National Scenic Trails Parity Act

OVERVIEW

The National Scenic Trails Parity Act addresses inequities in the management of the six National Scenic Trails (NSTs) administered by the National Park Service (NPS). The NPS has assigned "unit status" to the Appalachian, Potomac Heritage and Natchez Trace NSTs, while withholding "unit status" from the North Country, Ice Age and New England NST's.
This exclusion has resulted in inequities ranging from access to unit-restricted funding and programs and the exclusion from major promotional opportunities as part of the National Park System.

BACKGROUND

Unit status within the National Park System for all NSTs creates a level playing field in access to NPS funding and programs. Trails with "unit status" are treated as part of the "core mission" of the Park Service. Without "unit" status, three of the NPS's six NSTs are excluded from opportunities including:

- **Public awareness:** Non-unit NSTs are often excluded from maps and related efforts promoting the National Park System including the interactive website launching the "Find your Park" campaign, the NPS's official map (*See http:// www.nps.gov/hfc/carto/PDF/NPSmap2.pdf*), and a high profile article in National Geographic magazine (January 2016), seen by millions.
- **Many funding opportunities are restricted to NPS units:** There is a long history within the NPS of excluding the North Country, Ice Age and now the New England NSTs from access to funding and programmatic resources of the agency.

"Unit" status is an administrative decision by the NPS. It would not create jurisdictional and management conflicts where they traverse other Federal lands, such as National Forests, since this is precluded in Section 7(a) of the National Trails System Act. All NSTs have the same legal status under the National Trails System Act. The three excluded NSTs clearly meet the criteria for "units."

There are no clear or consistent reasons, legal or policy-wise, for why the North Country, Ice Age and New England NSTs are not units while three other NSTs are. Nevertheless, the disparate treatment continues every time the NPS issues a publication, press release, or public statement referencing how many "units" are in the National Park System. The excluded NSTs lose opportunities for funding and recognition and are at an immediate disadvantage within the NPS hierarchy. ***Perhaps most critical, the message this unfair treatment sends to the volunteers working so hard to build, maintain and protect these NSTs is that their trails aren't as important.***

QUICK FACTS

The Appalachian NST is less than half the length of the North Country NST, but has more than 3 times the NPS staff allocated and more than 3 times the budget allocation per mile of trail.

ACTION REQUESTED

Cosponsor the National Scenic Trails Parity Act, S.1027 and H.R.2090

Contact the Director of the National Park Service, and demand that NPS evolve an equitable management paradigm unique to the needs of all National Scenic Trails (NSTs) it administers.

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