



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **BLAIRSVILLE AND UNION COUNTY, GA JOINTLY DESIGNATED AN APPALACHIAN TRAIL COMMUNITY™**

**Blairsville, GA (March 17, 2011)** – On March 22, 2011, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, and town leaders from Blairsville and Union County will hold a ceremony celebrating their designation as the newest Appalachian Trail Community™ with a proclamation signing and speakers including Mayor Jim Conley, Commissioner Lamar Paris, ATC board chair Bob Almand, and others.

The Appalachian Trail Community™ designation program is a new program of the nonprofit managers of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.). Launched in 2010, this program recognizes communities for their part in promoting awareness of the A.T. as an important national and local resource. Towns, counties and communities along the A.T.'s corridor are considered assets by A.T. hikers, and many of these towns act as good friends and neighbors to the Trail.

At 11:00 am, the designation ceremony will take place on the A.T. at the famous Mountain Crossings @ Walasi-Yi (pronounced Wa La See Yee). The historic building was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps at the same time the A.T. was constructed. The A.T. actually passes right through the building, where hikers can have their pack contents evaluated by store staff. Each year, Mountain Crossing hiking experts evaluate over 500 packs and ship back over 9000 lbs of unnecessary gear from the store.

“Over the past 30 years, Mountain Crossings and the people of Union County have served the hiking community graciously and unselfishly. This A.T. designation, through this celebration, is a grand tribute to all who have extended their hand of hospitality to the A.T. dreamers who visit our home here in the Appalachians,” stated proprietor Winton Porter.

Blairsville and Union County are celebrating their A.T. Community™ designation and welcoming hikers setting out to hike over 2,000 miles, those who enjoy shorter sections of the A.T. as well as local citizens who use the iconic Trail. The ceremony will highlight the importance of Blairsville and Union County's designation and highlight students who are using the Trail as an educational resource and tool.

“With over 35 miles of the A.T. in Union County it is no wonder that this national treasure is a source of pride for Union County residents. The county includes the highest section of the A.T. in Georgia, crossing the 4458 foot summit of Blood Mountain just 12 miles south of Blairsville in the spectacular Blood Mountain Wilderness. The history, culture, economy, and future of Union County are intertwined with the A.T.,” stated Dayton Miller, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) volunteer who helped organize the Blairsville-Union Country Appalachian Trail Community™ designation.

For over 80 years, volunteers from the GATC, one of ATC's federation of 31 AT maintaining clubs from Georgia to Maine, have led the maintenance, management, and protection of the A.T. in Georgia, in cooperation with the ATC, the US Forest Service's Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, and Georgia DNR. The GATC works closely with Blairsville and Union County to make the most of this new program.

“The ATC is proud to celebrate communities that are helping to protect and promote the



Appalachian Trail,” stated Julie Judkins, Community Program Manager of the ATC. “These new partnerships will increase local stewardship of public lands, support community initiatives for sustainable economic development and conservation planning, as well as support healthy lifestyles for community citizens.”

The ATC was founded in 1925 by volunteers and federal officials who were working to build a continuous footpath along the Appalachian Mountains. The A.T. is 2,181 miles in length from Maine to Georgia, making it the longest, continuously marked footpath in the world. Volunteers typically donate more than 200,000 hours a year on trail-related work. About 2 to 3 million visitors walk a portion of the A.T. each year. The ATC is focused solely on preserving and managing the A.T. to ensure that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come.

#### **About the Appalachian Trail Conservancy**

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail – ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. For more information please visit [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org).

#### **About the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club**

The GATC manages, maintains, and protects the 75 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and several connecting trails, in Georgia with volunteers from its membership and the interested public. For more information please see [www.georgia-atclub.org/](http://www.georgia-atclub.org/).

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