

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
U.S. REP. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS (AZ-08)  
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**JULY 15, 2008**

**CONCERNING**

**H.R. 2297 – the Arizona National Scenic Trail Act**

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Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the Subcommittee: thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to testify on H.R. 2297, the Arizona National Scenic Trail Act. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on this exciting proposal.

The purpose of this bill, of which I am the primary House sponsor, is to designate the Arizona Trail as the nation's 9<sup>th</sup> National Scenic Trail. The bill has bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress.

On February 8, 1965, President Johnson, delivered a message to Congress on "Natural Beauty." In it, he called for the nation to "copy the great Appalachian Trail in all parts of our country." Three years later, Congress acted on that message by passing the National Trails System Act of 1968.

Congress has since designated eight National Scenic Trails. These long-distance trails provide exceptional opportunities for outdoor recreation and help conserve nationally significant scenic, historic, and cultural resources. It is noteworthy, however, that despite the vast open spaces and awe-inspiring beauty of the American West, only two of the National Scenic Trails are located there: the Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide Trail. There are no National Scenic Trails dedicated specifically to the beautiful and diverse landscapes of the American Southwest.

H.R. 2297 offers us the opportunity to change that.

The purpose of this bill is not to *create* the Arizona Trail; that has already been done. The trail is 94% complete, with plans underway to finish the few remaining stretches. It travels north-south the entire length of the state, from Utah to Mexico. Along the way, it meanders through some of the most diverse and spectacular scenery in America. 99% of the route is on public land.

Normally, when a new National Scenic Trail is proposed, the first step is for Congress to authorize and fund a feasibility study. In this case, however, a feasibility study would simply create needless delay and expenditure of public funds. I am pleased that the National Park Service agreed with this viewpoint in its testimony on the Senate companion bill, S. 1304, last September, when it said:

“While the Administration typically does not support the designation of a National Scenic Trail without the completion of a feasibility study, we recognize that the Arizona Trail presents a unique situation...it is located primarily on public land; it is already established for much of its length; it has strong local, regional, and state advocates; and it offers outstanding recreational opportunities. For these reasons we do not object to an expedited process in this case and proceeding directly to designation.”

I wish to emphasize that no congressional appropriation is needed for the Trail, and none is authorized in this bill. It has been built, and will continue to be maintained, through the efforts of volunteers and a very successful public/private partnership, with the non-profit Arizona Trail Association functioning as the coordinating body.

According to the National Trails System Act, the intent of National Scenic Trails is “to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation.” The Arizona Trail fits these criteria in spades. In a state with a rapidly growing population, expanding urban areas, and a tourism-heavy economy, the Arizona Trail is many things to many people: an invitation to discovery, an oasis from urban life, and a valuable economic resource. Designating the trail as a National Scenic Trail would raise its profile and further enhance its ability to fulfill all of these missions.

I would like to close my remarks by recalling the words of Wallace Stegner, often called the “Dean of Western Writers.” He is one of my favorite authors because of his ability to capture the essence of the American West in his words, and express why it is so important to the American character. He said:

“There is something about living in big empty space  
Where people are few and distant  
Under a great sky that is alternately serene and furious  
Exposed to sun from four in the morning to nine at night  
And to a wind that never seems to rest.  
There is something about exposure to that big country  
That not only tells an individual how small he is  
But steadily tells him who he is.”

Not many of us live in big empty spaces anymore, not even in the West, which is why places like the Arizona trail are so important. It is something we can return to – for inspiration, for challenge, for contemplation, or simply to remember who we are and where we came from. I urge the subcommittee to act swiftly and report this bill favorably.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for all you do for public lands, in Arizona and across our nation. I sincerely appreciate you holding this hearing and for giving me the opportunity to share my views.

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