

OVERSEER GUIDANCE

Trail Overseers are truly the most essential people for keeping the Appalachian Trail functioning. Without them, the trail would eventually fall into such a state of disuse that it would be practically impassable for long distance hikers. Here are the general guidelines from the ATC on maintaining the Trail:

“The Trail shall be kept clear of vegetation and obstructions that unnecessarily impede foot travel. It shall be cleared to such a width and height that a hiker with a pack can walk the Trail without undue difficulty”

Here is some detailed guidance on the tasks performed by a RATC Overseer:

Clipping and clearing: Plant growth along the AT should be cut twice per year. This includes limbs, saplings, brush, briars, and weeds. Ideally, the trail corridor should be cleared to a width of four feet in width and a height of eight feet. Particular attention should be paid to the uphill portion of the trail. When this is overgrown hikers are forced to the outside of the trail, causing damage to the downhill side of the treadway. Cut saplings at ground level.

Checking and reporting trail conditions: Report any problems on your assigned section of trail. Report problems, such as badly eroded sections of trail, large sections of standing water on the trail, steps out of place, trees hanging dangerously over the trail or at camping places, or bridges or other structures missing or in need of repair. Take pictures if possible. Give approximate distance from nearest trailhead.

Report illegal trail uses: Report any illegal trail uses, such as a large volume of trash dumped at road crossings, ATV or horses on the trail, or acts of vandalism. Brush in any switchback shortcuts or trails that have been formed by hikers walking around an obstruction, such as standing water. Regularly brush in switchback shortcut trails. This will prevent erosion problems. Signs are available advising hikers to stay on the trail. Request them from the Trail Supervisor if needed.

Work Hikes: The Trail Supervisor will advise the Overseer when a work hike is planned for their section. This will include what type of work will be done, such as step installation or sidehill digging. Overseer is welcome to join the work hike, if possible.

Signage: Note any missing or damaged signs. Overseers can order signs directly from the Club sign maker (Jim Brown, jimjoanbrown@cox.net) or notify Trail Supervisor of a needed sign. Overseers can request a sign for a location that currently does not have a sign, such as a trail junction, if he or she believes there is a need for an additional sign. Overseers can install the new or replacement signs or can request assistance from the Trail Supervisor. It is recommended that you take a photograph of each sign or your section of trail so that a new sign can be easily and accurately made.

Work hour reporting: Record hours worked and report annually when requested by the Trail Supervisor.

Blowdown Reporting/Removal: Report any fallen trees that block the trail that the Overseer is unable to remove. Give approximate distance from nearest trailhead. Include pictures if possible. Only chainsaw certified individuals are permitted to operate a chainsaw along the trail. Chainsaw training and certification classes are provided by the Forest Service at least once per year. Overseers will be advised

of upcoming training. Overseers can remove blowdowns they feel capable of removing, whether with chainsaw (if certified) or by handsaw or axe. Opening on trail should be two to four feet in width. Chainsaw usage is not permitted in federal wilderness areas. The club's section of trail goes through two wilderness areas, Mountain Lake and Brushy Mountain.

Drainage structure cleaning: Waterbars and drainage ditches should be kept free of dirt, rocks, and debris. They should be cleaned twice per year, once in the Spring and again in the Fall. Drainage ditches should be a foot wide and continue far enough off the trail so that the water does not run back on the trail. It is critical that these structures be maintained to prevent major erosion problems.

Blazing: Blazes should be repainted every five years or more frequently if the blazes are faded or peeling. Use a high gloss exterior paint. Use a paint scraper to prepare the tree surface, unless the bark is smooth. Blazes should be at eye height at regular intervals. Frequency of blazes depends on the character of the trail. Where the trail is conspicuous, such as on ridgelines, blazes can be as much as 800 feet apart. More blazes are needed in trail sections with frequent turns. Place double blazes before sharp turns in the trail, such as at switchbacks. Pay special attention at road crossings and trail junctions. Ensure that an adequate number of blazes are placed at these locations so hikers are not confused about the proper way to go.

Litter removal: Remove any litter at trailhead parking lots or you find along the trail on each work trip. Bring a trash bag. Check any campsites along the trail section for litter, particularly in any fire rings. Break up any fire rings that are not in authorized camping areas in the national parklands corridor from Newport Road (Route 624) to Mountain Pass Road (Route 652), near Roanoke.

Grass and weed cutting: In open areas, grass and weeds along the trail should be cut at least twice per year. The club has weedwackers available for loan. Overseers who have significant open areas can be issued a weedwacker on a long-term basis.

Structure Repairs: Depending on their skill level, Overseers are permitted to perform on-site repairs of structures on the trail. These would include such tasks as nailing back in loose decking on a bridge, reinstalling a loose log step, or replacing an eroded signpost. The club can provide reimbursement for materials purchased for repairs.

Treadway repairs: Remove loose rocks or roots that are tripping hazards on the trail treadway. Particular attention should be paid to removing roots that form tripwire-like loops across the trail. These can easily cause an unwary hiker to take a bad fall. Tools, such as a pulaski or pick, can be provided to Overseers to aid in removal of treadway obstructions.