

\$1.5 million earmark for construction of the California Historic Trail Interpretive Center for exhibits, trails, and an amphitheater in Elko, Nevada

The omnibus earmarks \$1.5 million for construction of the California Historic Trail Interpretive Center for exhibits, trails, and an amphitheater in Elko, Nevada

The California Trail Interpretive Center was established by Congress in 2000 and took eight years to complete. Its purpose is to “to facilitate the interpretation of the history of development and use of trails in settling the western portion of the United States...”¹ It aims to provide multimedia exhibits, life size dioramas, video production, and interpretive programs.

It was intended, among other things, to be an economic engine for the region.² It resulted in an economic drain on the federal government.

From 2000 to 2007 the center was earmarked a total of \$5,950,000 for construction costs through BLM. In 2008 the center received an additional \$738,300 for exhibits – a total of \$6,688,300. According to a BLM press release, the center has received a total of \$8 million from the federal government.³ Now, an additional \$1.5 million has been earmarked for exhibits, trails and an amphitheater.

Left alone, the Interpretive Center is not sustainable.

Although the center was originally established as a public-private partnership, the federal government has carried the bulk of the financial costs.⁴ Currently, their doors open only temporarily for exhibits as funding

¹Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Senate Reports: No. 106-441. Legislative History-S.2749.
<http://bulk.resource.org/gpo.gov/laws/106/publ577.106.pdf>

²Bureau of Land Management, Elko District, Interpretive Center Briefing:
http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/nv/resources/racs/recreation_rac.Par.98612.File.dat/CaliNatI%20HistTrail_Presentation.pdf

³Bureau of Land Management, Elko Field Office: California Historic Trail Center out for Bid:
http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko_field_office/blm_information/newsroom/2006/California_Historic_Trail_Center_out_for_Bid.html

⁴Legislative Information System of the U.S. Congress, the California Trail Interpretive Act (S.2794) 106th Congress:
<http://www.congress.gov/cgi-lis/query/D?c106:6:./temp/~c106wl1awH::0>

becomes available. The center's dependency on federal funding has left it without consistent resources to carry out the original mission on a daily basis.

There is already a federal program to help fund projects like this one.

The National Park Service administers a Challenge Cost Share Program (CCSP) for historic trail projects such as interpretive exhibits. It is a matching fund program that is already one-third earmarked specifically for National Trails System Projects and requires a timely completion of projects – generally, less than one year.⁵

While the California Historic Trail Interpretive Center may serve a noble purpose, Congress should not reward poor business models by continuing to serve as the center's financial lifeline.

⁵National Park Service, Management Documents, Challenge Cost Share Program and Forms:
<http://home.nps.gov/cali/parkmgmt/index.htm>