

Executive Director Report

In addition to Arizona Trail Association accomplishments detailed within the attached program reports, below are some highlights and issues the Board of Directors should be aware of.

Member Survey

Over 1/3 of our active members participated in the recent ATA Member Survey, so these results are 99% statistically accurate. The Strategic Plan Subcommittee met in September to discuss ways to integrate results data into the draft Strategic Plan (2022-2026), which will be reviewed, discussed, and voted on during the October Board Meeting. Results of the survey also inspired a “member visioning exercise” that Board and Staff are invited to participate in on November 10 (5:30-7 pm) to take a look at our overall membership structure; engagement and membership benefits; how to diversifying our membership to be more representative of the trail community; how to grow our #s; and more. Please let Karrie (karrie@aztrail.org) know if you'd like to participate.

AZT in a Day

Our big fundraiser and initiative to cover all 800 miles in a single day is coming up on October 9 and we need help spreading the word! Staff and Board are encouraged to encourage their contacts to help us cover all segments, and raise \$ for the ATA. See additional information in the attached Development Report.

AZT Administrator Position

The position has been vacant since May (after Brian Poturalski's detail ended) and has been combined with a Regional Trails and Dispersed Recreation Program Manager position. Great individual who accepted the position, but the USFS effectively eliminated the AZNST Administrator position. This is troubling, to put it lightly. I have met with Regional and Washington Office leadership to express our concerns, which are shared by the National Trails Lead and NST/NHT trail organizations nationwide. Please see attached information on the individual who accepted the position.

Impending Government Shutdown

With lack of agreement within Congress regarding a FY22 budget and continuing resolution unlikely to get 60 votes in the Senate, all signs point toward a government shutdown coming soon. This could significantly impact trail operations and volunteer opportunities on public lands – right as our busiest season of the year is beginning. I am currently seeking Forest Supervisors' approval for scheduled projects to continue independently without federal agency staff involvement and oversight, but it's a longshot – mostly due to liability concerns. Other trail organizations are planning for a complete shutdown of operations (conservation corps, volunteers and recreation activities). Instead, they are encouraging their volunteers, members, and others to take the “down time” to contact their members of Congress to encourage them to figure it out so we can get back to work!

State Funding

- Arizona Trail State Fund -- \$250,000 approved for priority projects, paid from State to conservation corps. ATA Staff is working through the approval and permitting process to implement projects on the ground now, with the goal of spending all \$250K by next April. All funds must be spent in order to make a strong case for going back to the Legislature to ask for a continual appropriation. Board Members are asked to thank their representatives for their support, and to plant the seed for a continual appropriation moving forward.
- Visit Arizona Initiative – Governor dedicated \$100 million in grant funding to support Arizona-based tourism. Arizona Trail was used as an example during the announcement from Arizona Office of Tourism! We are eligible for funding and plan to apply for grants, specifically to create a more robust presence within Arizona Trail Gateway Communities.
- State Parks Heritage Fund has \$5 million available in new grants, and ATA is encouraged to apply for up to \$100,000 for non-motorized trail projects; \$50,000 for education projects; and possible funding for cultural resource surveys on previously uninventoried segments of trail. Since we were a major advocate for the Heritage Fund, we are likely to receive funding. All \$5 million needs to be spent in order to make a strong case for going back to the Legislature to ask for a continual appropriation.

Federal Funding

- \$356,000 in Great American Outdoors Act funding approved. This is in addition to the ATA's \$298,360 in our current Challenge Cost Share Agreement. Staff is working on contracts, agreements, permits and approvals now.
- Recent Infrastructure Package includes \$8 billion in forest thinning funds, and \$100 million available for contracting crews for fuel reduction. Need to tap into this to improve forest health along the AZT corridor. I will work with USFS leadership to see what's possible.
- Lots of new grant opportunities, but balancing what we are applying for with our current capacity – and more importantly – the capacity of our federal agency partners to approve projects (this is the weak link).

Babbitt Ranch Solar & Wind Project

Babbitt Ranches' plans to utilize the CO Bar Ranch for renewable energy projects passed Coconino County planning and zoning commission. Solar and wind farm may be coming soon to Passage 35, but they have agreed to keep all infrastructure outside the AZT corridor (1/2-mile of trail centerline). Project proponent (NextEra Energy) has been great to work with, and recently made a \$5,000 donation to the ATA. Board will be asked to approve a statement of support for this project in the near future. Read more about the project [here](#).

Climate Change Impact Grant

\$85,000 in grants approved for advocacy related to fighting climate change through AZ Senator support of a future infrastructure plan that includes clean energy initiatives to reduce carbon emissions. Up to \$25,000 can be spent on ads (mostly through social media) that have AZT users sharing their concerns about climate change and its impacts on the trail – wildfires, excessive heat, extreme drought, air quality, and disappearing water sources. [First video](#) was launched on September 20, and the second video (in Spanish) will be released soon.

Endurance Events

We have returned to hosting in-person participatory events on the trail, with our first being the Flagstaff to Grand Canyon Stagecoach Ultra on Sept 18-19. Almost 300 runners and mountain bikers participated! Gross event revenues = \$63,310.75. Other events are scheduled for December 11, January 29, April 10 and August 20-21, and will be held pending approval of permits and Covid restrictions. More information on Endurance Events at <https://runazt.org>.

Awards and Recognition

ATA is being considered for an [Environmental Sustainability Award](#) for our Rainwater Collector project by Arizona Forward. The awards gala has been postponed until Spring of 2022 with the hopes it can be held in-person at the Arizona Biltmore.

Grand Canyon Protection Act

Thanks to Congressman Raúl Grijalva, the Grand Canyon Protection Act was included as an amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The House passed the NDAA on September 23 and it's on its way to the Senate. If it remains intact, it will protect 1 million acres of public land around Grand Canyon National Park from future uranium mining.

Vaccination Requirements

ATA employees are required to be fully vaccinated since the organization is considered a "government contractor" and the President's most recent mandate requires it. All staff have been notified, and are providing proof of vaccination in case we are ever asked for it.

Annual Meeting

We need to decide if we are going to host an in-person annual meeting on February 5, 2022 by November 5, 2021. Indoors may be impossible or undesirable; an outdoor (covered) event is a possibility, however weather can be very unpredictable in early February. Staff is open to suggestion from the Board on whether or not to host this in-person (outdoors) or virtually.