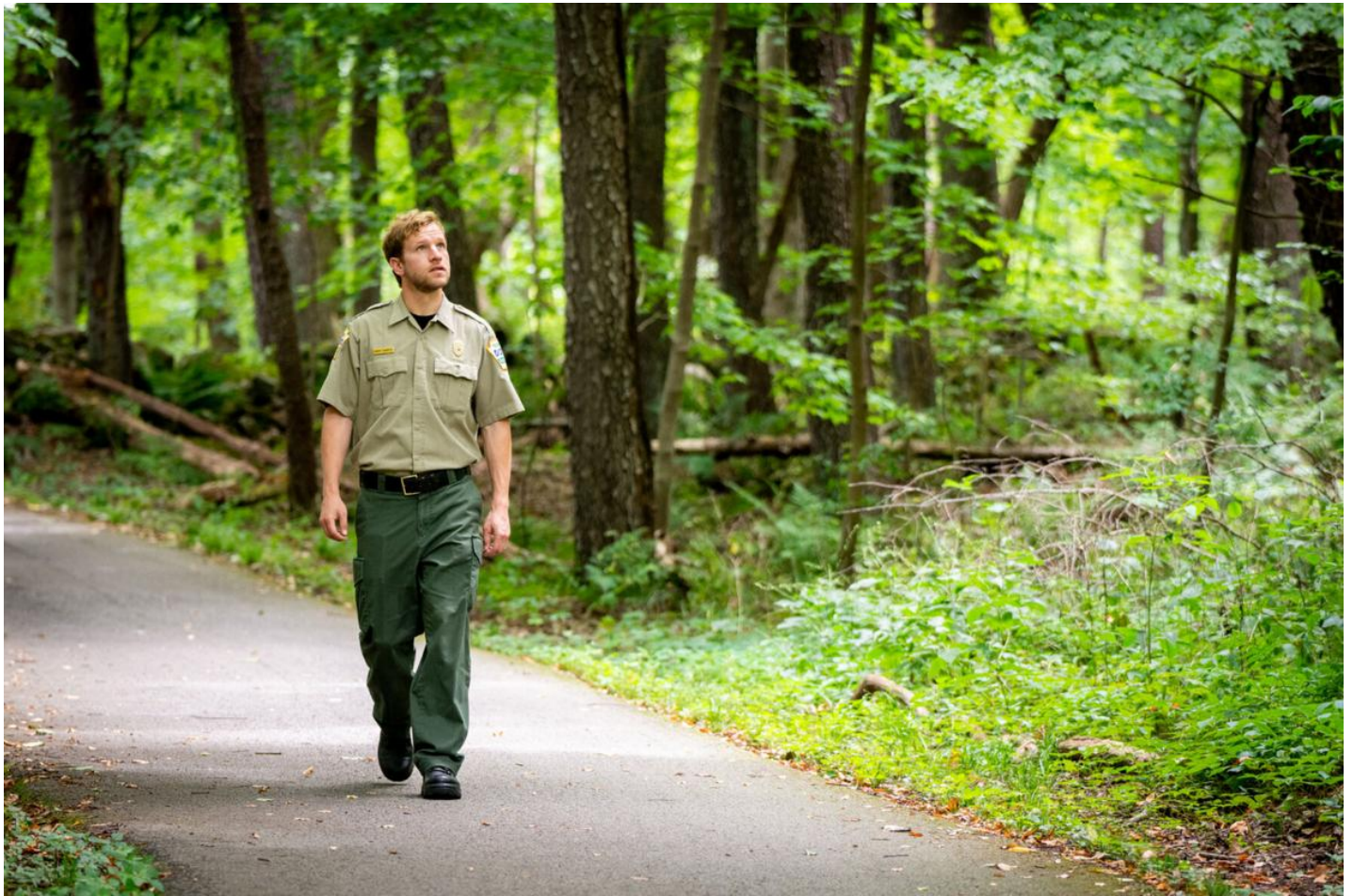


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## GUEST VIEW: 'Washington's Trail - 1753' deserves official historical recognition

Jan 24, 2024



Maurice K. Goddard Park Manager Mark Scarpitti walks a trail in 2020 at the state park in Sandy Lake. The park's website says the area was first noted in reports made by George Washington during his trip to Fort LeBoeuf in 1753.

TANNER MONDOK | Herald file



IN October 1753, 21-year-old George Washington set off from Williamsburg, Va., on a mission to deliver an ultimatum to French forces at Fort Le Boeuf in present-day Erie County.

Washington's route took him through Alexandria, Va., Cumberland, Md. and the Forks of the Ohio — pre-Fort Duquesne — a thousand-mile round trip.

This expedition was the first, but perhaps least famous, of Washington's treks across the Alleghenies to what is now Pennsylvania. A consortium of Pennsylvania and West Virginia members of Congress, led by U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Butler, want to elevate this episode's importance by designating Washington's route as a National Historic Trail (NHT).

There are currently 21 such trails, most of which commemorate western expansion, while others mark Revolutionary-era or earlier paths.

It's a move that would make available federal resources to improve and market the route, and destinations along it, particularly in Pennsylvania where the trail is already signed and supported by a private organization. Congress should approve the bill directing the Department of the Interior to conduct a "feasibility study" on the route's suitability as an NHT.

Pittsburgh-area drivers may recognize the round blue signs, featuring a white silhouette of the first president, labeled Washington's Trail — 1753. The driving trail roughly follows Washington's route along what became the National Road in Somerset and Fayette counties, north to Greensburg then west to the Point.

From there, it goes up the Ohio River to the Native American settlement of Logstown, near Baden; north to Moraine State Park then along Route 8 to the Allegheny River at Franklin; then parallel to French Creek to Meadville and Waterford, where Fort Le Boeuf once stood.

The organization Washington's Trail — 1753 was founded in 2000 to promote knowledge of this historic moment, and sites along the route. The group now partners with a dozen regional tourism agencies, and is said to be responsible for a modest boost in tourism spending in Butler County.

A National Historic Trails designation would supercharge that impact, which now measures in the tens of thousands, possibly to the millions.

Nearly a decade ago, Kelly, who represents Mercer County in Congress, requested a “reconnaissance survey” from the National Park Service, the purpose of which is to preliminarily determine how a proposed trail would perform in a full “feasibility study.” (Everything in government is more complicated than you'd expect.)

The tedious 73-page survey report determined that Washington's Trail — 1753 would only fulfill one of three mandated criteria for an NHT. The criteria, however, are vague, and the report's arguments unconvincing. As with so many bureaucratic determinations, it easily could have gone the other way, and Congress should not be discouraged.

If, however, the federal recognition route fails, we hope state lawmakers will take up the cause. The commonwealth's portion of Washington's Trail — 1753 could, and should, be considered for inclusion as a Pennsylvania Trail of History.

No matter how it happens, the route of Washington's trek to Fort Le Boeuf deserves official recognition to boost knowledge of this fascinating historical episode — and tourism in Western Pennsylvania.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette | AP

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