

The Sea-to-Sea Route: Exploring the Mid-Continent Options

A Brief Reconnaissance of the Montana-North Dakota Gap

May 16-25, 2006



**National Park Service
North Country National Scenic Trail**

North Country Trail Association

September 2008

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Forward

The expansiveness of long-distance trails in both geography and time make their creation truly visionary endeavors. The Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails led the way in the first half of the 20th century and in the latter half Congress authorized the creation of others that, relatively speaking, are still in their youth.

The North Country National Scenic Trail is one of those—4,600 miles from New York to North Dakota, with 2,200 miles completed to date—a bold vision indeed. In recent years, trail enthusiast, promoter, and backpacker Ron Strickland has proposed a yet bolder vision: create extensions or connections from the North Country Trail eastward and westward, linking the Appalachian, North Country, Lewis and Clark, Continental Divide, and Pacific Northwest Trails into a transcontinental hiking route through our northern tier of states—a proposal he calls the “Sea-to-Sea Route.”

This report discusses possibilities for one of those connections—westward from Lake Sakakawea State Park, the present western terminus of the North Country National Scenic Trail, through western North Dakota and much of Montana to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. This report chronicles the brief reconnaissance trip of a team of two National Park Service (NPS) employees and one North Country Trail Association (NCTA) employee in May 2006.

This document is:

- Not a plan
- Not a proposal for a specific route
- Not an official National Park Service proposal of any kind
- Not a substitute for the fuller analysis and evaluation that would be needed and required to move forward with some of the options suggested

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Summary

As passed in 1968, the National Trails System Act contained the elements necessary to establish a nearly coast-to-coast hiking route through our northern tier of states. The Appalachian Trail, designated a National Scenic Trail (NST) by the Act, plus the potential North Country and Lewis and Clark NSTs would have formed a transcontinental hiking trail.

Two events thwarted that outcome. First, in 1974 then-Governor of Vermont Thomas P. Salmon sent a letter to then-Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton asking that the Vermont portions of the proposed North Country NST be deleted from the final feasibility study report. The Interior Department complied with this request. That created a 30-mile gap in a potential transcontinental hiking route.

Second, the study of the Lewis and Clark Trail concluded that it was not feasible to establish it as a continuous, on-the-ground hiking trail like the Appalachian and North Country. Amendments to the National Trails System Act in 1978 created a new category known as National Historic Trails (NHTs). The definition of this category did not include an objective of building a continuous foot trail along the length of the historic route. The 1978 authorization of Lewis and Clark's route as a NHT meant that it would not serve as the western link in a transcontinental hiking route across our northern tier.

Today, the possibility of fulfilling the vision of a transcontinental trail has new life. The Pacific Northwest Trail, extending from the Pacific Coast in Olympic National Park, Washington, to the Continental Divide (authorized as a NST in 1978) in Glacier National Park, Montana, has been under development by public and private partners since the mid-1970s. Now there are bills in Congress to authorize it as a NST. If a 30-mile connection to the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail could be forged in Vermont, and the gap between the western terminus of the North Country NST in North Dakota and the Continental Divide NST in Montana could be filled, a transcontinental route would result. Long-distance trail enthusiast, Ron Strickland, who founded the Pacific Northwest Trail, has proposed filling these gaps to create a transcontinental trail. He calls his concept the "Sea-to-Sea Route,"



sometimes abbreviated C2C. In 2004-2005, a young man named Andy Skurka hiked the 7,700-mile route in just 11 months.

Ron Strickland

Andy Skurka



At its December 3, 2005, meeting, the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) Board of Directors passed a resolution supporting further exploration of the Sea-to-Sea Route, including possibly an expanded role for the North Country NST as part of that route. May 16-25, 2006, National Park Service (NPS) Superintendent Tom Gilbert, NPS Trail Manager Fred Szarka, and NCTA Director of Trail Management Clare Cain (“the Team”) traveled from Madison, Wisconsin, to the Continental Divide NST in Montana to explore opportunities for a trail route west of the present terminus of the North Country NST at Lake Sakakawea State Park, North Dakota. Besides briefly exploring the landscape from a trail planner’s point of view, they also met with federal, state, and local land managers and officials to share the Sea-to-Sea Route concept, gather ideas on routing options, and gauge their interest in going forward.



From the discussions with federal, state, local, and tribal officials, there was overall support for some type of trail or route to form a cross-country connection. Opinions on what type of route or trail that could or should be, and whether it should be an extension of the North Country NST or something else, varied greatly.

There are many challenges to be faced, including lack of water, vast distances between communities, many miles of non-public lands, and sparse population to support a volunteer-based effort to establish and maintain the route. However, the Team considered the perspective that the North Country NST already goes through some sparsely populated areas, and that with over 2,000 miles yet to be established, another 750 miles may not seem daunting.

Based on their explorations and discussions with public officials, the Team synthesized the following array of options for bridging the Montana-North Dakota gap in the potential transcontinental Sea-to-Sea Route:

1. Officially extend the North Country NST west to the Continental Divide NST (would require a federal feasibility study and subsequent Congressional reauthorization).
2. Conceptually design and propose a new/different NST with an independent identity to fill the gap (would require a federal feasibility study and subsequent Congressional authorization).
3. Design and designate an overland route as part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, since much of any logical route through this area parallels their Missouri River route or the designated Lewis and Clark Trail highway (US-2). (This would not necessarily require a further feasibility study or expanded Congressional authorization, but perhaps a revision of the trail's management plan.)
4. Identify and designate highways (e.g. US-2), railroad rights-of-way, utility corridors, and other routes as North Country Trail "Connectors."
5. Identify and designate a combination of routes, such as the types mentioned in #4, above, as an official Connecting or Side Trail in the National Trails System as a single entity with a unique identity and trail emblem.
6. Establish and designate a single National Recreation Trail, or series of such trails but proposed as a whole concept, from Lake Sakakawea to the Continental Divide, rather than "just letting it happen." (This would have to happen over a long period of time.)
7. Design, propose, and establish a trail or route named "????", but not associated with or designated as part of the National Trails System at all, consisting of a variety of mapped and/or marked routes.

Additional options could be formulated by combining portions of two or more of the options above. For example, one could consider the possibility of extending the authorized route of the North Country NST westward to Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site and the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers (a segment of Option 1). This would add two national park areas and other outstanding resources to the route of the trail. A route meeting the parameters of Option 4, 5, or 7 could continue westward from there to the Continental Divide NST.

This report describes and summarizes what they saw and learned. It includes descriptions and analyses of the seven principal options described above for creating a connecting trail or route between the western terminus of the North Country NST and a to-be-determined point on the Continental Divide NST.

Potential opportunities for filling the 30-mile gap in Vermont have support from key local stakeholders. They are being explored and moving forward.

Background

As passed in 1968, the National Trails System Act contained the elements necessary to establish a nearly coast-to-coast hiking route through our northern tier of states. The Appalachian Trail (AT), designated in the Act as one of the first two National Scenic Trails (NSTs), extended from Mt. Katahdin in Maine southwestward through New Hampshire and Vermont before continuing south to Georgia.

Section 5(c) of the Act identified 14 trail routes to be studied as potential NSTs. The proposed North Country Trail connected with the AT in Vermont and extended westward through seven states to the Missouri River in North Dakota. There it connected to the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, another of the 14 potential NSTs.

Had both the proposed North Country and Lewis and Clark Trails been established as NSTs, as initially envisioned, there would have been a continuous footpath from near the East Coast in Maine, following the Appalachian, North Country, and Lewis and Clark Trails, to the West Coast at the mouth of the Columbia River, the western destination of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. However, two things thwarted that outcome.

First, in 1974 then-Governor of Vermont Thomas P. Salmon sent a letter to then-Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton asking that the Vermont portions of the proposed North Country NST be deleted from the final feasibility study report. The Green Mountain Club (GMC), which established and maintains the Long Trail, was very concerned that a connection with the eastern end of the North Country Trail would result in a significant number of additional hikers on the already-overused Long Trail. Their board adopted a policy opposing creation of another National Scenic Trail in Vermont (besides the AT) and persuaded Governor Salmon to send the aforementioned letter. The Interior Department complied with the request and the 1975 final feasibility study indicated that the eastern terminus of the trail should be at Crown Point, New York, while mentioning that future planning for the North Country Trail might explore possible feasible connections to the AT. Congress authorized the North Country NST in 1980, specifying that the eastern terminus of the trail would be in “eastern New York State.”

Second, the study of the Lewis and Clark Trail—along with studies of other historic routes such as the Oregon Trail and Mormon Pioneer Trail—concluded that it was not feasible to establish them as continuous, on-the-ground hiking trails like the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, and North Country. Yet there was a clear sense that these routes, so important to the history of our Nation, should in some way be marked and developed for public use and appreciation. Out of the dialogue and discussion over this matter in the mid-1970s came the concept we now know as a National Historic Trail (NHT). The concept for NHTs did not include an objective of building a continuous foot trail along the length of the historic route. Once this concept crystallized, legislation was introduced to add this category to the National Trails System. This legislation passed in 1978 along with provisions authorizing the Lewis and Clark, Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, and Iditarod NHTs. The authorization of Lewis and Clark’s route as a NHT meant that it would not serve as the western link in a continuous NST hiking route across our northern tier.



Today, nearly 30 years later, the possibility of fulfilling the vision of a transcontinental hiking trail has new life. In the mid-1970s, a Pacific Northwest Trail (PNT), extending from the Pacific Coast in Olympic National Park, Washington, to the Continental Divide (now a NST) in Glacier National Park, Montana, was proposed by Ron Strickland. He also organized a Pacific Northwest Trail Association. Through the work of the association and many other proponents and partners, the PNT is becoming a reality upon our northwestern landscape. In 2001, Ron realized that if a 30-mile connection to the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail could be forged in Vermont, and the gap between the western terminus of the North Country NST in North Dakota and the Continental Divide NST in Montana could be filled, a transcontinental route would result. He also suggested that if the “International Appalachian Trail” from Mt. Katahdin in Maine to the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, Canada, could be included in this string of trails, a route extending from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific Coast would be the result. He calls his concept the “Sea-to-Sea Route,” sometimes abbreviated C2C.

Ron submitted an article about his idea to Backpacker Magazine and it was published in their February 2003 issue. A soon-to-graduate student at Duke University was electrified by the idea of hiking 7,700 miles across the continent. Andy Skurka set out from the Gaspé Peninsula on Canada’s Atlantic Coast in August 2004 and finished at Cape Alava, Washington, on the Pacific Coast on July 10, 2005, just 11 months later.



Ron Strickland and Andy Skurka at Cape Alava

Because the North Country NST forms the largest link in the Sea-to-Sea Route concept, Ron contacted the National Park Service (NPS) Superintendent of the trail and the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) to ascertain their interest in extending the trail westward to the Continental Divide NST to fill the mid-continent gap in the route. Adding more miles to the already daunting task of establishing over 2,000 more miles to complete the North Country NST could seem a bit intimidating. Nevertheless, at its December 3, 2005, meeting, the NCTA Board of Directors passed a resolution supporting further exploration of the Sea-to-Sea Route, including possibly an expanded role for the North Country NST as part of that route. The NPS Midwest Regional Director also gave permission for his North Country NST staff to participate in this very preliminary exploration of options.

How long is the connection that would need to be made across western North Dakota and most of Montana? Roughly 500 miles “as the crow flies.” Depending on how direct the actual route is, approximately 670 to 750 miles of new trail, or mapped and marked routes, would need to be established. It could be longer if a route meandered to connect with significant scenic, natural, and cultural resources that would add interest to the trail.

May 16-25, 2006, NPS Superintendent Tom Gilbert, NPS Trail Manager Fred Szarka, and NCTA Director of Trail Management Clare Cain traveled from Madison, Wisconsin, to the Continental Divide NST in Montana to briefly explore opportunities for a trail route west of the present terminus of the North Country NST at Lake Sakakawea State Park, North Dakota.

The three-person Team traveled from early light until well past sunset nearly every day exploring the territory. Besides exploring the landscape from a trail planner's point of view, they also met with federal, state, and local land managers and officials to share the Sea-to-Sea Route concept, gather ideas on routing options, and gauge their interest in going forward.

This report describes and summarizes what they saw and learned. It includes descriptions and analyses of seven options for creating a connecting trail or route between the western terminus of the North Country NST and a to-be-determined point on the Continental Divide NST.

Potential opportunities for filling the 30-mile gap in Vermont have support from key local stakeholders. They are being explored and moving forward.



Thunderstorm encountered by the Team along US 87 northeast of Ft. Benton, Montana

The Journey

Although the Team's reconnaissance trip departed from Madison, Wisconsin, on Tuesday, May 16, the first two days were used to travel to North Dakota, stopping near Park Rapids, Minnesota, to walk and inspect a new segment of the North Country NST with the local volunteers (Itasca Moraine Chapter of the North Country Trail Association) who had constructed it. A meeting with state officials in Bismarck, North Dakota, on May 18 marked the actual beginning of the Team's exploration of opportunities to fill the gap between the current western terminus of the North Country NST at Lake Sakakawea State Park near Pick City, North Dakota, and the Continental Divide NST in western Montana.

DAY ONE—THURSDAY, MAY 18 BISMARCK, ND, TO WASHBURN, ND

The Travel Route

The Team met with state officials in Bismarck during the morning of this day (see notes below). Following the meeting, they traveled north on US-83 to the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge at Coleharbor, North Dakota. After visiting the refuge, they retraced their route on US-83 down to Washburn, visiting the North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

- Audubon National Wildlife Refuge
- North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center
- Fort Mandan Park

Trail Routing Opportunities

The travels this first day were within the currently authorized route of the North Country NST and had very little to do with extending the trail westward or otherwise filling the Mid-Continent gap in the Sea-to-Sea Route. However, the challenges of routing the trail through Audubon National Wildlife Refuge (see notes below) and the enthusiasm encountered at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center led the Team to subsequently consider a possible change in the route for the North Country Trail between the McClusky Canal and the trail's western terminus at Lake Sakakawea State Park (see notes for Day 7).

Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

- Meeting with state officials, Bismarck, North Dakota

Attendees:

Doug Prchal, Director, North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department

Arik Spencer, Trails and Lands Coordinator, North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department

Thomas Balzar, Recreation Division Manager, North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department

Bennett Kubischta, Local Government Division, North Dakota Department of Transportation
Valerie Naylor, Superintendent, Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Notes:

- State officials indicated that if they are to be involved in establishing additional trails, they would have to be designated for non-motorized multiple use. In part, this is because the Recreational Trails Fund committee that selects projects is a diverse group representing all types of trail users.
- Senator Conrad might be an ally to extend a trail to Fort Union National Historic Site, but he also is a strong supporter of multiple use trails.
- The Lewis and Clark Legacy Trails initiative of Senator Conrad envisioned routes for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, and canoeing.
- State parks and recreation officials are strongly attached to their status as hosts of the western terminus of the North Country NST at Lake Sakakawea State Park. If the Montana-North Dakota gap in the Sea-to-Sea Route is filled in, they would prefer it be under a different name.
- Utilizing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) lands along Lake Sakakawea may be problematic—the COE has been having discussions with the Three Affiliated Tribes about transferring the lands to them. In areas where the North Dakota Game and Fish Department leases and manages the COE lands along Lake Sakakawea, they will not allow recreational trails.
- The state Department of Transportation is very interested in creating trails along the Missouri River.
- Land survey section lines are still public access ways, but they are not necessarily safe or scenic.
- The northern portions of the Maah Daah Hey Trail might serve as part of the route.
- There is an abandoned railroad right-of-way (RR ROW) between Zap and Killdeer following Spring Creek. (It is shown in the DeLorme atlas.)
- There is an abandoned RR ROW west of Watford City extending to Fairview, Montana. The RR bridge across the Yellowstone River at Fairview has been converted into a pedestrian bridge.

[Note: A subsequent meeting of North Dakota stakeholders in the North Country NST was held in Bismarck on June 23, 2008. Participants reviewed the status of the trail in the state and discussed opportunities for development of additional segments. A further note about this meeting can be found in the narratives for Day Seven.]

- Meeting with Audubon National Wildlife Refuge staff, Coleharbor, North Dakota

Attendees:

Jackie Jacobsen, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Notes:

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service brochure about trails, published by the Washington Office, mentions



that the route of the North Country NST traverses Audubon National Wildlife Refuge.

- The refuge manager's position is that the only acceptable route through refuge is walking the auto tour road. Even a foot trail paralleling the road is unacceptable. This is a dilemma because section 7(c) of the National Trails System Act prohibits motorized use by the general public on any segment of a NST.



- Meeting with North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center staff, Washburn, North Dakota

Attendees:

David Borlaug, President, Lewis and Clark Fort Mandan Foundation

Notes:

- There is a great deal of interest in somehow having the center connected to the North Country NST.
- There are other trails being developed in the local area.
- The Sakakawea Scenic Byway between Washburn and Stanton (Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site) includes plans for a parallel bicycle/pedestrian trail.
- The Foundation would like to establish a pedestrian path connecting the interpretive center with Fort Mandan Park, but to date the intervening landowners have not be willing to consider allowing a trail to traverse their lands.
- North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department is developing water trails along the Missouri River. A water trail from Fort Mandan to Knife River Indian Villages would be an interesting possibility.



DAY TWO—FRIDAY, MAY 19

WASHBURN, ND, TO WILLISTON, ND

The Travel Route

From Washburn, the Team traveled north on US-83 and then west on SR-200 to Garrison Dam, stopping at the wayside and overlook on the east end of the dam, and then visiting Lake Sakakawea State Park on the west side of the dam, the present western terminus of the North Country NST. They then retraced their route on SR-200 to Riverdale, stopping there to meet with U.S. Army Corp of Engineers officials. Following that meeting, they continued east on SR-200, then north on US-83 across Lake Sakakawea. They traveled west on SRs-37, 1804, 37, and

23 to New Town for a meeting with representatives of the Three Affiliated Tribes. They followed SRs-23, 22, 73, 23, and US-85 to Williston, North Dakota.

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

- Garrison Dam, Overlooks, and Recreational Areas
- Lake Sakakawea State Park
- Riverdale parks and trails
- Fort Berthold Indian Reservation
- Four Bears Memorial Park
- Three Affiliated Tribes Museum
- Killdeer Mountain Four Bears Scenic Byway
- Sakakawea Trail System in Watford City

Trail Routing Opportunities

If there is to be a trail or identified route extending westward from the present terminus of the North Country NST, it could go either north or south of Lake Sakakawea reservoir. Fred Baker of the Three Affiliated Tribes recommends a northern route. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) owns the shoreline of Lake Sakakawea and there are some trails on these lands. However, no overall off-road footpath routing opportunity all the way to New Town is readily apparent. Further investigation of the potential for such a route would require extensive consultation with public and private interests on the north side of the lake. Grazing activities on the COE lands would have to be factored into the viability of these lands for additional trail connections. Grazing rights are divided between the COE and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). It would seem a northern route would have to rely on “Connector” routes (road walking) for a long time into the future.

The same situation exists on the COE-owned lands along the south shore of Lake Sakakawea. However, there are some opportunities for a westward trail or route well south of the reservoir. This would require an abrupt southward swing from Lake Sakakawea State Park. However, it would permit the inclusion of another national park area in the route of the trail—Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site. West of Stanton, North Dakota, there are abandoned railroad rights-of-way between Zap and Killdeer, and between Watford City, North Dakota, and Fairview, Montana, with a pedestrian bridge already established over the Yellowstone River just west of Cartwright, North Dakota. Federal lands in the Little Missouri National Grassland could be utilized as part of this route which in turn connects with the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. It may be possible to utilize a portion of the Maah Daah Hey Trail in the park as part of the route. From the North Unit of the park or the Watford City area, a decision would have to be made whether to take the trail/route northward to Williston before proceeding to the three historic sites near the Yellowstone-Missouri Confluence, most notably Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, or whether to take a more direct route to the confluence via Cartwright, bypassing Williston.

Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

- Meeting with Lake Sakakawea State Park staff

The Team visited the park and western terminus sign and met briefly with Park Manager John Tunge. Like the North Dakota Park and Recreation Department staff in Bismarck, he is very proud of anchoring the western end of the North Country NST.



- Meeting with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers staff, Riverdale, North Dakota

Attendees:

Phillip Brown, Lake Manager Garrison Project
Linda Phelps, Park Ranger

Notes:

- The COE owns all the land along the shore of Lake Sakakawea. A lot of it is leased to other agencies, primarily the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, which does not allow recreational trails on these lands. The current projected route for the North Country NST route follows the south shore of the lake between Audubon National Wildlife Refuge and Garrison Dam, but these lands are managed as Wolf Creek Wildlife Management Area and passage for the North Country NST has been denied.
- Within the Fort Berthold Reservation, the land is owned in fee by the COE. However, the 1986 law says that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) manages the grazing rights, except for 9 miles from New Town to Reunion Bay, where grazing is managed by the COE.
- The 1986 law also says that the COE can transfer lands to Interior (BIA), if requested to do so. The Three Affiliated Tribes has requested that the lands be transferred to BIA; it is being considered by the COE.
- The north side of Lake Sakakawea has more trails on the COE lands than those on the south side.
- There are 3 miles of trails in the New Town area.
- While the ND Parks and Recreation Department places heavy emphasis on multiple use trails, the COE's lessees would probably only consider allowing low impact activities, like hiking.

- Meeting at Three Affiliated Tribes Museum, New Town, North Dakota

Attendees:

Richard Mayer, Chief Executive Officer, Three Affiliated Tribes
Fred Baker, Three Affiliated Tribes Museum Board of Directors
Cheryl Kulas, Executive Director, North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission
Scott Eagle, Director of Tourism, Three Affiliated Tribes
Marilyn Hudson, Director, Three Affiliated Tribes Museum

Dawn Charging, State Representative
Dominick Silletti, Attorney, Three Affiliated Tribes

Notes:

- The Tribes are working on planning and establishing trails.
- There is a great deal of interest in cooperating with projects that could tie in with these trails and enhance tourism and stimulate appropriate economic development.
- There are questions and concerns about how to best develop trails through the reservation while ensuring respect for traditional resources. There are a lot of ideas and opportunities, but also challengers in sorting them out and selecting which ones to pursue.
- There are concerns about landowner liability associated with trails. The Team explained that there is a state law limiting landowner liability toward persons recreating on private lands. The also explained provisions of the National Trails System Act which can provide additional liability protection for private landowners.
- There were questions about compensation for easements across properties. The limited authorities for the North Country NST were explained—federal agencies cannot spend funds to acquire lands or easements for the trail. However, Congress has appropriated funds for acquisition of trail lands in Wisconsin which the NPS has granted to partners.

DAY THREE—SATURDAY, MAY 20

WILLISTON, ND, TO GLASGOW, MT

The Travel Route

The Team headed west from Williston on US-2 and then southwest on SR-1804 to visit the Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center, Fort Buford State Historic Site, and Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site. They then retraced their route to Williston. From Williston, they drove west on US-2 until reaching SR-13 west of Poplar, Montana. There they turned south, crossed the Missouri River, and immediately turned west on an unnamed road paralleling the south side of the Missouri River. They followed that road for approximately 40 miles until reaching SR-24 southeast of Fort Peck Dam. They followed SR-24 to Fort Peck Dam, stopping at the visitor center, various overlooks of the dam and lake, and the community of Fort Peck. They then went on to Glasgow, Montana.

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

- Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center
- Fort Buford State Historic Site
- Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site
- Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail



- Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
- Fort Peck Dam and Visitor Center

Trail Routing Opportunities

The cluster of nationally- and state-significant sites at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers and astride the North Dakota-Montana border is itself a compelling reason for extending the route of the North Country NST (or some type of route) at least that far westward from Lake Sakakawea State Park. The joining of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers is one of the most significant confluences on the continent. Fort Union Trading Post emphasizes that importance and provides outstanding historic and cultural educational experiences to visitors.



Between Williston, ND, and Glasgow, Montana, the corridor encompassing US-2 and the Missouri River is the obvious location for a trail extending westward. To the extent that an off-road trail could be established along the Missouri River, or closely paralleling it, to that extent the trail would take users along another national resource—the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail (NHT). Such trails could be considered part of the Lewis and Clark NHT, providing additional recreation opportunities for that national trail while also serving the needs of the Sea-to-Sea Route.

If establishment of off-road trails is not feasible in the near future, consideration could be given to designating portions of US-2 and other roads as “Temporary Connectors.” While US-2 could serve that purpose, other less-used roads, such as the unnamed road the Team followed for nearly 40 miles on the south side of the Missouri River, would provide a more remote experience with far less traffic. Occasional connections to US-2, especially at communities where services and supplies are available, would make the “Temporary Connector” route more attractive to trail users as well as foster a connection between the trail and centers of population in the region.



Unnamed road followed by the Team for 40 miles along the south side of the Missouri River between SR-13 and SR-24 in Montana; Andy Skurka also followed this route on his Sea-to-Sea journey in 2005

Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

- Mayor of Glasgow, Montana

As the Team poured over maps and discussed what they had seen this day (during dinner in Glasgow), their discussions were observed and overheard by the Mayor of Glasgow who, unknown to the Team, was dining at the next table. He came over and introduced himself and asked the Team who they were and what they were doing in the area. The Team explained the purpose of their travels. The mayor was very intrigued with the prospect of a transcontinental hiking trail/route passing through the area. Glasgow being the only community of any size in that area of the state, the mayor said that if some type of route were established through the area, it should come through Glasgow. He expressed his opinion that following US-2, either along the road itself or on a closely paralleling pathway, was the only sensible route in that region of the state since all of the communities where supplies, services, and water could be obtained were along the highway.

DAY FOUR—SUNDAY, MAY 21 GLASGOW, MT, TO GREAT FALLS, MT

The Travel Route

From Glasgow, the Team headed west on US-2 until reaching Malta, Montana. There they turned south-southwest on US-191 until reaching the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Auto Tour Route loop road (consisting of roads NWR-303, 201, and 101) about 1.5 miles south of the



Along US-2 west of Glasgow, Montana

intersection of SR-66. Upon exiting the Auto Tour Route, they again headed south on US-191, crossed the Missouri River, and immediately turned west on the Missouri Breaks Backcountry Byway parallel to the south side of the river. However, this unimproved road proved to be impassable due to repeated deep mud holes from recent rainstorms. The Team returned to US-191 and continued south. At Hilger, they turned north on CR-236. At Winifred, they continued north on the road to the McClelland Ferry to evaluate the landscape and scenery along the south bank of the Missouri River. After reaching the ferry, the Team retraced its route to Winifred and then continued north on CR-236. They again reached the Missouri River, crossed it, and continued north on CR-236 until they reached the community of Big Sandy on US-87. They followed US-87 west to Fort Benton and then Great Falls.



US-191 south of Malta, Montana



Little Rocky Mountains along US-191

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

- Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge
- Little Rocky Mountains
- Nez Perce National Historic Trail
- Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Auto Tour Route
- Missouri River (Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail)
- Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River
- Missouri Breaks National Back Country Byway
- Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument
- McClelland Ferry
- Judith Landing
- Historic Fort Benton
- Lewis and Clark Monument, Fort Benton



Trail Routing Opportunities

As US-2 continues northwestward from Glasgow, Montana, the Missouri River and surrounding public lands of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge are coursing southwestward, thus diverging from each other. If a westward connection was structured around the US-2 corridor, as suggested by several contacts, it could follow US-2 all the way to Glacier National Park and the Continental Divide NST and Pacific Northwest Trail, or it could follow US-2 to Havre, Montana, and then follow the US-87 corridor southwestward to Great Falls, Montana. The points of interest and trail system in Great Falls would argue strongly for the latter alternative.



The Team, however, felt there was even a more compelling alternative, although accompanied by several significant challenges—follow the Missouri River and surrounding publicly-owned wildlife refuge lands southwestward from the vicinity of Glasgow, thereby following the route of the Lewis and Clark NHT. To the extent feasible and possible, the Lewis and Clark NHT should be followed all the way into Great Falls, traversing public lands of the Bureau of Land Management that are part of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and Missouri Breaks National Monument.

Because of the limitations of time, the Team was not able to thoroughly explore the backcountry roads through the wildlife refuge lands. Instead, the Team drove west from Glasgow on US-2

and turned south at Malta on US-191, following it to the Missouri River. Portions of US-191 near the river are included in the route of the Nez Perce NHT. Just north of the river, a refuge auto-tour route provided an opportunity for the Team to explore the terrain of a small area of the backcountry of the refuge along the river. This quickly revealed one of the greatest challenges of the wildlife refuge and river corridor route—the dry conditions and lack of water sources on the uplands, other than occasional stock tanks. However, Andy Skurka managed to traverse these lands during his 2004-05 thru-hike of the Sea-to-Sea Route. Lands down at the river level are not always passable, even for a foot trail. However, near the US-191 crossing, there are public campgrounds and passable terrain along the river.



Upper Missouri River Breaks along the road to McClelland Ferry

West of the US-191 crossing, the Missouri Breaks Backcountry Byway, an unimproved, low traffic road along the river could potentially serve as a scenic part of a “Trail Connector” route utilizing existing roads. However, the conditions of the road prevented the Team from exploring that route and the river corridor more closely. The byway and other unimproved roads along the south side of the river would take hikers to remote public lands within Missouri Breaks National Monument and Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. Whether off-road foot trails are feasible in this area would depend on the terrain along the river; however, the scenery of the Missouri Breaks and White Cliffs would be the reward to the hiker if a trail could be put through these lands. As pointed out in a meeting with state and federal officials in Helena, Montana, the following day, an assessment of the opportunities to establish a hiking trail along the Missouri River could only be made by traveling the river, and that was not possible during this very brief reconnaissance trip. The superlative scenery of this part of Montana and the Missouri River corridor would make a backcountry trail/route through this area a prized destination for backpackers nationally and internationally, and certainly merits further investigation.

Alternatively, or for the foreseeable future, other roads and highways south of the river corridor could serve as “Connector” or temporary routes into Great Falls, or into Fort Benton and then into Great Falls. Local officials and stakeholders could help to identify the best routes in terms of scenery, access to water and services, etc.



Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

There were no meetings this day.

Lewis & Clark Monument, Ft. Benton

DAY FIVE—MONDAY, MAY 22 **GREAT FALLS, MT, TO HELENA, TO GREAT FALLS, MT**

The Travel Route

This day the Team reached the Continental Divide NST, the end of their westward journey. They began the day touring the trails of the city Great Falls and the immediate vicinity, including



those that connect to the U.S. Forest Service's Lewis and Clark NHT Interpretive Center. Following that tour, the Team followed I-15 south to Helena for a meeting with state and federal officials. They returned along I-15 and accessed the old two-lane highway (formerly US-91) in the vicinity of Wolf Creek to get better views of the abandoned railroad right-of-way paralleling the Missouri River between Helena and Great Falls. From Wolf Creek, the Team followed US-287 northwest to Augusta, Montana. At Augusta, the Team turned west on Augusta Ranger Station Road. At the end of the road at the Lewis and Clark National Forest boundary, they continued west on Benchmark Road, FR-235, to its end at a campground and the Benchmark Trailhead of the Continental Divide NST. The Team began their return journey by retracing the route to Augusta and then on to Great Falls via SR-21, US-89, and I-15.

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

- City of Great Falls Trail System
- Black Eagle Falls, Dam, and Park
- Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail
- Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center (U.S. Forest Service)
- Giant Springs State Park
- Rainbow Falls and Dam Overlook Park
- Missouri River Canyon
- Burlington Northern RR ROW
- Lewis and Clark National Forest
- Benchmark Campground and Trailhead
- Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

Trail Routing Opportunities

The city and vicinity of Great Falls has an extensive, well-developed, very scenic bicycle-pedestrian trail system. The River's Edge Trail network takes maximum advantage of the scenery, parks, and natural and cultural resources along the Missouri River as it passes through the present-day city. The Great Falls trail system has benefited greatly from the support provided by Doug Wicks and his non-profit organization: Recreational Trails, Inc. If any type of

route is eventually created across Montana as part of the Sea-to-Sea Route, the city of Great Falls and its trails must be included in that route. Omitting it would deprive users of an opportunity to visit a scenic and historic trail mecca.

From Great Falls, a trail route could go westward along the Sun River corridor to Augusta, a jumping off location for access to national forest lands along the Continental Divide. The Sun River is part of the Lewis and Clark NHT. It was the route traveled by Meriwether Lewis and several expedition members in 1806 as they traveled overland from Travelers Rest (near Missoula) to the Great Falls, while Clark and the rest of the men went southeastward to the Beaverhead River to recover their canoes and supplies cached there.



The other option is to travel southwestward to Helena following the Missouri River as it winds through the Chestnut Valley and the river canyons above the valley. This route is also part of the Lewis and Clark NHT. The route to Helena is potentially feasible primarily because the Burlington Northern Railroad between Great Falls and Helena has been abandoned. The scenery along the river and railroad is spectacular, with numerous bridges and some tunnels. The state is considering its potential as a bicycle-pedestrian trail. If eventually secured by the state and developed as a trail, it could serve as an outstanding segment of the Sea-to-Sea Route, even though less direct than going straight westward from Great Falls to the Continental Divide NST.

If the route via Helena was selected, there are a number of attractions along the way and in the city of Helena. The railroad pulls away from the Missouri River and I-15 near Wolf Creek, but there would be the opportunity for the trail to remain near the river, traversing state and federal lands along the river, including the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness in Helena National Forest. The Gates of the Mountains is a landmark of rock formations along the Missouri River named by Meriwether Lewis in his journal.

From Helena there are a number of possible route options to connect with the Continental Divide NST. The trail is directly west of the city not many miles. Alternatively, routes could be explored that would go northwestward through national forest lands before connecting into the trail, but probably no further north than Benchmark Creek, where the Team accessed the trail after the Helena meeting.



Scenes along Benchmark Road, west of Augusta, Montana



Benchmark Creek and Benchmark Trailhead on the Continental Divide NST, Montana

Benchmark Trailhead turned out to be the same place where Andy Skurka accessed the Continental Divide NST on his 2004-05 thru-hike of the Sea-to-Sea Route. Clare Cain also worked on trails in this vicinity during previous employment in Montana.

Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

- Meeting with Doug Wicks, Director, Recreational Trails, Inc., Great Falls, Montana

Doug provided the Team with an extensive tour of the River's Edge Trail network in Great Falls and the outstanding features associated with it. Clearly, Great Falls and its trail system should be a high priority for inclusion on any route eventually selected through Montana.



- Meeting with state and federal officials, Helena, Montana

Attendees:

Bob Walker, Trails Program Coordinator, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Walt Timmerman, Recreation Bureau Chief, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Steve Gilbert, Non-motorized Trails Specialist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Ray Paige, Motorized Trails Specialist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Pam Langve-Davis, Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, Montana Department of Transportation
 Mike Wherley, Community Transportations Enhancements Program Coordinator,
 Montana Department of Transportation
 John Favro, Region 1 Trails Coordinator, USDA-Forest Service
 Gary Weiner, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service

Notes:

- Evaluation of the potential for trails along the Missouri River will require traveling the river.
- Public ownership of land on the plateaus above the river is not continuous along the river.
- US-2 across Montana is one of Adventure Cycling's designated routes.
- Adventure Cycling is trying to establish a Lewis and Clark Trail bicycling route; they sought Recreational Trails Fund money to develop it, but they do not qualify as a public jurisdiction.
- The state receives 4000 requests annually for information on bicycling in Montana; a Sea-to-Sea Route designated on roads and highways would help create bicycling opportunities.
- There was general agreement that any route must include/connect through Great Falls.
- There are multiple trails extending westward from Great Falls into the Bob Marshall Wilderness and thence to the Continental Divide NST.
- There are trails westward from Augusta and Chouteau connecting to the Continental Divide NST.
- Attendees generally embraced the idea of identifying and designating a North Country Trail Connector route or Side and Connecting Trail as most practicable.
- One participant suggested the assembled group, using BLM maps, could probably identify a possible route right then composed of backcountry roads and other routes connecting communities for re-supply purposes; this could serve as a temporary route while allowing a true off-road footpath/trail to develop over time.
- Bob Walker felt establishment of such a route would be a wonderful accomplishment.
- Others agreed that an option that does not require all of the normal federal planning and environmental analysis would serve the needs of the situation (sparse population, enormous distance, remoteness, terrain lack of water) and be in the best interests of everyone, because there are not going to be enough people to create a separate off-road footpath that would qualify as a NST.
- Asked why more potential stakeholders had not been invited to the meeting, the Team explained that this reconnaissance trip has a very limited purpose—to visually assess routing options at a very cursory level and to ascertain interest and the perspectives of key public stakeholders, and then to synthesize that information into a report.
- The Team will not be suggesting any specific route; that is a next step that would need to involve many other potential public and private partners, assuming there is general support for the concept at this stage.

DAY SIX—TUESDAY, MAY 23

GREAT FALLS, MT, TO WATFORD CITY, ND

The Travel Route

The Team traveled from Great Falls to Lewistown, Montana, via US-87/SR-200 to meet with federal officials there. After the meeting, they followed SR-200 to Fairview, Montana, and on into North Dakota. At US-85, they turned south and east to Watford City.

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

No significant sites or features were noted along US-87 and SR-200.

Trail Routing Opportunities

Numerous abandoned railroad beds were observed along SR-200. Their status and potential as trails routes is unknown. However, the potential of this corridor was viewed as low by the Team because of the absence of sites and features along the route. The big sky scenery is appealing, but there was little variation for many a mile.

There is an abandoned railroad right-of-way between Fairview, Montana, and Cartwright, North Dakota, with a pedestrian bridge already established over the Yellowstone River.

Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

- Meeting with federal land management officials, Lewistown, Montana

Attendees:

June Bailey, Field Manager, Lewistown Field Office, Bureau of Land Management
 Gary Slagel, Manager, Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and Missouri River Breaks National Monument
 Barron Crawford, Project Leader, Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge

Notes:

- Participants were intrigued by the concept of a transcontinental route traversing the lands of the C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Breaks National Monument, and Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, but they all emphasized the remoteness and harsh environment of these lands, particularly in terms of access to water.
- While there are large areas of federal ownership, a continuous route would encounter significant amounts of private land and there are concerns about the feasibility of crossing these lands.
- All of the participants expressed concern about budgetary and workload factors associated with having such a trail on their lands; reduced budgets and staffs are already stretched way

too thin. Even if the NPS could provide the funds to establish wells for water along the trail, the BLM and FWS would not have the staff to take the required monthly water samples.

- If a North Country NST extension was undertaken with NPS and NCTA resources and support, then it might be possible. FWS staff said that if it was left to their agency to implement, then it is likely nothing would happen given current staff and budget constraints. BLM staff does not have the capacity to take on tasks related to the trail, such as installing signs. They have a warehouse full of signs, but no one to put them up.
- Participants felt it would be important to demonstrate that there is interest in using such a route before establishing it, rather than operate under the “if we build it, they will come” philosophy.

DAY SEVEN—WEDNESDAY, MAY 24

WATFORD CITY, ND, TO DETROIT LAKES, MN

The Travel Route

From Watford City, the Team headed south on US-85 to the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. They drove the loop road through the unit, then returned to Watford City on US-85, before turning east and then south following SRs-23, 73, and 22 to Killdeer. There they turned east on SR-200 to Halliday. From there the Team went north and then east on SR-1806, taking a side trip to visit recreation facilities at Beulah Bay. Before reaching Pick City, they turned south on SR-200 and then followed local roads to reach Knife River Indian Village National Historic Site near Stanton. After visiting the site, they followed SR-31 and 200-Alt. to Washburn, stopping once again at the North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center. Traveling south on US-83 brought them to Bismarck. There they picked up I-94 east to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.



Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Unit

Significant Sites and Features Along the Route

- Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Unit
- Killdeer Mountain Four Bears Scenic Byway
- Little Missouri State Primitive Park
- Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge
- Beulah Bay Recreation Site
- Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site
- Sakakawea Scenic Byway
- Fort Clark State Historic Site
- North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center



Killdeer Mountains Four Bears Scenic Byway (State Route 22)

Trail Routing Opportunities

The North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park offers spectacular scenery and would be a highlight of a trail through this area. It may be possible to utilize a portion of the Maah Daah Hey Trail within the park as part of the trail route. Public lands immediately east of the park in Little Missouri National Grasslands and Killdeer Mountains Wildlife Management Area may offer a possible routing opportunity eastward toward Killdeer, where an abandoned railroad right-of-way continues to Zap. Little Missouri State Primitive Park offers camping opportunities in this area, but would be north of the route just described.

Also, north of this alignment, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns the lands along Lake Sakakawea and operates a series of public recreational sites. This may or may not offer a high potential route for a trail. Grazing rights on this land are variously managed and there is a request from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to transfer the COE's lands to their trust on behalf of the Three Affiliated Tribes.



If any routing is workable on the south side of Lake Sakakawea, whether on the lakeshore or south along the State Route 200 corridor, efforts should be made to try to connect to Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site (NHS). This national park area preserves the historic sites of the Mandan and Hidatsa Indian villages occupied at the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and tells the story of their culture and traditions.



Because the managers of Audubon National Wildlife Refuge and Wolf Creek (State) Wildlife Management Area will not allow the establishment of a recreational footpath through these lands, the Team considered other possible trail routes between McClusky Canal and Lake Sakakawea State Park. The most appealing concept involves leaving the canal at a point east or northeast of Washburn, before reaching Lakes Audubon/Sakakawea. A route into Washburn would be designed; local roads could be identified as Temporary Connector routes until an off-road pedestrian trail could be established.

Washburn could function as a “Trail Town,” providing opportunities for lodging, meals, and supplies. The North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and Fort Mandan Park would be outstanding attractions for trail users. The trail could follow the proposed Sakakawea Byway bicycle-pedestrian trail to Stanton and Knife River Indian Villages NHS. The NHS has several miles of existing foot trails along the Missouri River. There are potentially promising opportunities for trails along the west side of the Missouri River northward to Lake Sakakawea

State Park. While there are uncertainties about the viability of this route, the nationally-significant attractions along the route, the potential for a Trail Town, and the certainty that the trail cannot follow the south shore of the Lakes Audubon/Sakakawea make this concept worth further exploration.

Meetings with Officials and Potential Partners

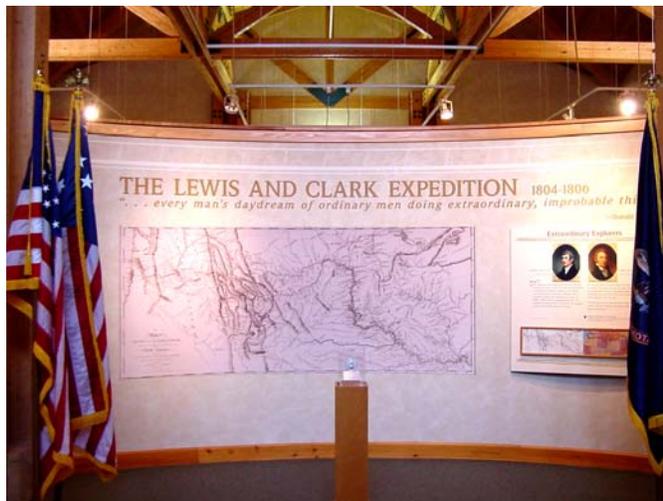
- Meeting with North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center staff, Washburn, North Dakota

Attendees:

David Borlaug, President, Lewis and Clark Fort Mandan Foundation

Notes:

- The Team visited the center to seek the staff's input and reaction to their idea of rerouting the western portion of the North Country NST from the McClusky Canal, through Washburn and Stanton, and then along the west bank of the Missouri River.
- Foundation staff were very interested in the concept, although unsure of the feasibility or alignment of a trail from McClusky Canal into Washburn. They certainly saw value in connecting the interpretive center, Sakakawea Scenic Byway, and Knife River Indian Villages, and the services available in Washburn and Stanton as the final miles of the North Country Trail. They pledged their support if such a change in the route moves forward.



[Note: At a recent meeting in Bismarck, North Dakota, on June 23, 2008, North Country NST stakeholders were generally very enthusiastic about the alternative routing opportunity via Washburn and Stanton. David Borlaug was not able to attend, but Knife River Indian Villages Superintendent Brian McCutcheon was in attendance. His input helped participants understand the viability of taking the trail up the west bank of the Missouri River. State Park Director Doug Prchal expressed his desire that further investigation of this alternative be undertaken. The NPS staff pledged to do so.]

Return to Madison, Wisconsin

On Thursday, May 25, the Team met with the Refuge Manager and staff at Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) northeast of Detroit Lakes concerning how the North Country NST can be routed through the refuge. The issues at Tamarac NWR are very similar to those at Audubon NWR—the staff feels that the north half of the refuge is not legally open to trail development because of Indian treaty rights, and that the only compatible route through the southern half of

the refuge is walking the auto tour route. Following that meeting, the Team drove back to Madison, Wisconsin.



Potential routes for a trail that maximizes the utilization of existing public lands would involve many miles where finding water could be a challenge for trail users.

Options and Analysis

From the discussions with federal, state, local, and tribal officials, there was overall support for some type of trail or route to form a cross-country connection. Opinions on what type of route or trail that could or should be, and whether it should be an extension of the North Country NST or something else, varied greatly.

There are many challenges to be faced, including lack of water, vast distances between communities, many miles of non-public lands, and sparse population to support a volunteer-based effort to establish and maintain the route. However, the Team considered the perspective that the North Country NST already goes through some sparsely populated areas, and that with over 2,000 miles yet to be established, another 750 miles may not seem daunting.

Based on their explorations and discussions with public officials, the Team synthesized the following array of options for bridging the Montana-North Dakota gap in the potential transcontinental Sea-to-Sea Route:

1. Officially extend the North Country NST west to the Continental Divide NST (would require a federal feasibility study and subsequent Congressional reauthorization).
2. Conceptually design and propose a new/different NST with an independent identity to fill the gap (would require a federal feasibility study and subsequent Congressional authorization).
3. Design and designate an overland route as part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, since much of any logical route through this area parallels their Missouri River route or the designated Lewis and Clark Trail highway (US-2). (This would not necessarily require a further feasibility study or expanded Congressional authorization, but perhaps a revision of the trail's management plan.)
4. Identify and designate highways (e.g. US-2), railroad rights-of-way, utility corridors, and other routes as North Country Trail "Connectors."
5. Identify and designate a combination of routes, such as the types mentioned in #4, above, as an official Connecting or Side Trail in the National Trails System as a single entity with a unique identity and trail emblem.
6. Establish and designate a single National Recreation Trail, or series of such trails but proposed as a whole concept, from Lake Sakakawea to the Continental Divide, rather than "just letting it happen." (This would have to happen over a long period of time.)
7. Design, propose, and establish a trail or route named "????", but not associated with or designated as part of the National Trails System at all, consisting of a variety of mapped and/or marked routes.

Additional options could be formulated by combining portions of two or more of the options above. For example, one could consider the possibility of extending the authorized route of the North Country NST westward to Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site and the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers (a segment of Option 1). This would add two national park areas and other outstanding resources to the route of the trail. A route meeting the parameters of Option 4, 5, or 7 could continue westward from there to the Continental Divide NST.

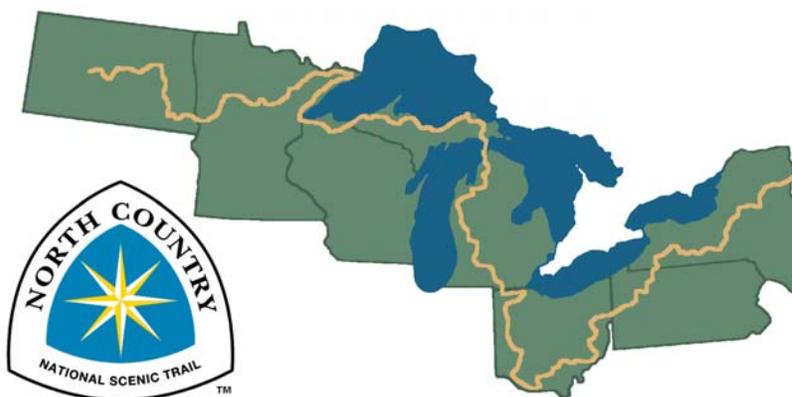
One conclusion of the Team was that any option that is pursued should, in some way at some points, reach and interface with the Missouri River, the route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. It offers such spectacular scenery and cultural interest that some portion of it should be incorporated into the Sea-to-Sea Route.

Discussion, Advantages, and Disadvantages

Option 1—Officially extend the North Country NST west to the Continental Divide NST

Discussion:

This option would lead to the construction of perhaps 750 additional miles of high quality foot trails built, marked, and maintained to the standards and guidelines in the North Country NST *Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*. It would require a federal feasibility study and subsequent Congressional action to revise the description of the western terminus of the trail from a point along the Missouri River in North Dakota to a point of intersection along the Continental Divide NST.



With more than 2,000 miles of North Country NST yet to be established, adding 750 more miles may seem like a daunting task. However, the volunteers to establish and maintain the trail would need to be drawn from the local areas along the trail, just as is the case along the currently-authorized route. Pursuit of this option could include the designation of temporary “Connector” routes (see Option 4) on a long-term interim basis until off-road foot trail segments can be established.

Advantages:

- Developing an extension of the North Country NST through North Dakota and Montana would provide continuity in terms of the type of trail that would make up the overall Sea-to-Sea Route.
- This option would potentially connect three additional NPS sites together via the North Country NST.
- While this option would require Congressional action to authorize the extension, it would not require the creation of another NPS administrative structure for the trail, which would likely be the case with Option 2.
- This option would not require the creation of another non-profit, volunteer partner organization, as would likely be the case with Option 2.

Disadvantages:

- Adding 750 miles of new trail route to the responsibilities of the NPS operation responsible for the North Country NST and to the responsibilities of the North Country Trail Association would require significant amounts of increased public and private resources.
- Volunteers are already scarce in North Dakota compared to the miles of North Country NST to be established and maintained. West of the present terminus and into Montana, the population base from which to draw volunteers is even smaller, and more scattered.

Option 2— Conceptually design and propose a new/different NST with an independent identity to fill the gapDiscussion:

This option would lead to the construction of perhaps 750 miles of high quality foot trails between the western terminus of the North Country NST and a point of intersection with the Continental Divide NST. It would require a federal feasibility study and subsequent Congressional action to authorize it as a NST. It might be named the “High Plains NST” or something else more appropriate.

Advantages:

- Developing a NST through North Dakota and Montana would provide continuity in terms of the type of trail that would make up the overall Sea-to-Sea Route.
- This option would potentially connect three additional NPS sites together via the North Country NST.

Disadvantages:

- Congress might be less likely to authorize a new independent NST than merely authorize an expansion of the North Country NST.
- Compared to Option 1, this option would require the creation of another Federal (NPS?) administrative structure for the trail.
- This option would require the creation and growth of another non-profit, volunteer partner organization to recruit, organize, train, and direct volunteers who would do the work of establishing and maintaining the trail.
- Creating 750 miles of new trail would require significant amounts of public and private resources.
- The population base from which to draw volunteers in western North Dakota and eastern and central Montana is small and scattered.
- A stand-alone new NST may not be as likely to be successful as an extension of the North Country NST.
- A new NST would suffer from a lack of identity more severe than the North Country NST.

Option 3— Design and designate an overland route as part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, since much of any logical route through this area parallels their Missouri River route or the designated Lewis and Clark Trail highway (US-2)

Discussion:

While the category of National Historic Trails was created in 1978 primarily because it was deemed problematic to establish continuous pedestrian trails along many of the historic routes that were studied as potential NSTs, nevertheless creation of foot trails along a NHT is an acceptable way of providing the retracement opportunities encouraged in the National Trails System Act. There are portions of the Lewis and Clark NHT that were proposed in the 1982 comprehensive management plan as footpaths along the Missouri River route of the trail, despite the fact that the expedition primarily traveled by watercraft. Throughout their travels on the Missouri River, Meriwether Lewis (usually) and William Clark (occasionally) walked along the river, as did the expedition's expert hunters, such as George Droulliard.



Creation of walking trails close enough (but not necessarily adjacent) to the Missouri River to be considered part of the Lewis and Clark NHT would not require a federal feasibility study nor Congressional action. It would require amending the trail's general management plan through a public planning process. The outcome would be the same—approximately 750 miles of new high-quality foot trails.



Advantages:

- Developing a high-quality foot trail through North Dakota and Montana would provide continuity in terms of the type of trail that would make up the overall Sea-to-Sea Route.

- The Lewis and Clark NHT is already well-known and widely supported in North Dakota and Montana.
- The route of the trail is already known.
- This option would not require Congressional action to authorize it, but rather a revision to the Lewis and Clark NHT general management plan.
- It would not require the creation of another NPS administrative structure for the trail, which would likely be the case with Option 2.
- This option may not require the creation of another non-profit, volunteer partner organization, assuming the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation would embrace this as part of their mission.

Disadvantages:

- Adding 750 miles of new trail route to the responsibilities of the NPS operation responsible for the Lewis and Clark NHT and to the responsibilities of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation would require significant amounts of increased public and private resources.
- The population base from which to draw volunteers to build and maintain the trail in western North Dakota and eastern and central Montana is small and scattered.
- The river corridor and its terrain offer challenges to creating a continuous hiking route.
- Table lands above the river are dry land farm country; crossing these private lands will be a challenge.

Option 4— Identify and designate highways (e.g. US-2), railroad rights-of-way, utility corridors, and other routes as North Country Trail “Connectors”

Discussion:

This option is similar in concept to Option 1, but assumes that the volunteer and other public and private resources necessary to establish and maintain 750 miles of high-quality foot trails may not be available now or for a long time into the future. Yet it seeks to fill the Sea-to-Sea Route gap in North Dakota and Montana with a route under the auspices and umbrella of the North Country NST. Portions of the currently authorized North Country NST that do not, for some reason, meet the criteria to be “certified” as official segments of the trail are designated as unofficial “Connector” routes. The most frequent situation is the presence of motorized use on the route, such as portions of public roads and highways that make up parts of the overall trail route. This Option is built around this concept.



Trail “Connector” routes are not certified as official segments of the North Country NST, yet because they are components of a continuous North Country Trail route the NPS feels authorized and justified in assisting in their creation, marking, and maintenance. Consequently, for the NPS to feel authorized and justified in expending resources on “Connector” routes west of the trail’s present western terminus, Congressional action would be needed to move the western terminus of the North Country NST west to the Continental Divide in Montana. A federal feasibility study might also be necessary; however, if the intent is merely to identify, designate, and mark “Connector” type routes and not ever build high-quality foot trails, the study and environmental analysis may not need to be as detailed and thorough as for Options 1 and 2.

Advantages:

- Locating a route for the “trail” and gaining access to that route would be significantly easier since the focus of this option is on using existing corridors such as roads, highways, railroad rights-of-way, and utility corridors; contacting hundreds of landowners to secure access across their lands would not be necessary
- The effort required to establish the “trail” would primarily be marking; there would be little need to construct a trail tread
- The amount of volunteer effort needed to merely mark the routes would be significantly less than would be needed to construct high-quality foot trails meeting NST standards
- Trail maintenance would be primarily maintaining the signs and markers
- The cost of establishing and maintaining the trail would be relatively low compared to high-quality, off-road foot trails
- Communities as a source of supplies and services would be more readily available along such a route compared to a more remotely located NST footpath
- Being established under the auspices and umbrella of the North Country NST, there would not be a need for another NPS administrative structure or private volunteer partner organization

Disadvantages:

- Hikers would be walking along roads or other corridors of human impact for several hundred miles, rather than the more scenic and remote routes usually selected for NSTs; while the routes may have degrees of scenic quality, it would be continuously compromised by the contemporary human developments
- The routes hikers would be walking would have safety issues and noise intrusions
- While this option would seem to require Congressional approval to extend the North Country NST, it may become a complicated and even controversial issue if all that is intended is hundreds of miles of “Connectors” (Congress might wonder why the extension is being sought if there is no intention of actually creating NST-quality foot trails)
- Establishing “Connector” type routes might undermine any possible future efforts to “upgrade” the route to high-quality, off-road foot trails

Option 5—Identify and designate a combination of routes, such as the types mentioned in #4, above, as an official Connecting or Side Trail in the National Trails System as a single entity with a unique identity and trail emblem

Discussion:

This Option is nearly identical to Option 4, except for the fact that the “trail” routes would not be established under the auspices and umbrella of the North Country NST. Instead, the routes would be established under the authorities in the National Trails System Act for “Connecting or Side Trails” (sections 3(a)(4) and 6).

The Connecting or Side Trail category has been little used. Only two such trails have been designated since 1968—the first associated with the Ice Age NST and the second associated with the Iditarod NHT. In part, this is because there are no clear definitions or standards concerning the quality or location of such trails. Some presume, therefore, that any route could qualify as a Connecting or Side Trail, and to a large extent they would be correct. If existing roadways (road shoulders) could qualify as Connecting or Side Trails, then the creation of such “trails” really requires little effort. Thus, every road could become a Connecting or Side Trail.

Connecting or Side Trails are not authorized by Congress. They are designated by the Secretary of the Interior, or the Secretary of Agriculture when the trail involves primarily Forest Service lands, upon application from the entity (entities) responsible for the trail.

Advantages:

- Congressional action would not be needed to implement this option
- This option would not involve any compromise of the NST model, since there are no specific qualitative or routing criteria or standards for Connecting or Side Trails
- Connecting or Side Trails are entitled to have their own unique identity and trail emblem
- Locating a route for the “trail” and gaining access to that route would be significantly easier since the focus of this option is on using existing corridors such as roads, highways, railroad rights-of-way, and utility corridors; contacting hundreds of landowners to secure access across their lands would not be necessary
- The effort required to establish the “trail” would primarily be marking; there would be little need to construct a trail tread
- The amount of volunteer effort needed to merely mark the routes would be significantly less than would be needed to construct high-quality foot trails meeting NST standards
- Trail maintenance would be primarily maintaining the signs and markers
- The cost of establishing and maintaining the trail would be relatively low compared to high-quality, off-road foot trails
- Communities as a source of supplies and services would be more readily available along such a route compared to a more remotely located NST footpath

Disadvantages:

- The NPS would not necessarily have any responsibility for helping to establish this “trail” because it would not be under the auspices and umbrella of the North Country NST or any other trail the NPS administers
- An entity or coalition of entities would have to be created to sponsor and establish the “trail” and subsequently apply to the Secretary of the Interior for Connecting or Side Trail designation
- Hikers would be walking along roads or other corridors of human impact for several hundred miles; while the routes may have degrees of scenic quality, it would be continuously compromised by the contemporary human developments
- The routes hikers would be walking would have safety issues and noise intrusions
- No new opportunities would be created; the public can walk along roadways now
- A long-distance trail of this type could be seen as lowering the standards for all other trails and might undermine any possible future efforts to “upgrade” the route to high-quality, off-road foot trails

Option 6— Establish and designate a single National Recreation Trail, or series of such trails but proposed as a whole concept, from Lake Sakakawea to the Continental Divide, rather than “just letting it happen”

Discussion:

Like Connecting or Side Trails, National Recreation Trails (NRTs) are designated by the Secretary of the Interior, or the Secretary of Agriculture where the trail involves primarily Forest Service lands, upon application from the entity responsible for the trail. The criteria for NRTs require that the trail already be in existence and available for public use, so national designation would have to wait until the trail was actually established and marked.



The emphasis in the NRT criteria is on trails that are within 2 hours drive of population centers (urban areas). The criteria also discourage the inclusion of roads in the routes of NRTs, stating that an NRT “should provide a trail experience rather than a road experience, although short segments of roads, generally less than a mile, may be incorporated to ensure connectedness.” Finally, the criteria also state that the location of the trail must “reasonably provide for public safety.” These criteria could pose a challenge to designation of NRTs to fill the Montana-North Dakota gap in the Sea-to-Sea Route. Developing trails to meet NRT criteria could require much more intensive efforts to establish and maintain the routes than Options 4 and 5.

Advantages:

- Congressional action would not be needed to implement this option

- National Recreation Trails are entitled to have their own unique identity, but share a single common trail emblem
- The emphasis on proximity to population centers would tend to favor routes that connect to communities in Montana and North Dakota, which serve as a source of supplies and services
- Segments of the route could be developed and designated over time as local support for another segment developed
- The trails would be marked with a National Trails System emblem

Disadvantages:

- There would be challenges to meeting the criteria for NRT designation
- Roads could not as readily serve as components of a route through Montana and North Dakota under this option compared to Options 4 and 5; emphasis would have to be placed on utilizing existing non-road corridors such as utility and railroad rights-of-way
- The NPS would not necessarily have any responsibility for helping to establish this “trail” because under the NRT program the agency only becomes involved when an application for designating an already-existing trail is received
- An entity or coalition of entities would have to be created to sponsor and establish the “trail” or “trails” and subsequently apply to the Secretary of the Interior for NRT designation
- This option would not necessarily help to establish the Sea-to-Sea Route because it only designates existing trails; the NRT program does not necessarily stimulate the development of new trails or routes

Option 7—Design, propose, and establish a trail or route named “????”, but not associated with or designated as part of the National Trails System at all, consisting of a variety of mapped and/or marked routes

Discussion:

This is the least intensive and most flexible option. It recognizes the challenges associated with establishing routes within the structure, criteria, standards, and procedures of the National Trails System and proposes creation of routes outside of that framework.

This option would not necessarily require that any work be done “on the ground,” although development and/or marking of trails could be included in this option. It would require no more than someone or some entity identifying a route(s) and publishing some maps or descriptions of it. It could be just a set of GPS waypoints—something that helps a Sea-to-Sea Route long-distance hiker find their way western North Dakota and the portion of Montana east of the Continental Divide. The single focus of this option is facilitating transcontinental travel by hikers while not creating any administrative or management burdens on federal, state, or local agencies or on private landowners.

Advantages:

- Congressional action would not be needed to implement this option

- On the ground development and/or marking of trails or routes would not be required
- The amount of effort needed to establish a route could be minimal; route selection could be done with or without fieldwork and the sponsor could decide whether to distribute GPS waypoints or invest time in the creation of maps and/or written descriptions
- Trail maintenance could, in this case, be maintenance of a website with the route information
- This option could be done in a manner that would not require any governmental action at all, except perhaps permission to publish or describe a route across lands they administer

Disadvantages:

- This option may be so weak that it will not actually create a sense of connectedness between the western terminus of the North Country NST in North Dakota and the Continental Divide NST in Montana for Sea-to-Sea Route travelers
- There may be no unifying identity for the trail/route
- It would not be a component of the National Trails System in any way
- There would likely be no overall public agency coordination in the creation of this route; an individual could assemble and publish the route without any public accountability for the quality or safety of the trail/route or assurances that there is legal access to all portions of the route
- Public awareness and understanding of the route could be problematic
- Hikers would likely be walking along roads or other corridors of human impact for several hundred miles; while the routes may have degrees of scenic quality, it would be continuously compromised by the contemporary human developments as well as safety and noise concerns
- A trail or route of this type could be seen as lowering the standards for all other trails and might undermine any possible future efforts to “upgrade” the route to high-quality, off-road foot trails



Missouri River west of US-191, Montana

Next Steps

The NPS' North Country NST office will circulate this report to all relevant stakeholders, including all of the entities and persons with whom the Team met during their reconnaissance trip. It will probably be posted on the NPS North Country NST website (www.nps.gov/noco) and NCTA website (www.northcountrytrail.org). The interest that the report generates will dictate what, if any, further steps may be taken, such as legislation to authorize a feasibility study under the National Trails System Act.

Another next step may be the mapping of specific routes reflecting the array of options enumerated above. This may help the consideration of the pros and cons of these various options. This could be done through exchange of electronic or hard copies of maps or by convening a gathering of key people from among those visited during the Team's trip. The NPS and/or NCTA could retain initiative and coordination of such further work, or it could be handed off to other interests and stakeholders.



Entrance to Fort Union Trading Post, North Dakota