

Southern National Historic Trail Progress Report

3/15/10

This is an update on our National Historic Trail project following our week spent in Washington DC.

We had a very productive week in Washington and thanks, very much, to the help of Bill & Jeanne Watson, Bill Martin, Vern & Carol Osborne, Jere Krakow, Pat Hearty, and Reba Grandrud we were able to make a lot of congressional contacts. The enclosed packet was discussed and left with each contact. In most cases we met with key staff members and in a few situations where appointments could not be made we left packets for the staff member involved and will be following up with them.

Based on conversation with some key supporters I believe there is a good possibility that we may have a bill, or be part of a larger bill, that will request the authorization for a feasibility study by the end of this year. The next big hurdle will be to have the support behind us to make sure the bill will pass when it does come up before Congress for a vote. Based on information we picked up there are a couple of major factors we need to work on to insure we get that support behind us.

First, is continuing to call on legislators at both the local and federal level with our positive message on why the Southern Trail deserves National Historic Trail Designation. That's an easy sell, we just have to keep talking and working hard at it. Few people that we talked to realized the historic significance of the Southern Trail. Once understood it seemed to make sense to everyone that it deserves consideration to be a National Historic Trail. Three national historic emigrant trails during the mid 19th century across the northern half of the United States and zero across the southern half leaves a big void that just don't give the complete and true history of the greatest migration of people in the history of our country. Looking at today's map one would think it was only a northern experience, when in fact, it was very much a national experience and the time has now come for our National Trail System to reflect that.

Second, we have to work on turning this into a positive economic benefit. With the pressure coming down on cutting government spending we have to build a strong case for the economic benefit to all the towns and other interests that our southern trail routes will be passing through. We are working on a presentation that will include the advantages to small businesses of having a National Historic Trail pass through their towns. It can be very significant and we will want to talk to Chamber of Commerces, Lion's Clubs, etc., to get them to contact legislators, as well as, give us letters of support. We learned that endorsements from key authorities and letters of support from positively affected groups can be important factors. They always hear from those who feel they will be negatively impacted; it's our job to make sure they also hear from those who see it as a big positive.

Included in any economic discussion we need to point out that incremental expense of the feasibility study will be lower due to all the volunteer time and expense we have already, and are willing to continue, to put into this project in the future. It's not often the government has willing

citizens to share the work and cost of doing something. Trail organizations have a long, proven record for doing it.

Another key issue is an educational one in being able to explain clearly to concerned parties what happens to private land ownership and private leases on public lands the trail passes through, once it receives National Historic Trail Status. Landowners need to know there is no condemnation or restrictions placed on the use of their land. Until this is properly understood it can be a big negative.

Currently we are working on setting up a meeting with a key Representative in Arizona, who we have asked to sponsor the bill for us in the House, and a key Senator in New Mexico that we would like to have sponsor it in the Senate. We hope to have these meetings while they are home for the Easter recess. Hopefully our next progress report will confirm that we have sponsors in both the House and Senate.

We are off to a good start.
Bert