

Appalachian Trail in Pennsylvania Protected from Racetrack Development

Written by Australian Business

HARPERS FERRY, WV, September 22, 2013 **/24-7PressRelease/** -- The Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) has successfully taken control of 350 acres of land that were slated to become a racetrack in Monroe County, Pennsylvania, the noise and fumes of which would have destroyed the Appalachian Trail, less than a half-mile distant. After a decade-long battle with developers, the Emmaus, Pennsylvania based Wildlands Conservancy purchased the land this May, and it was transferred to the PGC. It is now protected from development and preserved for hunters, hikers, bird watchers and other nature-based recreationists and local residents.

The 3.8 million dollar asking price was raised among several federal and state organizations including the PGC, Monroe Open Space Program, Pennsylvania Audubon Society, and the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, with 2.3 million dollars provided by the Palmerton Superfund Trustees—the result of a settlement with CBS which paid 21 million dollars in reparations for natural resource damage as the result of historic zinc smelting near Lehigh Gap.

"The Appalachian Trail Conservancy has been fighting this battle for so long, it's great to see all our efforts and those of the Blue Mountain Preservation Association (BMPA), finally come to fruition. Our success here sets the standard for future pursuits and sends a message to all those trying to undermine our mission," said Karen Lutz, regional director of the ATC.

The ATC first took up the battle in 2001 as developers under the name "Alpine Rose Motorsports Club" applied for land use permits to build "a country club for sports car enthusiasts." With encouragement from the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club and the newly formed BMPA, the ATC board of managers voted in 2001 to take action in opposing the development. ATC retained legal counsel and sought to protect the Trail through the 1978 Pennsylvania Trail Act (PATA). However, the land in question possessed no specific zoning ordinance and thus the PATA could not prevent development. (The PATA was later amended in 2008 to the applause of conservationists by providing Pennsylvania towns along the A.T. with the ability to change zoning ordinances, thereby solidifying state protection of lands near the A.T.)

Eventually, state regulatory agencies did grant the permits to racetrack builders, and the ATC and BMPA were forced to pursue other avenues of action. In 2003 and 2004, developers delayed again due to violations of EPA storm water discharge regulations and the builder's inaccurate assessments of potential sound pollution. The coordinated efforts of ATC staff, bolstered by community support, and augmented by world-class ATC-hired sound experts from HMMH, Inc., brought these issues to light and stalled progress.

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The economic downturn between 2005 and 2009 stalled efforts on both sides of the battle. Developers struggled to obtain funding to continue construction, and environmentalists had trouble retaining financial backing and were running out of legal options. Ultimately, time passing precipitated the success for the BMPA and the ATC. Alpine Rose developers chose to sell the land, while the BMPA began to find success in federal and state non-profit support. In 2013, they finally gathered enough resources to purchase the land, and protect it forever.

The ATC has also effectively fought other similar potential industrial expansion that would threaten the A.T. In 2002, the ATC stopped another racetrack from being built in Greene County, Virginia immediately adjacent to Shenandoah National Park. Following testimony by ATC and the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, the builder's requests to change zoning ordinances were rejected, as was the development permit. Again, noise pollution and negative ecological impacts on the serenity of the Trail played a major role, but it required engaged clubs, citizens and organizations like ATC to prevent this intrusion.

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About the Appalachian Trail Conservancy The Appalachian Trail Conservancy mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail - ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. For more information please visit <http://www.appalachiantrail.org>.