

Statement of  
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AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL  
A PROJECT OF THE AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL SOCIETY

Presented to the United States House of Representatives  
NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS SUBCOMMITTEE  
CONGRESSMAN GEORGE RADANOVICH, CHAIR

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THE NATIONAL DISCOVERY TRAILS ACT OF 2001

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Chairman Radanovich and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Reese F. Lukei, Jr. I am the National Coordinator of the American Discovery Trail, a project of the American Discovery Trail Society to develop and establish our nation's first coast-to-coast multi-use recreation trail, and to have it authorized as the 23<sup>RD</sup> long-distance trail under the National Trails System Act of 1968 in a new long-distance trail category to be known as National Discovery Trails.

During the past 30 years there have been many new trends affecting trails and the people who use them. With a greater awareness of the benefits of outdoor exercise to our personal health and a greater awareness of our environmental surroundings, people have discovered trails in their communities in ever-growing numbers. Over 800 trails have been designated National Recreation Trails, mostly in urban areas. Communities large and small have or are currently developing trails systems to accommodate this increased demand. The proposed National Discovery Trails category and the American Discovery Trail are an outgrowth of this intense interest in trails, especially at the local level.

## **NATIONAL DISCOVERY TRAILS**

National Discovery Trails would have several important features that would enhance the National Trails System and meet the needs of trail users. Currently there are no congressionally designated trails that are primarily intended to link existing trails and urban areas into the national network envisioned by the National Trails System Act. National Discovery Trails provide this opportunity by linking existing and developing national, regional and local trails into an integrated system, much like the interstate highway system. National Discovery Trails would connect urban areas where most people live to rural and backcountry regions. Trail users would have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of physiographic regions and human settlement patterns and could gain a sense of national connection.

Recent studies addressing outdoor recreation needs and especially trail use by federal agencies, the outdoor industry, the housing industry, and a coalition of citizen groups have all indicated a greater need for trails. The proposed National Discovery Trails and the American Discovery Trail have intentionally addressed the following aspects of these studies:

- Trails should be established closer to where people live and work;
- Trails should be developed through grassroots efforts;
- Trails should be linked to form an interconnected system.

National Discovery Trails would be defined to fulfill four specific purposes:

- Specifically emphasize linkages with national, regional and local trails;
- Emphasize connections with urban and metropolitan areas;
- Include existing trails and could be located along roadways if necessary to make the trail continuous;
- Administration of the trail to be shared between land managers and a competent trailwide volunteer-based organization.

## **AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL**

The American Discovery Trail (ADT) has been designed, developed and established to address the intent and objectives of the National Trails System and the proposed National Discovery Trails category.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The effort to establish the ADT began in the fall of 1989 as a joint project of the American Hiking Society, a national nonprofit organization, and Backpacker Magazine. In April 1996, the American Discovery Trail Society was formed and currently administers all the affairs of the ADT. The following are the major objectives:

- Establish the first permanent coast-to-coast multi-use non-motorized recreation trail through a nationwide grassroots effort in cooperation with federal, state and local land managers;
- Connect together as many existing national, regional, state and local trails as possible;
- Include in the trail route major metropolitan areas as well as smaller cities and towns, thus bringing the trail as close to where people live and work as possible;
- Provide incentives and encourage the development of new trails and trail support organizations, and increase citizen participation in the upkeep of the trails they use.

## TRAIL ROUTE

The ADT is over 6,000 miles long and traverses 15 states and the District of Columbia. 32 million Americans live within the corridor of the route. It begins (or ends) at the edge of the Pacific Ocean at Point Reyes National Seashore north of San Francisco. From there it crosses California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado, where in Denver it splits into two routes. The northern Midwest route winds through Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and a short section of Ohio. The southern Midwest route explores Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. After reconnecting just west of Cincinnati, the route continues through Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Delaware, where it ends (or begins) at the Atlantic Ocean at Cape Henlopen State Park.

## TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The route of the ADT was determined through the cooperative efforts of citizens working with federal, state and local land managers, state and local economic development and tourism commissions, state and local planning and transportation departments, and state departments of natural resources through each States' trails coordinator. The activities within each state have been coordinated and administered through the efforts of a volunteer coordinator. The original route was determined by a three person scouting team in 1990-91 during which they hiked and biked trails and roads that were selected by citizen committees in each state. Subsequent to that event, efforts have continued to refine the route and to obtain the permission of land managers to mark the route ADT with markers. Over 4,000 miles of the route are currently marked.

The ADT links 5 of the 8 National Scenic Trails, 10 of the 12 National Historic Trails, 23 National Recreation Trails, 35 rail-trails and over 100 other regional, state and local trails. In addition the ADT passes through 14 National Parks, 16 National Forests, dozens of State Parks and Forests, and many local recreation areas. The National Park Service feasibility study estimates that the corridor of the ADT route contains over 10,000 historic, cultural and natural sites of significance.

The ADT is the first long-distance trail that has been intentionally routed to pass through or near some of our largest cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Carson City, Moab, Denver,

Lincoln, Omaha, Des Moines, Davenport, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Evansville, Cincinnati, and Washington, D.C. Many smaller cities and towns are also on the route, bringing the trail close to where 32 million Americans live. There are also many opportunities to visit remotely located forests, deep canyons, and the vast wide open deserts of the west. The variety of experiences that one can expect is as large as one can dream, from city sidewalks and parks to the most distantly located mountain top. The entire route of the ADT is now described in detail on our web site – [www.discoverytrail.org](http://www.discoverytrail.org).

Grand opening events were held in each state during the year 2000. Over 300 events in communities large and small marked the official opening of the ADT. In 1999 the ADT was designated as one of 16 National Millennium Trails by the White House and U.S. Department of Transportation.

## **LOCAL INCENTIVE**

The ADT has provided an incentive to local citizen groups to develop new trail projects, regional or citywide planning efforts, and has been of assistance to projects already underway by municipal entities. Some examples are:

- Delaware Greenways project – Delaware
- Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Recreational Trail – Maryland
- North Bend Rail-Trail – West Virginia
- Buckeye Trail – Ohio
- Cardinal Greenway – Indiana
- River to River Trail – Illinois
- Grand Illinois Trail – Illinois
- Gateway Trailnet – Illinois and Missouri
- Flints Hills Nature Trail – Kansas
- Waterloo/Evansdale/Cedar Falls Trails System – Iowa
- Nebraska State Trails Plan – Nebraska
- Ute Pass Trail Corridor – Colorado
- Washoe Lake State Park – Nevada
- Western State Trail – California
- East Coast Greenway – Maine to Florida
- Trans Canada Trail – Canada

There are currently over 35 trail projects in 12 ADT states totaling over 1,000 miles that will in the future move the ADT off paved or gravel roads and onto trails. All these projects are as a result of local citizen efforts in cooperation with appropriate state and local agencies.

## **PRIVATE PROPERTY**

Eighty-eight miles of the trail is on private property, and then only by landowner invitation on existing rights-of-way. States with no trail on private property are Delaware, Maryland, Washington, DC, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, and Utah. Sections on private property are:

- Ohio – Buckeye Trail, 10 sections involving Mead Paper, General Electric and  
Eight other landowners
- Iowa – Hoover Valley Nature Trail – nonprofit owned trail

Indiana – Campus of Hanover College  
Cardinal Greenway – nonprofit owned trail  
Indiana Power and Light right-of-way  
West Virginia – farm field – temporary until Harrison County Trail completed  
California – In-holdings in Tahoe National Forest to be acquired as part of  
Western States Trail

## **PROJECT FUNDING**

The development of the ADT has been accomplished with a minimal amount of federal government funding, and that has come through the cooperative efforts of the personnel in the local and regional offices of the National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management, plus the cost of the NPS feasibility and desirability study. Many local, state and regional agencies have also contributed through their cooperative efforts.

Funding of the project, estimated at about \$4 million, has come through the members of the American Discovery Trail Society, and early in the project the American Hiking Society, the volunteer state coordinators who have funded their own efforts, and our major sponsors, Backpacker Magazine, Trails Illustrated/National Geographic, Coleman Company, Ford Motor Company and about 30 other businesses in the outdoor industry.

## **GRASSROOTS SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS**

The American Discovery Trail has generated a nationwide constituency of grassroots groups, private sector businesses, and local, state, regional and federal agencies to establish a route which is at once nationally and locally significant as it weaves its way through communities large and small, and through national, state and local parks and forests. It is equally important for connecting trails which alone might not be of national significance, but linked together are essential to a comprehensive national system and form a whole much greater than the sum of its parts.

In its short lifetime, the ADT development effort has strengthened and broadened the trails community. In an era when government is reaching out to the private sector, looking for strong partnerships, the ADT represents partnerships on every level: a strong partnership between a national nonprofit advocacy group and private businesses, partnerships between local trails groups and local agencies working to find the best route across this country, and partnerships with local businesses and state agencies which see the ADT as a source of potential economic benefit.

## **SUMMARY**

The American Discovery Trail is about people and for people. It is a trail that winds through communities large and small, forests and mountains, and has involved a large number of active volunteers and partnerships with trails organizations, local and national businesses, and a huge number of local, state and federal agencies. The ADT combines the qualities of national scenic, historic and recreation trails with an urban emphasis, but its real strength is that it provides connections - the connection between trails, between cities and the backcountry, and between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The ADT connects people on their neighborhood trail to other people on

their neighborhood trail many miles away.

The American Discovery Trail deserves to be the first National Discovery Trail. The U.S. Senate has passed a companion bill S.498. Senator Frank Murkowski, who sponsored the bill, stated “This is an historic piece of legislation. By combining volunteer efforts with those of local and state governments, we have created a unique partnership, which ultimately will benefit the entire country. I am excited by this bill and I believe it will set a precedent for future trails across America”.

The American Discovery Trail Society urges you to join Senator Murkowski and the U.S. Senate, and Congressman Doug Bereuter and the 39 cosponsors of House Bill H.R.36 with your support of The National Discovery Trails Act of 2001.