



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

July 1, 2003

S. 651

National Trails System Willing Seller Act

*As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
on June 25, 2003*

S. 651 would amend the National Trails System Act to allow the federal government to purchase land from willing sellers for nine of the 23 national trails currently in the system. Under current law, federal agencies are not authorized to spend funds to acquire land for these nine trails that is outside of existing federal areas such as national forests or parks. (An exception to this prohibition is that one site in each state crossed by each trail may be acquired for an interpretive site.)

The costs of implementing S. 651 are uncertain because the federal agencies that administer the national trails have not completed land protection plans for most of the trails that would be affected by the legislation. CBO expects that relatively little land along the nearly 19,000 miles composing the nine trails would be acquired because most land can probably be protected in other ways, as it is for most other trails in the system. Under the bill, total acquisition costs could be significant, however, because some of the longest trails would probably require large areas to be purchased. For example, land acquisition for multistate trails such as the 3,200-mile North Country National Scenic Trail could cost over \$100 million, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts. For some of the shorter trails, costs would be much lower. For example, trails located primarily on state or federal lands, such as the Iditarod National Historic Trail in Alaska, would probably require few or no purchases. In any case, all acquisition funding would be subject to the appropriation of the necessary amounts and would be spent over a period of several years. This estimate is based on information provided by the National Park Service and the Forest Service, which administer most of the national trails affected by the bill.

Of the other 14 existing national trails (not covered by this legislation), only the Appalachian National Scenic Trail has ever received significant appropriated funds for land acquisition (almost \$230 million to date); other trails have been protected by other methods, including state acquisition, cooperative agreements with landowners, and inclusion in other federally administered areas.

S. 651 would not affect direct spending or revenues. The bill contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would have no significant impact on the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Deborah Reis. The estimate was approved by Paul R. Cullinan, Chief for the Human Resources Estimates Unit of the Budget Analysis Division.