

Member Day Hearing
House Committee on Natural Resources
Virtual
Thursday, May 6
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Thank you to Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman for hosting this Member Day hearing. The Natural Resources Committee has important work ahead of it in the 117th Congress, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify.

Today, I would like to provide testimony on my bipartisan bill, the September 11th National Memorial Trail Act (H.R. 2278), which I introduced with Congressmen Fitzpatrick and Beyer. This legislation would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to designate the September 11th National Memorial Trail Route. This trail is a 1,300-mile system of trails and roadways that connects the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and the Flight 93 Memorial near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. It starts at the Pentagon Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, the trail extends northwest to the Flight 93 National Memorial. It continues east to New York City's National September 11th Memorial and Museum. The trail then heads south following the East Coast Greenway connecting to the 9/11 Memorial Garden of Reflection. It then connects to the National Mall in Washington D.C. and ultimately returns to the Pentagon Memorial. It extends through six states and the District of Columbia.

It is a multi-use trail with more than 50 percent of the route off-road. The idea for this trail was born in the wake of September 11, 2001 at the Mid-Atlantic Governors Conference on Greenways, Blueways and Green Infrastructure. Conference Chair and then-Director of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, David Brickley presented the vision for a trail route connecting the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, the site of Flight 93's crash near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and the Twin Towers in New York City. David then founded the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance the following year to develop the September 11th National Memorial Trail.

Last Congress, I introduced a resolution "Recognizing the September 11th National Memorial Trail as an important trail and greenway to be enjoyed by all in honor of the heroes of September 11th" (H.Res. 384). Senators Toomey and Warner introduced identical legislation which passed through unanimous consent.

Before I close, I also want to note for the Committee that H.R. 2278 would not create a new unit of the National Park Service (NPS), but would allow the administration of the trail through the Flight 93 Memorial. The Secretary would be authorized to designate new stops on the trail, produce and disseminate educational materials, and create a trail marker. This framework is similar to legislation that designated the Votes for Women History Trail Route. Section 7111 of H.R.146, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 authorized designation of that trail route and administration through its existing park unit, the Women's Rights National Historical Park.

This trail is a tribute to the family members and loved ones we lost and the bravery of the heroes that responded, and our nation's resilience and perseverance. It will connect travelers with the majestic landscapes and cultural points of interest along its route. In addition to driving tourism and recreation it will provide opportunities for education on September 11, 2001. I believe authorizing the designation of this trail will serve as a natural embodiment of our pledge to never forget the heroes and victims of that day and a fitting tribute on the 20th anniversary of September 11, 2001. Thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to working with this committee to advance this bill.