

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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**STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND  
PUBLIC LANDS  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, ON H.R. 588, THE NATIONAL DISCOVERY TRAILS ACT OF 1997.**

**JUNE 10, 1997**

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**Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee to present the Department's views on H.R. 588, the National Discovery Trails Act of 1997.**

**We support enactment of H.R. 588 if amended according to our testimony. We strongly support the concept of the American Discovery Trail and believe that the best way to integrate it into the existing National Trails System is through carefully establishing a new category of national discovery long-distance trails.**

**The American Discovery Trail (ADT) was proposed in 1990 as a continuous mid-continent, coast-to-coast trail to link metropolitan areas to the Nation's major long-distance trails, as well as to shorter local and regional trails. It was envisioned by its founders as a strong backbone for America's National Trails System.**

**In October 1992, through P.L. 102-461, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to study the feasibility and desirability of adding the ADT to the National Trails System. This study was completed in December, 1995, and submitted to Congress last year. The ADT route, as described in this legislation and mapped in the feasibility study, extends for over 6,000 miles from Cape Henlopen State Park in Delaware to Point Reyes National Seashore in California, crossing the states of Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, a bit of Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.**

**The feasibility study team visited many parts of the Trail's route, analyzed its purposes and goals as a stand-alone project and as an integral part of the National Trails System. They developed the following three alternatives based on their findings:**

**Alternative 1 examined the ADT as a potential national scenic trail.**

**Alternative 2 recognized the unique characteristics of this trail and suggested a new category of trail within the National Trails System.**

**Alternative 3 explored taking no Federal action.**

**H.R. 588 is based on Alternative 2, a new category of long-distance trail.**

**We believe that the National Trails System can be improved by adding this new category, which links America's cities together, is open to a variety of trail users (as determined by local conditions), and relies on a relationship of equals between the Federal Government and a nonprofit partner. However, such trails**

**must be limited to those that meet specific requirements and are of national interest and significance.**

**If created as proposed in this legislation, the ADT, as well as the new category of national discovery trails, will further the goals of the National Trails System in several significant ways -- ways which help update the System**

to reflect current popular and political realities. The ADT will:

- 1) link America's long-distance trails to a variety of cities and towns, thereby providing population centers direct access to our Nation's remarkable trails system;
- 2) welcome into the National Trails System a new category of trails for which the primary responsibility for protecting and maintaining these trails lies not with the Federal Government, but with others;
- 3) be built largely upon existing trails and trail systems, thereby eliminating the need for Federal acquisition; and
- 4) require that an effective private-sector partner is present from the start, rather than following designation. It is our experience that trails created without such partners tend to flounder and do not serve the public well. In this case, the nonprofit partner would shoulder much of the coordination and certification responsibility, which in the past, has fallen to the Federal Government in caring for long-distance trails created under the National Trails System Act.

**The importance of a strong partner.** The Appalachian Trail was the model and impetus for the National Trails System. When that trail was established as a national scenic trail in 1968, it was well- supported by a vibrant nonprofit organization, the Appalachian Trail Conference, with thousands of members and decades of trail-building and maintaining experience. For the National Park Service, helping protect and administer the Appalachian Trail from the beginning has been a mutual partnership, with both the Conference and the Service offering their skills and strengths to keep the trail viable and intact.

However, some of the trails subsequently established as part of the National Trails System have not had (and still do not have) strong partner organizations. In some cases, the federal agency administering a trail has had to wait for such a group to get started or to assist in organizing it. Trail partnerships are essential to the well-being of the National Trails System. We strongly support the amendment to the National Trails System Act in H.R. 588, which insists that one of the criteria for establishing a national discovery trail is that there already exist a competent organization for the proposed trail, backed up by State and local public support.

**Trail protection.** By far the most controversial issue associated with the National Trails System is trail corridor protection and, specifically, Federal land acquisition. The organizers of the ADT recognized this early on and routed this Trail to minimize its impact on private lands. It is our understanding that there are only a handful of private parcels crossed by the Trail, and these occur where an underlying trail already exists, such as the Buckeye Trail in Ohio. The feasibility study team felt strongly that local and State jurisdictions should bear the primary responsibility for protecting and enhancing the ADT and its corridor on both sides. The Federal Government should only be a facilitator and agent of last resort.

**Trail costs:** The National Park Service today administers 15 of the Nation's 20 national scenic and historic trails. They range in length from 300 to 5,600 miles. Operating costs range from \$25,000 to over \$720,000 per year. Because of its length and complexity, costs for the ADT will fall somewhere in the middle of this range. The feasibility study team estimated the Trail's comprehensive management plan would cost approximately \$360,000 over several years, and that annual Federal operating costs of the Trail as a national discovery trail will be about \$400,000 a year. There should be no land acquisition or protection costs for the Federal Government, since primary responsibility for trail corridor protection lies with State, local, and nonprofit partners. It should be noted that authority already exists within the National Trails System Act to appropriate any necessary funds to support this Trail, or other trails created as national discovery trails. Funding for this addition to the National Trails System is not currently assumed in outyear budget estimates. Establishment of this new trail, even if authorized by Congress, would be contingent on Administration priorities and available resources.

**Amendments.** We suggest the following amendments to H.R. 588:

1. On page 2, line 21 strike "Section 5" and insert "Section 5(b)".

**2. On page 2, line 23 strike "subsection" and insert "paragraph".**

**3. On page 2, line 24 strike "(g)(1)" and insert "(12)".**

**Amendments 1-3 would keep the entire discussion of trail feasibility in the same section of the National Trails System Act.**

**4. On page 3, at the end of line 19 add "Where national discovery trails are congruent with other local, state, national scenic, or national historic trails, the designation of the discovery trail shall not in any way diminish the values and significance for which those trails were established."**

**This amendment would ensure that discovery trails have the same significance as other trails in the system.**

**5. On page 4, line 3 strike "and" and add "(3) by redesignating the paragraph relating to the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail as paragraph (20)".**

**6. On page 4, line 3 strike "(3)" and insert "(4)".**

**7. On page 4, line 5 strike "(20)" and insert "(21)".**

**Amendments 5-7 are necessary since the establishment of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in the 104th Congress, which is numbered 20.**

**8. On page 5, line 1 strike the remainder of the sentence and insert "managed by a competent trailwide nonprofit organization in close cooperation with the appropriate Secretary and other affected land managing agencies and trails organizations."**

**This amendment will clarify the relationship of the nonprofit trail partner to the Federal Government.**

**9. On page 5, line 8 strike "sections 7(e), 7(f), and" and insert "subsection".**

**The NPS believes national discovery trails should not be exempt from subsections 7(e) and 7(f) of the National Trails System Act. An exemption from subsections 7(e) and 7(f) may unduly restrict Federal activity needed to protect this Trail. Subsection 7(e) authorizes acceptance of donations and collaboration through cooperative agreements, and 7(f) authorizes land exchanges to protect national trails.**

**10. On page 5, line 13 strike "(h)" and insert "(g)".**

**This is a technical amendment.**

**11. On page 6, lines 10 and 11 strike "of the trail and a plan for its implementation" and insert "for critical segments of the trail and a plan for their implementation where appropriate."**

**We suggest this amendment because the reference to "identified carrying capacity" creates a difficult requirement which has been almost impossible to address in other trail plans.**

**Mr. Chairman, we support designation of the ADT as the first of a new category of national discovery trails. We believe it is innovative and worthy of designation with the amendments suggested. The feasibility study has shown that people across the Nation are clearly enthusiastic about this effort. The American Discovery**

**Trail and future discovery trails will link America's towns and cities, creating a true National Trails System.**

**This concludes my prepared remarks. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.**

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