

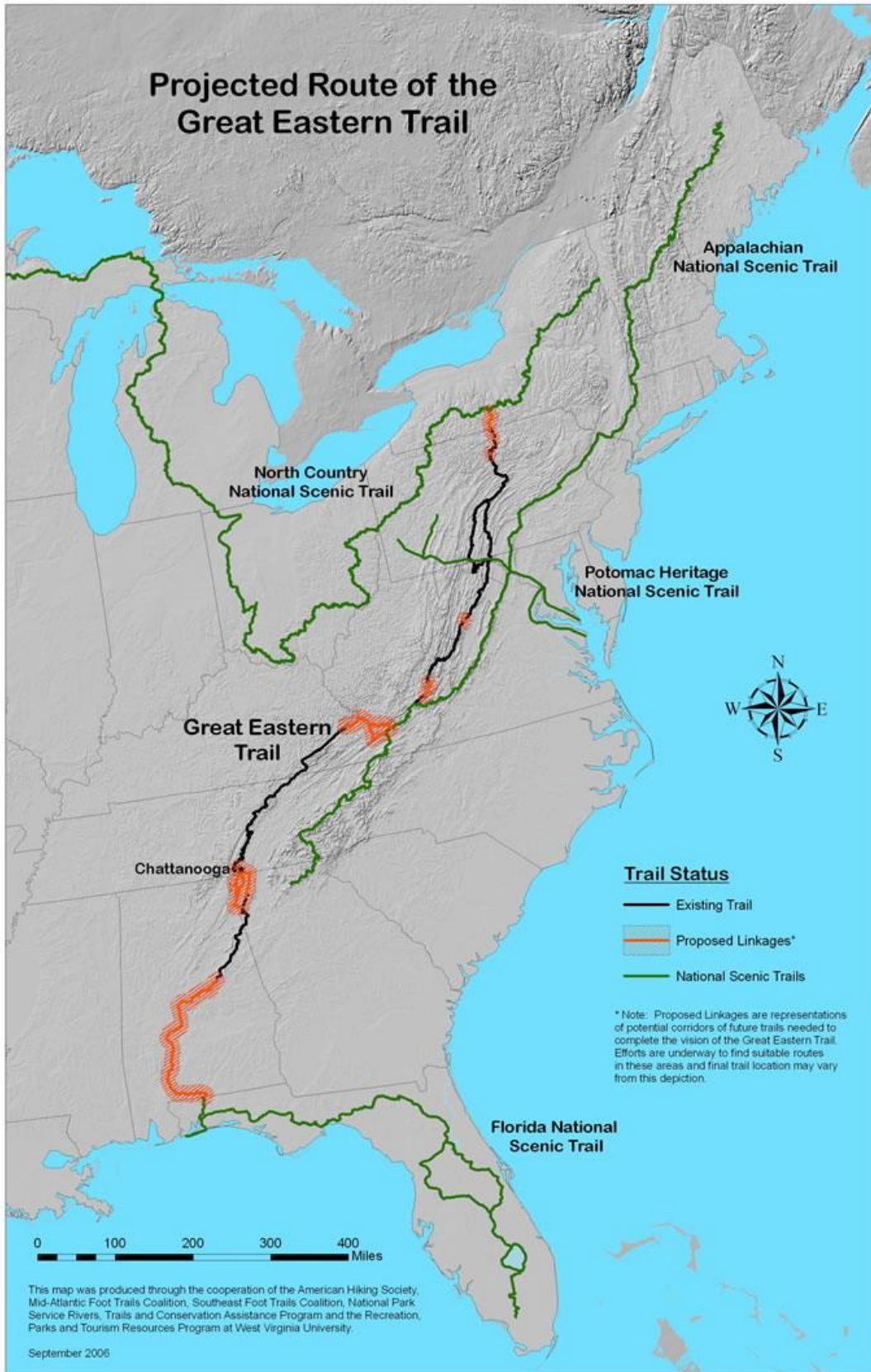
# *Great Eastern Trail Progress Report*



*A 2000-mile hiking trail, paralleling the Appalachian Trail, linking Alabama and New York.*



**www.GreatEasternTrail.net**  
*November, 2011*



## **Background and History**

After his legendary hike in 1948, Earl Shaffer, the first Appalachian Trail (AT) thru-hiker, came up with an idea for a new trail. He sent the idea to his brother John in a letter in 1952. Why not create a new trail west of the AT? Trails were already out there – they just needed to be linked together. Shaffer’s idea was first publicly articulated by Stan Murray, the chairman of the ATC Board of Directors, in 1969, at the opening meeting of the Tennessee Trails Association. This new trail took on the name of the Western Appalachian Alternative (WAA).

The Appalachian Trail became a huge success, and as time went on, became more and more popular (and crowded). In 2000 Lloyd MacAskill of PATC published an article in the *Appalachian Trailway News* calling attention to the existing trails to the west of the AT and saying “Don’t look now, but parts are already in place.” He named some of the various trails that could be linked to provide a western alternative.

In the fall of 2003 the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) proposed to the Southeast Foot Trails Coalition (SEFTC) which had just formed in Chattanooga, that the two organizations begin discussing such a project. SEFTC accepted the proposal and in an executive committee meeting in April of 2004 endorsed it as a central organizing theme and Coalition objective. The idea was to make certain southeast foot trails part of this new trail.

American Hiking Society (AHS) and the National Park Service/Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program, which had partnered to form SEFTC, offered to assist in the early organizational effort. In the fall of 2004 NPS/RTCA, AHS, and PATC signed a memorandum of agreement.

In May of 2005 a group of representatives from Mid-Atlantic trail clubs, and National Park Service officials, met at a PATC cabin in southern Pennsylvania and formed the Mid-Atlantic Foot Trails Coalition (MAFTC). In November of 2005 representatives from SEFTC and MAFTC selected the name, Great Eastern Trail.

## **The Vision**

The Great Eastern Trail will link existing trails in the Appalachian Mountains into a new, long-distance trail stretching ultimately from the Florida National Scenic Trail at the Florida/Alabama line, north to the North Country National Scenic Trail in New York. This will provide a premier hiking experience on a series of existing trails that become linked to each other. Due to its location in more remote areas of the Appalachians, hikers will have a more primitive backcountry experience, providing an alternative to the relatively crowded Appalachian Trail.

## **Route Status**

State by state from south to north.

In Alabama, there is a gap between the Florida line and the Alabama-Pinhoti Trail. Alabama Hiking Trail Society is currently extending the Pinhoti Trail southwest, and there is a plan to link it with a planned Alabama Trail that will run the length of the state, from Tennessee to Florida.

The Pinhoti Trail in Alabama links to the Pinhoti Trail in Georgia. In northwest Georgia a temporary route has been selected to trails in the Chickamauga and Chattanooga Military Park on

Lookout Mountain. The GETA has signed an MOU with the National Park Service designating 8.5 trail of Park trails as part of the GET. Much of the temporary route is a road walk, but new trail sections are gradually being filled in, principally by the Lula Lake Land Trust.

In Tennessee, the Cumberland Trail Conference has selected a temporary route from the trails on Lookout Mountain through Chattanooga, connecting to the Cumberland Trail at Soddy Daisy. This is almost entirely a road walk at present, much of it along city streets in downtown Chattanooga. This route is approximately 20 miles. The Cumberland Trail, a 300+-mile trail that is approximately 60% finished, ends at the Kentucky line, where it links to the Pine Mountain Trail.

In Kentucky, the Pine Mountain Trail Conference is working to complete the trail from Cumberland Gap National Park to Breaks Interstate Park at the Kentucky-Virginia border.

A new link has been selected between the Pine Mountain Trail and the Appalachian Trail. A primary route proceeds north from Elkhorn City, Kentucky, along the Kentucky-Virginia border to Matewan, West Virginia, and then east across the National Coal Heritage Area of southern West Virginia to Pipestem State Park. The route then follows the Bluestone and New Rivers into Virginia. trails exist between Pipestem and the Virginia border. From Pipestem to the Virginia line is mostly on existing trails, approximately 40 miles.

In Southwest Virginia, there will be a brief co-alignment with the Appalachian Trail near Pearisburg, but the southern connection with the AT has not yet been designated. On the northern end, the Allegheny Trail, part of the GET, has its southern terminus at that connection on Peters Mountain.

. At that point, the GET follows the Allegheny Trail back into West Virginia. It follows the Allegheny Trail to a point north of Lake Sherwood, where it returns to Virginia.

Back in Virginia, it follows a new 150-mile link, called the Headwaters Section, using existing Forest Service trails. On Great North Mountain, the Headwaters section connects with the Tuscarora Trail and follows it as it winds through Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. The section in Virginia is 57 miles. In West Virginia, the GET-Tuscarora is 33 miles.

When the GET crosses the Potomac into Maryland, it takes two routes, east and west. The eastern route continues on the Tuscarora, which is co-aligned with the Chesapeake and Ohio Towpath for the first 10 miles, then turns north through Maryland for an additional six miles. It then enters Pennsylvania, where it continues on the Tuscarora for 26 miles to Cowans Gap State Park. At that point it co-aligns with the Standing Stone Trail for 70 miles, where it joins the Mid State Trail. The western route also follows the C&O Towpath, but it goes west until it turns north onto trails in Green Ridge State Forest. At the Pennsylvania line it meets the southern terminus of the Mid State trail, and follows that trail north to the New York line.

In New York, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference has built a new trail, the Crystal Hills, to connect the Mid State with the Finger Lakes Trail. This connection is the northern terminus of the GET.

### **Side Trails and Linkages**

It is anticipated that other trails will link with the central trail corridor. Such trails may become part of

the formal organization and will be designated “side trails” using the parlance of the National Trails Act of 1968. In addition, the Great Eastern Trail will connect with the Florida, Appalachian, Potomac Heritage, and North Country National Scenic Trails.

### **The Volunteer Paradigm**

The paradigm of this trail is volunteer effort. The initial organizational scheme will involve existing volunteer trail clubs, augmented where necessary by new volunteer groups. The model will be the Appalachian Trail, which was initially constructed almost entirely by volunteer effort. Volunteers will work closely with governmental entities, but the emphasis will be on volunteerism.

### **The Nature of the Trail**

The Trail will be primarily a hiking trail, and its support comes from hiking trail clubs. There are parts of existing trails, however, that are already multi-user, and there will be no attempt to change the nature of those trails, or the user groups. Thus parts of the trail will also be open to equestrians and mountain bikers, according to decisions by the relevant land managers.

The Trail will be non-motorized throughout. No motorized segments will be incorporated, except when road shoulders or dirt trails and jeep or ATV tracks must be used. The objective is to get the trail off roads entirely.

The initial mission of the project is to establish an organizational structure that will encompass the entire length of the trail, including all organizations involved, and begin building capacity for new trails in those areas where there are gaps. In August of 2007 the trail groups involved in the effort incorporated as the Great Eastern Trail Association, and held an organizational meeting in Virginia in November of 2007.

The Trail will consist of more than just a narrow track. Since it will be a long-distance trail, overnight accommodations may be created. The preferred option is the three-sided shelter similar to those constructed on the Appalachian Trail. Parts of the trail lacking shelters may have campgrounds. Accommodations will be approximately 8-12 miles apart. Each shelter or campground will have a privy and water source. Maps will show trail access points and parking facilities.

This trail complements the existing eleven national scenic trails, providing recreational opportunities for the entire East Coast. It is further from population centers than is the AT, but with the advent of the interstate highway system, remote areas of the Appalachians are reachable in only a few hours; in MacKaye’s day just reaching trail heads in places like West Virginia was a more daunting task. The increasing number of day hikers and backpackers demands an ever-expanding network of trails, especially in the populous Atlantic Seaboard.

### **Trail Standards**

Initially the Trail will adopt the AT standard, but the width will be three feet (vice four feet for the AT) to account for its more primitive nature. *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*, by William Birchard, Jr., and Robert Proudman, will be adopted for most trail sections. Where the trail is multi-use, the construction standards already in place will be used for that section of trail.

### **Mapping and Description**

Individual organizations now involved with portions of the trail will create maps and guide books unique to their trail sections. Go to the website, [www.greateastertrail.net](http://www.greateastertrail.net), to contact trail clubs and find maps and route descriptions.

Each trail club that assumes responsibility for a section of the new trail will determine the user groups and signage. It is anticipated that where new trail is to be constructed, the emphasis will be on hikers only. The trail will not be for motorized users.

## **Support for the Project**

The following organizations are supporting this effort:

Great Eastern Trail Association (GETA), consisting of representatives from the trail organizations involved in the project ([GreatEasternTrail.net](http://GreatEasternTrail.net))

South East Foot Trails Coalition, an organization of 29 trail groups, sponsored in part by the RTCA Southeast regional office in Atlanta and the Chattanooga field office. These are the 8 member trail groups along the GET:

- Alabama Trails Association, a GETA member
- Alabama Hiking Trail Society, a GETA member
- Georgia Pinhoti Trail Association, a GETA member
- Cumberland Trail Conference, a GETA member
- Tennessee Trails Association
- Pine Mountain Trail Conference, a GETA member

Mid-Atlantic Foot Trails Coalition, an organization of 6 trail groups focused on the GET all of which are GETA members

- Finger Lakes Trail Conference
- Standing Stone Trail Club
- Mid State Trail Association, Inc.
- Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
- West Virginia Scenic Trail Association

American Hiking Society

National Park Service -- Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

Green Ridge State Forest, Maryland

Woolrich Corporation of Woolrich, Pennsylvania, is a corporate sponsor.

*Backpacker Magazine* is providing national publicity for the trail.

The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests have been notified and the superintendent has indicated that the Forest Service would support the project. A memorandum of understanding is in draft, and the link between the Tuscarora Trail and the Allegheny Trail is in their master plan.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Appalachian Trail Park Office have been notified that we anticipate a link with the AT, and discussions are underway regarding this proposal.

The GET route will not be co-aligned with neither the Florida National Scenic Trail nor the North Country National Scenic Trail. GET will simply link them together.