

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the feasibility and eligibility of designating the Old Spanish Trail as a National Historic Trail under the feasibility study provisions of the National Trails System Act (NTSA, PL 90-543, 16 USC 1241, et seq.). Specifically, section 402 of Public Law 104-333, the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, adds the following provision to study section 5(c) of the NTSA (16 USC 1244c) directing the Secretary of Interior to study the Old Spanish Trail:

The Old Spanish Trail, beginning in Santa Fe, New Mexico, proceeding through Colorado and Utah, and ending in Los Angeles, California, and the Northern Branch of the Old Spanish Trail, beginning near Española, New Mexico, proceeding through Colorado, and ending near Crescent Junction, Utah.

Although not mentioned in the act, during its historic development, at least one route of the Old Spanish Trail also passed through northeastern Arizona.

This feasibility study will be submitted to Congress. Any future federal involvement in the Old Spanish Trail as a National Historic Trail must be based on a specific congressional authorization.

NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM AND NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS

The National Trails System was established by the National Trails System Act of 1968

to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and to 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.

Initially, the National Trails System included National Scenic Trails and National Recreation Trails. National Historic Trails were added when the Act was amended in 1978. National Scenic Trails are extended trails for outdoor recreation, such as the Appalachian or Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails, which also provide "for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass." Recreational use along scenic trails is intended to be continuous, allowing uninterrupted travel from end to end. National Recreation Trails are trails that meet prescribed criteria and offer a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation in or reasonably accessible to urban areas. Such trails can be established and maintained by non-federal entities, with the "national" designation conferred by the Secretary of the Interior, or they may be trails on lands administered by the Secretary of the Interior or Secretary of Agriculture.

National Historic Trails are "extended trails which follow as closely as possible and practicable the original route or routes of travel of national historical significance." The purpose of National Historic Trails is "the identification and protection of the historic route and its historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment." The designation of such trails or routes is to be continuous, but established or developed trails are not necessarily continuous land areas; they may include portions or sections of land areas, land and water segments, or other specific sites. Together, these qualifying entities form a chain or network of areas that may be included as components of a National Historic Trail. National Historic Trail authorization would require federal funds for the planning, development, research, and/or

management of the trail and related trail activities. Some existing authorized National Historic Trails are the Santa Fe, Oregon, Pony Express, Mormon Pioneer, and Lewis and Clark trails.

The National Trails System Act provides for a lead federal agency to administer each National Scenic and National Historic Trail in perpetuity, in cooperation with a variety of partners, including other federal agencies, state and local agencies, American Indians, local communities, private landowners, and others.

If Congress authorizes a National Historic Trail, a management plan will have to be prepared to guide the preservation and public use of the trail, as well as education and partnership efforts. Existing trail segments already in federal ownership could become the initial components of the National Historic Trail. Other trail segments could be developed and protected through various means, such as cooperative and certification agreements, easements, and actions by non-profit organizations.

A basic National Historic Trail tool is the certification of historic sites, segments of the trail, and interpretive sites along the route. Historic sites and segments that are not on federal land can be certified only if the owners request such recognition. A certification agreement is developed between the National Park Service and the owner. Only historic sites and trail segments used during the period in which the trail is considered to be nationally significant and that have a direct and significant relationship to the reasons for which the trail is considered nationally significant are eligible for certification. Certification voluntarily commits the owner or manager to preserve trail-related resources and to allow appropriate public access.

National trails are managed through cooperative partnerships among public agencies, non-profit organizations, and landowners. The federal role is one of setting and maintaining standards; providing incentives like technical and limited financial assistance to partners; helping to ensure consistent preservation, education, and public use programs; and managing the use of the official trail logo for marking and other appropriate purposes.



Figure 1: Trail traces in Colorado.



Figure 2: An Overview of Routes Studied