

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
INTRODUCTION OF THE ARIZONA TRAIL BILL
May 3, 2009

Mr. President, I am pleased to be joined today by Senator Kyl in introducing the Arizona Trail Feasibility National Scenic Trail Act. This bill would designate the Arizona Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

The Arizona Trail is a beautifully diverse stretch of public lands, mountains, canyons, deserts, forests, historic sites, and communities. The Trail is approximately 807 miles long and begins at the Coronado National Memorial on the U.S.-Mexico border and ends in the Bureau of Land Management's Arizona Strip District on the Utah border near the Grand Canyon. In between these two points, 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.

For over a decade, more than 16 Federal, state, and local agencies, as well as community and business organizations, have partnered to create, develop, and manage the Arizona Trail. Through their combined efforts, these agencies and the members of the Arizona Trail Association have completed over 90% of the longest contiguous land-based trail in the State of Arizona. Designating the Arizona Trail as a National Scenic Trail would help streamline the management of the high-use trail to ensure that this pristine stretch of diverse land is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Since 1968, when the National Trails System Act was established, Congress has designated over 20 national trails. Before a trail receives a national designation, a federal study is typically required to assess the feasibility of establishing a trail route. The Arizona Trail doesn't require a feasibility study because it's virtually complete with less than 60 miles left to build and sign. All but one-percent of the trail resides on public land, and the unfinished segments don't involve private property. The trail meets the criteria to be labeled a National Scenic Trail and already appears on all Arizona state maps. Therefore, the Congress has reason to forego an unnecessary and costly feasibility study and proceed straight to National Scenic Trail designation.

The Arizona Trail is known throughout the state as a boon to outdoor enthusiasts. The Arizona State Parks recently released data showing that two-thirds of Arizonans consider themselves trail users. Millions of visitors also use Arizona's trails each year. In one of the fastest-growing states in the U.S., 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, snowshoers, eco-tourists, equestrians, and joggers.

I urge my colleagues to support the passage of this legislation.