

I am very pleased to report that the New England Scenic Trail Designation Act, H.R. 1528, received an official hearing at the House Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands on Tuesday, May 15th. This legislation would designate portions of the Metacomet, Monadnock, Mattabesett (MMM) Trail System as the New England National Scenic Trail. This hearing was the first step in the process of bringing this legislation to the floor of the House of Representatives.

As you may know, a large segment of the historic 190-mile MMM Trail passes through Massachusetts' First District. The historic MMM Trail System hosts an array of scenic features and historic sites. Long vistas of rural towns, agrarian lands, extensive un-fragmented forests, and large river valleys, as well as pathways through important Native American and colonial landmarks showcase some of the best examples of classic New England landscapes. I have personally hiked every mile of the trail through Massachusetts, and it is my goal to protect this majestic natural resource from development encroachment.

The MMM Trail is distinctive because it passes through some of the most densely populated parts of the country. According to the 2000 Census, the 39 municipalities in Connecticut and Massachusetts in which the trail system is located have a combined population of 775,604 people. More than one million additional people live within 10 miles of the trail but in communities through which the trail does not pass. The trail system has long offered a unique recreational opportunity for Massachusetts residents in urban areas. It is my hope that National Scenic Trail designation would provide an opportunity for long term viability by protecting against increasing pressures from developmental growth and raise the profile of the trail to one of national significance.

Currently, the MMM Trail System is administered by local public and private organizations. The Berkshire Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club is the primary steward of the trail system in Massachusetts. The entire system is predominantly managed and maintained by volunteers, and much of it relies on the generosity and commitment of landowners who voluntarily allow it to cross their lands.

If the New England Scenic Trail Designation Act is passed, private landowners will continue to own and control the use of their own land. Every landowner whose property is within the historic trail system can choose not to have it included in the National Scenic Trail designation. The Federal government will act as a partner in the maintenance and preservation of this resource. This will provide local communities with funding and management assistance that will greatly enhance their ability to maintain the viability of the trail system for generations to come.

I am encouraged by the progress this bill has achieved in the House of Representatives. Senator Kerry has introduced a companion bill, S. 923, in the Senate. I look forward to hopefully passing this important legislation during the 110th Congress.

Sincerely,

John W. Olver
Member of Congress