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Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the House Resources
Committee
Hearing on H. R. 1266
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Chairman Grijalva and members of the Subcommittee.

I am Marilyn Heifner, executive director of the Fayetteville, Arkansas Advertising and Promotion Commission and founding president of Heritage Trail Partners

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about HR 1266 “a bill to conduct a resource study along the “Ox-Bow Route” of the Butterfield Overland Trail.” My involvement with the Butterfield Overland Trail is through the Heritage Trail in Northwest Arkansas.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) adopted the Heritage Trail Plan on October 28, 2002. The MPO Policy Committee consists of the highest elected official of each jurisdiction in the Northwest Arkansas area. As a result, the Heritage Trail Plan was amended to the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan for Metropolitan Northwest Arkansas. The Heritage Trail Plan was also included in the recently adopted 2030 Northwest Arkansas Regional Transportation Plan.

PLAN OVERVIEW

Northwest Arkansas offers a unique opportunity for recreational travel through the area. Our region includes national forests, state parks, recreational areas, cultural assets, and significant state, national and local historic sites.

The Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail was conceived to provide a regional network of automobile, bicycle and pedestrian facilities that connects Northwest Arkansas citizens and visitors to its rich heritage, cultural assets, a healthier lifestyle, and to each other. It also provides opportunities to experience the historic and natural environments of the area. As a result, the overall quality of life, economy, and health of the region is enhanced.

By linking with the region’s cities’ emerging master trail plans and including strategic spurs, the NWA Heritage Trail Plan provides links to recreational sites, parks, historic sites, museums, schools, work centers and retail shopping. By incorporating local trail plans into the regional network, a functional regional system is beginning to emerge.

Almost the entire regional trail network coincides with the existing road network. The Heritage Trail Plan depends primarily on existing right of ways in order to achieve immediate continuity. Off road facilities will be developed by the involved cities as part of their individual master trail plans.

As cities have adopted their own Master Trail Plans that link to the Regional Plan, those plans have been recognized as part of the Regional Plan.

In 2003, I was elected the founding president of Heritage Trail Partners, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting the design, development, preservation and advancement of the Heritage Trail in western Arkansas. The Heritage Trail utilizes the historic roads of Northwest Arkansas and commemorates three major historic themes: Civil War troop movements, the Trail of Tears and the major “backbone” component of the plan, the Butterfield Overland Route.

Heritage Trail Partners Activities

- Promotions. The most important activity for Heritage Trail Partners is promoting the Heritage Trail. Promotions include designing, installing, and maintaining on-site identification and directional signage; designing and printing brochures with maps of historical locations and historical accounts; and designing and monitoring a website. The purpose of promotional activities is to raise awareness of the trails and local heritage, increase use of the trails for health and fitness benefits, and expand tourism activity. Members of Heritage Trail Partners are responsible for all promotions. Brochures have been distributed throughout Arkansas to national parks, state parks, tourist information centers, historic societies, museums, chambers of commerce and tourism bureaus. We have coordinated with the state highway department and local jurisdictions regarding location and erection of roadway signs. We have an active website www.heritagetrailpartners.com.
- Special Events. Special community events include trail rides, stagecoach rides, period reenactments and an annual Butterfield Commemorative ride. The purpose of these events is to emphasize the various themes and encourage use of the regional trail. All events are open to the public.
- Educational Programs. Members distribute informative literature about the Heritage Trail to area schools and other educational organizations and groups. We have established a speaker’s bureau for special programs. These educational programs increase awareness of the trail network, encourage the use of the trails, and enhance history education through experiential learning.
- Historical Research. Historical research is being conducted to explore the history of already identified routes and to discover additional historical or cultural trails and routes. The purpose of this is to expand knowledge of history of western Arkansas and to provide additional trail opportunities for recreational and tourism activities. Our research began in 2002 and continues to be an integral activity of this organization. We are conducting this research in partnership with historic societies, the state Trail of Tears organization, the Civil War Roundtable and other interested organizations.

H. R. 1266, the “Ox Bow Route” of the Butterfield Overland Trail in Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, would evaluate a range of alternatives for protecting and interpreting the resources of the trail area, including possible alternatives for potential addition of the trail to the National Trails System.

HOW THIS MEETS CRITERIA FOR NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL DESIGNATION

A. Trail established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use.

California was admitted as a state in 1850 and immediately started to demand that Congress get a transcontinental railroad build to their state. Congress battled over the proposal for six years because they could not agree on the best route to follow to get to California.

California requested that mail service be improved while they waited for the railroad to be constructed. Mail had to leave the east coast by boat and sail all the way around the southern tip of South America and back up to California and that took weeks. The time could be shortened by 10 days by taking the mail to Panama and carrying it overland to a waiting ship on the Pacific side of Panama. In early 1857, the Post Office Department put up for bids a contract a time of 25 days and would run two times a week. John Butterfield was awarded the \$600,000 contract. The contract stated that the mail route would have to go into operation in September 1858. It took a year of frantic and grueling work to get the route planned, built, and equipped. Butterfield chose St. Louis as his eastern terminal but when the mail route was ready to go into operation, the line had already reached Tipton. By using the railroad line he was able to draw more passengers and reduce his operating costs. To satisfy some political factions, he also had to make Memphis an eastern terminal and the Tipton route and the Memphis route met at Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

As soon as the contract was signed, 56 year old John Butterfield set out on a rapid survey of the route, taking a staff of helpers from four other express companies. He sent out representatives to hunt out and employ guides, scouts, and frontiersmen who were friendly with the various Indian tribes, and who knew every spring, water hole, stream, ford and mountain pass on the entire route. John Butterfield had to devise his own route from Tipton to San Francisco. He divided the 2,975 mile route into 200 way stations and relay posts. The relay posts were close enough together that the distance could be traveled at a rapid pace under any weather conditions and without danger of exhausting mules or horses. At the end of each relay, living quarters, stables and corrals were constructed. At the end of each day's travels, they had to provide sleeping and feeding accommodations for passengers and drivers. These stations also had to be equipped with blacksmith and harness shops and emergency horses and mules. Preparing the trail was also tedious. Bridges had to be built across streams, or ferryboats provided for the larger streams, creek banks cut down to make fording places, large rocks removed from roads, wells dug, passes through mountains cleared and the road graded enough so that the trail would be passable for travel.

Collecting the supplies was a huge job. Traders went out to buy the toughest and fastest horses and mules available. They bought, or had made, hundreds of sets of harness. They ordered Concord stage coaches and Celerity wagons for use on the route and heavy freight wagons for hauling the thousand tons of hay, grain, and provisions that would be required each month at the way stations and heavy tank wagons for hauling water to the arid posts.

During the year of preparation Butterfield drove his men relentlessly, and spent more than a million dollars to get the mail route ready to go into operation. In September of 1858 they had these things ready:

250 Concord coaches

500 other vehicles ready to roll

3000 tons of hay and grain provisions stored in warehouses

A well dug or water stored at all relay posts in arid regions

1200 skilled superintendents, road bosses, drivers, guards, conductors, keepers, blacksmiths, harness makers, hostlers and clerks

Most of the men Butterfield chose were rough, tough frontiersmen, because no other men could have withstood the hardships and performed the tasks he demanded of them. On his last inspection trip, he gathered his men at the relay stations for final instructions, **“Above all else, passengers and mail must be protected and schedules maintained but this can only be done by keeping on friendly terms with the Indians.”**

The first stage left St. Louis September 15, 1858 followed by a second the next day; the latter being necessary to handle the accumulation of mail. Both arrived in San Francisco on October 10th, thus inaugurating the first transcontinental mail and passenger line on which continuous travel was kept up.

B. Trail must be of national significance with respect to broad facet of American history, such as trade and commerce, and have a far reaching effect on broad patterns of American culture

Congress in 1857 passed the Overland California Mail Act. This act offered government aid in the form of mail contracts to any company that could provide stagecoach service from the eastern United States to California.

The Butterfield Overland Trail, a 2,800 mile long trail was mandated by the Postmaster General and began running on September 15, 1858. John Butterfield was paid \$600,000 to get the mail between St. Louis and San Francisco in 25 days. At that time, it was the

largest land-mail contract ever awarded in the United States. It was required by contract to go through El Paso, Texas, and through Ft. Yuma, Arizona. This route was an extra 600 miles further than the central and northern routes through Denver, Colorado and Salt Lake City, Utah. However the southern route was free of snow.

The trip must have been brutal traveling day and night and more than 100 miles a day. Waterman Ormsby, a correspondent for the New York Herald and the only through passenger on the inaugural trip, remarked after his trip west, “**Had I not just come out over the route, I would be perfectly willing to go back, but I now know what Hell is like. I’ve just had 24 days of it.**”

John Butterfield operated the longest stagecoach run in the history of the world. Butterfield’s mail coaches ran from Tipton, Missouri to San Francisco. Coaches were to run each way twice a week. Having 25 days to make each run, the coaches traveled day and night to meet this deadline. There were stage stops every 20 miles or so to change teams.

C. Significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.

The following are some local examples of how local recreational and historic efforts will be enhanced by historic trail designation of the Butterfield Overland Route.

- Incorporate Butterfield Overland Trail route into regional tourism marketing and promotion
- Improve existing facilities to make them more accessible, usable, and enjoyable
- Develop new facilities to provide
 - Link to existing local trails
 - Provide connections between communities, parks and other key destinations.
 - Establish desired design guidelines for access, safety, and enjoyment
- Promote shared use of resources by using public lands in the best manner possible
- Provide access to scenic vistas, historic sites, points of interest, and support facilities.
- Provide for viewing stations, rest areas, turnouts, and interpretative signs
- Build public awareness and support through road signs, brochures, maps and bulletin boards, route guides and promotional events.