

Arizona National Scenic Trail

Nature and Purposes

Background for Nature and Purposes

The nature and purposes of a national scenic trail defines the ideal trail setting and the context for what types of uses and activities are appropriate for the trail and its corridor. The nature and purposes are critical to the proper protection and management of national scenic trails and can be derived, in part, from Sec. 3(2) of the National Trails System Act (NTSA)(P.L. 90-543, as amended through P.L. 111-11) which describes national scenic trails as:

“...extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass. National scenic trails may be located so as to represent desert, marsh, grassland, mountain, canyon, river, forest and other areas, as well as landforms which exhibit significant characteristics of the physiographic regions of the nation.”

Sec. 7(c) of the NTSA states:

“National scenic or national historic trails may contain campsites, shelters, and related-public use facilities. Other uses along the trail, which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trail, may be permitted by the Secretary charged with the administration of the trail. Reasonable efforts shall be made to provide sufficient access opportunities to such trails and, to the extent practicable, efforts be made to avoid activities incompatible with the purposes for which such trails were established.”

In 2009 the NTSA was amended, through the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (PL 111- 11), to designate the Arizona Trail a national scenic trail, one of only 11 in the nation. The requirement to produce a feasibility study to support national scenic trail designation was waived in the case of the Arizona National Scenic Trail (Arizona Trail). Such a study would have provided guidance in defining the nature and purposes. The enabling legislation itself did not provide an adequate sense of what the Arizona Trail represents in terms of its significance and uniqueness, and the importance of the landscapes it traverses. Therefore, we must look to the basic intent of the NTSA, subsequent executive orders, elements of legislative history, and to the original vision for the Arizona Trail for guidance.

John McCain’s introduction to the Arizona National Scenic Trail Act, S. 1304 – In part:

“...the Trail winds through some of the most rugged, spectacular scenery in the Western United States. The corridor for the ARIZONA TRAIL encompasses the wide range of ecological diversity in the state, and incorporates a host of existing trails into one continuous trail. In fact, the Trail route is so topographically diverse that a person can hike from the Sonoran Desert to Alpine forests in one day.the designation of the ARIZONA TRAIL as a National Scenic Trail would ensure the preservation of a corridor of open space for hikers, mountain bicyclists, cross country skiers, showshoers, eco-tourists, equestrians, and joggers.”

Senate Report 110-290 on S. 1304, April 10, 2008 - Background and Need:

“The ARIZONA TRAIL is a proposed 807 mile non-motorized trail that traverses Arizona from Mexico to Utah. The trail is intended to be a primitive, long distance trail that highlights the State’s topographic, biologic, historic, and cultural diversity. The primary uses are expected to be

hiking, equestrian use, and mountain bicycling....in most places, the ARIZONA TRAIL overlays existing trails. Primitive roads are temporarily being used in areas where linkages are needed. However, new trail construction is needed in these areas, especially to maintain the vision of a non-motorized trail. When complete, the ARIZONA TRAIL will become one of the premier long-distance trails in the country.”

House Report No. 90-1631 accompanying P.L. 90-543 provides the following language to clarify the intent of specific wording in the Act, and therefore the intent of Congress:

“...selection of routes for National Scenic Trails – Such rights-of-way shall be (1) of sufficient width and so located to provide the maximum retention of natural conditions, scenic and historic features, and primitive character of the trail area, to provide campsites, shelters, and related public-use facilities, and to provide reasonable public access; and (2) located to avoid, insofar as practicable, established highways, motor roads, mining areas, power transmission lines, existing commercial and industrial developments, range fences and improvements, private operations, and any other activities that would be incompatible with the protection of the trail in its natural condition and its use for outdoor recreation.... National scenic trails shall be administered, protected, developed, and maintained to retain their natural, scenic, and historic features; and provision may be made for campsites, shelters, and related public-use facilities; and other uses that will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trails may be permitted or authorized, as appropriate: Provided, That the use of motorized vehicles by the general public along any national scenic trail shall be prohibited...” (1968 U.S. Code Cong. & Admin. News 3855, 3863-3864, 3867).

Executive Order 13195 directs:

“Federal agencies will... protect, connect, promote, and assist trails of all types... This will be accomplished by... protecting the trail corridors associated with National Scenic Trails... to the degree necessary to ensure that the values for which [the] trail was established remain intact.”

The 1989 Arizona State Trails Plan described the Arizona Trail as the “spine of the state trails system”. The vision for the trail was stated in the 1995 interagency Arizona Trail Management Guide as follows:

- Creating a non-motorized, primitive trail connecting deserts, mountains, forests, wilderness, canyons, communities, and people;
- Linking existing and new trail segments to form a continuous pathway south to north across the state;
- Providing high quality recreation and educational experiences for Arizona’s residents and visitors;
- Promoting land stewardship in the development and use of the trail in a way that cultivates appreciation and protection of the State’s natural resources;
- Promoting multiple non-motorized trail use by hikers, equestrians, mountain bicyclists, and cross-country skiers on a shared trail or within a general trail corridor whenever appropriate, and in keeping with local land management objectives;
- Continuing the existing model (of) public-private partnership to create and maintain a long-distance trail.

Public Views of the Arizona Trail

Because the Arizona Trail was nearly complete and had long been in use at the time of national scenic trail designation, we can draw on the views of the builders and users of the Trail to get a sense of its importance and significance to a well-established community of supporters. In 2012 public sensing meetings were conducted to collect input from those most familiar with the Arizona Trail. While the

comments received were as diverse as the trail itself, the key themes are consistent with the early vision for the trail:

The ARIZONA TRAIL is special because:

- It has great diversity in climate, ecosystems, geology, wildlife and history;
- It supports a variety of non-motorized uses, primarily hiking, backpacking equestrian and bicycling;
- It offers wildness and remoteness, yet is accessible for shorter trips as well as longer treks;
- It is an important state legacy that must be preserved for future generations;
- It includes many wilderness passages;
- It is located primarily in a non-motorized setting;
- It offers solitude and requires skills in self-reliance;
- It is an important state legacy that showcases Arizona's diverse ecosystems.

All of these components together have been used to define the Trail's Nature and Purposes. This sets the sideboards and provides guidance for future administration and management decisions, and ultimately defines the Arizona Trail for future generations.

Nature and Purposes

Nature

The Arizona National Scenic Trail is a primitive, non-motorized long-distance route that preserves and showcases the unique and diverse scenic, natural, historic and cultural treasures of Arizona and our nation. The Trail experience provides opportunities for quality recreation, self-reliance and discovery within a corridor of open space defined by the spectacular natural landscapes of the state.

Purposes

- Connecting deserts, mountains, forests, wilderness, canyons, communities, and people;
- Linking existing and new trail segments to form a continuous pathway south to north across the state;
- Providing high quality recreation and educational experiences for Arizona's residents and visitors;
- Promoting land stewardship in the development and use of the trail in a way that cultivates appreciation and protection of the State's natural and cultural resources as a legacy for future generations;
- Promoting multiple non-motorized trail uses, primarily hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing on a shared trail while observing local land management objectives;
- Continuing the existing model of public-private partnership to create and maintain a long-distance trail.
- Offering wildness, remoteness and solitude while providing opportunities for day use as well as longer treks.

This definition of the Nature and Purposes sets the sideboards and provides guidance for future administration and management decisions, and ultimately defines the Arizona Trail for future generations.