

U.S. Rep. Fleischmann reintroduces legislation for Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) to become a National Scenic Trail

Legislation to study the feasibility of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) to become a National Scenic Trail was reintroduced in Congress by Representatives Chuck Fleischmann, Steve Cohen, Chuck Edwards and Lucy McBeth; and Senators Thom Tillis, Raphael Warnock and Ted Budd. The Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study Act of 2025 would direct the U.S. Forest Service to advance the process for formally designating the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) as our country's 12th National Scenic Trail.

When asked about the BMT and what the designa-

tion would mean for the trail, Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) President Bob Cowdrick said, "The BMT, which was completed in 2005, provides an exceptional opportunity for tens of thousands of people to get outdoors each year and experience the stunning beauty of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The legislation is a critical step forward in the BMTA's quest to have the BMT designated a National Scenic Trail. The designation would help protect our storied outdoor heritage for future generations, support local economies, and provide a wide array

of recreation opportunities for everyone from day hikers to thru hikers, solo trekkers to families."

Nestled in the Southern Appalachians, the 288-mile-long BMT offers day hikers and long distance hikers a unique opportunity to experience a journey that winds its way through three states (Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina). The trail passes through three National Forests (the Chattahoochee-Oconee, the Cherokee and the Nantahala National Forests) and crosses six wilderness areas. The route includes 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP),

making it the longest trail in the GSMNP.

Ninety-five percent of the BMT is on land managed by either the Forest Service or the National Park Service – just 15 miles of the trail remain on public roads/private lands. New land acquisition will be limited and will be on a willing seller basis.

At festivals, on sponsored hikes and at other events, the association's 855 members spread the word about the BMT as they educate the public about hiking, camping and a

Wilderness experience in the Southern Appalachian Mountains – and – instill a sound conservation ethic.

Best of all, a portion of the BMT is in your backyard. Landmarks in or around the trail in Polk County include treks along Lost Creek and the Hiwassee River as well as hikes to Big Frog Mountain and Buck Bald. The Ocoee River/Thunder Rock Campground is an especially scenic area. Make plans for a day hike or backpacking excursion soon!

If you would like more information about the BMT or BMTA, contact Joy Forehand, jforehand@bmta.org.