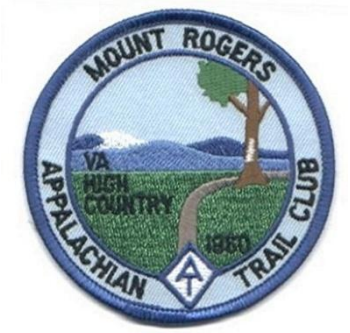


Welcome, New MRATC Board Member!

Now that you have agreed to be an MRATC Board Member – or are thinking about it – you might have questions about what that entails.

Mostly, Board Members are people who are involved in one or more MRATC activities (such as trail work, rare plant monitoring, outreach activities), and participate in discussions and voting at club meetings. Board Members represent the club by being knowledgeable about the Appalachian Trail and the AT Conservancy (our parent organization) and about trail club activities and concerns, and by encouraging other people to join our club activities.

This brief handbook is to point you to information to help you understand the club and a bit about ATC procedures and where to locate relevant information, and to be able to answer questions people might ask.

A. Why does MRATC exist and what does it do?

The Mount Rogers Appalachian Trail Club was organized in 1960. The AT is maintained by 30 all-volunteer trail clubs under the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), by agreement with the National Park Service.

MRATC has maintenance responsibility for 59.4 miles of the AT from the TN/VA state line north to the South Fork of the Holston in Teas (Sugar Grove, VA). Since most of the club's trail section lies on US Forest Service lands, the club follows USFS land management plans and procedures in trail work.

The club also enjoys recreational hikes and social events, monitors the AT boundary and rare plants along the AT, provides trail and club information at community events, and sometimes works with youth groups to promote trail education.

B. What is expected of Board Members?

Meetings: The club holds five meetings a year to discuss topics related to the trail. Board members should attend all of them, if possible. Meetings are held in January, April, July, and November, with an annual membership meeting in the early spring. Board members should participate in discussions at meetings and be prepared to vote, if a vote is called for.

Steering Committee Coordinators and Board members plus the Secretary and Treasurer vote on behalf of the club at quarterly meetings. At the Annual Membership Meeting, all club members vote and new club officers and Board members are elected. Terms are for two years.

Sometimes, meetings are held by videoconference and phone instead of in person. Email communications are sent out to Board members if there are matters in between meetings that require their input.

In November, the club meets with our Agency Partners (the ATC Virginia Regional Office, the US Forest Service – Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area district, and Grayson Highlands State Park). We discuss topics which need input from our Agency Partners and the club, such as plans for special trail crews, trail facilities, signage, and camping impacts.

C. What is the club's organizational structure? How do I fit in?

The MRATC's leadership is composed of a five-person Steering Committee, plus a Board, a Secretary and Treasurer, and Task Coordinators.

1. Steering Committee Coordinators (for Trails, Natural Resources, Outreach, Club Recreational Activities, and Representative to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Regional Partnership Committee) are elected for two-year terms by the club membership at the Annual Meeting and may be re-elected. They have committees to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities. Board members are strongly encouraged to participate in the work of one or more of these committees. (Examples: trail work, community festivals, leading club hikes, social event planning, rare plant monitoring on the AT.)

2. Board Members: elected for two-year terms by club members attending the Annual Meeting and may be re-elected. Familiar with club activities and concerns. Vote on topics up for vote at meetings.

3. Secretary: Records minutes of meetings, which are approved by the Board, and helps with other club communication. Elected for a two-year term by the club membership at the Annual Meeting and may be re-elected.

4. Treasurer: Keeps the club's financial records, including membership dues, grant funds, and donations, and presents a report at club meetings. Files annual state and federal forms. Elected for a two-year term by the club membership at the Annual Meeting and may be re-elected.

5. Task Coordinators: Newsletter, Webmaster, Timekeeper, Membership, Social Media, Administrative Assistant, AT Community Representatives. People in these positions are appointed by the Board for one-year terms at the January meeting each year. The Timekeeper keeps and reports to the ATC and Forest Service the volunteer hours of club members and presents relevant awards (pins, patches, etc.) on behalf of the ATC and USFS to club members at the club's Annual Meeting. The Membership Coordinator updates the club's membership list when new members join and sends them membership cards and information about the club. The Administrative Assistant arranges meetings and updates the club's volunteer service agreements with the USFS and NPS. AT Community Representatives look for ways to promote the club in nearby communities.

D. How can I learn more about the club's organization and operating procedures?

Board members should read through the documents on the club's website (www.mratc.org under "Organization Documents": Documents include Bylaws, Volunteer Service Agreements, Code of Conduct and Local Management Plan.

The club holds coverage for liability under volunteer service agreements with the USFS and NPS. The VSA agreements spell out the parameters of different categories of volunteer work we do (administrative work, trail work, natural resources work, and outreach). The Local Management Plan describes trail work procedures and the trail concerns the club has.

It is not necessary to read all these club organization documents at once! Get an idea of what information is included, then know you can refer to these to fill in information gaps when meeting topics are announced, or if you think of a question, or if someone asks you something about the club and you need a good answer. You can also ask other club members who have been in the club for several years, or send a question by email to the general club email address, info@mratc.org. Don't be shy about asking questions! It shows an interest in learning and Board members should have this interest.

E. I thought club members hiked and did some trail maintenance. What about "partners" and policies I've been hearing about? How does the club work with them?

1. Board members should become familiar with the resources on the ATC's website. Most of the topics below are covered under: https://appalachiantrail.org/get-involved/ and apply to all AT clubs. Check sections under "Volunteer" and "Safety." Again: Don't try to absorb all the information on the ATC's website all at once! Know you can refer to sections of it when you have a question. These are some of the topics:

    News about AT conservation/protection efforts

    How the ATC addresses safety: reporting incidents and injuries

    ATC policies governing trail work and working with youth

    Job hazard analyses for some kinds of trail work

    Other volunteer AT clubs and their location; AT Communities along the Trail

    Training opportunities and other AT volunteer opportunities

2. Be aware of USFS policies that affect the club's volunteer trail work (e.g. ADA guidelines for trail structures, Federal Wilderness areas, camping, group size. Start by reading the club's Local Management Plan (www.mratc.org – under "Organization Documents." Understand liability coverage for trail volunteers by the USFS – and that the National Park Service covers volunteers working on the AT on non-USFS land (e.g. state parks).

3. Understand the club's trail concerns and how these are being addressed cooperatively with our partners (e.g. high volume of visitor use in the Mt. Rogers high country - user-made trails and campsites, need for education of under-prepared new backpackers, damage to natural

resources). Start by reading the club's Local Management Plan (www.mratc.org – under "Organization Documents;") and also learn at club meetings.

F. How can I be sure I am doing what I should as a Board Member? What is most important?

All club members are encouraged to be involved in club trail work and activities, but Board members particularly should plan to participate actively. Contact the appropriate Steering Committee member for trail work, outreach, club recreational activities, or natural resources – or if there are questions or uncertainties, email the general club email-box: info@mratc.org. Sign up at a meeting or in response to an email when volunteers for an activity are requested. Be familiar with the club's activities (e.g. trail work and rare plant monitoring and what these entail) and encourage other people you know to join us.