



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

MAY 13 1977

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It is with pleasure that I recommend the designation of the Continental Divide Trail, located in portions of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, as a component of the National Trails System.

The recommendation stems from this Department's responsibility under the Act of October 2, 1968 (82 Stat. 919; 16 U.S.C. 1241), which established a National Trails System; designated the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails as National Scenic Trails; and listed 14 additional routes, including the Continental Divide Trail, for study as potential National Scenic Trails. The Act also prescribed procedures for establishing additional National Scenic Trails, National Recreation Trails, and connecting and side trails in the National Trails System.

The enclosed draft bill implements the recommendations resulting from the Department's study of the Continental Divide Trail route. We have concluded that the trail, as studied and presented in the report, meets the criteria for addition to the National Trail System as a National Scenic Trail. A copy of the study report is also enclosed.

The Continental Divide Trail Corridor, as discussed in the study report, covers some 3100 miles and runs as close to the physical Continental Divide as is reasonable. It starts at the Canadian border on the west shore of Waterton Lake in Glacier National Park, leads south through western Montana and along the Idaho-Montana boundary. From there, it proceeds southeastward through Yellowstone National Park and across the Great Divide Basin of south-central Wyoming. It goes through Rocky Mountain National Park and follows the Divide in Colorado to a point near Chama, New Mexico. The corridor then proceeds south-ward in

western New Mexico, through Silver City, to the United States-Mexican border near Cloverdale, New Mexico. Extending along the backbone of the Continent, this trail would provide a complementary north-south scenic route between the Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails.

Approximately 82 percent of the Continental Divide Trail Corridor is located on federally-owned lands. While some 62 percent of the trail is in place, mostly on public land, only some 19 percent (about 600 miles) located on Federal land is developed to presently acceptable standards.

The findings of the Continental Divide Trail study indicate that the most immediate and highest trail priority in the vicinity of the trail corridor is for trails at lower elevations and loop systems which would allow users to enjoy a Continental Divide Trail experience and return to the same trail head from which they started. This need is especially great near the population concentrations and recreation destination centers flanking the Continental Divide. In recognition of the above priorities, the enclosed draft bill would establish only about 600 miles of the trail as the Continental divide National Scenic Trail. Appropriate legislation will be submitted to the Congress in the future whenever the development of additional trail segments as a north-south connecting National Scenic Trail is warranted.

Overall administration of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail would be assigned to the Department of Agriculture, which will consult with the heads of other Federal agencies, where lands administered by them are involved, and with State, county, and local agencies or private trails organizations as appropriate.

The enclosed bill provides that, notwithstanding the provisions of section 7(c) of the National Trails System Act (prohibiting use of motorized vehicles), the use of motorized vehicles on roads which will be designated segments of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail will be permitted in accordance with regulations prescribed by the appropriate Secretary. A total of 218 miles of the route would be located on primitive roads, and this provision would permit vehicular use now existing on those roads to continue. This vehicular use, however, should be periodically evaluated to assure that conflicts in trail use are not developing. Should conflicts develop, vehicular use would be curtailed or limited, or the trail would be relocated.

The proposed Continental Divide National Scenic Trail will pass through or by spectacular scenery of a quality and magnitude matched only by the North Cascades and the Yellowstone-Teton areas. The proposed trail will traverse a variety of terrain, including high desert, forest, geologic formations and mountain meadows. It will provide outstanding recreation opportunities for a substantial number of users.

Inasmuch as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail qualifies for inclusion in the National Trails System as a National Scenic Trail, we urge that the enclosed draft bill be transmitted to the Congress with a recommendation that it be enacted.

Sincerely,


Bob Herbst
Assistant Secretary

Enclosures



IN REPLY REFER TO:
D38 CDT

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TO ALL INTERESTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, PUBLIC GROUPS, AND INDIVIDUALS

I am pleased to advise you that the study report on the Continental Divide Trail has been sent to the President and the Congress, along with draft legislation to designate the route a national scenic trail. The report and recommendations are in response to the National Trails System Act of October 21, 1968, Public Law 90-543.

The report recommends that the 3,100-mile route from Canada to Mexico be designated as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, with the designated trail being limited initially to those segments of trail already in existence on Federal lands. However, no new major trail developments would be undertaken along the Continental Divide Trail route until higher priority needs in the vicinity are met, i.e., the upgrading of existing trails and development of new loop trails to meet the more immediate recreation needs of population and recreation destination centers near the Continental Divide.

Responsibility for overall administration and details of trail alignment rests with the Secretary of Agriculture, with continued management of segments by the respective State and Federal agencies and Indian tribes having jurisdiction over the lands involved.

A copy of the study report and draft legislation are enclosed for your information.

Sincerely,


Ferrell P. Thompson
Regional Director

Enclosures



A B I L L

To amend the National Trails System Act by designating the Continental Divide Trail, located in portions of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, as a component of the National Trails System.

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Act of 1977."

SEC. 2. Section 5(a) of the National Trails System Act (82 Stat. 919; 16 U.S.C. 1241) is amended as follows:

After existing paragraph "(3)" insert a new paragraph "(4)" as follows:

"(4)" The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, a trail of approximately thirty-one hundred miles, extending from the Montana-Canada border to the New Mexico border, following the approximate route depicted on the map, identified as, "Proposed Continental Divide National Scenic Trail" in the Department of the Interior Continental Divide Trail Study Report dated August 1976: Provided, (i) That only those already existing trail segments along the route which are located within exterior boundaries of federally administered areas and which meet presently acceptable standards for use are established initially as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail by this Act,

and (ii) That notwithstanding the provisions of section 7(c) of this Act, the use of motorized vehicles on roads which will be designated segments of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail will be permitted in accordance with regulations prescribed by the appropriate Secretary."

SEC. 3. The responsibility for coordination of Continental Divide National Scenic Trail matters shall rest with the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the heads of other Federal and State agencies where lands administered by them are involved. Such responsibilities shall include:

- (a) selecting the specific trail route, as provided for in Section 7(a) of the National Trails System Act, within four years after the date of enactment of this Act;
- (b) identifying those segments of the trail which are presently constructed, or which are reconstructed, to acceptable use standards as components of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail;
- (c) assuring that Federal land managers adequately mark segments of the trail when they become suitable for use;
and
- (d) establishment at the appropriate time of additional segments as prescribed in Section 7 of the National Trails System Act.