



## Mile Zero Trail Association

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### **MZTA seeks Chapter Organization leaders and volunteers in communities along the Link Trail in preparation for the Appalachian Trail centennial**

Mile Zero Trail Association (MZTA) plans to develop a National Recreation Trail to connect the Appalachian National Scenic Trail with the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. The connection will bring the continuous system of U.S. major trails on par with the Trans Canada Trail (the Great Trail) at over 16,000 miles.

Utilizing the Interior Highlands and uplifts for scenic interest, including the Ouachita and Wichita Mountains, the trail is planned in two phases - Southern Great Plains to Interior Highlands and Mississippi Delta to Eastern Highlands. In the first phase, it will be possible to hike from the DFW Metroplex to Little Rock, Arkansas and Taos, New Mexico.

The Mile Zero Trail Association is much more than a group with a goal to establish a new National Recreation Trail; it is an organization with cultural, educational, recreational and economic benefits for people and communities.

While it will take about a year to describe the trail and possibly another year to have good informational campaigns up and running, it will take several more years to create and improve segments of the trail network in order to achieve the optimum conditions for cars, bikes and wheelchairs, and foot travelers. In this time, we will connect the trail with interesting programs for local people and visitors, and communities linked by their activities.

It will take a strong organization made up of people who are deeply committed. And it is the long timeframe of the initial key project that provides the opportunity to have tremendous social and economic impact through many other short-term projects that can be accomplished along the way. Chapter Organizations are the key to achieve these goals.

Volunteers will be critical in the plan to establish Chapter Organizations. Those with leadership experience and community connections are especially needed to help establish Chapter Organizations in towns and cities along the Link Trail corridor. An array of backgrounds, professions and experiences is desired. People who are interested should send a message to chapters [at] mile0.org.



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Communities along the Link Trail corridor, which are on or near the intermodal route:

Taos, NM	Atoka, OK
Chama, NM	Clayton, OK
Chimayo, NM	Talihina, OK
Raton, NM	Rich Mountain, AR
Wagon Mound, NM	Hot Springs, AR
Clayton, NM	Natural Steps, AR
Dalhart, TX	Little Rock, AR
Stinnett, TX	Clarendon, AR
Borger, TX	Helena-West Helena, AR
Canadian, TX	Tunica, MS
Elk City, OK	Memphis, TN
Clinton, OK	Holly Springs, MS
Granite, OK	New Albany, MS
Hobart, OK	Oxford, MS
Medicine Park, OK	Tupelo, MS
Duncan, OK	Tuscumbia, AL
Muenster, TX	Muscle Shoals, AL
Denton, TX	Florence, AL
Grapevine, TX	Decatur, AL
Fort Worth, TX	Huntsville, AL
Dallas, TX	Scottsboro, AL
Plano, TX	Chattanooga, TN
Farmersville, TX	Cleveland, TN
Paris, TX	Ocoee, TN
Clarksville, TX	Tellico Plains, TN
Idabel, OK	Fontana Dam, NC
Broken Bow, OK	Bryson City, NC
Davis, OK	Cherokee, NC
Sulphur, OK	Amicalola, GA

Note: The Link Trail intersects the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail and Natchez Trace Parkway, providing additional intermodal access to Franklin and Nashville, Tennessee, and Jackson and Natchez, Mississippi.



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Like most recreation trails, as well as some historic trails, Chapter Organizations are essential in planning, maintenance and promotion of the trail. A few major differences in the Link Trail are based on its modern potential to be an intermodal trail, accommodating various forms of recreation and adventure travel (and to utilize future modes of transit and activity), as well as the potential to develop a trail that is connected by activities beyond strictly recreational use, extending significantly to educational, cultural, social, ecological and historical interests. The Link Trail and its Chapter Organizations will also strive to realize the potential economic benefits for communities, many of which hold tremendous cultural resources and unique attractions, but face decline in their local activity and visitor support.

The trail corridor has been preliminarily surveyed to confirm its viability. The organization's goal is to precisely describe the trail by 2021, the 100 year anniversary of Benton MacKaye's concept for the Appalachian Trail in 1921, with further improvements to follow.

A general depiction of its corridor is shown:





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By utilizing existing trails, 35-40 percent (700 of 1,800 miles) of the necessary trail is already developed or in development. The organization will examine potential connecting routes, including existing park trails, abandoned railroads, rural roads, new projects and others.

The most exciting aspect of the planned effort is that communities all along the route are already interested in making connections to their neighbors. Obstacles, like river crossings, are already being resolved. The biggest challenge for pedestrians and cyclists on the trail appeared to be the Mississippi River, where few bridges are available and they all carry busy car and train traffic. But the cities of Memphis, Tennessee and West Memphis, Arkansas opened the Big River Crossing project in 2018, making it possible to walk or bike across the Mississippi River.

Further examination and evaluation of the project revealed that it is not a path problem, but a lodging problem. The solution boils down to an economic challenge that most communities would like to solve; they need more visitors for more lodging to be available.

As the organization studied the challenge presented by the frequency of lodging and services, as well as the phenomenal level of natural, cultural and educational resources along the route, the solution became clear and exciting: Develop the trail as an intermodal corridor with routes for autos, bikes and pedestrians, as well as sections for additional recreation (including equestrians and wheelchair athletes) and casual use. The Link Trail (LT) will not only link the Appalachian Trail with the Continental Divide Trail for backpackers, but it will connect cyclists with the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route in the Rockies and auto tourists with the Cherohala Skyway and Blue Ridge Parkway in the Southern Appalachians.

The auto route (LTA) - utilizing the Arkansas-Oklahoma Talimena Parkway, traveling the Old Ozark Trails and Bankhead Highway, intersecting Route 66, and crossing the Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field - will be described in 2019. The bike route (LTB) - utilizing the Tanglefoot Trail, Delta Heritage Trail and Northeast Texas Trail (rail-to-trails projects), following Mississippi Scenic Byway 315, passing through intermittent mountain ranges, traversing the grasslands of the Anadarko Basin and High Plains, and accessing Black Mesa - will be described by 2020.

As Mile Zero Trail Association works toward the most difficult challenge, the footpath, it will establish Chapter Organizations to improve local planning along the trail, in preparation for the establishment of a Conservancy Organization to oversee the hiking route (LTC).



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In addition to many specific interests in Nature (Recreation, Photography, Ornithology, Wildlife, etc.), subjects include Cultural interests (History, Genealogy, Music, Arts, Agriculture, Parks, Transportation and more), along with vast fields of Science (Geology, Meteorology, Botany, Archaeology, Paleontology and more).

The Link Trail is unique in that, rather than a uniform mountain range, its route across the Heartland, mostly parallel to 35° North Latitude, accesses a wide variety of environments: natural, rural, urban, industrial and agricultural. The initial assessment indicates it will be 50 percent natural, 40 percent rural and agricultural and 10 percent urban, though bypasses are planned to accommodate hikers and cyclists who might like to avoid the largest urban areas (DFW and Memphis). Travelers will be exposed to distinctive mountain ranges, foothills, escarpments, river basins, lakes, grasslands, volcanoes, the Great Plains, Blackland Prairies, Cross Timbers and the Mississippi Delta.

The Link Trail will serve highly diverse and versatile forms of transit and users: auto tourism, new vehicle technology (autonomous/driverless vehicles and rideshare/bikeshare services), bus tours, bike travel, competitive cycling, backpacking, thru-hiking, trekking, sport walking, trail horse riders, public transit, and local recreational use, including segments in use between communities for leisure hikers, runners, wheelchair users, equestrians, charity events, festivals, temporary commerce (food trucks, event vendors, etc.), art walks, and more.

By better connecting the national trails network, the Link Trail will facilitate many new possibilities for hikers and cyclists, as well as sports competition organizers. With numerous special features (varied terrain, diverse cultures, storied roadways, divergent themes, intriguing history, iconic landmarks) of international interest, it may even one day serve as a multi-stage competitive cycling tour route, North America's own unique version of the famed Tour de France.

The Appalachian Trail serves about 2 million visitors per year. According to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, interest from thru-hikers has been steadily on the increase. More than 4,000 backpackers set out to complete a thru-hike of the long-distance trail and about 1,000 accomplish their goal. The park near its southern terminus, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, is among the nation's busiest, with 9.5 million or more visitors annually.

While it is difficult at this stage to predict the numbers of visitors who will utilize the Link Trail by auto, bike and on foot, it will likely exceed the Appalachian Trail (AT), because the Link Trail (LT) is planned as an intermodal trail and it will pass through or near communities reaching nearly 40



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million people. Auto tourists who depart Interstates 30 and 40 will bring vast visitors. Cyclists will account for tens of thousands of users on the Link Trail. Thru-hikers will likely be fewer, because the AT is one of the most storied and prominent trails in the world. Short-term users (day hikers and weekend campers) will likely exceed the Appalachian Trail's 2 million visitors per year. The Link Trail's unique suitability to trekkers and sport walkers, as well as future travelers who may enjoy the ability to work remotely due to technology, may increase its use for medium-distance and long-distance hikers to make it one of the most utilized in the United States.

Parks (national parks, forests and refuges, historic sites, state parks and others) along the Link Trail corridor, which will serve travelers' interests and needs:

Carson National Forest	Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park
Heron Lake New Mexico State Park	White River National Wildlife Refuge
Rio Grande Gorge New Mexico State Park	Louisiana Purchase Historic State Park
Sugarite Canyon New Mexico State Park	Mississippi River Arkansas State Park
Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge	St Francis National Forest
Capulin Volcano National Monument	Parkin Archeological Arkansas State Park
Kiowa National Grassland	T.O. Fuller Tennessee State Park
Clayton Lake New Mexico State Park	John W Kyle Mississippi State Park
Rita Blanca National Grasslands	Wall Doxey Mississippi State Park
Lake Meredith National Recreation Area	Holly Springs National Forest
Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument	Trace Mississippi State Park
Black Kettle National Grassland	Tombigbee National Forest
Washita Battlefield National Historic Site	Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail
Washita National Wildlife Refuge	Tupelo National Battlefield
Foss Oklahoma State Park	Tombigbee Mississippi State Park
Quartz Mountain Oklahoma State Park	Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site
Mountain Park Wildlife Area	Bay Springs Lake
Great Plains Oklahoma State Park	Tishomingo Mississippi State Park
Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge	J.P. Coleman Alabama State Park
(Mount Scott Observation Area)	Joe Wheeler Alabama State Park
Ray Roberts Lake Texas State Park	Bankhead National Forest
Lavon Lake (Army C.O.E.)	Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge
Caddo National Grassland	Monte Sano Alabama State Park
Hugo Lake Oklahoma State Park	Cathedral Caverns Alabama State Park
Beavers Bend Oklahoma State Park	Guntersville Lake
Hochatown Oklahoma State Park	Sauta Cave National Wildlife Refuge



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Chickasaw National Recreation Area	Buck's Pocket Alabama State Park
Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge	Tumbling Rock Cave Preserve
Boggy Depot State Park	Little River Canyon National Preserve
Atoka Wildlife Management Area	Cloudland Canyon Georgia State Park
McGee Creek Natural Scenic State Recreation Area	Russell Cave National Monument
McGee Creek Oklahoma State Park	Franklin Tennessee State Forest
Ouachita National Forest	Lookout Mountain
Talimena Oklahoma State Park	Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park
Winding Stair Mountain National Recreation Area	Raccoon Mountain Caverns
Queen Wilhelmina Arkansas State Park	Moccasin Bend National Archeological District
Lake Ouachita Arkansas State Park	Prentice Cooper Tennessee State Forest
Hot Springs National Park	Harrison Bay Tennessee State Park
Lake Catherine Arkansas State Park	Johns Mountain Wildlife Management Area
Mount Magazine Arkansas State Park	Chattahoochee National Forest
Mount Nebo Arkansas State Park	Amicalola Falls Georgia State Park
Lake Dardanelle Arkansas State Park	Fort Loudoun State Historic Park
Petit Jean Arkansas State Park	Nantahala National Forest
Pinnacle Mountain Arkansas State Park	Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The inventory of parks above is only a short list of resources that will be experienced and promoted as interests along the Link Trail. A preliminary assessment of the natural, cultural, industrial and monumental resources along the trail corridor, or easily accessible to it by unique connections, is available online at: [www.mile0.org/details.html](http://www.mile0.org/details.html)

More information about planning and development stages and timelines is available online at: [www.mile0.org](http://www.mile0.org)

Chapter Organization info is available at: <http://www.mile0.org/chapters.html>

Chapter Organization volunteers should review info at: <http://www.mile0.org/volunteer.html>

A full website index will help locate more information and frequently asked questions (FAQs) is available online at: [www.mile0.org/siteindex.html](http://www.mile0.org/siteindex.html)