

SEFTC Strategic Planning Meeting Summary Report

December 9-11, 2005 at Cohutta Lodge in Chatsworth, GA

Organization

Formed in 2002, the Southeastern Foothills Trail Coalition (SEFTC) is working cooperatively to **build** hiking trails in the Southeast, as well as the relationships and individuals who are overseeing out foot trails, **protect** the natural hiking trail corridors by jointly raising the visibility of the value and importance of hiking trails to the public and **promote** a vast long-distance trail network spanning nine southeastern states.

Highlights of the 5000-mile trail network include the Pinhoti Trail, Benton MacKaye Trail, Mountains to Sea Trail, and the Cumberland Trail.

In attendance at the meeting were representatives from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Benton MacKaye Trail Association, Nantahala Hiking Club, Carolina Mountain Club, North Carolina Bartram Trail Society, Cumberland Trail Conference, the Chattanooga Hiking Club, Kennesaw Mountain Trail Club, National Park Service-RTCA, Kentucky Trails Association, Hiawassee Hiking Club, Smoky Mountain Hiking Club, Alabama Hiking Trail Society, Potomic Appalachian Trail Club, Virginia Creeper Trail Club, Georgia Pinhoti Trails Association, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, Mountain High Hikers, Georgia Bartram Trail Group, Cherokee Hiking Club, Friends of the Mountain to Sea Trail, Alabama Trails Association, NC Bartram Trail Society, Tennessee Trails Association, ALDHA and others.

Great Eastern Trail Meetings

The meeting began Friday afternoon with a short hike along the Georgia Pinhoti Trail. After dinner a number of Stakeholders for the Great Eastern Trail (formerly known as Western Appalachian Alternative) held a meeting. The Great Eastern Trail is comprised of the Florida Trail, Alabama Pinhoti, Georgia Pinhoti, Cumberland Trail, Pine Mountain Trail, and the Mid-Atlantic Foot Trails Coalition (MAFTC) recently formed to push this trail system up into NY State.

The group decided to discuss forming a committee and work out some mechanism for the Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition (SEFTC) to communicate and make decisions with the MAFTC.

On Saturday the Great Eastern Trail Working Group met over breakfast and came to consensus regarding a structure and mechanism to communicate between the SEFTC & MAFTC.

Leadership Council Strategic Planning Workshop

At 9 AM on Saturday December 10 the meeting began with our Facilitator Wendy Cardell outlining the responsibilities of the various participants. Then, Coalition Coordinator Jeffrey Hunter gave an overview of the Coalition activities since the 1st Conference held in May '02.

Jeffrey informed the participants that the SEFTC was envisioned as a 5-year project by American Hiking Society (AHS) and the National Park Service, and we are currently at the mid-point. While AHS does not have plans to walk away at year 5, the AHS Board of Directors will look at the project in year 4, and determine if the Coalition needs additional assistance. Currently the Coalition is not sustainable, in the sense that it would probably not survive the loss of a Coordinator. Jeffrey emphasized that the AHS Board of Directors will be taking a hard look at program success in spring '07, and that would help with a decision to extend support for the Coalition with a full-time Staff person. One benchmark that AHS is looking at is whether or not individual memberships in AHS are increasing in the southeast. Jeffrey emphasized the fact that the relationship between the Coalition and AHS is a symbiotic one. The more members AHS has, the greater the capability to provide assistance to the Coalition.

We then launched into an exercise to perform a **SWOT** analysis for the Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition. A **SWOT** analysis identified the **Strengths** and **Weaknesses** of the Coalition, and the potential unexploited **Opportunities** as well as the outside **Threats** that could impact the work of the Coalition.

Each participant identified a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity & Threat, participants were given an opportunity to select the most important focus areas.

After the SWOT analysis, several different Working Groups were formed around different topics based on the priorities from the SWOT. They are as follows;

- Coalition Sustainability (Deborah Stewart-Kent, Don Walton, Tom Johnson, Jeffrey Hunter)
- Advocacy Working Group (Eddi Minche, Marianne Skeen, Betty Petty)
- Connections Working Group (Bob Williams, Lorin Smith, Warren Devine)
- Gaps Working Group (Larry Madden, Steve Lindeman, Dennis Crowley, Howard Pardue, Mike Kennedy, George Owen, Alison Bullock)
- Outreach & Education (Richard Angeli, Linda Davis, Diana Ristom, Bill Van Horn, Hilary Browder)

On Sunday December 11, the participants reconvened and discussed the prior days meeting outcomes. The Coalition Sustainability group put forth a motion that an Interim Executive Committee be formed, and that this body would make recommendations to the Leadership Council for a permanent Executive Committee at the next full meeting in May '06.

The following nominees were approved unanimously for the Interim Executive Committee; Mike Kennedy-Alabama Hiking Trails Society, Don Walton-Carolina Mountain Club, Bob Williams-Alabama Trail Association, Deborah Stewart/Kent-Florida Trails Association, Larry Madden-Georgia Pinhoti Trail Association and Marianne Skeen-Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

The Interim Executive Committee will create the agenda for the next meeting.

The Great Eastern Trail Working Group presented the findings from their meeting held Saturday morning. The Leadership Council unanimously approved the creation of a joint SEFTC/MAFTC Committee, with representatives from each of the (10) states that the trail will potentially pass through. Ideally, decision making would be made via consensus, but simple majority would be the fallback position.

The Florida Trail Association suggested that the next meeting of the Leadership Council take place May 5-7, 2006 in White Springs, Florida. This was approved.

The theme for the 2007 conference (*May 3-6, 2007 at Montreat Conference Center in Montreat, North Carolina*) was discussed, and participants provided suggestions to try and grow our attendance.

SEFTC link to more info: <http://www.americanhiking.org/alliance/sai.html>

Don Walton