

Testimony of
Congressman John W. Olver (MA-01)
On H.R. 1297 the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area Act
Before the
National Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and for giving me the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee. I am here to ask for your support for H.R. 1297, which would establish the Freedom's Way Heritage Area and create a commission to oversee it.

According to the National Park Service, a heritage area is a region in which residents, businesses, and governments join together to preserve, promote and celebrate their heritage, culture, and natural resources for the benefit of current and future generations. To date, Congress has established 37 National Heritage Areas across the country to commemorate, conserve, and promote areas that include important natural, scenic, historic, cultural and recreational resources.

The Freedom's Way Heritage Area includes 37 historically rich communities in Massachusetts and 8 communities in New Hampshire and highlights a region of the country that was host to a series of key historic events that influenced the course of the early settlement of our country, most notably the American Revolution. Freedom's Way chronicles and celebrates the stories of Lexington and Concord; the religious freedom and the activities of the Shakers and Transcendentalists; social justice and the social criticism in the writing of Emerson, Hawthorn, Alcott and Fuller; as well as the first stirrings of

women's rights, abolition, gender equality and conservation that individually and in their entirety have national and international significance.

Once designated, the private land in heritage areas remains in private hands; areas often include existing local, state and national parks that actively partner in heritage area activities. The National Park Service provides technical and financial assistance for a limited time (usually 10-15 years) following designation through a management entity, in this case the Freedoms Way Heritage Association.

Although no legislative criteria exist, there are guidelines for determining whether an area contains the resources that make the region worthy of national recognition. A heritage area should include:

- Outstanding opportunities to conserve historic, cultural, scenic or natural resources
- An assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage.
- Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folk life that are a valuable part of the national story
- And that resources are important to the identified theme or themes

In addition, there are also four recommended steps prior to seeking Congressional support and designation legislation.

- Completion of a feasibility study

- Public involvement in the study
- Demonstration of widespread support among residents of the proposed designation
- Commitment to the proposal from key constituents, which may include government, industry, and local organizations.

The proposed Freedom's Way Heritage Area meets all the previously mentioned guidelines, the recommended steps have been completed, and the area is therefore, deserving of federal heritage designation. This legislation enjoys the support of every member of the House whose district would include a portion of the heritage area and a companion bill has been introduced in the Senate by Senator Kerry.

I am hopeful that this legislation will move quickly through Congress so that Freedom's Way will receive the national recognition it deserves.

Thank you for your time and consideration.