



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

MAY 17 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman, Committee on Energy
and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

I am pleased to transmit to Congress the *Chisholm and Great Western National Historic Trails Feasibility Study/Environmental Assessment*. The study was completed pursuant to section 5303 of Public Law 111-11, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the national significance of the Chisholm and “Great” Western cattle trails and the feasibility, suitability, and desirability of designating them as national historic trails.

The Chisholm and Western cattle trails (Western being the more historically accurate name for what is sometimes called the “Great” Western Trail) were the two primary trails used by Texas ranchers and contractors to move cattle to market during the 1850s through the 1880s. The development and intensive use of these trails played an important role in the economic recovery of Texas and other western States following the Civil War.

The study area includes approximately 2,548 miles of trail routes in four States: Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. The study evaluated the Chisholm Trail from the vicinity of Cuero and San Antonio, Texas, northward through Oklahoma to Abilene, Kansas; and the Western Trail from the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas, northward through Oklahoma and Dodge City, Kansas, to Ogallala, Nebraska.

The National Park Service (NPS) conducted the study in accordance with the National Trails System Act (Public Law 90-543, codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. 1241-1251). The routes were evaluated under the feasibility study provisions of the National Trails System Act. In addition, to be eligible for designation as a national historic trail, the trail(s) must be nationally significant, have a documented route through maps or journals, and offer significant potential for public recreational use.

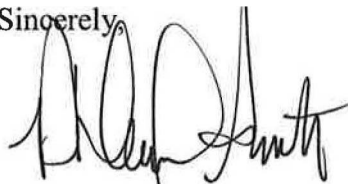
The study determined that the Chisholm and Western trail routes meet the criteria for national historic trail designation. Two alternatives for managing the routes were presented. Under Alternative A, the no-action alternative, current practices and policies would continue. The Chisholm and Western Trails would not be designated as national historic trails. Under Alternative B, Congress would designate two national historic trails as the Chisholm National Historic Trail and the Western National Historic Trail. The designated trails would be administered together as a single entity because of their nature as cattle trails.

The study included a public involvement process starting in 2010, with 12 public meetings and approximately 320 participants. The study and environmental assessment were released for public review in January 2015 and generated over 800 responses. Comments received during the study process were overwhelmingly supportive of national trail designation. Accordingly, the NPS selected Alternative B, *Designate Two National Historic Trails as One Administrative Unit*, for implementation, which is documented in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) signed September 13, 2016. The FONSI has been included in this transmittal.

Although there is public support and NPS selected Alternative B, the Department of the Interior does not support trail designation at this time due to the \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog within NPS.

Thank you for your interest in the National Park Service. A similar letter is being sent to the Honorable Joe Manchin III, Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate; the Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives; and the Honorable Rob Bishop, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives. The delegations from the States included in the study will also receive a copy of the study and this letter.

Sincerely,

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P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

Enclosure



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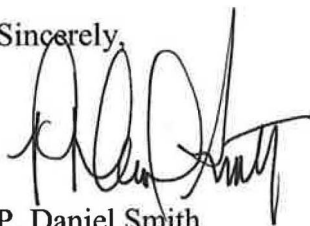
The study determined that the Chisholm and Western trail routes meet the criteria for national historic trail designation. Two alternatives for managing the routes were presented. Under Alternative A, the no-action alternative, current practices and policies would continue. The Chisholm and Western Trails would not be designated as national historic trails. Under Alternative B, Congress would designate two national historic trails as the Chisholm National Historic Trail and the Western National Historic Trail. The designated trails would be administered together as a single entity because of their nature as cattle trails.

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P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

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Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

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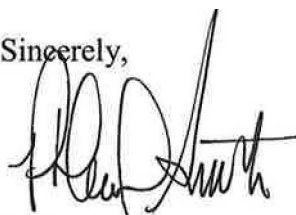
The study determined that the Chisholm and Western trail routes meet the criteria for national historic trail designation. Two alternatives for managing the routes were presented. Under Alternative A, the no-action alternative, current practices and policies would continue. The Chisholm and Western Trails would not be designated as national historic trails. Under Alternative B, Congress would designate two national historic trails as the Chisholm National Historic Trail and the Western National Historic Trail. The designated trails would be administered together as a single entity because of their nature as cattle trails.

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P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

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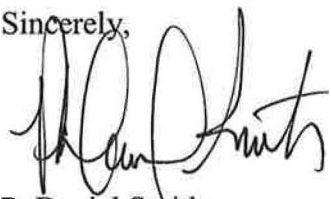
The study determined that the Chisholm and Western trail routes meet the criteria for national historic trail designation. Two alternatives for managing the routes were presented. Under Alternative A, the no-action alternative, current practices and policies would continue. The Chisholm and Western Trails would not be designated as national historic trails. Under Alternative B, Congress would designate two national historic trails as the Chisholm National Historic Trail and the Western National Historic Trail. The designated trails would be administered together as a single entity because of their nature as cattle trails.

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Sincerely,

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P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

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