

Testimony presented to
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
24 July 2001
Washington, D.C.

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H.R. 1814
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) appreciates the committee's invitation to attend today's hearing. I offer the following testimony for your consideration regarding the House Bill 1814, entitled "To Amend the National Trails System Act to designate the Metacomet-Monadnock-Sunapee-Mattabesett Trail extending through eastern New

Hampshire, western Massachusetts, and central Connecticut for study for potential addition to the National Trails System". We commend the committee for taking a leadership role and exploring new opportunities in New England to enhance the network of hiking trails. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I come before you today to speak in support of H.R. 1814 and offer the following recommendations.

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) is the oldest non-profit conservation and recreation organization in the United States with a membership of over 95,000. The AMC promotes the protection, enjoyment and wise use of the mountains, rivers and trails of the Appalachian Mountain region. AMC provides regional and national leadership in trail corridor planning, construction and maintenance and trailhead protection. AMC is responsible for the management, maintenance, and stewardship of over 1,400 miles of trails throughout out the AMC region and each year over 1000 volunteers contribute their time---many of them contribute a full week---to keeping the trail system in top condition. AMC's White Mountain Professional Trail crew is responsible for nearly 350 miles of trails and 800+ trail signs. We work cooperatively with Federal, State and Local agencies as well as other non-profit organizations to protect and care for trails knowing that the experiences they provide are invaluable to the public.

The trails identified and proposed for National Scenic Trails study in H.R. 1814 provides unique and valuable recreational opportunities in addition to stunning vistas from key ridges and peaks. This trail network pass along special streams, marshes, lakes, and ponds while taking hikers and skiers through forests and agricultural lands that provide both solitude and a glimpse into the cultural character of the New England communities that play host to these footpaths and their visitors. We believe that the mountains and rivers have an intrinsic worth and also provide needed recreational opportunity, spiritual renewal, and ecological and economic health for the region. AMC encourages people to enjoy and appreciate the natural world because we believe that successful conservation and stewardship depends on this experience.

The Metacomet-Monadnock-Sunapee-Mattabesett trail system as it exists today is a resource that presents extensive opportunities for both long distance backpacking as well as local day hiking, cross country skiing, jogging, and other fitness activities that are easily accessible to people in the surrounding communities. Ongoing efforts since the 1920's and 1930's to secure access to and maintain these trails have

been critical to the continued enjoyment of the trail and helped to preserve its landscape and a corridor of fragile habitat reaching from Connecticut to New Hampshire. Designation as a National Scenic Trail would create the opportunity to ensure that these outdoor experiences could be enjoyed throughout this proposed corridor for generations to come.

The backbone of each stretch of this trail system consists of dedicated volunteers, including AMC members and its Chapters, that have identified the trail alignments, worked with private landowners to ensure appropriate use, published guides, and maintained the trails over the years to lessen the effects from overuse and unsafe conditions. The proposed study and potential designation as a National Scenic Trail would provide the volunteers with an additional source of funding for maintenance and long-term planning. The designation would also increase the organizational support to recruit additional volunteers and garner additional resources for ongoing maintenance needs and landowner relations.

Based on discussions we have had with our members and partner organizations, the AMC offers its support for the feasibility study of the Metacomet-Monadnock-Sunapee-Mattabesett Trail for the benefits that designation as a National Scenic Trail could provide to recreational opportunities and the protection of the habitat corridor.

Based on past studies and development of National Scenic Trail systems, AMC recognized that the issue of public land acquisition and methods used are often of great concern and may affect local support for final designation. We understand from AMC members and partner organizations that this is a concern that will need to be addressed during the feasibility study prior to the designation of the Metacomet-Monadnock-Sunapee-Mattabesett trail system. AMC hopes that this study will build on the good relations that now exist among property owners and the maintaining clubs. We encourage the feasibility study to be conducted in a manner that continues to involve the maintaining clubs, associations and state land management agencies, as they have been in the course of discussions leading to this point. The success of this initiative will depend largely on the communication among the private landowners, who up until now, have generously allowed trail use through their properties and as well as reaching out to other interested parties.

Since designation as a National Scenic Trail could result in increased use of the trail system by long-

distance hikers, particularly if it provides a connection to the Appalachian Trail, AMC also recommends that the feasibility study include an assessment of anticipated use, the adequacy of overnight facilities, and any additional maintenance and management needs that would be required to accommodate new users and avoid negative impacts to the trail system or the surrounding areas. AMC would be happy to serve as a resource for information on trail usage throughout New Hampshire as well as management of backcountry facilities.

Finally, AMC understands that there will be additional discussions at the local level with maintaining clubs and state land management agencies. We hope that all input gathered through the stakeholder process will be considered in developing the scope of the feasibility study.

Thank you for your consideration of AMC's comments.

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