

Benton MacKaye Trail Association



A Note from the President: These are difficult times for all. As we fight the effects of a highly contagious virus, trail users must consider the directives of federal, state and local governments, some of which can be a bit confusing. Initially, many of our members felt the remote and solitary nature of the Benton MacKaye Trail was a good opportunity to relieve stress and remain safe from the threats posed by crowds and unintended public contact.

I still feel this way, **but** am reminded by daily notices from differing government agencies that there are other considerations. Local governments are especially impacted by threats posed from a contagious virus: many first responders are volunteers; doctors and health care professionals can be few and far between in areas served by our trail

We invite you to make use of the trail as opportunity provides, but we remind the public to be responsible and adhere to directives as posted. Where the trail remains open, individuals and small groups of hikers certainly may enjoy the trail.

In these areas, maintainers are encouraged to do minor maintenance and note problems that need more extensive work – work that can be resolved when threats posed by COVID 19 have receded.

NOTE: The CDC has recommended an upper limit on group size to ten people with a distance of six feet maintained between individuals.

Federal agencies have left many decisions on park and trail closures to local officials within each agency. Governments widely recognize the benefits of recreation in times of stress. So, when planning an outing, first look to federal and state agencies for guidance on recreation and trails, with local governments providing the final word as the most directly impacted.

As of March 29, 2020, the Benton MacKaye Trail is closed from Springer Mountain to Fall Branch Falls. The Benton MacKaye Trail through Graham County, North Carolina and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is also closed.

The following websites are some that provide current information:

Blue Ridge Ranger District and the USFS have announced the closure of the Benton MacKaye Trail from Springer Mountain thru Fall Branch Falls, including parking and trailheads at Springer Mountain, Big Stamp Gap and Fall Branch Falls.

In addition, both Fannin and Gilmer Counties in North Georgia have asked that residents minimize travel and stay at home to reduce the burden on Emergency and First Responder personnel. Please refer to the following link for up to date information on Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest and Recreation closures: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/alerts/conf/alerts-notice>

Great Smokey Mountains National Park has closed all Recreation areas and hiking trails through at least April 6. Please check current information at: <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm>

Graham County, North Carolina in conjunction with the USFS has closed all back-country camping on USFS lands in the county indefinitely. To review current status, please check information at: <http://grahamcounty.org/>

Trails in much of Tennessee and North Carolina remain open to small groups of hikers and maintainers, but check with local County and USFS officials for up to date status. Counties involved are Polk and Monroe in Tennessee, as well as Cherokee, Nantahala, and Pisgah National Forests in Tennessee and North Carolina. Note these National Forests have already closed ALL trailheads for the Appalachian Trail. Up to date closures on National Forest lands can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/news-events/?cid=FSEPRD715959>

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