

Edna Kennell Testimony
for
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
May 4, 2002

Good morning Chairman Radanovich and Committee members. I am very honored to be invited to testify this morning. My name is Edna Kennell. I reside at 1661 Nottingham Dr., Casper, WY 82609. I am testifying as an individual. I am a student of history and supporter of cultural tourism with the benefits it brings to Wyoming, Natrona County, and the City of Casper. I am currently employed by the National Historic Trails Center Foundation.

We all benefit economically, as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints celebrates their history. The Hand Cart Center, located approximately 60 miles from Casper, opened in May of 1997 and has had 75,000 to 80,000 visitors per year. When we use published figures from the Department of Tourism, this equates to \$11,220,000.00 added to the Wyoming economy. Natrona County's yearly share of tax dollars, from these figures, is \$591,000.00. (See Exhibit A).

Ten years ago, when we first started the National Historic Trails Center, many of the same people in this room (except the Historians) knew little if anything about the hand cart disaster or triumphs. When we were making presentations to the public asking for tax money and talking about a "cold room" to tell this hand cart story, many thought we were crazy. Very few people were interested in this story, nor knew of the cove's location, but now claim it as their own.

The Sun family was a good steward of the land when it was used for ranching only, but there was little public access to the cove. Since The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints purchased the ranch, they allow anyone and everyone to enter the cove at any time. They have done an excellent job of maintaining the site and willingly share their history.

Three years ago elders from the church appeared before the Natrona County Planning Commission about building some additional structures and a water tank on their deeded land. Only 3 or 4 individuals, including myself, cared enough to object to the placement of the water tank & buildings that would have obstructed the view of Devil's Gate from the Bureau of Land Management rest stop on Highway 220. The church was very cooperative and moved the water tank and lowered the roof lines so they would not affect the view of Devil's Gate. Last year, 2001, they encouraged a State archeology dig on their property to determine the location of the Seminoe Trading Post. They are currently reconstructing the Seminoe Trading Post, adjacent to the dig. The church is paying for this expensive project. This will add to Wyoming's history and encourage more visitors to the ranch.

As indicated in previous testimony, the Historic Trails do not go into the cove but are across the river from the cove. There is no positive indication this is a prehistoric Indian site.

There needs to be some amendments to this bill, HR 4103. The acreage should be smaller and specific to the known cove and/or the presumed cove. There needs to be a guaranteed access for perpetuity. Congresswoman Cubin is correct in asking for something that will benefit Wyoming, particularly Natrona

County. Since B. L. M. has stated that it would trade land for "comparable value"; rather than land, I would ask that the money paid for the cove be earmarked for the National Historic Trails Center. The center, a public/private partnership, will be owned and operated by the Bureau of Land Management.

The return from the sale of Martin's Cove will help operate the National Historic Trails Center. If Congress approves the sale of Martin's Cove to the L.D.S. Church; I believe there are many people in Wyoming who would like to see these funds come back to Wyoming, into our trails center. Therefore, I think it's very important that the Martin's Cove legislation be amended in this respect. It would benefit the center and everyone else and could be considered of comparable historic value. The center will be completed and open August 9, 2002.

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