lost Pond Trail (Appalachian Trail) in the White Mountains; crews cleared substantial blowdown damage in October after the significant storms; AMC re-built the Speck Pond Shelter on the Appalachian Trail; and elsewhere, Teen Crews in the Berkshires, Mid-Atlantic, Maine, and NH’s North County all saw record participation, completing priority trail stewardship projects across our region. On the Bay Circuit Trail, Teen Trail Crews completed 1,746 hours of stewardship with 182 volunteers. Our Ridgerunner program in Connecticut supported 577 thru hikers at overnight sights and had contacts with almost 6,500 trail users!

AMC’s Mohican Outdoor Center Hosts Public Stewardship Event

Since the inauguration of staff led trail programming in the NY/NJ region, there has been discussion between AMC and the National Park Service about having a large-scale stewardship event in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. We are happy to report that 2017 was the first year we were able to make it happen. On the morning of June 17th, Mohican Outdoor Center saw over 100 people arrive to help give back. In partnership with REI, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, and DEWA Trail Stewards, we were able to lead volunteers into the field to work on check steps, turnpiking, and drainage improvements on the Rattlesnake Swamp and Van Campen Glen trails. We wrapped up the field work with a free lunch, raffles and Outdoor School classes, all provided by REI. The event was such a success that planning has already begun to strengthen our commitment by hosting an overnight event at Mohican Outdoor Center for National Public Lands Day in 2018.

Creating Even More Opportunity for Youth Opportunity Program Participants

In 2016, the NY/NJ Trails Region received an internal AMC grant for the following year to implement a one-week Teen Trail Crew specifically for local Youth Opportunity Program (YOP) participants. In collaboration with the YOP New York office we were able to identify nine deserving youth to fill the crew. They were awarded their prize at the end of April and the stewardship program was scheduled to take place in August. Not only did the recipients help reconstruct trails in Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, but they also spent some time alongside the Park Service’s professional trail crew. A huge thank you goes out to John Casey, Trails Supervisor at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, for taking the time to show a group of teens how rewarding working outside can be.
Planning for the long-term in New Jersey

AMC conducted a baseline trail inventory and made site-specific trail improvement recommendations based on multi-use trail objectives for the Morris County Park Commission, NJ to guide their long-term management planning.

New Paddlers’ Trail Campsite in Connecticut

In 2017 AMC partnered with The Nature Conservancy on the establishment of a new Connecticut River Paddlers’ Trail Campsite on Chapman Pond in East Haddam, Connecticut. The Chapman Pond Preserve Campsite is a short paddle down from the Goodspeed Opera House and features two tent platforms, which can accommodate up to ten-twelve people or 4 tents. The campsite is in a 500-acre preserve that provides nesting, breeding, and feeding habitat for a variety of plants and animals and is a winter roosting site for bald eagles. Four rare plant species are found in the adjacent marsh.

Increasing Awareness and Access on the New England National Scenic Trail

AMC worked with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and Department of Transportation to install signs at five major road crossings along the New England Trail, including at the newly completed reroute in Holyoke, located at the Whiting Street Reservoir.

Bay Circuit Trail Re-Route Moves Trail Closer to Working Farm and Historical Landmarks

A portion of the Bay Circuit Trail was re-routed this summer, taking the trail through Mass Audubon’s Drumlín Farm Sanctuary in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Drumlín farm is a working farm with educational programs and exhibits for children and adults. This new section of trail re-routes a significant stretch of trail off road to a protected conservation area. The new route also places the trail close to numerous historic landmarks including the Codman Estate and the Gropius House.

Mapping Trail Viewsheds in the Mid-Atlantic

AMC researchers conducted a Circuit Trails Visual Assessment Pilot Project. The Circuit Trails are Greater Philadelphia’s multi-use trail network, a vast regional network of hundreds of miles of built and planned trails that connects people to communities, parks, and waterways, and provides opportunities for recreating and commuting. The pilot project on the Schuylkill River Trail ranked parcels in the trail’s viewshed according to visual resources, scenic character, key observation points, and ownership fragmentation information. The results will guide local land protection conservation efforts related to preserving the visual ambience of their trail systems.
PA Highlands Trail Network Works to Close Key Gaps

Along the Pennsylvania Highlands Trail Network, AMC made great strides in 2017: closing key trail gaps, advancing priority trail development projects, and sharing the network with the public through new signage and promotion. In Bucks County, AMC led the public input process to advance the design and engineering plans for the Upper Bucks Rail Trail, while developing official support for a new trail segment on Boy Scout property, and beginning the construction of a new trailhead to Ringing Rocks County Park from the Delaware River. On signage, AMC developed 100 new signs that will accompany the trail route through Quakertown Borough, as well as designing and installing three new interpretive kiosks, including one kiosk in partnership with the Lehigh University Earth and Environmental Studies Program focused on the unique geology of the Pennsylvania Highlands. AMC’s Pennsylvania Highlands Trail Stewards, a volunteer crew that supports the PA Highlands Trail Network vision, built new trails at Ringing Rocks County Park and installed trail markers, blazes, and blades, to encourage visitors to stay on established trails while enjoying the park. An interpretive and education kiosk now explains to the recreating public how to read trail signs and why it is important to Leave No Trace when we visit the places we love.
Good Policy Needs Good Science

The Boston Chapter hosted a well-attended Earth Day event as part of the “March for Science” in Boston. The activities included a talk on AMC’s long-term air and climate research and monitoring and ongoing policy initiatives. After decades of progress in cleaning up our air and water, the nation faces reversals through executive orders, Draconian budget cuts, an anti-science agenda, and misguided leadership halting action on climate change and undermining clean air and water policy. AMC Research and Policy staff, along with local members, also attended concurrent events in ME and NH. The “March for Science” was a national event to support science in the United States and across the world.

Pipelines Crossing the Appalachian Trail

Increased use of natural gas during the last decade has led many producers to seek expansion of interstate pipelines. This has been particularly true in the mid-Atlantic region. AMC has been monitoring three natural gas pipelines of note: Atlantic Coast Pipeline (Virginia), Mountain Valley Pipeline (Virginia), and PennEast (Pennsylvania). Each of these pipelines would cross the Appalachian Trail and would be constructed through recreational and water resources. Despite plans to place the pipelines in tunnels beneath the AT itself, above ground pipes would mar scenic vistas, disrupt recreation, and create threats to ground and surface water. AMC has submitted comments on these construction projects that we consider to be unnecessary and misplaced. As states and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission review permits for these activities, AMC will continue to oppose their placement in valuable recreation areas along the Appalachian range.

States Assume the Mantle on Climate Leadership

Nine Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Governors proposed an update to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) that will extend the timeline through 2030 and tighten the regional cap on polluting emissions by requiring a 30% reduction. This update could result in a reduction of 132 million tons in regional carbon dioxide pollution in 2030. The avoided emissions are equivalent to taking nearly 28 million of cars off the road each year. AMC and a large environmental coalition have been advocating for changes to RGGI.
Defending AMC’s Achievements

AMC received funding from a family foundation and an individual donor to defend the Clean Air Act (CAA) and state-based clean air policies. AMC’s three decades of research into air quality in the White Mountains, NH has shown major improvements in air quality over this time period, including declines in acidity, sulfur, and nitrogen in rain and clouds, declines in ozone pollution, and improved visibility that can be attributed to Clean Air Act reductions programs that are now under threat.

The US Environmental Protection Agency backed down from its decision to delay the 2015 federal ozone standards, with the agency retraction coming after legal challenges. The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) had joined legal action by environmental and public health groups to challenge the agency’s grounds for the delay. AMC’s hiker health research with the Harvard School of Public Health and Brigham Women’s Hospital has shown ozone to be a pollutant that can impact even healthy people exercising outdoors.

Numerous legal challenges were filed by AMC and others on the US EPA Haze Rule updates that propose to delay implementation. The Haze Rule’s purpose is to restore natural visibility to 156 national parks and wilderness areas by 2064. EPA had used the program to force cleanups of older coal-fired power plants, but the latest amendments postpone required implementation plans another three years. AMC has long researched haze pollution in the White Mountain National Forest and been an important advocate on this issue nationally.

Getting Wind Located Right

EDP Renewables withdrew its efforts to develop a large wind farm in Alexandria, NH where AMC’s Cardigan Lodge is located. This wind farm would have abutted both AMC’s land and Cardigan State Park. Like the similar but also withdrawn Wild Meadows Wind Project, these two proposals would have severely impacted Cardigan State Park viewed due to their immediate proximity to the summit of Mount Cardigan, which has a 360 degree panorama and is one of the most climbed mountains in NH. AMC had submitted testimony opposing these poorly sited projects.

Preventing Transmission Towers from becoming NH’s State Tree

In its 8th controversial year of seeking permits, the proposed Northern Pass 192-mile HVDC electric transmission project from Canada to MA that would place almost 1,800 new or larger transmission towers up to 165 feet tall will be decided in early 2018. AMC has been a long-time opponent of this project as proposed, favoring newer technologies using full burial of the cables. AMC research staff were expert witnesses in the NH Site Evaluation Committee hearings on visual and ecological impacts to the NH north country. To date AMC has been successful in getting 60 miles of the project buried around the White Mountain National Forest.