

## ATC Policy on Drinking Water

Adopted by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in 1993

Water sources located at or near overnight-use areas provide virtually all the water needed by hikers along the A.T. Hikers on the Trail have a reasonable expectation that water will be available at these intervals and that the water sources be adequately marked. Water along the Trail is available for hikers from two sources:

Natural or backcountry water sources, which are naturally occurring surface-water sources (including springs and seeps) that are undeveloped or minimally improved. Minimal improvements include construction of small catchment basins or other primitive collection devices that clearly do not indicate to the user that water is being provided from a developed, protected water system.

Water systems, which typically are engineered systems that transport, store, or deliver water for human consumption. Improvements, such as wells, service connections, pumps, hand pumps, holding tanks, faucets, or spigots usually indicate that water is being provided through a water system.

ATC guidelines for natural or backcountry water sources are as follows:

1. ATC Web site, guidebooks, brochures, maps, and other publications will emphasize the need to adequately treat water from unprotected water sources before use. Guidebooks will advise the reader that the purity of water from natural sources cannot be guaranteed, and all water should be treated before use. Guidebooks and other Trail publications that contain detailed information on hiker health and safety should continue to provide information on currently accepted methods for boiling, filtering, and chemically treating water.
2. While ATC recognizes the risks inherent in identifying water sources along the A.T., it also recognizes the need to inform hikers as to where water can be found. ATC's marking standard, as outlined in *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*, recommends methods for marking water supplies and encourages Trail clubs to assist hikers in locating water at appropriate intervals along the Trail. Water sources along the Trail may be identified by blue-blazed trails, directional signs, and guidebook or map references.
3. In order to inform hikers of potential hazards incident to the use of natural water sources, Trail clubs and agency partners should include information on signs at Trailheads (or in other appropriate locations) advising hikers to treat water from all sources before use. The specific language used for Trail-club signs should be reviewed and approved by the landowning agency partner.
4. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy will make signs available to Trail clubs that can be posted at Trailheads or other appropriate locations along the Appalachian Trail with prior approval of agency partners. These signs will contain a message

that advises the public that water from unprotected natural sources should be boiled, filtered, or chemically treated before use.

5. Natural water sources should not be modified or developed in a manner that would lead the user to believe that the source is protected or that water from the source is safe to use without treatment. Minor modifications to improve water collection, such as small catchment basins, springboxes, short lengths of pipe, or other devices, should not include faucets, spigots, or cisterns, or otherwise appear to indicate that water is being provided from a developed, protected water source.
6. Natural water sources located in an area where the potential for chemical contamination is known to exist should not be identified to the public. Subject to availability of funds, ATC will assist Trail clubs in testing natural water sources suspected of chemical contamination. Where testing indicates that chemical contaminants are present, appropriate action should be taken to deter public use.

ATC guidelines for water systems are as follows:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy will comply with all provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act and state and federal regulations promulgated to implement the provisions of the act. As necessary, the Conservancy will assist local Trail clubs in testing and treating water from water systems to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal regulations.

Water resources on the Appalachian Trail provide the vital water supplies needed by hikers, both along the Trail and at shelter sites. Hikers have a reasonable expectation that water will be available at reasonable intervals, that water sources will be adequately marked, and that identified water sources will be clean and potable after treatment. Typically, these water sources are undeveloped or are only nominally improved by construction of a small catchment basin. Improvements such as hand pumps usually are considered only when no other water sources are available.

Because of the complexity of maintaining water systems in accordance with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the ATC declared an open-ended moratorium in 1998 on building or integrating already existing water systems to the Trail water supply.