

**Statement by Marge Darby, Chairman of the Advisory Council of Freedom's Way  
Heritage Association to the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest and  
Public Lands on H. R. 1297  
The Freedom's Way National Heritage Area  
July 12, 2007**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to have the opportunity to present our full written statement and supplementary information.

**Introduction**

Freedom's Way is about beginnings – of the America Revolution, and of the evolution of our concepts of liberty, freedom and land use. Freedom's Way was formed to celebrate our unique heritage and to interpret it to keep these important concepts alive to inspire future generations.

The area produced a great number of nationally renowned patriots, writers, environmentalists, thinkers, and visionaries. The legacy of what is often called the American Renaissance is a tradition of discourse about the meaning of freedom, civil and women's rights. It represents the progress of American thought that is intrinsically connected to the landscape. Ideas about liberty, land ownership and usage are the same ideals people everywhere have debated and embraced. This discourse has certainly produced words and actions that have reached far beyond the boundaries of Freedom's Way.

The Freedom's Way Heritage Association (a 501 © 3) began as a handful of citizens and has since grown to represent over 100 regional organizations including 45 cities and towns with a population of about 726,000 in an area covering 994 square miles. We are a truly grass roots initiative, all of our work has been accomplished by a volunteer staff and unpaid Board of Directors.

The legislatures of both the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the State of New Hampshire have seen fit to designate state Freedom's Way Heritage Areas. Now we are seeking your designation.

Freedom's Way fills a need that is not currently being met by any other entity: to provide a regional heritage network. Using real sites and places, we have the capacity to develop educational programs no other region could produce. The area's museums and historical societies stand ready to work under the aegis of a Freedom's Way National Heritage Area by offering thematically connected interpretive programs. We can enhance the story told at the Minute Man National Historic Park by placing it in the context of the larger region.

To illustrate the rich assemblage of resources, we have defined three themes:

**Rediscovering the Native Landscape** is about the land that nurtured and inspired us. It is the story of the changes wrought by the past 300 years and the current efforts to save our rivers and scarce resources.

**Inventing the New England Landscape** describes how the environment became a working landscape and taught us concepts of human survival and land usage. It is about the ways people shaped the landscape to their use and in turn how the landscape shaped their society.

**Shaping the Landscape of Democracy** encompasses the others to show relationships between the growth of our towns and cities and the development of democratic principles.

During more than 100 years before the American Revolution, the people of Freedom's Way came to understand democracy as a way of life. The land was their legacy for future generations. You don't plant an orchard for this generation; its fruits are for those who will farm after you.

In the small towns the job of government fell to generations of ordinary farmers and merchants, not the highly educated and wealthy as in the port cities. During those years the people ably governed themselves, thus strengthening the very American notion of government by the people.

The re-enactments in Lexington and Minute Man National Historic Park every year bring close to 2 million visitors hungry for the spirit that prevails in those towns. We add other places that are part of the American story in the Freedom's Way area. Our historic town centers and paths are hallowed places; they became mustering fields and battlegrounds.

Surely, there is a renewed interest in American history, in our beginnings and our passages. The enormous outpouring of patriotism in 1775 is an emblem of the spirit that has always engulfed our country. Nothing educates better than the real thing.

In 1990, E. L. Doctorow spoke at Walden Woods about great historic and cultural assets in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Emphasizing how the education of an idea requires preservation of its origin, he said,

*"History, composes places, identifies them, locates them in the moral universe, gives them a charged name, makes them resound... as in 'You read the book, now see the place.' We have to be able to take children there to say, 'This is it.... You give them that which is theirs... so they can see where it happened.... Then it is truly meaningful...."*

The concept of National Heritage Areas fosters education about the story of America. We ask that you authorize a Freedom's Way National Heritage Area. The institutions stand ready to supply their interpretive experience and the sites are there to see.

This completes the oral testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions you or any members of the subcommittee may have.

## **Background Data and Information**

*Some of the items in the Feasibility Study and Addendum are no longer current. This supplementary information will correct and update those documents by showing the current status of Freedom's Way and the initiative.*

The Freedom's Way Heritage Area sites represent the possibility of partnerships between all levels of government as well as public and private non-profit organizations.

Many resources offer potential for recognition; some local resources with national importance are unrecognized. The inventory is not finite; it is a work in progress, which the designation will help to refine through theme development.

The expressed priorities of residents and institutions within Freedom's Way have been linkages through education and the preservation of nationally significant resources. Bricks, mortar and paint deteriorate; education is forever. The Association's main goal is an educational effort to accomplish the following:

- To elevate the importance of the region through the national designation and a coordinated educational effort;
- To mobilize communities to build stewardship and cultural/historical connections;
- To develop educational programs through interpretive sites, most of which have educational facilities and staff in place, using the Freedom's Way themes;
- To support local and regional conservation efforts to nurture future land stewards through education;
- To expand current National Park exposure through thematic linkages without acquiring new land.

The plan is to use visitor sites that are already locally or nationally recognized as interpretive centers to increase their exposure through the national designation. By establishing linkages through theme-related efforts, by creating partnerships to further define each institution's focus and eliminate duplication, the goal is to protect precious resources and tell a richer story.

Success will evolve through the recognition that a National Heritage Area designation will increase local pride and encourage efforts toward further protection and preservation and increased local investment.

Each of the participating institutions already has interpretive programs relating to the Freedom's Way themes; but they lack the cohesiveness necessary to tell the entire story. Ten sites have agreed to participate because they recognize the potential of cooperative efforts connected to one over-all endeavor that has been given national recognition. Additional sites may be added during the heritage/resource management plan, provided those sites are capable of addressing the themes. The Minute Man National Historic Park will play an important role in connecting the Freedom's Way themes.

There are four main core areas of focus of cultural heritage sites. Each one has the combined resources of a solid open space component adjacent to or proximate to, a cultural/heritage visitor center. An example is the core of cultural heritage sites that are connected to the theme-related open space and recreational areas at Minute Man National Historic Park and the National Wildlife Refuges in the Concord/Lexington/Lincoln area.

This combination is repeated in three other areas: the central area that includes Fruitlands Museum and the Oxbow NWR, the western area that includes Wachusett Mountain and the Gardner Heritage State Park and the northern area including Nashua and Beaver Brook in New Hampshire.

The concept of the Freedom's Way heritage area has been well defined by a feasibility study, a technical document, a map and the continuing refinement of the themes through additional, ongoing stakeholder meetings and newsletters.

### **Feasibility Study and Addendum**

The Freedom's Way suitability/feasibility study (1997) was completed under the supervision of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management and conducted by ICON architecture, inc.

The proposal fills a need that is not currently being met by any other regional, state or federal agency. John Ott, Director of the Museum of Our National Heritage, states clearly that, "No other organization is doing what Freedom's Way has plans to do." There are no entities available to take on the task of providing a regional network through a national heritage designation to enhance regional educational efforts.

- The study process included hundreds of participants, three public meetings and four monthly newsletters. A steering committee representing a wide-range of interests oversaw the study and public participation. Participants were invited from the general public through published announcements in local papers and through a committee of liaison or contact people representing each town.
- Freedom's Way continued the public participation process through stakeholder meetings, prospective partner breakfasts, a web site, and newsletters. (Since the conclusion of the feasibility study Freedom's Way Heritage Association has continued public presentations and workshops and regularly mailed at least two newsletter/updates per year to over 1,300 residents.)
- Freedom's Way Heritage Association presented the National Park Service with the Feasibility Study Addendum. Through the refinement of the initial feasibility study themes, the current proposal indicates a gradual evolution that has tightened four major themes into three:
  1. **Rediscovering the Native Landscape,**
  2. **Inventing the New England Landscape,**
  3. **Shaping the Landscape of Democracy.**
- Two descriptive map/brochures about Freedom's Way and the "Paths of the Patriots" have been developed and distributed throughout the region. The "Paths of the Patriots" is directly connected to new web site that will feature heritage sites in each town.

### **Area economic picture.**

- From the beginning, we have had the full support of MassDevelopment the Commonwealth entity charged with overseeing the economic development of the Devens communities, their abutters and beyond. All of these communities are in Freedom's Way.

- The region is part of the Rtes 128, 495 and 2 corridors. Population growth in these areas provides increasingly larger communities to help support the initiative.
- The development boom also underscores the importance of designation as a vehicle to assess resources for preservation.

### **Public Support**

**Both state legislatures have signed into law Freedom's Way State Heritage area designations.**

- One hundred percent of the Massachusetts cities and towns wrote letters of support for the designations. In New Hampshire, every community made their support known to their legislators. There are additional individual commitments from Mayors, Town Selectmen, local Commissions and Boards.
- The Board of Directors of Freedom's Way Heritage Area represents more than 12 area institutions and organizations. A community liaison in each town acts as a conduit of information
- Membership in Freedom's Way includes residents, towns, museums, cultural and educational institutions.
- Private non-profits such as Massachusetts Audubon Society, Nashua River Watershed Association, Museum of Our National Heritage, Concord Museum, Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg Historical Society, Lunenburg Historical Society, Fruitlands Museum, Cyrus Dallin Museum, the Beaver Brook Association and many others have expressed support.
- There are eight Chambers of Commerce and additional businesses and business organizations in support of this initiative.

A broad cross-section of residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and governmental agencies have participated in Freedom's Way area activities and have demonstrated continued strong support for the designation.

- Over the years Freedom's Way Heritage Association has been bringing together representatives of the area's business, and the public and private sector.
- The Freedom's Way Board is comprised of representatives of the following entities: Chambers of Commerce, regional environmental organizations, area museums, regional planning commissions, mayoral appointees, businesses, Native Americans and African Americans, Historical Societies, local historians, federal land managers, farmers, local community non-profits, local boards, and trails advocates.
- Having established working relationships with many public and private not-for-profit entities, through stakeholder and partnership meetings, Freedom's Way continues to refine roles of all participants. Museums and cultural institutions have already stated that they consider that a primary role of Freedom's Way is as a clearinghouse and communications resource. The main request to date is for FWHA to facilitate linkages and partnerships to strengthen their roles in local issues.

- The legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts appropriated the funding for the Feasibility Study. Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, with a matching grant from MassDevelopment helped produce the Freedom's Way Map. MassDevelopment also supplied facilities, resources and utilities.
- The federally required resources management plan will help to identify additional financial resources.
- Freedom's Way has developed a list of major corporate entities. The association is actively seeking corporate support. Partnerships with these companies and many more will be explored in depth.

### **The Opportunities**

Freedom's Way reflects a valuable part of the national story. Evidence and examples of early traditions, customs, and beliefs exist within the region. Told by local museums, these stories lack the cohesiveness a National Heritage Area designation can bring. These include:

- Examples of evidence of Native American life such as Eliot's Praying Village of Nashoba, and archaeological digs.
- Towns that were founded before the Revolutionary War. Many were in existence for more than 100 years prior to that war, and townspeople had already developed their own concepts of freedom and governance.
- Village life focused around common property and interdependence as a process for town development. Early settlers shared clay quarries, slate quarries. Village clusters housed residents, and the outlying fields supported their crops and livestock. The shared efforts were practical.
- The thinking of a citizenry accustomed to self-governance and independence is linked to freedom. Town Meeting form of government is still actively practiced in its purest form.
- Shakers, Transcendentalists, Millerites, African American, Native American, early tri-racial and other ethnic communities experimented in ways of living.
- Examples of the continuation of the earliest national efforts at conservation as well as the evolution of democracy offer a unique educational opportunity to teach how old ideas can still stimulate new actions. Henry David Thoreau, Benton MacKaye, Marion Stoddart are part of a regional ethos that has fostered a local concept in sustainable development efforts.

The three themes will provide the framework for conservation opportunities:

- The rediscovered landscape combines the concept of preserving the natural and native landscape with the conservation movement. It is still possible to walk from the Town of Westford to Concord through a wild and natural landscape as described in John Hansen Mitchell's book "Walking Toward Walden." Thoreau's "Walk to Wachusett" can still be accomplished with only a few present day interruptions. But the old growth forest on Mt Wachusett faces the threat of destruction. The Nashua River has been partially cleaned, but the regions' rivers still battle pollution.

- By developing a network of educational opportunities through thematic connections, future stewards of the land will emerge.
- Opportunities for conservation through linkages between organizations have already been identified: Communities Connected by Water, Nashua River Watershed Association, Sudbury Valley Trustees, Land Trust Alliance, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Massachusetts Audubon, local Conservation Trusts, Municipal Conservation Commissions, US Fish and Wildlife, and local conservation commission land managers.
- Cultural and historic sites offer unique opportunities to teach conservation and preservation: area museums, National Historic Landscapes, National Historic Sites, Shaker Villages, Town centers, churches, and town commons are only a few.
- Business partners express quality of life issues as a shared concern. There is an additional strong interest in brownfields, old building adaptations and other smart growth initiatives relating to heritage development.
- The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation offered Freedom's Way communities the opportunity to identify their heritage landscapes and 22 were selected to participate. (The Town of Hollis, New Hampshire, is to be commended for conducting its own survey using only volunteers.) Freedom's Way will continue this program for the remaining communities. The second step will be to help the towns pull these reports together and plan as a region. The Freedom's Way linkages will help towns to recognize the value of a regional preservation effort.

**Recreational and educational opportunities are abundant.**

- The Map shows there are existing recreational and educational opportunities. By thematic connection the opportunity for enhancing use of these sites is exponential.
- Massachusetts sites begin 30 minutes from Boston, and the New Hampshire sites are one hour away. This indicates the strong potential for use by major city residents and foreign visitors.
- The Map/Brochure shows how the sites can be integrated as part of the interpretation of the themes. There is at least one major recreational area paired with each cultural/heritage site.
- The Feasibility Study Summary and Technical Report list the inventory of significant sites. This inventory will be expanded during the required process of preparing a heritage resources study.
- Sites are: federal lands and state parks, educational/interpretive centers, local historical societies, regional colleges, public schools, and museum schools.

**Important resources connected to the identified themes of the area uniquely capable of supporting interpretation.**

- The themes reinforce each other and provide a method for viewing the region to maintain integrity of place.

- The educational efforts are important. This is an ideal place to teach conservation and democracy. The resources for such an effort are strong: museums, open land, interpretive centers.
- The proposed Interpretive Centers are stable, substantial, and well organized. Such centers already in existence give ample opportunity for establishing and enhancing mutually beneficial relationships.

**Commitment.**

The proposed management entity and units of government supporting the designation are willing to commit to working in partnership to develop the heritage area

- A MinuteMan National Park representative attended feasibility study meetings. Additional involvement will have to be worked out. The Superintendent of Minute Man National Park has suggested creating the position of Site Steward on the Freedom’s Way Board.
- One missing piece is that the federal heritage designation will permit further participation of the National Park Service and a working relationship with Minute Man National Park.
- Mass Development Agency, Mass Department of Environmental Management, Wildlife, Regional Planning Commissions, and US Fish Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism are all committed to supporting the designation.
- Many municipalities have joined as contributing members of Freedom’s Way.
- The composition of the board of FWHA has been expanded and may be expanded further to accomplish stronger relationships between important entities.
- At least three levels of government have offered potential headquarters for Freedom’s Way. MinuteMan National Park suggested use of one of the unoccupied historic houses in the park. U.S. Fish and Wildlife has discussed the possibility of including offices for Freedom’s Way in their proposed visitor center at the Oxbow National Wildlife Reserve, and MassDevelopment currently provides office space without fee.
- MassDevelopment has made a major contribution in addition to providing the office space for Freedom’s Way: the donation of office furniture and utilities and a matching grant for the Map/brochure. Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce provides office assistance.

**The Freedom’s Way Heritage Association is ready to act as the management entity as described in the legislation.**

- Freedom’s Way has already shown its willingness to adapt, expand and improve its structure to adjust to required changes.
- The Freedom’s Way themes are an expression of residents’ definition of themselves and their communities and will become the basis for all future action plans.
- Any federal money will be used for this major regional effort by helping the communities to find ways to develop their own linkages through participation and cooperative partnerships. We will:

1. Focus on the three main themes in order to teach about and connect the major trails that will be marked.
2. Improve both the usage and meaning of significant sites within the trails through interpretation;
3. Develop an educational curriculum based within the community to benefit teachers, children, visitors, and residents;
4. Bring increased recognition to Minute Man National Park as well as the regional museums through the benefit of a broader based effort;
5. Connect to the National Park Service nation-wide heritage themes to gain additional linkages and exposure through the stories that relate to the Freedom's Way themes. It is an advantage to connect the telling of the entire story of American Democracy through each region's participation.
6. Link major federal land protection efforts with historic and cultural themes adding synergy and broader exposure to the efforts of two Department of the Interior services.
7. Act as a clearinghouse, or regional resource to help communities learn the methods for land preservation and conservation that are available to them through a regional educational program focused on town planning issues relating to sustainability.
8. Cultivate a working relationship with educational institutions of higher learning.

**Freedom's Way Goals:**

Following designation, a cultural resource study and a detailed management plan will be developed and submitted to the Secretary of the Interior, as required. The purpose will be to support the work of regional educational and planning entities, focusing on a regional approach. Long-term by products will be more livable communities, and more sustainable development. Tourism and its economic benefits are an anticipated byproduct, although not a goal.

Thank you again, for this opportunity to present this material to you.

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