

Benton MacKaye close to milestone designation

From staff reports

Rep. Steve Cohen (D – Tenn.), Rep. Jim Cooper (D – Tenn.), Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R – Tenn.) and Chuck Fleischmann (R – Tenn.) are co-sponsors of a House Bill which – if approved by Congress and signed by the President – will designate the Benton MacKaye Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

Cohen announced the introduction of the “Benton MacKaye Scenic Trail Act” in a May 27 press release.

The prestigious designation is reserved for trails that epitomize the stunning, natural beauty of America’s wide array of natural landscapes. The trails also offer outstanding recreational opportunities.

Only 11 trails have received this honor, including the Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide Trail.

“We are grateful to Representatives Steve

Cohen, Jim Cooper, Scott DesJarlais and Chuck Fleischmann for co-sponsoring the legislation in the House proposing the BMT be designated a National Scenic Trail!” said Ken Cissna, President of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. “The inherent qualities of the BMT make it worthy of such a designation. The trail’s emerald green forests, stunning vistas, rippling streams and rushing waterfalls exemplify the spectacular beauty found in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

“If the bill passes, the BMT will be able to offer even better recreational opportunities to the tens of thousands of day hikers, backpackers and long-distance hikers who take advantage of the BMT each year.

“But the introduction of the bill in the House is just the first step. There’s still a lot of work to be done before the BMT receives Congressional approval

as a National Scenic Trail. The outpouring of public support has been fantastic. But we’ll need to build on that to get a final bill passed by Congress and signed by the President!”

Known for its beauty and peaceful seclusion, the 288-mile Benton MacKaye Trail crosses three states (Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina); passes through three national forests (the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala); and traverses six wilderness areas, including 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Since its inception in 1980, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association first constructed and now has maintained the trail for over 40 years.

Today, just 15 miles remain on private land or as short road walks – 95 percent of the route is on public lands managed by either the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service.

In fiscal 2021, Benton MacKaye Trail Association’s all-volunteer work force put in almost 8,000 hours maintaining the trail. In 2020, Benton MacKaye Trail Association volunteers cleared 300 blowdowns left by Tropi-

cal Storm Zeta in just three weeks. The tunnel on the Road to Nowhere, the incredible views from the Mount Sterling Fire Tower and the historic Fontana Dam are just a few of the popular hiking destinations on the Benton MacKaye

Trail that are in and around the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

If you would like more information, contact Joy Forehand – Benton MacKaye Trail Association Communications Director – at jwfbarga@gmail.com.