

Legislation introduced— Iditarod Nat'l Historic Trail

WASHINGTON—Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, recently introduced legislation to designate approximately 1,600 miles of historic routes between Seward and Nome, Alaska as the Iditarod National Historic Trail within the National Trail System.

The bill would establish a new category for historic trails and provide national recognition for the annual Iditarod Race from Anchorage to Nome, started in 1967 as "the biggest and best sled dog race of all time" to commemorate the Alaska Purchase Centennial Year.

Gravel said, in a prepared statement accompanying his bill, that the bicentennial year, when "all Americans are learning and relearning, affirming and reaffirming the lessons and inspirations" of the nation's history, is an appropriate time to amend the National Trails System Act to include historic trails as well as scenic and recreational ones.

"The Iditarod Trail is one of these, connecting the fabulous gold fields of the Iditarod River with the town of Seward on Resurrection Bay to the south, northward to Nome on the Bering Sea," Gravel said.

The Alaska lawmaker was in Nome in late March as some of the 1976 Iditarod mushers crossed the finish line of the 1,049 mile race. Gravel met with Joe Reddington, Sr., father of the race, who discussed details of the legislation with him. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, is cosponsoring the bill.

The Bureau of Outdoor

Recreation has already made a study of the Iditarod routes, which comprise a network of trails. Gravel said in his statement that this network is known to have been used in 1794 by the English explorer Vancouver, who reported that a portage route he traveled had earlier been used by Russian fur traders and, for several hundred years before that, by Alaskan Natives.

Gravel pointed out that the demand for the long distance trails into the Interior of Alaska began with the gold rush at the turn of the century. Work was started to mark a trail that could link the Iditarod gold fields to the two ports at Seward and Nome.

Gravel noted that the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, in its report on the trail, concluded that "the entire Seward-Nome route including appropriate branch, alternate, and Iditarod sled dog race routes and related sites, should be designated as a National Historic trail within the National Trail System."

The late Sen. Ernest Gruening, D-Alaska, would have cheered this recommendation, Gravel said, because he had requested "further study of Alaskan gold rush trails for future development of a nationwide trail system" nine years ago.

Gravel proposed that the National Trails Systems Act be amended to include historic trails and the Iditarod be the first one designated.

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*Candidates should understand that due to the extreme distances involved, personal interviews will be limited; for this reason candidates are encouraged to submit a complete and detailed resume and/or other credentials.

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