

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

**STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
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DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR**

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, ON H.R. 1513, A BILL TO AMEND THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM
ACT TO DESIGNATE THE LINCOLN NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL AS A COMPONENT OF THE
NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM.**

JUNE 10, 1997

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee today regarding H.R. 1513, a bill to amend the National Trails System to designate the Lincoln National Historic Trail as a component of the National Trails System.

The Department of the Interior supports enactment of H.R. 1513, but only if amended to change the name and focus of the designated trail to address the broader historic uses of the Illinois Trail and not be limited to just the uses associated with Abraham Lincoln. In large measure, the proposal you have before you in this bill is the proposal in the national trail feasibility study report for the "Illinois Trail" that was transmitted to Congress by then-Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, Jr., on September 12, 1991. The study was conducted between the years 1984 and 1987.

The report was prepared by the National Park Service, in conjunction with the State of Illinois, in response to a 1983 amendment to the National Trails System Act (16 U.S.C. 1244(c)(26)) directing the Secretary of the Interior to determine the feasibility and desirability of establishing the "Illinois Trail" route as a National Scenic or National Historic Trail. The approximately 300-mile route was described in the legislation as "extending from the Lewis and Clark Trail at Wood River, Illinois, to the Chicago Portage National Historic Site, generally following the Illinois River and the Illinois and Michigan Canal."

The report contains a proposal for a National Historic Trail consisting of the historic water route between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River and a parallel land trail between LaSalle-Peru and the Chicago Portage in Summit. If authorized by Congress, a plan would be prepared to provide for development and management of river access areas and facilities to enhance recreational boating on the historic waterway, as well as interpretive facilities at appropriate sites along and near the waterway to explain the trail's historical use as a route of exploration, trade and commerce, transportation and communication, and migration and settlement. Specific details about the development and management of the trail would be determined through the process of developing the plan. Implementation of the plan would be a partnership effort among all public and private interests with the National Park Service providing overall coordination and direction.

If the Trail were administered by the National Park Service, operating costs could range from \$150,000 to \$300,000 a year. Funding for this addition to the National Trails System is not currently assumed in outyear budget estimates. Establishment of this new trail, even if authorized by Congress, would be contingent on Administration priorities and available resources.

H.R. 1513 takes the trail proposal in the report and renames it the "Lincoln" National Historic Trail. It also proposes studying an addition to the route evaluated in the feasibility study to connect Springfield, Illinois, a center of importance in the life of Abraham Lincoln, to the Illinois River route.

In transmitting the report to you in 1991, the Department of the Interior included draft legislation to authorize the Illinois National Historic Trail. We still support authorization of the trail under that name.

We have concerns, however, about the proposal to authorize this concept as the Lincoln National Historic Trail. While our evaluation of the route's eligibility for authorization as a national historic trail did note several connections to the life of Abraham Lincoln, we do not believe that the criteria in the National Trails System Act would support designation of this historic route under the name Lincoln, as proposed in H.R. 1513.

To qualify as a national historic trail, a route must meet three criteria (16 U.S.C. 1244(b)(11)):

"(A) It must be a trail or route established by historic use and be historically significant as a result of that use.

"(B) It must be of national significance with respect to any of several broad facets of American history, such as trade and commerce, exploration, migration and settlement, or military campaigns. To qualify as nationally significant, historic use of the trail must have had a far-reaching effect on broad patterns of American culture. Trails significant in the history of native Americans may be included.

"(C) It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historic interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation. The presence of recreation potential not related to historic appreciation is not sufficient justification for designation under this category."

The nationally significant historic use of the Illinois Trail route identified by the National Park Service and others who participated in the study was the use of the Illinois River for commerce and transportation from prehistoric periods to the present day. The river was a main route of transportation and communication for prehistoric Indians from the Woodland (1000 B.C.- A.D. 700) and Mississippian (A.D. 700-1600) periods. The first Europeans to the Illinois River valley, the Frenchmen Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet, recognized the value of the river as a main thoroughfare in connecting the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes. For a time the French centered their western administrative headquarters, called Fort St. Louis, along the river at Starved Rock and then later at Lake Peoria.

Navigational improvements to this route began in the early 19th century. Early efforts focused on construction of a canal between the south branch of the Chicago River and the head of navigation on the Illinois River at LaSalle. As a state legislator from 1834 to 1842, Abraham Lincoln gave wholehearted support for building the canal. Completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal propelled Chicago into a position of national economic importance. After the Civil War, the State of Illinois and Federal Government began work to complete a slack water system of four locks and dams. Improvements have continued to the present day. Each year since the second World War, the waterway has seen increased growth in barge traffic. As a result, the water route from the Mississippi River to Lake Michigan has outstripped its own importance of any previous time as one of the nation's leading waterways.

The national significance of the Illinois River/Illinois and Michigan Canal water route is evidenced by its relative importance during the prehistoric and historic periods of use. The concentration of Woodland and Mississippian Indian village sites and burial mounds in the lower Illinois River valley and the location of Cahokia Mounds (capital of the Mississippian culture) a few miles south of the study route exhibit the great importance of the river and its valley to these cultures.

The reason for the Illinois River's prominence, during the French and subsequent periods, is that it afforded the shortest and most easily manipulated portage between the Mississippi River watershed and the lower Great Lakes. This aspect of the Illinois waterway's importance is commemorated and interpreted at the Chicago Portage National Historic Site. Other canals, such as the Ohio and Erie, the Miami and Erie, and the Wabash and Erie, were built between the Mississippi or its major tributaries and the Great Lakes, but because of its importance and economic value, only the linkage made by the Illinois and Michigan Canal remains in use today by means of its modern day successor--the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. In time, both of these canals were supplemented by locks and dams to overcome seasonal low-water problems on the remainder of the Illinois Waterway. Today, the original linkage is being commemorated and preserved as the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor.

As just described, the historic use and significance of this route spans a much greater time period than the life of Abraham Lincoln. While not minimizing in any way the contributions of Abraham Lincoln to the history of our country, we believe that focusing merely on the connections he had with this historic route in its designation would diminish the importance of the many other elements of history and prehistory found along the route. Indeed, if the determination of the historic use of this route and the national significance of that use on broad patterns of American history is limited to Lincoln's connection to it, we doubt that the route would qualify as a national historic trail.

Consequently, we recommend that in authorizing a national historic trail along the Illinois River and waterway route, the name "Illinois" be given to the designation. Accordingly, we also recommend that the section 2, authorizing an additional study of the Sangamon River from Beardstown to Springfield, be deleted.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

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