

**Testimony of the Honorable Frank A. LoBiondo
New Jersey – 2nd District**

**Hearing on H.R. 1815, To Extend the Authorization for the Coastal Heritage Trail in the
State of New Jersey**

**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources**

July 12, 2007

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Subcommittee:

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for taking this opportunity to learn more about the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route and the importance of ensuring its continuation. In particular, I would like to thank Rep. Rush Holt and his staff for their continued assistance and support. I would also like to thank Meghan Wren, Executive Director, Bayshore Discovery Project for her testimony today. It is the dedication of individuals like Meghan which have allowed for the Trail to succeed in educating and sharing the history and unique value of this special area.

Established by Congress in 1988, the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail incorporates the very best of what the great state of New Jersey has to offer to the rest of the Nation. The Trail unifies New Jersey's many scenic points of interest. These points of interest include a wealth of environmental, historic, maritime and recreational sights found along New Jersey's coastline, stretching 300 miles from Perth Amboy in the north, Cape May in the extreme southern tip of the State and Deepwater to the west.

The Trail's area includes three National Wildlife Refuges, four tributaries of a Wild and Scenic River system, a Civil War fort and National cemetery, several lighthouses, historic homes, and other sites tied to southern New Jersey's maritime history. Through a network of themes and destinations, the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail connects people with places of historic, recreational, environmental and maritime interest.

One exciting aspect of the Trail is its focus on maritime history. There is a rich story to be told about the industries once sustained by the Delaware Bay, such as whaling, shipbuilding, crabbing and the harvesting of oysters. While we often define our Nation's history through military or political milestones, the Trail will serve to remind visitors that maritime-dependent commerce was a major factor in the growth of the United States.

"Eco-tourism" along the Trail has proven to be a huge success. There is an abundant variety of natural habitats and species to be found on the Trail. Whale and dolphin watching have become extremely popular, and bird lovers from throughout the country, and in fact around the world, are realizing what Southern New Jersey residents have known all along: our region is unmatched for observing migratory birds, ospreys and bald eagles.

The Trail has also helped to foster important partnerships between the federal government and individuals, groups, corporations, state and local governments. Since the Trail began, these partnerships have resulted in additional funding amounting to almost double the investment of the federal government.

As the Subcommittee may be aware, legislation reauthorizing the Trail was included in S. 203, the National Heritage Areas Act of 2006, which the President signed into law in October of 2006. S. 203 requires a strategic plan for the Trail to be prepared "Not later than 3 years after the date on which funds are made available." Unfortunately, under S. 203, the Trail is only reauthorized through September 30, 2007.

H.R. 1815 was introduced in March 2007 with the support of the entire New Jersey Congressional delegation. It would extend the authorization of the Coastal Heritage Trail Route in New Jersey until September 30, 2011. This would allow for adequate time to complete the required strategic plan, which will explore opportunities to increase participation by private and public interests, as well as organizational options for sustaining the Trail. S. 1039, legislation identical to H.R. 1815, was also introduced in the Senate in March.

Since its inception, the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail has not only helped New Jersey residents develop pride, awareness, experience with, and understanding of our coastal resources and their history, it has encouraged visitors to explore this area, bringing with them much needed tourism dollars. H.R. 1815 will allow the Trail to continue and flourish. I once again thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing and for this opportunity to testify.