

**Statement by
Rep. Jo Ann Emerson
Member of Congress
before the
Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands**

October 30, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today and discuss H.R. 3616, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Extension Study Act of 2007.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail tells a brilliant and inspiring story of our nation's history -- but it only tells half of the story.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were important figures during the early years of our Nation. These individuals, along with the Corps of Discovery, braved the unknown to explore the Louisiana Purchase from May 1804 to September 1806 and report their findings to President Thomas Jefferson in December 1806. The explorers overcame incredible obstacles to open the American wilderness to westward expansion and settlement. While the most famous portion of their journey was conducted west of the Mississippi, the duo and their party significantly interacted with many towns and populations east of the Mississippi, often referred to as "Eastern Legacy Sites". The profound impact of their stops is reflected in the many towns near and throughout the Ohio River Valley, as well as the Mid Atlantic region. The Eastern portion of the Lewis and Clark deserve much the same recognition that has been afforded to the western segment of the expedition.

At this time, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail begins near Hartford, Illinois, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. The trail proceeds west

following the Corps. of Discovery path until reaching its conclusion in the present-day states of Washington and Oregon at the Pacific Ocean. While the National Parks Service recognizes several Eastern Legacy Sites, there is no existing trail which would allow individuals to follow Lewis and Clark's preparations for their journey, or their return. H.R. 3616 would authorize a study by the Department of the Interior to address the feasibility and suitability of establishing a National Trail along the Eastern Legacy Sites. This is the first step in determining whether to create a trail that would follow Lewis and Clark's travels both jointly and separately in relation to the initial phase of the expedition, as well as the return segment. The study would examine the travels of the Corps of Discovery in and around the District of Columbia to St. Louis, Missouri, as well as their return trip back to the District of Columbia.

The Eastern Legacy begins in the District of Columbia where Meriwether Lewis was directed by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Purchase. He then proceeded through Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania gathering supplies and men. Meriwether Lewis arrived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and traveled down the Ohio River until he arrived in Louisville, Kentucky. There, Lewis met William Clark who gathered a group of Kentuckians to join the Corps of Discovery, and they continued together down the Ohio. At the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, the expedition traveled north on the Mississippi and eventually arrived at the start of their expedition, Camp Dubois in Western Illinois.

That's where the trail begins, along with the national recognition of the places and people who influenced and aided Lewis & Clark in their quest to document the far reaches of the Louisiana Purchase.

In many congressional districts in eleven states and the District of Columbia, however, including mine, we are not part of that recognition despite the fact that the celebration of Lewis and Clark's journey is a continuous part of our local history. During the month of November 1803, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark stopped in my home town of Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Their time in Cape Girardeau is immortalized through the Red House Interpretive Center which details their experience with Louis Lorimer, the founder of the city and their host during their visit. The residents of Cape Girardeau are proud of their role they played with the Corps of Discovery, so much so that Lewis and Clark are a draw not just for local citizens and students seeking to learn more about their city's rich history, but for thousands of history buffs and interested citizens who travel to Cape Girardeau just to see where Lewis and Clark stopped along the Mississippi River.

This bill would clear a path for recognition of those sites and the dedicated Americans who work -- usually as volunteers -- to ensure this part of our national history is preserved for and communicated to every passing generation in our country. There are many towns with similar experiences which are locally recognized as sites of significant historical value. The historical recognition of Lewis and Clark's path throughout the eastern portion of the United States would allow communities to cooperatively tell the tale of the Corps. of Discovery and provide a greater understanding of the effort involved in organizing the expedition and returning from their trip. As you can see, the Eastern Legacy sites are equal in importance to our American history with sites already noted on the National Historic Trail. Expanding the Trail to include the other part of this historic expedition would be a great boon to the causes of history and

education in our country -- and a fitting, complete remembrance of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's great service to our nation.

Again, thank you for your consideration of this legislation today. I very much appreciate the committee's time on this important subject.