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Points of Interest

Click the title to go directly to the page.

[Challenge Met](#)

[Annual Meeting](#)

[Wilderness Mastery](#)

[Maintenance With a Twist](#)

[Massive Effort](#)

[National Trails Day at Vogel](#)

[Happy Ol' Hikers](#)

[Refreshes](#)

[Bob Bald](#)

[Trash in the Creek](#)

[Upcoming](#)

[Corporate Sponsors](#)



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BMTA Headquarters

Benton MacKaye Trail Association

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Wilderness Challenge Met

by Joe Cantwell and Joy Forehand

The May storm wreaked havoc on the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) in Georgia and Tennessee. Tennessee Sections 12a-b were obliterated. The majority of this 6.7 miles of trail is in Wilderness where no mechanized equipment (including chainsaws) is allowed. Volunteers rely on crosscut saws and, if the trunk of the tree is on the ground, they must use handsaws to make the final cuts to ground level.

The rest of the trail fared better, but blowdowns and tread damage were prevalent. Crews were able to move quickly to take out a slew of scattered blowdowns blocking Georgia Section 1a (Springer Mountain >> Big Stamp Gap).

Safety is a high priority when a major storm hits. Hikers should not attempt to navigate a trail that has sustained significant damage – getting lost or injured is a very real possibility. There always are a few intrepid hikers who refuse to be deterred. The initial prep work for clearing the trail does help these hikers find their way over, under around or through the blockages, but it is far from a guarantee of a safe or successful trek.



Continued next page

Nevertheless, those hikers can be an asset for developing plans for re-opening the trail. By providing GPS coordinates with pictures of what they encounter, they help Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) volunteers determine the extent and complexity of the damage. The treetops were so numerous and so massive the trunks weren't visible, let alone accessible. Crews had to open pathways to the trunks before the sawyers could begin their work to clear the trail.

The first crew's foray to do maintenance was anything but encouraging. Removing blowdowns and large limbs as they went, they made it only 100 yards – not a positive preview of what was to come.

Thirty-six volunteers including 21 certified sawyers were on hand for the final push to clear the trail on the June 8 Maintenance Trip. The pace was agonizingly slow. In some areas, the distance between trees was only a step or two. As soon as the trail workers removed one blowdown, they would take a step or two and they were at the next tree to take out. Many of the large limbs blocking the trail were up to 30" in circumference ... as large as a blowdown.

The final count was 48 trees on Sections 12a-b. Other obstacles included huge rootballs (a tree's roots come out of the ground leaving a large, gaping hole where the trail once was). Twenty-inch to 48" blowdowns had fallen on top of up to 15' high rootballs!

The all-volunteer crews put in 362.5 hours to make Sections 12a-b once again safe and open for all to enjoy. During the month since the storm, BMTA volunteers have removed more than 200 blowdowns from the BMT. The average number of trees removed from the trail per month is 23-25.

If you would like to learn more about the Benton MacKaye Trail Association and/or the Benton MacKaye Trail, contact Joy Forehand jforehand@bmta.org.

For more information/pictures of the damage done by the storm, go to page [8](#) in this *Newsletter*.

Storm Decimates Parts of Charit Creek Lodge Area

A favorite destination of many BMTA hikers suffered major damage to the crew quarters and equipment used to maintain the Lodge. Luckily none of the actual lodge structures were damaged but due to the remote location of the Lodge insurance is not available and the Lodge will be closed for four weeks while repairs are made. Charit Creek Lodge has often donated a stay as part of the BMTA Annual Meeting Raffle and we are looking forward to the Lodge reopening. This is devastating to the owner at a time of peak season.

If you would like to know more or help in rebuilding contact [Charit Creek Lodge](#).



Photo credit Charit Creek Lodge

**Book
Today!**

BMTA's 2024 Annual Meeting & Hike Fest

Unicoi State Park & Lodge, Helen, Georgia

October 31 — November 3, 2024



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Mention the Benton MacKaye Trail Association!**

Discovering Wilderness Mastery at the Wilderness Skills Institute

by Bob Cowdrick with photo courtesy of SAWS

Nestled in the heart of the Pisgah National Forest, the Cradle of Forestry recently played host to the Wilderness Skills Institute (WSI), an extraordinary event dedicated to enhancing skills and knowledge essential for wilderness trail maintenance and conservation. As a proud participant, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in this intensive program, where I re-certified in Wilderness First Aid and the Crosscut Saw course.



The Wilderness Skills Institute is a beacon for those passionate about preserving our natural landscapes. This year's event, facilitated by the highly skilled instructors from the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS), combined rigorous classroom instruction with practical fieldwork. This hands-on approach ensured that participants gained not only theoretical knowledge but also the practical skills necessary to apply this knowledge in real-world scenarios.

During the Wilderness First Aid course, we delved into crucial techniques and protocols to address medical emergencies in remote settings. The training was comprehensive, covering everything from assessing patient condition and managing injuries to making critical decisions when professional medical help is hours away. This re-certification is invaluable for anyone spending significant time in the wilderness, ensuring we are prepared to respond effectively to emergencies.

Equally enriching was the Crosscut Saw course, a vital skill for maintaining trails in designated wilderness areas where mechanized tools are prohibited. Under the guidance of SAWS instructors, we learned the intricacies of crosscut saw use, from proper handling and safety procedures to the nuances of different cutting techniques. The fieldwork sessions were particularly engaging, allowing us to practice these techniques on actual trail projects within the Pisgah National Forest.

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One of the most rewarding aspects of the Wilderness Skills Institute is the chance to meet and collaborate with like-minded individuals dedicated to conservation. Participants included members from SAWS, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and various other associations committed to maintaining and enhancing our wilderness trails. These interactions fostered a sense of community and shared purpose, as we exchanged ideas, experiences and strategies for effective wilderness stewardship.

Attending the WSI was not just an educational experience but an inspiring journey into the heart of conservation. The dedication and passion of the instructors and fellow participants were truly motivating. For members of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) and others involved in trail maintenance and wilderness preservation, I highly recommend attending a future WSI course. It's an unparalleled opportunity to advance your skills, connect with a vibrant community and contribute meaningfully to the preservation of our treasured natural landscapes.

By investing in our education and skills through programs like the Wilderness Skills Institute, we ensure that the trails we cherish remain accessible and pristine for future generations. Let's continue to support and participate in these invaluable training opportunities, strengthening our collective ability to safeguard the wilderness.

Donna Shearer- Advocate for Georgia's Hemlocks



Environmentalist, conservationist and dear friend, Donna Shearer passed away June 16, 2024. The conservation community lost a fervent advocate for preserving one of our national treasures, the majestic hemlocks. The value of the legacy she leaves behind is incalculable.

In the early 2000s, Shearer became concerned about the extent to which the wooly adelgid was destroying hemlocks in the North Georgia Mountains. She immersed herself in researching the tree along with potential treatments. Her interest in, and love for the towering giants grew into a full-fledged mission to save them.

Shearer spearheaded the movement to develop resources and procedures that professional arborists, forestry agents and homeowners use today to rescue the hemlocks from the devastating pestilence.

A few of the resources she developed are:

- ♦ Save Georgia's Hemlocks (SGH), a nonprofit dedicated to saving the hemlocks.
- ♦ Save Georgia's Hemlocks' website that includes extensive resources on the hemlocks, the wooly adelgid invasion, treatment procedures and educational materials.
- ♦ The Hemlock Help Line.
- ♦ A Facilitator Training Course for DIY Treatment, including a 600-page guide.
- ♦ An educational program for grade school students that presents the hemlock message, incorporates the ecosystem interdependencies and emphasizes the importance of environmental stewardship.

Through partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service and other organizations, SGH became a driving force behind the preservation of hemlocks throughout southern Appalachia. Many BMTAers will remember the BMTA/SGH co-sponsored hikes when we enjoyed a leisurely fall hike through the forest as we treated the hemlocks. If you would like to learn more about Saving Georgia's Hemlocks, visit [Save Georgia's Hemlocks](#).

Shearer is survived by her husband, Mark Shearer, her daughters Sarah Davis and Abigail Giordano, stepson Ian Shearer and stepdaughter Laura Boling.

National Trails Day in Tennessee

A Maintenance Day with a Twist

by Joy Forehand

The American Hiking Society's (AHS) National Trails Day is the largest trail event in the United States. Held the first Saturday in June, the AHS encourages local organizations through the country to focus on public events aimed at promotion, conservation, stewardship and trail service. The theme and pledge for this year was "to leave the trail and the outdoor community better than we found them".

In line with that theme, a coalition of trail workers from the Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen (SABCH), the Tellico Ranger District, Cherokee Hiking Club (CHC), Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA), Friends of the Cherokee National Forest (FCNF) and McMinn Saddle Club (MSC) fulfilled the pledge by clearing trails in the vicinity of Little Citico Creek.

"We are fortunate to live next to the foothills of these ancient Appalachian Mountains. There is tranquility in the undisturbed beauty of the flora and fauna. It provides a quiet serenity in the slowness of time, the one place where progress is not the goal. It's a reset," said SABCH member Terri Haver. "That gift needs to be protected and available for future generations which is why we chose Little Citico Creek for our project for National Trails Day."

Tellico District's Lead Wilderness and Trails Technician Robert Alwood and Assistant Fire Engine Operator Allen Chapman along with a group of 14 hikers/trail workers and seven equestrians set out from the Young Branch Horse Camp. The equestrians headed uphill to where wind damage (blowdowns) was known to have occurred. The chainsaws were packed on a very large mule and a horse – safely attached with leather scabbards. The scabbard is a sheath that slides the blade under the rider's leg between the saddle and saddle blanket.



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When a blowdown was encountered, the riders dismounted. The horses were held either by another rider a good distance away from the flying sawdust, or they were loosely tied to a sapling ... or to whatever was safely available.



Surprisingly, the horses are unfazed by the whine of the chainsaw.

Some horses have been doing this long enough to know the routine and will ground tie. They've learned to go forward or backward to their owner by voice command.

Of course, some horses can't be trusted and need to be secured.

When multiple cuts are needed to remove blowdowns, the blade can get extremely hot. It must be cooled before mounting it back on the pack animal. If enough bottled water is available, the blade is cooled by running water over it. Otherwise, it's just a matter of waiting.

The ground crew of 14 hikers from CHC, BMTA and FCNF as well as the two Forest Service agents from the Tellico District were driven to another trailhead. This crew was equipped with a variety of tools ... loppers, a weed eater, a pole saw (used to clear overhead branches), nippers, hand-saws and chainsaws. They split into two teams to brush and log out the trail.

An extremely successful workday, the crews hiked or rode over 20 miles, clearing 13 miles of trail. They removed 30 blowdowns as well as the encroaching growth of rhododendrons and ground saplings.

The group's efforts received high praise from the Forest Service. "This was the best National Trails Day I've been to," said Alwood.

If you would like to learn more about these groups and/or trail maintenance, contact Terri Haver at terri.haver@gmail.com. She will direct your inquiry to the relevant group.



Massive Effort on an Impassable Trail

by Joe Cantwell with photos courtesy of Brenda Harris and Clare Sullivan

This was a massive blowdown removal effort 36 BMTA volunteers on June 8, 2024. Multiple hiker reports stated that the trail was impassable from Thunder Rock to Kimsey Highway as the result of a violent storm in early May.

After scouting the area, Joe Cantwell devised a plan of attack by deploying seven saw crews armed with cross-cut saws, silky saws and loppers within the Little Frog Wilderness. Previously, four individual crews had cleared the hike route of blowdowns to speed access to the major area of concern.

Everything went right from the beginning at Thunder Rock Campground. The weather was great. A tremendous turnout gathered for the safety briefing and crew assignments. Teamwork was accomplished by all crew members. Everyone was prepared for a long, hard day. Safety was the overriding concern in tackling the very difficult and varied cutting scenarios.

As a result of this effort, Sections 12a and b are now clear of **48 massive blowdowns!!** Every one of the 36 volunteers should take pride in being a part of the 362.5 hours donated to the BMTA and the Forest Service.

Thank you all for your continued support of our maintenance efforts!









National Trails Day at Vogel State Park

by Joy Forehand with photos courtesy of Kathy Williams

June 1 was the American Society's National Trails Day (NTD) – the largest trail event in the nation. This year's theme was “to leave the trail and the outdoor community better than we found them”.

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, Georgia Forest Watch and Mountain High Hikers joined together to celebrate the day at Vogel State Park in Blairsville, Georgia.

Members of the organizations as well as the public visiting Vogel were invited to participate in several fun and educational activities. Leave No Trace offered valuable information for preserving the beauty of the forest pathways as well as enhancing sustainability of the forest for generations to come.

Also offered were a Maintenance Trip to work on the trail, a Family Friendly Hike and a Junior Ranger Program. On the docket for the afternoon was music by the Wilderness Pickers at the Outdoor Pavilion.

If you have questions or would like additional information about any of the organizations, trail maintenance or hiking in the North Georgia Mountains, contact Joy Forehand, jforehand@bmta.org and she will direct your question to the relevant organization.



Attendees had the opportunity to cut “their own piece of the tree” at BMTA's Inter-Active Crosscut Saw exhibit.



The Georgia Rock Crew showed how rocks can be moved and used to maintain a trail.



Four Happy Ol' Hikers

by Clare Sullivan with photos courtesy of Ray Myers and Clare Sullivan

Every hiker should aspire to be like the four who set out on the June 15 Watch the Water Arrive Hike. “You’re as young as you feel” would be an appropriate motto for this group – the average age of the four hikers was 80 years young!

The 91-degree heat didn’t faze them and neither did the 3.4-mile trek on the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT). The four thoroughly enjoyed a delightful afternoon.

Before setting out on the hike, the hikers watched the water arrive. A slow trickle quickly became the famous roaring rapids of the Ocoee River. Rafterers were soon testing their whitewater skills. Some sailed through the rapids. A few weren’t quite up to the challenge and flipped out of their rafts.



Before the water is released the river seems empty and easily crossed. Notification of the release is done via blinking lights along this stretch which hosted the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Kayaking Competition. Water release times and dates are also posted at the Center’s kiosk. Photo courtesy of Ray Myers.



Roaring and tumultuous! There is no strolling across this riot of water!



Stairs, narrow bridges we do it all!!!



Next on the docket was the 3.4-mile hike on the BMT. The blooms of the rosebay rhododendrons were absolutely gorgeous and the ripening wild raspberries provided a tantalizing snack! What a great hike!

Turtletown Creek Falls Refreshes Dogs and Humans

Photos courtesy of Ray Laws, Ken Cissna and Kathy Williams



Hike to Bob Bald

by Brenda Harris

Today I led a hike on the Benton MacKaye Trail to Bob Bald in the Nantahala National Forest. It was a joint venture with the Benton MacKaye Trail Association and the Cherokee Hiking Club. We started at the TN/NC state line at Beach Gap. Joining me were Sue Robinson, Steve Dennison, Leslie Auriemmo, Lynne McPhail and Danny Yarberry. It was about 10 degrees cooler there than in Tellico Plains. This trail is mostly shaded and we were treated to a breeze making the day a really nice trek in the forest.



Adding more enjoyment to the day was the discovery of flaming azaleas which were still blooming!!



We had lunch at the Bald where we enjoyed the spectacular view. It is hard to beat this for "ambience!"



On the way down, we met a couple from Ukraine. They came to the US at the start of the war to live with their daughter who is married to an American. They gave us firsthand reports of the war there and asked for continued help from the US and prayers and/or thoughts of peace for their country and its people.

Kathy, There is Trash in the Creek

by Kathy Williams with photos courtesy of Janet MacMillan

I got the phone call “Kathy someone has dumped 10 to 12 bags of trash into Laurel Creek by the old mill. If we don’t get them out soon animals will strew the contents everywhere.” I am lucky to have great neighbors who let me know when there is an issue on my section of the BMT, Section 7a, between Weaver Creek and highway 515. We live in a cabin community that borders the BMT.

So, Janet McMillan, her husband Vance and I, headed to the creek. Vance and Janet had gathered several tools to enable us to scoop some of the trash out of the creek. Vance was really good at snagging many of them. Unfortunately I still had to “sort of rappel” down the steep embankment to get into the creek to fish out some of the nasty bags. The only other time I had rappelled into the creek was when we treated hemlocks several years ago. The area of the creek where the bags were dumped is the steepest point and you need a rope to help you get in and out.

We checked the contents as we were enraged and wanted to find out who had done this. Unfortunately, no identifying documents were in the trash—just evidence of a cabin rental cleanup.



Vance McMillan braces as he drags the garbage from Laurel Creek on Section 7a.

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We were able to get most of the trash, but some did get away and flow downstream.

Kudos to the McMillans and their help! You guys are the best!!

Upcoming Hikes and Maintenance Trips

by Kelly Motter, Hiking Director

July



July 13 (Saturday) BMTA Monthly Maintenance Trips.

- GA Team Section 8 Bushy Head Gap to Dyer Gap.
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.
- TN Team Sections 12c, d. (Kimsey Hwy to Lost Creek Campground).
Contact the TN/NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

July 22 (Monday) BMT: Lost Creek Section. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Easy 6 miles. Beautiful walk along Big Lost Creek. One stream crossing will probably get your feet a little wet so come prepared. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

July 27 (Saturday) Wauchesi Creek. Moderate 6.7 miles, but with 11 stream crossings. We will leave vehicles at the Bald River Road trailhead near the Holly Flats CG, then a long shuttle to Sandy Gap on the BMT. We will hike mainly downhill to the lower trailhead. At about mile 3, we reach the first stream crossing on Wauchesi Creek, then cross this creek and Kirkland Creek. The last crossing is across the Bald River. Come prepared with water shoes, extra socks and a towel. We will eat lunch at the first stream crossing. Long shuttle back to our vehicles. Contact Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris at rharris@bmta.org or text 513-260-1184 if you plan to attend.

July 29 (Monday) Cartecay River Loop Trails. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 5-6 miles, much of it along the beautiful Cartecay River. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

August

August 2 (Friday) Bear Creek Trail. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 7 miles. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



August 10 (Saturday) BMTA Monthly Maintenance Trip. TBA

Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.
Contact the TN/NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

August 12 (Monday) Whigg Meadow. Easy to mildly moderate 2.6 miles with a 500' climb. We will drive to the Mud Gap Trailhead of the BMT at mile 3.5 on the North Carolina side of the Skyway. We will hike on an old roadbed steadily uphill to the 5000' summit of Whigg Meadow, a large wide open bald with expansive views into the surrounding mountains. We will eat lunch there, then return. Contact Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris at rharris@bmta.org or text 513-260-1184 if you plan to attend.

August 16 (Friday) Emery Creek. Moderate 5 miles. This in-and-out hike is fairly easy, but with 26 stream crossings (a number up to your ankles and two around your knees) and a section of potentially slippery rock toward the beginning and again at the end make it more difficult than it otherwise would be. Holly and Emery Creeks, two lovely waterfalls, and a beautiful trail make it worth the trouble. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

August 19 (Monday) Watson Gap to Hemp Top. Moderately/strenuous 8.2 miles round trip. Contact Hike Leader Steve Dennison at sdennison@bmta.org.

September

September 2 (Monday) Yonah Mountain. This is a challenging 2.3-mile uphill with approximately 1600 feet of elevation gain. Iconic Yonah Mountain is located between Helen and Cleveland, Georgia. It is used by rock climbers from throughout the southeastern United States as well as the Army Rangers from Camp Merrill. Majestic views of up to 30 miles are a highlight of the trip up to the summit. Contact Hike Leader Mike Pilvinsky at mpilvinsky@bmta.org.

September 6 (Friday) Gahuti Lite. Five intersecting trails loop at Fort Mountain State Park. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). About 5 moderate miles. Highlights include cascading creeks, a long-distance view and a lakeside walk. Ends with a moderate uphill walk. Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.



September 14 (Saturday) BMTA Monthly Maintenance Trip. TBA
Contact the Georgia Maintenance Director at bmtagamaintdirector@bmta.org.
Contact the TN/NC Maintenance Director at bmtatn-ncmaintdirector@bmta.org.

September 21 (Saturday) Falls Branch Falls in Tennessee. Moderate 2.4 miles with a 500' climb out of the gorge of the falls. We will drive on the Skyway to mile 22.5 at the West Rattlesnake Trailhead. From there we will hike down an old roadbed for about a mile, then steeply descend into the gorge, cross the creek (usually not requiring water shoes), then hike up to the base of the falls on a difficult trail. We will eat lunch there, then return the way we came, mostly uphill. The falls are spectacular and are about 90' high. Contact Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris at rharris@bmta.org or text 513-260-1184 if you plan to attend.



September 27 (Friday) BMT Swinging Bridge.

From Highway 60 to the Swinging Bridge and back. DOG-FRIENDLY HIKE (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Moderate 7.4 miles.

Lunch by the Toccoa River and BMT's iconic Suspension Bridge.

Contact Hike Leader Ken Cissna at kcissna@bmta.org.

September 30 (Monday) The Hangover. Difficult 7.5 miles. This challenging hike will start from the Wolf Laurel Trailhead in NC, about an hour's drive from the Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center. We will first climb steeply about 500' to the ridge crest to meet the Haoe Lead Trail and the BMT. We will turn right (north) and steeply descend 500' to Naked Ground, a great camping area. Then we will steeply climb up 500' to Haoe and down to the Hangover itself. On the stretch between Naked Ground and Haoe, the trail in places is often very overgrown with sticker bushes due to a fire several years ago at the same time as the Gatlinburg Fire. So, wear long pants. The views are incomparable with a 360-degree range of mountains, including the Smokies and the valley of the Little Tennessee, the Tennessee and the Cheoah Rivers. We will eat lunch at the Hangover, one of the most scenic spots in the Southern Appalachians. Warning: this is a demanding hike. Contact Hike leaders Rick and Brenda Harris at rharris@bmta.org or text 513-260-1184 if you plan to attend.

To access our website calendar, go [HERE](#).

Forest Service Seasonal Hiring - Applications Open Now!

Seasonal positions just opened up on USAjobs. This is an excellent opportunity for someone to get their start with the Forest Service. Please see the list below for details.

Duty Station: Blairsville, GA / Blue Ridge Ranger District

- ♦ Recreation Technician (0462) GS - 04 : <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797389700>
- ♦ Recreation Technician (0462) GS - 05 : <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797391200>
- ♦ Recreation Technician (0462) GS - 06 : <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797387100>
- ♦ Engineering Aid – Civil (0802) GS – 03: <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797387900>
- ♦ Engineering Technician (Civil) (0802) GS – 04: <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797388800>
- ♦ Biological Science Technician (0404) GS -06: <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797374200>
- ♦ Biological Science Technician (0404) GS -07: <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/797390100>

These positions are all temporary appointments, open to all applicants. Applications are open from 06/27/24 to 07/10/24.



Welcome BMTA Corporate Members!

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association is grateful for the help and support provided by our Corporate Members. When you visit one of these businesses, please identify yourself as a BMTA member and be sure to thank them for their support!



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The deadline for the August Newsletter is Wednesday, July 31.
Thank you!