

Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail Completion

By Jim Mallory, Immediate Past President Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation

The National Park Service Special Resources Study Team has created a newsletter dedicated to the Eastern Legacy Study. This Congressional mandated study is gathering public opinion concerning the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail (LCNHT) extension east of the Mississippi River. In addition to reviewing the newsletter responses, the study team will be hosting public hearings in communities along the Eastern corridor of travel use by the Lewis & Clark Expedition. It is extremely important that each member of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation and our friends provide comments concerning this great opportunity. Of course, I hope you will provide a positive statement supporting the action but more importantly, I urge you to make your feelings known, pro or con, to the team of National Park professionals. As part of the report, your comments will be sent to Congress, as the public law authorizing the study required. This is your opportunity to express your opinion on a subject that will be beneficial to the entire Nation. <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/eastern-legacy-srs>

- 1) A completed sea-to-sea trail will tell the full story, including the pre-exploration phase of planning, provisioning and staffing for the expedition. The post exploration phase will explain discoveries made during the epoch journey as they were reported to President Thomas Jefferson and the Nation. Other historical events in our Nation's history are interpreted through the cause-event-effect on our history and the same should be done with the Lewis & Clark story.
- 2) The educational benefits, especially east of the Mississippi River, will be greatly improved in the classroom or out-of-doors settings. There is nothing like the NPS-LCNHT "Two Captains Pointing the Way" Signs to attract the attention of children and adults. This is another resource for teachers in the east, just as it has been in the west for many years. All tools should be made available to enlighten and motivate students of all ages about their history and legacy. Scholars during the past 20 years have found new primary source documents and collections that shed new light on the full story of the Lewis & Clark expedition. It is now time to complete the LCNHT so that everyone can learn the lessons of perseverance, determination, shared responsibility, and respect for their fellowman of all cultures as experienced during the expedition.
- 3) Tourism will be enhanced because of those same "Two Captains" signs through increased communications, publications, and opportunities for volunteers of all ages. A completed trail will be a truly continental trail that leads easterners to see the beautiful western country and western citizens will be enticed to travel east to see original historic building like Monticello, Charlottesville, VA and Historic Locust Grove, Louisville, KY or the White House at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC. These are homes visited by Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and other members of the expedition including York and the Tribal delegations that visited Thomas Jefferson as diplomats from their respective Nations. All of these homes are connected by beautiful vistas along rivers and highways. While traveling the trail in the east, everyone should take advantage of the opportunity to see original documents or material collected during the exploration of the west, including the original hand written Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition housed in the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, PA.

- 4) The health benefits of a trail experience are entwined in points 2 & 3 but have a major impact on all of us. Hiking, canoeing, geocaching or any kinds of out-of-doors experience is beneficial to a healthy life style. I'll spare you my lecture about too much time in front of computer monitors or televisions by just saying, a good brisk 30 minute walk or even better, a ½ day hike along a segment of the trail, in the city or countryside, is good for the mind and body. At this time when our country is struggling with health issues of great magnitude, the trails, especially the LCNHT, need to be available to the entire population of our Nation from coast to coast.

From the prospective of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation this is not an effort to start a new trail but to complete the trail we have devoted ourselves to since 1969. Our Foundation pre dates the Congressional designated Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail by nearly 10 years. We are an out growth of the Lewis & Clark Commission established in 1965, and our Foundation has been involved in trail improvements and education from day one. Our long history of trail advocacy for the good of the entire Nation must go forward. A great Nation deserves great trails, so please join me in providing comments relative to completion of the LCNHT, complete and submit the questionnaire and attend public hearings.