

Testimony of
Congressman Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing
April 28, 2022

Good afternoon, and thank you to Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher for holding this hearing today. I am grateful for the opportunity to present the National Discovery Trails Act (H.R. 4878).

This bipartisan legislation would achieve two long-standing goals first identified in the 1994 National Park Service Study: to create a new category of national trail, known as a National Discovery Trail, and to make the existing American Discovery Trail an official part of the National Trail System. This bill would help to connect wilderness areas and national parks with rural towns and big cities alike in an effort to promote family-oriented recreation, physical health, and economic development.

One of the most important things to know about this bill is that the American Discovery Trail, sometimes known as the ADT, already exists and is enjoyed by hikers, bikers, and walkers every day – so the hard work is already done. In fact, the ADT is the nation’s first coast-to-coast, non-motorized recreation trail. On the East Coast, the trailhead is the Delmarva Peninsula and on the West Coast, the trailhead is Point Reyes National Seashore near San Francisco. In the central portion, the trail has northern and southern alternates, passing through Chicago to the North and St. Louis to the South. In total, including both the north and south routes, the trail runs 6,800 miles.

The trail passes through 14 national parks and 16 national forests and uses sections of or connects to five National Scenic Trails, 10 National Historic Trails, and 23 National Recreation Trails.

Not only does this trail have national significance, but it also means a lot to the community I represent. Part of the trail runs through California’s 11th District in the East Bay of California, through Antioch to the summit of Mt. Diablo, through Walnut Creek. The first hikers to complete the trail in one continuous walk were also from the East Bay: Marcia and Ken Powers from Pleasanton, California. From February 27 through October 15 in 2005, they walked an average of 22 miles each day and use the American Discovery Trail to take in the cities, desert, mountains, and farmlands our nation has to offer.

The National Discovery Trails Act is an important step in the right direction to recognize the importance of the ADT by officially incorporating it into the U.S. trail system and to promote this national resource to the public.

I’m told, unfortunately, that the Park Service will provide testimony that they have some concerns with this legislation. To be honest I am disappointed not just with this information, but with the fact that our office has been trying to get feedback from the Park Service since last July

and we only got their official feedback less than 24 hours before this hearing. I appreciate that they want to be good stewards of our nation's lands and in that spirit I truly hope to work with them with the Committee's support to come to a resolution. Here's an asset that already exists and I'm sure we all want to make sure it works for everyone.

Before I close, I'd like to thank the Discovery Trail Society for their support of the trail and this legislation. You will hear from their President today about the important work they do to keep the trail safe and accessible to millions.

Again, I thank the Committee for its consideration of this legislation and for the opportunity offer testimony, and I'd welcome any questions you may have.