

STATEMENT BY CHRISTOPHER K. JARVI, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR PARTNERSHIPS,
INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION, VOLUNTEERS, AND OUTDOOR RECREATION, NATIONAL
PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS CONCERNING THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present oversight of the National Trails System Act.

Trails designated through the National Trails System Act provide millions of visitors rewarding and enjoyable experiences. These national trails are a popular way of linking together thousands of significant historic sites and drawing attention to local cultural and natural resources. Many of the most important benefits of national trails are intangibles such as inspiration, education, fitness, adventure, challenge, and family time together. National trails also provide an important opportunity for local communities to become involved in a national effort. More than 500 community partnerships have been created annually in recent years in support of national trails. Thousands of volunteers each year work tirelessly to plan, promote, build, maintain, and otherwise care for these trails. The number of hours these volunteers have devoted has increased more than 20 percent in the last several years, from almost 500,000 in 1998 to over 600,000 in 2004.

The National Trails System Act (Act), passed in 1968, recognized this central role trails have played in forming our Nation, promoting good health and well-being, and connecting us to history. The Act instituted a national system of trails, designated the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, and prescribed the authorities for adding components to the system. It provides for the establishment of national recreation trails, national scenic trails, national historic trails, and connecting or side trails. The trails range from less than one mile to over 5,600 miles in length and together total around 50,000 miles. Today, there are almost 900 national recreation trails that have been administratively designated, and 24 long-distance trails - 8 national scenic trails and 16 national historic trails - all designated by Congress.

National recreation trails, officially recognized each year by the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, are existing trails that connect people to local resources and improve their quality of life, with applications for these trails often reflecting diverse partnerships. These trails have been designated on Federal, state, local and privately owned land throughout the country. National recreation trail designation offers only recognition and seldom affects each trail's long-term protection and management.

National scenic trails and national historic trails are among the pre-eminent trails across the Nation. Of the national scenic trails and national historic trails, the National Park Service (NPS) administers 17, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers one, the Forest Service administers four, and the NPS and the BLM share administrative responsibility for two of the trails. Other Federal agencies, such as the Fish and Wildlife Service, are responsible for managing the parts of the trails that cross their lands. Many of the long-distance trails cross Tribal lands. Often, different agencies administer and manage portions of the same national trail.

National scenic and national historic trails are developed through voluntary partnerships and emphasize local initiatives and involvement to better serve the needs of communities and their local conservation efforts. Every one of the national scenic and national historic trails is based on a web of partnerships often involving a variety of volunteer organizations, state agencies, Tribes, Federal agencies, landowners, land trusts, service organizations, and historic societies. Some may have close ties to universities, outing clubs, youth clubs, and similar groups. Trail partners, especially advocacy groups such as the Oregon-California Trails Association, the Santa Fe Trail Association, and the Florida Trail Association, are vital to ensuring stewardship of trail resources and trail heritage.

Strong partnerships that respect private property rights are critical to achieving preservation of historic trail resources and interpretation of those trails to the public. Only the two national scenic trails established with the Act in 1968, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (Appalachian Trail) and the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (Pacific Trail), are authorized to use the Act's full set of land acquisition authorities, including the use of condemnation authority as a last resort. The next nine national scenic trails and national historic trails established between 1980 and 1983 are not permitted to use Federal funds for land acquisition because Congress believed acquisition authority would not be needed to complete the trails. National trails established after 1983 are permitted to use Federal funds for land acquisition from willing sellers. These designations include specific language that protect the private property owner by clearly stating that all lands or interests in lands acquired by the Federal government to protect national trails shall be acquired by providing willing sellers the full market value through the standard Federal appraisal process. In some places, state governments have taken the lead

to assemble trail corridors. Where private lands are involved, nonprofit land trusts have in some cases obtained scenic easements on those lands.

The Appalachian Trail is a continuous footpath in a rural and rustic setting that has been established and maintained by volunteers since 1937. Dislocations of the footpath onto roads to keep it continuous led trail proponents to seek Federal government support as a last resort to restore the trail to its ridge-top location and protect a corridor around it. The Appalachian Trail is the only trail on which NPS has used condemnation authority to achieve corridor protection. All of the other national historic and national scenic trails have been developed segment by segment (through partnerships, acquisition from willing sellers, and other cooperative means) usually starting on public lands. While the Appalachian Trail is almost completely in public ownership, the remaining national scenic trails range from 20 to 50 percent under public ownership, easements, or land trust covenants.

The administration of national trails consists of the trail-wide functions outlined in the Act (such as planning, coordination, trail marking, site and segment certification, volunteer support, etc.). Trail management consists of on-the-ground activities that make the trail accessible to the public (including visitor and volunteer management, resource monitoring, interpretive services, local land use planning and compliance, etc.). Each agency utilizes methods of corridor protection that most appropriately relates to their respective missions.

For example, in Wyoming, the BLM has worked with both the Petroleum Association of Wyoming and the Oregon and California Trail Association to facilitate management of the trail and the surrounding oil and gas development in a way that benefits all interests. Screening of oil and gas facilities can be accomplished in several ways including the use of blending paint colors, and siting, using topography and vegetation to hide or reduce the visibility. They have worked together on uses of these techniques to maintain the integrity of the trail while not unduly burdening the oil and gas industry.

Along the national historic trails, voluntary site and segment certification of non-Federal properties, rather than Federal acquisition, has become the preferred mode of officially identifying and incorporating properties associated with each national historic trail. Certification allows local, voluntary groups to request that the Federal government recognize a segment of land as part of a national trail. The advantages to certification are that private landowners and the State take a more active role in a national effort, the land remains in private or State ownership, and it is less expensive to the government.

Partnerships and cooperation are keystones to the development of national trails. Trails often cross private and public lands and it is important to develop corridors and solid, long-lasting relationships that stimulate and maintain a strong trail system, while enhancing public/private partnerships that make nationally designated trails successful.

Economic benefits from trails may include new businesses, raised real estate values, and increased visitation on recently designated trails. Many towns hope that designation of a trail through or near their town will bring tourism benefits, but there has been no multi-trail research to verify the actual tourism or land value benefits of national trails.

The presence of a trail in a region can also be the catalyst for a myriad of community-based conservation efforts, thus supporting Secretary Norton's policy of conservation through cooperation, consultation and communication. In 1995, a North Carolina State University study determined that visitors along the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail in the Carolinas were spending \$5.4 million (an estimated \$7.6 million in total economic impact when the multiplier effect is added) each year in the 15 counties along the trail. The trails contribute to an awareness of history, an increase in local heritage tourism, and an increased recognition of tribal issues, such as with the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

National trails have proven an excellent venue to leverage Federal funds with other sources of funds to complete projects of much greater combined worth. For example, in FY 2005 the NPS Challenge Cost-Share funds devoted \$5 million to Lewis and Clark Bicentennial projects. That money was leveraged 4 to 1, allowing funding for 103 projects that included special events, tribal cultural programs, new or upgraded visitor facilities, wayside exhibits, educational services, maps, publications, and resource preservation projects.

In addition, the National Trails System, through a number of authorities, supports and encourages the creation of trails at the state and local level to meet the outdoor recreation needs of the American people. Through the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program we work in collaboration with state, local and nonprofit groups to help create and expand trail opportunities throughout the country. Through such endeavors we help address the national need for increased physical activity by providing local, close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities.

With the renewed emphasis on improving overall health and physical fitness in our nation today, walking, jogging, and hiking along trails are popular activities that provide recreational and health benefits as well as creating social opportunities and camaraderie for millions of people. We are proud of our record in developing and maintaining these trails for the

enjoyment, education and inspiration of present and future generations.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Committee may have.