

STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1297, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE FREEDOM'S WAY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN THE STATES OF MASSACHUSETTS AND NEW HAMPSHIRE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 12, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department's views on H.R. 1297, a bill to establish the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the State of New Hampshire.

While the Department recognizes the appropriateness of designating the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area, we recommend that the committee defer action on H.R. 1297 and all other proposed heritage area designations until program legislation is enacted that establishes guidelines and a process for the designation of national heritage areas. Last year, the Administration sent to Congress a legislative proposal to establish such guidelines and a process for designation. Bills were introduced in the 109th Congress (S. 243, H.R. 760 and H.R. 6287) that incorporated the majority of the provisions of the Administration's proposal, and S. 243 passed the Senate. During the 110th Congress, a similar heritage area program bill, S. 278, has been introduced, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this very important issue.

With 37 national heritage areas designated across 27 states, and more heritage area legislative proposals in the pipeline, the Administration believes it is critical at this juncture for Congress to enact national heritage area program legislation. This legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas. Program legislation also would clarify the expectation that heritage areas would work toward self-sufficiency by outlining the necessary steps, including appropriate planning, to achieve that shared goal.

The proposed Freedom's Way National Heritage Area includes 37 Massachusetts and 8 New Hampshire communities northwest of Boston. It includes the Minute Man National Historical Park, the Oxbow and Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuges, the Concord, Assabet and Sudbury Wild and Scenic Rivers, as well as National Historic Landmarks and Districts, and many sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This is a region that substantively influenced our democratic forms of governance and the development of intellectual traditions that underpin the concepts of American freedom, democracy, conservation, social justice, and ethnic diversity. Historically prominent leaders in literature and intellectual thought found the region to be a source of inspiration including Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Louisa May Alcott. It was also the locale for expressions of religious freedom and social experimentation with the settlements of the Shakers, Millerites and Transcendentalists. Its natural and community resources are exceptional examples of the rural beauty of the New England landscape. The

events that occurred here during the American Revolution include the ride of Paul Revere and the engagements at Lexington and Concord, which are known to virtually every elementary school child in the nation.

The concept of a Freedom's Way National Heritage Area was defined in a feasibility study undertaken by the proposed management entity, the Freedom's Way Heritage Association, Inc. Priorities outlined in this study speak to linkages through education and preservation of the region's nationally distinctive natural and cultural resources through partnerships. The region has a strong partnership base among its many cultural institutions, businesses, non-profit organizations, local governments, and citizens. The governors of both states have endorsed the designation of a national heritage area.

The National Park Service reviewed the national heritage area feasibility study undertaken by the proposed management entity in July 1997. Since it did not fully address the interim national heritage area criteria, representatives of our Northeast Region conducted field reconnaissance visits in November 2000. Based on the findings of the reconnaissance team, the Freedom's Way Heritage Association, Inc. submitted an addendum in April 2001 to the 1997 Freedom's Way National Heritage Area Feasibility Study entitled "The Proposed Freedom's Way National Heritage Area and Compliance with the National Park Service Interim Criteria for National Heritage Area Designation." The National Park Service evaluated that addendum, as well as the original feasibility study, and found that the criteria were fully addressed and met.

Since 2001 when the study was amended, both Massachusetts and New Hampshire have enacted legislation establishing state heritage area commissions related to Freedom's Way. Although these state laws are quite similar to each other, and appear to be consistent with the general aims of H.R. 1297, they raise a number of issues. For example, each state is authorized to establish a Freedom's Way Heritage Area Commission, and among other duties "prepare and implement a unified historic preservation and interpretive plan for the area." If H.R. 1297 is enacted, the Freedom's Way Heritage Association, Inc., a nonprofit organization, would be the management entity, and would also be charged with developing a comprehensive management plan for the area. It is unclear how the heritage area would function with three separate management entities charged with similar duties. The Massachusetts law states that if a federal heritage area is designated by act of Congress, the governor may terminate the commission when a federal management entity is appointed, but the New Hampshire law includes no such provision.

It is our understanding that if the heritage area is federally designated, then both state commissions would not be established and the responsibility to prepare the management plan would be the duty of the Freedom's Way Heritage Association, Inc. as the management entity.

Mr. Chairman, while the proposed Freedom's Way National Heritage Area contains significant natural and cultural resources and meets the established criteria for congressional designation, we would again request that the committee defer action until national heritage area program legislation is enacted. However, if the committee chooses to move ahead with this bill, the Department would like to work with them to make some technical corrections to the bill. In addition, the Department would recommend that the bill be amended to include an additional

requirement for an evaluation to be conducted by the Secretary, three years prior to the cessation of federal funding under this act. The evaluation would examine the accomplishments of the heritage area in meeting the goals of the management plan; analyze the leveraging and impact of investments to the heritage area; identify the critical components of the management structure and sustainability of the heritage area; and recommend what future role, if any, the National Park Service should have with respect to the heritage area.

Mr. Chairman this completes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any of the members of the subcommittee may have.