

TESTIMONY OF DAVE HICKS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ARIZONA
TRAIL ASSOCIATION

On HR 2297 the Arizona National Scenic Trail Act
House Committee on Natural Resources- National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Subcommittee
July 15, 2008

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman and members of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee, the Arizona Trail is no longer just an idea or a vision. It is a real trail that exists and is in fact 94% complete. I know because I lost twenty pounds and had some very sore feet from walking the entire trail a few years ago.

My name is Dave Hicks and I am the Executive Director for the Arizona Trail Association. Today I am here with my friend and colleague, Lyn White, a volunteer member of the AZ Trail Board of Directors to support the H. R. 2297, the Arizona National Scenic Trail Act. The Arizona Trail is a diverse and popular path that meanders across the state of Arizona. It is ready now to formally join a prestigious group of other National Scenic Trails.

The Arizona Trail

Mr. Chairman, to my side is a map showing the Arizona Trail from the Southern to Northern border of the state.

The Trail (AZT) is an 807 mile panoramic pathway that weaves its way across the state of Arizona through some of the state's most spectacular scenery. As a result of an exemplary public/private partnership, the 19 years old Arizona Trail is now 94% complete. And the few remaining miles are moving towards completion. The Arizona Trail provides recreation opportunities to Arizona's expanding population and tourists while preserving and respecting the naturally diverse and beautiful Arizona landscape. From its southern point at the historic Coronado National Memorial on the Arizona/Mexico border to the breathtaking panoramic Southwest splendor on the Arizona/Utah boundary, the Arizona Trail offers an array of scenic, historic and cultural attractions to thousands of outdoor enthusiasts.

The Vision: In 1985 Dale Shewalter, an outdoor enthusiast and fifth grade schoolteacher from Flagstaff, Arizona scouted a long-distance trail across Arizona. Dale was captivated by the majestic views from Arizona's many mountain ranges; the lush beauty of the Sonoran desert; seemingly unending pine tree laden forests; and of course the most renowned canyon in the world – the Grand Canyon. He visualized a continuous path that would pass through all of these as it made its way across the entire state of Arizona. With the support and assistance of former Congressman Bob Stump just three years later, the first seven miles of the Arizona Trail were dedicated and opened to the public. Today, only twenty years later, completion of the entire Arizona Trail is in clear view.

A Public/Private Partnership: The Arizona Trail is a model case study in dedicated citizens working in cooperation with public and private agencies towards a common community goal. The leadership, funding, tremendous work effort and service each partner such as Lyn and her company Freeport McMoRan have provided to build and maintain the AZT is immeasurable. In your handouts is a listing of the ATA Board of Directors which includes our diverse group of major sponsors. The Arizona Trail is unique not only as a scenic, long distance trail but also in the make up of its management. Coordinated by the Arizona Trail Association, federal, state and local public agencies, private businesses, outdoor clubs, and individuals work productively together to realize the vision of an Arizona Trail.

Individual Volunteers - Arizona Trail Association volunteer stewards and trail workers are the backbone for maintaining the AZT. Working with the land managers, they form the nucleus for maintaining and building the trail. In calendar year 2007, from a solitary steward hiking into a remote mountain range to clear the trail to 87 people attending a 2-day work event, 1,760 people volunteered 22,589 hours on behalf of the Arizona Trail. Those volunteers included over 30 clubs and businesses that brought their members out for one or more work days on the trail. Stewards and volunteers toil diligently to build new trail and maintain the existing AZT, and they work closely with land managers to make improvements and reroutes to sections as well.

The Arizona Trail is Ready for National Scenic Trail Designation: Due to its rapid development resulting from a viable leadership organization, support from Arizona Governor Napolitano and state legislative leadership, positive relations with public agencies and strong support of business' and outdoor enthusiasts, the Arizona Trail is ready to become a National Scenic Trail. It meets National Scenic Trail legislative intent by offering:

1. Panoramic and diverse southwestern scenery;
2. A popular destination for thousands of people annually in the urban areas of the Flagstaff, Tucson, Phoenix Metro and the Grand Canyon and Saguaro National Parks while also offering remote solitude in places like the Mazatzal Mountains and the Sonoran Desert. The AZT offers a wide range of recreation opportunities for hikers, equestrians, mountain bikers, trail runners, cross-country skiers, birders, photographers, and other outdoor enthusiasts.
3. Continuous historic sites starting at one of the United States' most historic areas where Francisco Vasquez de Coronado entered what is now Arizona and the USA in 1540.
4. A unique opportunity to pass through six of the seven life zones identified as being between the Equator and the North Pole but also all along the diverse Arizona Trail.
5. A trail that has proven it is both financially and physically feasible. Today at 94% complete, more complete than six of the current eight National Scenic Trails and with plans and actions underway for the remaining miles, the Arizona Trail is a reality.
6. A trail that is 99% on public land. Fortunately for the Arizona Trail, acquisition of private property is not a concern.

Before closing, I would like to express my gratitude and that of our board and the Arizona Trails entire extended family to you Chairman Grijalva for holding this hearing today and lending your name as a sponsor. Also, in particular we would like to thank Congresswoman Giffords for being the lead sponsor and Congressman Flake for his historic support. Thank you, thank you, thank you!! In addition we appreciate your AZ House and Senate colleagues for their support of the Arizona Trail and your predecessors like former Senator Dennis DeConcini, Congressmen Bob Stump and Congressman Jim Kolbe.

Finally, Mr. Chairman and members of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands subcommittee, there are currently eight National Scenic Trails, two of which are in the western part of the United States. The Arizona Trail is ready now to join that select group. Mr. Chairman, we respectfully ask your Subcommittee's support for the passage of HR 2297 the Arizona National Scenic Trail Act.

I would be pleased to answer questions.