

# Complete America's Great Trails

*Help fill the gaps in a National Scenic Trail near you*

Dear Colleague,

National Scenic Trails connect America's greatest places. From Yellowstone to the Everglades, these 11 trails cross dozens of states and more than 100 Congressional Districts. Unfortunately, there are missing links in all but one of the National Scenic Trails, and all trails are threatened by encroachment from development. The *Complete America's Great Trails Act* will provide private property owners with tax incentives to dedicate public access and conservation easements in order to close gaps in these great trails and protect them from development. It has been endorsed by the American Hiking Society, International Mountain Bike Association, Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and the Potomac Heritage Trail Association. Please join me by cosponsoring this legislation to complete America's great trails through voluntary easements.

When the Appalachian Trail was established by statute in 1968, it followed remote ridgelines from Maine to Georgia. Today, though the trail is complete, much of the land surrounding it is under tremendous development pressure. *Complete America's Great Trails Act* would give landowners an incentive to protect their land forever, and protect the environs of the first great trail in America. Residents of Atlanta, Raleigh-Durham, Richmond, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, and the Boston metropolitan areas are within a two hour drive of the Appalachian Trail—an easy day or weekend trip. We must protect this trail to provide recreational opportunities in an increasingly connected and congested megalopolis.

The Continental Divide Trail and Pacific Crest Trail traverse some of the wildest, most scenic country in America. From the Sierra Nevada to Glacier National Park, these trails cross terrain of unrivaled ruggedness and solitude. Yet they are missing numerous links, and in some places, like Southern California, face development pressure. *Complete America's Great Trails Act* will ensure that residents of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Las Vegas, Denver, Phoenix, and surrounding communities can enjoy these trails for generations to come. Moreover, this bill will provide rural landowners with a valuable new tool to protect their ranches and farms.

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail is designed to run from the mouth of the Potomac to the headwaters of the Potomac, connecting George Washington's birthplace at Pope's Creek with his plantation at Mount Vernon and with historic sites like Harper's Ferry. Yet this trail is incomplete: without this legislative action we will not complete this trail to connect the home sites of the most prominent of our nation's founding fathers.

Other National Scenic Trails may be less well known but no less spectacular, and include the Florida National Scenic Trail, Ice Age National Scenic Trail, and North Country National Scenic Trail, which traverse places as varied as Wisconsin's moraine and Florida's vast Everglades.

*Complete America's Great Trails Act* will connect these trails by providing landowners with the voluntary opportunity (not a mandate) to receive a tax credit for placing their land in conservation easement along these scenic trail corridors with a public access easement for the trail. Please join me in supporting this important legislation. Please contact Jamie Smith at [jamie.smith@mail.house.gov](mailto:jamie.smith@mail.house.gov) to become a cosponsor.

Sincerely,

Gerald E. Connolly  
11<sup>th</sup> District, Virginia