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20-year project:
APPALACHIAN SCENIC TRAIL NJ CROSSING TO BE DEDICATED,
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Mahwah, NJ (October 1, 2002) – After 24 years of planning and heroic volunteer effort, the Appalachian Scenic Trail boardwalk and suspension bridge crossing, in Vernon Township, NJ, opened to hikers. The mile-long boardwalk, with its 110-foot suspension bridge, will be dedicated on October 20, 2002, at a ceremony hosted by Vernon Township and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, one of the key organizing forces behind the trail's creation. The dedication is co-sponsored by the Appalachian Trail Conference, National Park Service, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and New Jersey Office of Travel & Tourism. New Jersey Governor James McGreevey is the invited guest of honor and keynote speaker.

New Jersey dignitaries and participating organizations will salute the estimated 500 volunteers who gave nearly 9,000 hours of time, talent and sweat labor to bring the project to fruition.

The Pochuck boardwalk and bridge represent an extraordinary example of cooperation among very disparate entities in both private and public sectors. Its creation was sanctioned by every New Jersey governor since the project was launched in 1982.

Designed to take hikers off the narrow, winding Sussex County Route 17, with an alternate trail between the Pochuck and Wawayanda Mountains, the boardwalk and bridge form part of the Appalachian Scenic Trail and make it possible to walk across New Jersey, from the Delaware Water Gap to the New York border entirely on off-road trails. The Pochuck section is accessible to hikers of all ages and abilities and provides a unique floodplain crossing.

The area over which it extends is classified by the National Park Service as an "Exceptional Resource Value Wetland," comprising 240 acres and a 3,000-foot wide floodplain crisscrossed by tributaries and a quagmire into which a hiker can sink waist-deep, even in dry summer months.

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Meandering through it is Pochuck Creek, a non-delineated river with a 60-foot wide stream channel that can be up to eight feet deep. During extreme rains, it can rise six feet or more and be fast-flowing, carrying trees and other debris downstream.

In flood conditions, the entire area resembles the prehistoric lake it once was. More often, it is a beautiful marshy bog of tall grasses, bushes and wild flowers, surrounded by hardwood and evergreen forest. It is a habitat for a variety of threatened and endangered species and offers an extraordinary hiking experience unlike any other on the Appalachian Trail Scenic Park, that stretches from Maine to Georgia.

The project was coordinated by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, one of the oldest hiking federations in the country. An extraordinary number of dedicated organizations and individuals volunteered time, materials and manual labor to construct the crossing. Among these were the Appalachian Trail Conference; the National Park Service; New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection -Division of Parks & Forests; Vernon Township Municipal Authorities; Purcell Associates Consulting Engineers; Builders Association of North New Jersey; Jersey Central Power & Light; General Public Utilities; Vernon Public Schools; St. Benedicts Prep School and NY-NJ Trail Conference members.

The non-profit New York-New Jersey Trail Conference was formed in 1920 and currently is responsible for building and maintaining 1,500 miles of trails in New Jersey and New York, from the Delaware Water Gap north through the Catskill Mountains and east to the Massachusetts border. With a constituency of more than 100,000 hikers and naturalists, the federation membership roster comprises 82 organizations and 7,500 individual members in the bi-state region. It manages the Appalachian Trail in the two states and provides trail construction and maintenance to national, state and municipal parks and private land trusts. The Trail Conference also publishes authoritative hiking maps and books of the region.

For further information, contact the New York - New Jersey Trail Conference, 156 Ramapo Valley Road, Mahwah NJ 07430. Phone 201- 512-9348. Fax 201-512-9012. Website: www.nynjtc.org

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