



## MRATC Partners Meeting Minutes

Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club  
P.O.Box 789 Damascus VA 24236-3101

MEETING Nov. 14, 2018 Sugar Grove Forest Service Work Center on Flatridge Rd., VA

*Minutes were recorded and written by Mary Davis, MRATC Secretary*

**18 ATTENDEES:** Ron Bobko, Edie Bobko, David Hatcher, Bill Hurlebaus, Anna Sherrill, Beth Minnick, Janet Gibbons, Anne Maio, Sharon Trumbley, Doug Levin, Jim Warden, Mary Davis, Gerry Davis, Carol Broderson, Kathryn Herndon-Powell, Connor McBane, Josh Kloehn, Stephen Hmurciak

Meeting was called to order by Carol Broderson (MRATC Natural Resources Coordinator) and members and ATC and Forest Service partners were introduced 1:00pm.

### REVIEW OF TRAIL PROJECTS FROM THE PAST YEAR - Doug Levin

- Bear boxes have been installed. 2 small boxes are in storage at the work center. 3 large boxes deployed - Rhododendron Gap, Wise and Thomas Knob, 2 small boxes at Old Orchard. Looking at considerations for a shelf in the large bear boxes to accommodate more packs. We had two substantial groups to help bring in the boxes at Old Orchard in wilderness area. The large boxes were delivered most of the way by ATV.
- We will be looking at installing a bog bridge early spring just south of Dicky Gap. It requires a group to carry in the material. There is an existing bridge but needs to be replaced.
- NCCC group was useful to finish sidehill from Barton Gap to Dickey Gap plus 2/3 of the boundary south of Damascus.
- Doug Levin discussed our interest in getting a SPOT, GPS type of device. This is something we would like a recommendation for to provide protection.
- Doug discussed our interest in obtaining a new chain saw. We are interested in the possibly of an electric saw but understand there are currently safety issues on this. Gerry Davis explained the length of battery use and cost issues. It was discussed as a practical thing in certain situations. Bill Hurlebaus asked if other clubs were using electric. Josh referred to the ATC Chain gang committee. PATC has most experience with electric saws. There has been an ATC stand down issue on use of electric saws due to safety. Gerry Davis asked about the safety issue with chaps and the electric saws. Josh explained that the torque on the electric saw is more consistent and can bind chaps. The stand down notice is in effect until we get more information. There isn't enough data on e-saw use and the safety gear hasn't caught up yet.

### VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT - Anne Maio (for Terry Walker)

There are two items that must be signed by the club. Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). We need a digital copy so we can pass around to members and we can act on at our January Meeting. VSA must be signed before the MOU

### KONNAROCK PROJECT FOR 2019 - Doug Levin and Josh Kloehn

- Josh Kloehn discussed we will have 2 projects for this coming year. The Thomas Knob and Rhododendron Gap rehab project and the Hardcore project that we will pick up where we left off from last spring. We will have 3 weeks of Konnarock.

- Anne Maio asked if we could have work done on the spur trail to Mt. Rogers. Josh explained we would like to finish the sections we are currently working on. The allocation of Konnarock is up to us. Placing the crew is a mutual decision. We can work on the spur trail if that is what the club decides is the priority.
- Stephen Hmurciak mentioned we may be able to get a SAWS (Southern Appalachian Wilderness Crew) crew to work on the spur trail to Mt. Rogers. Stephen mentioned that this trail is part of a forest service trail. The Mt. Rogers spur trail would be a multi-week project.
- Doug Levin indicated the section from Thomas Knob to Briar Ridge is looking good. Briar Ridge south needs more attention.
- \* Connor McBane asked that for any major trail projects we contact him to assess any rare plants in the area.

## **HARDCORE 2019**

- \* Doug Levin - Hardcore 2019 will be a continuation of the work from Massie Gap and the stiles. Our materials should still be there from last year but we may need to re-flag the area.
- \* The Club asked ATC partners to get more information and a decision on the \$1400 for Hardcore that was discussed at the RPC meeting and Andrew Downs agreed.

## **BEARS - Kathryn Herndon-Powell**

- Stephen Hmurciak informed the group they would be taking the electric fences down and the plan is to not have any electric fences next year. Two of the bear boxes need to be better secured. Members asked about a shelf for the large boxes and Stephen indicated that it should be possible to make a middle shelf on the large boxes.
- Directional signage will need to be added for box at Rhododendron Gap. Kathryn Herndon-Powell indicated that the wooden signs are far less intrusive. Agreement that the term Bear Box would be the best wording with directional arrow. Sharon asked if we could split the cost with the Forest Service. Stephen indicated the USFS budget for signage is small but he would ask about this request and he would get back to us. The club indicated that we would help pay for a sign along with USFS.
- Anne suggested we have more permanent signage at trail heads indicating bear box locations.

## **OPEN AREAS AND INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT - Connor McBane**

- The two projects we had slated for MRATC were Elk Garden hawthorn thinning and Slab Town invasive species removal. Next year we are hoping to replicate the same. At Slab Town we will do some herbicide spraying. The priority project is for invasive species in Slab Town. Autumn Olive is a priority to be treated in the high country. Hawthorn is a pioneer species and we need to thin it to assist grassland bird species.
- Connor informed us that we will hopefully have some meetings next year to discuss the loss of open areas in the high country. Connor will let us know of the meetings if we wish to attend.
- The Elk Garden parking lot will be improved. There will be a meeting on December 7 at 8am at Elk Garden, to discuss site location, rare plant protection, and signage.
- Doug indicated that the Elk Garden Hawthorn removal is a good student group project. Connor asked us to refer student groups to him for further projects involving the removal of invasive species.

## **PRIVY AT MT. ROGERS - Doug Levin**

- The privy wasn't used as much this year due to bear activity. This privy needs attention. The only way we could help this would be to raise the floor. It isn't a high enough priority at this point to pursue but we need to think about it.
- The Trimpi Shelter has some masonry issues. There is some settling that may get bad enough at some point. We need some external expertise to give us recommendations.
- Anne Maio - We brought up last November the possibility of putting another privy near Rhododendron Gap. Is it worth looking into? Kathryn Herndon-Powell commented that there is a lot of human waste not being taken care of properly. The club feels that over time we need to expand Thomas Knob or add another privy near Rhododendron Gap. Anne Maio asked this to be explored in more detail.

## **STILES and ROAD CROSSING SIGNS- Anne Maio**

- Tom Blevins would like us to replace 3 stiles. We haven't addressed this yet. Connor McBane indicated that the walk-thru stiles are safer. No decision was made.
- VDOT ATC road crossing signs scheduled for January 2019
- Parking lots at Elk Garden and Fox Creek are still in the planning stages. They will need a natural resources analysis before work begins on these.
- Gerry Davis indicated that at the RPC meeting the plan is to have road crossing signs for all crossing throughout VA.

## **PROPOSED TRAIL RELOCATIONS**

- Josh Kloehn indicated we will need to get Brittany and Connor out for a site visit to review the area near Scales for rare plant populations. The project discussed involves a lot of stepping stones. Stephen Hmurciak has a project going on the Scales trail and Wilson Creek trail. The group discussed what solutions we could do to help the boggy spot. We may need to find material outside the area if none are available nearby.

## **REPORTING EMERGENCIES AND INCIDENTS**

- In the club first aid kits are ATC instructions on how to deal with emergencies.
- <http://appalachiantrail.org/home/explore-the-trail/report-an-incident>
- We have a USFS form to fill out for emergencies. Most of our club members wish to take care of emergencies under their own health plan. Guests should fill out Volunteer Forest Service Agreement. 301B. We should have a guest working with us always fill out a 301B Volunteer Service Agreement.
- Kathryn Herndon-Powell indicated the incident report (different than accident form) may become an online form in the future.
- Carol Broderson suggested we have our webmaster place a sign-in section on our website for us to obtain the emergency forms that we may not wish to have available to the general public.
- Sue Combs can address issues on release forms since the ATC policy may be changing with youth.
- Connor indicated that with youth projects scope of work should be listed on the release form.

- Discussion that the NPS emergency # should be used when possible for data. Stephen Hmurciak from USFS indicated that they have responsibility to report incidents and we can describe and email to them. Stephen indicated that the form for the USFS is now online. The accident form allows us to be eligible for the workers comp when we work on the trail. All hike leaders should have the emergency packet provided by the ATC. Josh Kloehn can provide the packets to us for our first aid kits.

**KIOSK AT MASSIE GAP** - Anne Maio - Discussion as to making the kiosk more visible and consolidated with the most important information and directions more prominent. Stephen Hmurciak will be working on this.

- Kathryn Herndon-Powell indicated that we may wish to put this information on the backside of registration forms that hikers/campers may be able to take with them.

## **INVOLVEMENT OF PARTNERS**

- Anne discussed trying to get the state park more involved.

## **CAMPFIRES**

Discussion as to whether we need to prohibit campfires and how can we inform campers better as to the rules for fires.

- Suggestion as to interpretive signs explaining the reason for prohibiting fires. Kathryn will look for the ATC information in the ridge runner handbook. We can post this information and the reason inside the shelter.

## **SPOT DEVICE**

Kathryn Herndon-Powell indicated that if we can afford the two way communication we may wish to get this. The cost for the two-way communication is around \$26.00. Gerry Davis suggested we get the no subscription device with just the emergency signal would best suit our group needs.