

PASSING THE TORCH



A Lesson in Stewardship, Leadership, and Legacy

By Heather B. Habelka

The Appalachian Trail Cooperative Management System (CMS) has long been recognized and emulated for its approach to Trail management. Driven by a dynamic and collaborative model, the CMS unifies the ATC, its public agency partners, and 30 local and independent A.T. Clubs around a common goal: to protect the A.T. and its future.

However, one of the system's most valuable assets cannot be fully illustrated on an organizational chart or fully described in the pages of a strategic plan. This asset is the volunteer-powered network that spans up and down the Trail's 14 states — striving to respond to each Trail section's unique needs; engage volunteers based on interests and capacity; and cultivate the next generation of leaders.

To that end, the A.T. Committee of the Appalachian Mountain Club's Connecticut Chapter (AMC-CT) recently navigated a significant leadership transition with the retirement of long-time volunteer Chair Dave Boone, and the election of new volunteer Chair Adam Lippman.

From Serviceman to Chairman

Boone, fondly called “Booneman,” stepped into the role of AMC-CT Committee Chair 23 years ago. It was a natural fit given his service in the U.S. Air Force, professional roles in public health and waste management, extensive experience stewarding Connecticut's 53 miles of Trail, and a naturally inclusive leadership style.

As Chair, Boone kept a consistent focus on his volunteers. He worked with Sara Haxby, the ATC's Volunteer Program Manager, to ensure his sawyers received training and resources, and that his volunteers were recognized by the ATC's awards program. In fact, he attributes the stellar reputation of Connecticut's section entirely to his team of volunteers.

According to Leanna Joyner, ATC Senior Director of Partnership and Trail Operations, “What was most notable about Dave was the spirit with which he led teams of people to care for the Trail. His jovial disposition and kindness offered warmth and motivation to people interested in

The view from Lions Head along the A.T. in Connecticut. PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIANCOLTON, CC BY-SA 4.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. **Dave Boone at the summit of Bear Mountain in Salisbury, Connecticut (inset left).** PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVE BOONE. **Adam Lippman on the Trail (inset right).** PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM LIPPMAN



As Chair, Boone strove to make all volunteers feel welcome and valued. “The Committee members are fantastic. Just as fantastic are the volunteers we see once or twice a year. I appreciated everybody’s efforts, however big or small,” he says.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVE BOONE

serving the Trail. His can-do attitude shaped a myriad of projects for the betterment of the Trail and hikers’ experiences.” Haxby agrees, “Dave is always prepared, friendly, accessible, and ready to have a chat — which I appreciate. It’s not always easy to find the way in with people that you’re just meeting at a conference table.”

In addition to training, celebrating, and empowering volunteers, Boone’s tenure focused on the environment. The Committee installed bear boxes at all of Connecticut’s 17 overnight sites. He also championed the conversion of old-school pit privies into modern, moldering composting systems. According to Boone, the majority of Connecticut’s campsites now have odor-free, eco-friendly composting models. “It’s



Volunteers are encouraged to bring their expertise and interests to the Trail. Boone’s professional background in public health, sewage disposal, and septic systems led to the spearheading of a wastewater survey. The findings ultimately improved Connecticut’s section of the A.T. and caught the attention of the Committee, launching Boone’s path to Chair. PHOTO BY TRACY LIND/ATC

so much better for the environment in terms of everything, even air quality,” he stresses. “It always comes down to waste disposal at some point during a conversation with hikers. But that’s not unique to Connecticut. That’s Trail-wide.”

A Methodical Approach to Mentorship

Another challenge that’s not unique to Connecticut is identifying and preparing the next generation of Committee leaders. “Dave wanted to share stories, impart knowledge, and help out with workshops. He was aware of the next generation coming in to take on these roles. He wanted them to learn these skills and give them an opportunity,” Haxby recalls.

When Boone started contemplating retirement, he proactively started cultivating a relationship with Adam Lippman, whose Trail experience closely mirrored his own. He focused his mentorship of Lippman on gradually introducing him to the CMS and the immense coordination required behind the scenes. “To give Adam a better chance of success, I thought it was important for him to serve as Vice-Chair and shadow me for one year so he could meet everyone and see how the inner workings operate,” Boone says.

In August 2025, the ATC and the National Park Service hosted its biennial Volunteer Leadership Meeting, a three-day conference designed for mentorship and succession planning. Two volunteers from each independent Club are invited — one established leader and one rising leader. “Adam attended and shared the work his Committee has been doing to update its Local Management Plan,” says Joyner. “He brings a light heart, an abundance of energy, and an obvious enthusiasm for the care of the Trail to the role.”

Lippman was elected Committee Chair in November of 2025 and officially led his first meeting in January 2026. As he continues to step fully into the role of Chair, he does so with the guidance of Boone’s continued involvement, unwavering support, and loyal friendship. “I can already see him stepping

up with his own voice, his own opinions, and his own perspective — which is very different from mine,” Boone shares.

For example, Lippman is constantly infusing new ideas into the Committee’s work, which he says are generated during every meeting and every time he sets foot onto the A.T. He’s also demonstrating confidence in his leadership style. “I reach out to new volunteers, personally thank them, and ask them if they had a good experience. The succession model is to welcome joyful, confident volunteers to not only join our events and help, but to become leaders themselves,” he explains. “I want to inspire people because I was inspired. I try to be the kind of teacher I would have wanted when I was new to something.”



Dave Boone (second from left), AMC-CT volunteers, and ATC staff worked together to bring a bear box to an A.T. campsite near the Connecticut-Massachusetts border. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ATC

Succession Not Replication

Leadership succession rarely results in an exact replacement. In Boone’s case, he was able to commit an incredible amount of time to the Trail, a feat often more easily achieved after retiring from a career. He earned his 25-year plaque in 2015, received a 1,000-hour volunteer vest, and was honored with the prestigious 4,000-hour Presidential Lifetime Service Award in 2021.

“Dave took on massive amounts of responsibility. He went beyond delegating and facilitating meetings. He took part in almost every committee, helped with fieldwork, worked directly with me and others at the ATC, and represented a number of different programs,” says Tracy Lind, the ATC’s Regional Manager in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont. “It can be hard to find folks to fill leadership roles



At last year’s Volunteer Leadership Meeting, Lippman spoke about the process of overhauling his Committee’s local management plan. Critical to each Club’s work, the plan outlines federal and ATC policies regarding the A.T. and Committee-specific policies and actions. PHOTO BY MICHELLE PRESLEY/ATC

sometimes — especially when existing leaders have a long tenure. Adam became part of the Committee and stepped up as Vice-Chair,” shares Lind. “He and Dave worked closely together and continue to do so.”

Another key indicator of a successful succession is the Committee’s membership. “What’s wonderful is that the Committee is open to change, open to the evolution of the Chair’s role, open to using new technology, and very supportive of Adam who is in a different place in life than Dave,” shares Lind.

While this success story is specific to Connecticut, Boone stresses how important mentorship is to the future of the Trail. “When it comes to something as important, involved, and complex as Trail stewardship and management, if we don’t mentor new leaders, we’re setting them up for failure. It’s not just simply a matter of grabbing a pair of loppers and going out anymore. It’s been our experience that finding someone who already has some familiarity with what they’re getting involved in and then taking that extra time — whether it’s six months or four years — is time well spent.”

When asked about the future of the Committee he spent 23 years leading, Boone shares, “I think relationships really go a long way. I’m certain Adam will be able to make and maintain the relationships and friendships that I was able to. He’s outgoing, approachable, friendly, and funny. And he’s passionate, too. We need to keep these strong bonds going with our federal partners, our state partners, and the ATC staff. This is important. Not just for our Committee, but for the entire Trail.” ☺

To learn more about the A.T. in Connecticut, visit appalachiantrail.org/connecticut. Find a Trail volunteer opportunity near you at appalachiantrail.org/volunteer