

Testimony of  
**Congressman John W. Olver (MA-01)**  
on H.R. 1528, The New England National Scenic Trail Designation Act  
before the  
National Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
May 14, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and for giving me the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee. I am here to ask for your support for H.R. 1528, the New England National Scenic Trail Designation Act, which designates major portions of an older, voluntary Metacomet Monadnock Mattabesett Trail System as a National Scenic Trail.

The 3M trail system is a 190-mile long trail route that has been in existence for over half a century and traverses 39 communities in central Connecticut and Massachusetts. I have hiked every mile of the trail through Massachusetts, and, while some segments are very well protected, other sections have suffered serious encroachment.

The 3M Trail System is distinctive because it passes through some of the most densely populated parts of the country, offering users a unique recreational opportunity within urban areas. National Scenic Trail designation would provide an opportunity for long-term viability for future generations by protecting against increasing pressures from encroaching development.

Currently, the 3M Trail System is administered by local non-profit organizations: the Connecticut Forest and Park Association in Connecticut and primarily the Berkshire

Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club in Massachusetts. I want to recognize and thank the many volunteers and staff of these organizations who have worked diligently to help develop this initiative. Because of their effort, every Member through whose district this Trail System passes supports this legislation, and these organizations will continue to maintain the trail after designation as a National Scenic Trail.

In 2005, the Park Service's Feasibility Study found that National Scenic Trail designation was feasible, viable and desirable in order to preserve a continuous and accessible trail system in New England. During the feasibility study, concerns were raised by some private landowners about their land being included in the designation. Much time was spent meeting with affected landowners and interested parties in order to make sure the concerns were properly understood and addressed.

All landowners are offered the opportunity to have the trail re-routed around their property. The language of H.R. 1528 explicitly states that "The United States shall not acquire for the trail any land or interest in land without the consent of the owner."

Landowners who decide not to have their land included in the National Scenic Trail designation can continue to allow their land to be used as part of the local historic trail system or not; it is completely up to them. In order to avoid confusion between previously existing, voluntary trails and the route included in the National designation, the name The New England National Scenic Trail has been adopted in place of the historic trail names. The National Park Service has no authority or jurisdiction over lands or side trails that are not specifically included in the National Scenic Trail. There is no

authority within the H.R. 1528 for the Park Service to take land by eminent domain, nor does the Service have any authority in local zoning issues that might affect National Scenic Trails.

Much effort has gone into ensuring that one proposed re-route solves the concerns of private landowners. This re-route would move the trail in the area between the Mount Holyoke State Park and Wendell State Forest in Massachusetts eastward to state-owned land in the Greater Quabbin landscape area. Initial inquiries into the use of this route for the National Scenic Trail have been met with strong support from Massachusetts officials. At most, such a re-route would affect 20 private landowners.

Throughout this process, the protection of private property has been of utmost concern, and I believe we can accommodate the concerns of landowners and continue to provide scenic, protected land for public use as the New England National Scenic Trail. There is wide support for this designation, and I have submitted for the record a copy of a March 25, 2007 *Boston Globe* editorial to that effect.

It is my hope that H.R. 1528 will establish permanent protection for this unique and majestic land and insure that future generations will be able to enjoy a great national treasure.

Thank you.