

Request: Use the name *Great Western Trail* as the officially designated name for the National Historic Trail name, not *Western Trail*

Deadline for comment: March 6, 2015.

Post comments: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=30803>

Why? The *Great Western Trail*, the last nineteenth-century cattle trail originating in Texas, was the longest, carried more cattle (millions), lasted the most number of years, but the least known cattle trail. It lived in the shadow of the Hollywood-famous Chisholm Trail to the east. This two-thousand-mile trail had many names, but the name *Great Western Trail* has been commonly used for years by historians and other people referring to the complete trail. In 2003 a grass-roots effort was made to recover its path and its past by placing *Great Western Trail* markers to secure its future. Hundreds of people from Mexico, across nine U.S. states, and into Canada dedicated and placed *Great Western Trail* posts on the trail in their states and provinces to commemorate the trail as the *Great Western Trail*.



The *Great Western Trail* group who marked the trail joined with *Chisholm Trail* friends to successfully request the two trails be considered for designation as National Historic Trails only to discover when the feasibility draft study was released for comment, the framers of the draft recommended another name for the *Great Western Trail*.

The Congressional Feasibility Study to consider designating two Texas cattle trails, the *Chisholm Trail* and the *Great Western Trail*, as National Historic Trails is of major historical importance. It will highlight a period of time that changed America's culture, economy, and ideology. The comment period gives individuals a voice in the approval of the content of the extensive research study and its conclusions that will ultimately become the "verified" history of the two trails. Much praise is to be given to the historians who led and prepared this study.

However, the draft study says, "The name 'Great Western' does not have strong historical associations. National Park Service (NPS) and independent research has led to an understanding that the 'Great Western' trail should be more appropriately referred to as the 'Western Trail.'"

That idea, while well-intended, is the same as saying the *Chisholm Trail* should be referred to as the *Eastern Trail*, a name once used for it. The name of the *Chisholm Trail* in Texas was highly disputed for years, but it is now known as the *Chisholm Trail*. Eventually like the *Chisholm Trail*, common usage of the name *Great Western Trail*, has become the name used by citizens along the trail to reference the longest trail.

The *Great Western Trail* has suffered from lack of academic research and continuing confusion about its name: it was like a bandit changing its name everywhere it went. The drovers used the next supply point for the name of the trail. *Western Trail* is only one of many names used for segments of the two-thousand-mile *Great Western Trail*. A study of the misinformation and even manipulation of its name would make a significant historical study.

Only two *Great Western Trail* scholars have focused on significant, detailed research seeking the path of the trail and documenting it. Jimmy Marion Skaggs's 1962 thesis, *The Great Western Cattle Trail to Dodge City, Kansas*, used *Great Western Trail* in its title. Gary Kraisinger's *Great Western Trail* maps documented the trail from the Rio Grande River on the border with Mexico across nine U.S. states into two provinces of Canada. Other sources have limited research on the trail with some tending to be generic, repetitious, even inaccurate.

The name *Great Western Trail* has been used for years by people living near or on the land the trail crossed. The name has gained common usage among people who do not live on the trail. In a surge of interest to recognize the largest and longest cattle trail, a grass-roots effort started in 2003 and continues today. The commonly used name *Great Western Trail* was used, without question, when metal molds were welded to make seven-foot cement posts with red letters: *Great Western Trail* to identify the path of the almost forgotten trail.

The posts that weigh 225 pounds were placed across Texas and Oklahoma approximately every six miles along 620 miles in Texas using the standard established in Oklahoma. Some 160 *Great Western Trail* posts stand today in those two states. Other trail states learned of the project and requested the Texans and Oklahomans to come north to their states to help them dedicate markers.

Great Western Trail molds were made and given to each state and Canada to continue the project of making posts to identify the path of the *Great Western Trail* in their states and provinces. Dedication ceremonies were held in each of nine U.S. states except one Wyoming (which is in process), in Matamoros, Mexico, Regina and Val Marie, Saskatchewan, Canada. Trail teams from the other states

participated in the dedications to emphasize the importance of preserving the history of the *Great Western Trail*.

All of the *Great Western Trail* posts were handmade at no cost to the Government. If the name is changed, that will create a significant problem to rename the posts with no guarantee that volunteers would be willing to redo this very time-consuming (12 years) expensive job, not only to reconstruct the posts, but to actually dig the other ones up and put new ones in with the name changed from *Great Western Trail* to *Western Trail*. *Great Western Trail* poems and award-winning songs written for post dedication ceremonies will no longer be valid.

This grass-roots effort to mark the path of the *Great Western Trail* from northern Mexico across nine U.S. states into two provinces in Canada was and is a twenty-first century history-making trail effort along with identifying the path of the nineteenth-century cattle trail. Rotary International, a service club, provided a network that made the unimaginable research project along the some two-thousand-mile path of the trail possible. More than eight-hundred volunteers participated in the trail research and self-funded travel to *Great Western Trail* post dedications. Today, *Great Western Trail* posts stand in Mexico, across South Texas, the Great Plains states, and Canada on courthouse lawns, at museums, in parks, at the gates of trail ranches, and along highways that were originally defined by the trail.

Great Western Trail posts identify the trail in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming (work in progress), and Saskatchewan, Canada. All of these states had dedication ceremonies to raise the awareness of the *Great Western Trail*. Elected national, state, and local officials participated in the dedications. Resolutions using *Great Western Trail* from congressional representatives and senators, state governors, and mayors were exchanged among the states at dedications along with resolutions from Mexico and Canada. These framed resolutions using the name of the *Great Western Trail* are hanging in national and state offices including offices of Rotary International presidents, strong historical associations.

The state of Texas recognized an Oklahoma senator and his wife on the floor of the House and the Senate along with some 50 people in the gallery for their work starting the "Marking of the Great Western Trail." Again the name, *Great Western Trail* was used. A *Great Western Trail* exhibit was placed in the lower rotunda of the Texas Capitol for a week. Again, *Great Western Trail* was used. Again, strong historical associations.

In North Dakota, the Governor (now a United States Senator) dedicated the *Great Western Trail* post. In Saskatchewan, a *Great Western Trail* post was dedicated at the entrance of the Canadian Western Agribition Center, which is the second largest livestock show in North America with some 150,000 people passing by the *Great Western Trail* post that acknowledges the importance of the trail that brought longhorns from South Texas to stock their open-range ranches.

The Rotary International President participated in the Montana *Great Western Trail* dedication. He invited Rotarians from Mexico, the U.S., and Canada to participate in an international good-will meeting at a *Great Western Trail* post on the southern border to acknowledge the sense of community and the international camaraderie resulting from Rotarians' efforts to permanently identify the path of the *Great Western Trail* with tangible evidence, the white posts with red letters, strong historical associations.

The name *Great Western Trail* was used in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111.11) Sec. 5303. Chisholm Trail and ***Great Western*** Trails Studies, which authorized the Congressional Feasibility Study for designating the two trails as National Historic Trails, strong historical association. The name *Great Western Trail* was used in the title of the *Draft Chisholm and Great Western National Historic Trail Feasibility Study/Environmental Assessment* that says that the name must be *Western Trail*. Congress has already shown the name of the *Great Western Trail* to have strong historical associations by selecting that name to be used in the title of the Bill that requested the study. The title of the draft study shows that to capture the attention of the general public, it chose the name in common usage by the general public, the *Great Western Trail*, a strong historical association among grass-roots people, historians, and Congress.

On May 16, 2012, in Washington, D.C. at the Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board meeting, Dr. Frank Norris, research historian for the Study from the National Long Distance Trails, Intermountain Region, Santa Fe, NM, presented a well-documented case for the two trails becoming National Historic Trails. The committee, composed of various cultural-resource professionals from across the nation, scrutinized the proposal for national significance. Dr. Norris introduced to the committee a member of the *Great Western Trail* grass-roots research project. Committee members responded enthusiastically to the explanation of the goals for the grass-roots *Great Western Trail* research project. Several of the committee members expressed interest in this unique endeavor. The committee members gave positive reinforcement to Dr. Norris for his proposal and voted unanimously to forward the proposal to the next level. If the name of the *Great Western Trail* is changed to *Western Trail*, this “unique endeavor” to raise from obscurity the name and path of the *Great Western Trail* will be negated. Once again, the *Great Western Trail* will lose its identity.

These examples, showing strong historical associations, acknowledge the efforts of hundreds of people who identified the path of the *Great Western Trail* and in so doing, they joined together with *Chisholm Trail* friends to contact their congressional elected officials to approve a feasibility study to recognize the *Chisholm Trail* and the *Great Western Trail* as National Historic Trails.

These trails are living history trails that continue to contribute to the cultural, economic, and ideological significant of a vast area across America. The marking of the *Great Western Trail* project is of significant cultural, economic, and ideological importance. **The trail’s name should not be lost to history by an effort to preserve its history, designating it as a National Historic Trail.**

If the Draft is approved as it is, the established identity of the ***Great Western Trail*** will once again be confused with yet another name, *Western Trail*. All the *Great Western Trail* posts along the two-thousand-mile trail will cause confusion; the name of the *National Great Western Cattle Trail Association* and the state organizations will cause confusion.

Please make your voice heard by taking time to go to the Comment Box to request: **Use the name *Great Western Trail*, not *Western Trail*, for the official name to be presented in the final draft to Congress.** If you wish, use some of the reasons that you found in this document to support your request.

The name used by hundreds of grass-roots people in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, Congress, Rotarians, Historical Societies, elected officials, and trail fans should be considered in determining the official name to be presented to Congress. If *Great Western Trail* is not used, the

general public will not recognize what trail is being recognized, just as the *Chisholm Trail* people would not recognize it if *Eastern Trail* was used.

Make a difference in *Great Western Trail* history; go online, look to the left, click open for comment, click *Draft Chisholm and Great Western Feasibility and Environmental Assessment*, click comment now. Thank you for being a voice for the name of the *Great Western Trail*.

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Help, Sylvia Gann Mahoney, Vernon, Texas, Rotary co-chairman, "Marking the *Great Western Trail*"