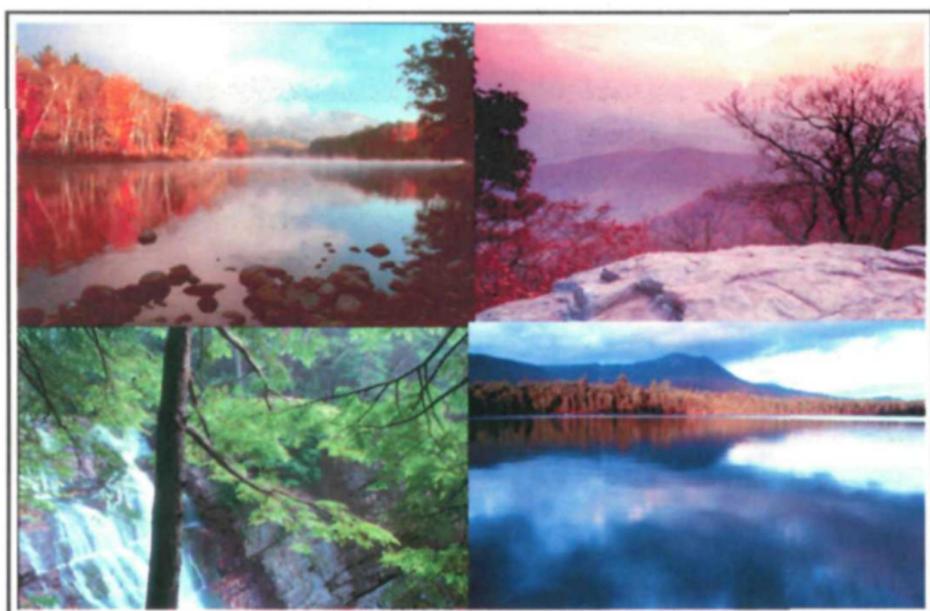




# Appalachian Trail Vital Signs

*“The Appalachian Trail is not merely a footpath through the wilderness, but a footpath of the wilderness.”*

—Benton MacKaye



Androscoggin River, ME; Blood Mountain Sunset, GA; Laurel Falls, TN; Mt Katahdin, ME. Photos by Joe Cook.

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT) extends along the Appalachian Mountain range in the eastern United States. The trail corridor averages 1,000 feet wide, spans fully 2,175 miles from Maine to Georgia and traverses the major elevational, latitudinal, ecological and cultural gradients that characterize the eastern United States. Appalachian Trail lands include approximately 280,000 acres, making it one of the largest parks in the east.

## **The Appalachian Trail Vital Signs Report**

The Appalachian Trail Vital Signs Report was published in January 2006 and is available in both hard copy and CD. It is also posted on the NETN website and can be downloaded at [http://www1.nature.nps.gov/im/units/netn/reports/reports\\_by\\_category.cfm?recID=Vital%20Signs](http://www1.nature.nps.gov/im/units/netn/reports/reports_by_category.cfm?recID=Vital%20Signs). For further information please feel free to contact the Northeast Temperate Network or the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.



**Horns Pond in Bigelow Preserve, Maine.**

Planning for ecological monitoring on the AT is the most important step in laying a strong foundation for an AT ecological monitoring program. Presently, many initiatives related in some way to monitoring are ongoing. AT staff have initiated the process of developing a resource management plan, and the ATC recently started an Appalachian Trail Environmental Monitoring Initiative. The USDA Forest Service and NPS prototype parks that encompass parts of the AT are also involved in long-term ecological monitoring and many other groups are conducting biological inventories and monitoring programs along or adjacent to the AT.

A coordinated, unified, AT environmental monitoring program provides an unprecedented opportunity to track the condition of priority natural resources along over 2,100 miles of green-space from Frasier Fir forests in the south to Balsam Fir forests in the north. A well designed and executed AT monitoring program can provide a unifying principle and a means of linking and strengthening existing programs through the interpretation of existing data in relation to the AT. This report is a step in this process. Specific monitoring vital signs were identified and available information was summarized, providing a starting point to focus the development of the AT Vital Signs Program.

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