



FREEDOM'S FRONTIER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, INC. BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Congressionally
Established in 2006

Neutral Testimony

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

SB 370

An Act concerning national land designations; requiring legislative approval of any designation of a national heritage area or national historic trail in the state of Kansas or the inclusion of certain property within any such designation; prohibiting state funding of any national heritage area or national historic trail unless such funding is first approved by the legislature of the state of Kansas.

**Bob Totten
On behalf of the
Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Board of Trustees**

February 13, 2024

Good morning Chairman Thompson, Vice Chairman Kloos, Senator Faust-Goudeau, and Members of the Committee:

I am Bob Totten and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Board of Trustees. I am here to share neutral testimony on SB 370 in order to clarify facts regarding the structure and basis for Freedom's Frontier. There are several Where As clauses in this bill that we would like to address.

First and foremost, Freedom's Frontier does not include private property, and we are not a part of the trails program mentioned in this bill. Freedom's Frontier only includes historical sites and historical museums that are open to the public.

The heritage area is like a set of thumb tacks on a map – we are the thumb tacks, not the area on the map. You will find a map included in this testimony that illustrates the “thumb tacks” which are our historical site and museum partners. The land around the partner sites is not included in our heritage area.

There is an application process to become a Freedom's Frontier partner, and the site/museum must be historically significant in order to be accepted as a part of the heritage area.

The fact that we do not encroach on private property rights is specifically set out in the National Heritage Area Act of 2020.

It states: "Nothing in this section...abridges any right of a public or private property owner, including the right to refrain from participating in any plan, project, program, or activity conducted within a National Heritage Area." In other words, it is not possible for land to be "opted-in" without the property owner's permission. The NHA Act also guarantees that Freedom's Frontier may never:

- Require public access to a property
- Modify any provision of any law regarding public access of private land
- Alter any land use regulation
- Interfere with water rights
- Obstruct hunting or fishing rights

I think it is significant that this federal law passed the U.S. Senate unanimously, and the U.S. House by 326-95. It was overwhelmingly approved—and Senator Roy Blunt, our Republican neighbor in Missouri co-sponsored the legislation.

Freedom's Frontier is the result of a Republican agenda that has become bipartisan. It was created by President Ronald Reagan in 1984 as "a new kind of national park" that did not encroach on private property or private property rights. Instead, national heritage areas spotlight nationally-important history and encourage economic development through tourism – without being a national park. We promote Kansas history about the Civil War, border wars, western settlement, the underground railroad and what followed those founding events. We attract heritage tourists who travel to see our sites, spending money at museums, stores, restaurants, gas stations and hotels along the way. For every \$1 Freedom's Frontier puts into Kansas, \$5.50 is returned to our economy.

Freedom's Frontier was signed into law by President George W. Bush, and we worked closely with Senator Pat Roberts when we were founded to be certain that agricultural land rights were protected. (Senator Roberts, by the way, was quite interested in founding Freedom's Frontier as his grandfather was an abolitionist news reporter.) A review of the program will show that President Trump approved six heritage areas himself.

We were established almost 20 years before any 30x30 effort, and do not have any connection to the 30x30 initiative. We do not have a "land management plan"—though we do have a "management plan" that guides our work. We have no programs focused on endangered species—except we work with all our partners—including the International Rotary—on the important issue of pollination. This is in accordance with the efforts by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Bleeding Kansas and the border war between Kansas and Missouri played a pivotal role in the U.S. Civil War and it is important our children learn about this history. We work with K-12 teachers to bring our Kansas history to life with grants for field trips so students can learn in person – rather than in a textbook. Our grants help some of the smallest museums which would otherwise be off the beaten path for tourists.

In fact, we recently provided a grant so the museum in Monticello had funds for a locksmith because the museum could not lock its door!

I have listed below a few of our grants that have gone to historical partners in areas that might be of interest to the committee:

- Tonganoxie: Historical Society website design
- Neosho County: Osage Mission, Passport program to increase museum visitors across SE Kansas
- Topeka: Brown v. Board of Education student-created exhibits
- Atchison: fieldtrip for students to visit Amelia Earhart Hanger Museum
- Fort Scott: fieldtrip to the historic fort and the Lowell Milken Center
- Olathe: Nine field trips from Olathe schools to the Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop
- Baxter Springs: Battle and Massacre of Baxter Springs Video Project
- Montgomery County: Independence Historical Museum, funded fixing their floor

Mr. Chairman, we are happy to partner with the State of Kansas and already enjoy a good relationship with the Kansas Tourism Division. And, as a note, we have no state funds in our budget and no plans to request any.

Thank you for your time this morning. I would be happy to stand for any questions.



Freedom's Frontier supports projects like this Civil War re-enactment during a fall festival, introducing children to our history and bringing tourists into our area.

Discover Freedom's Frontier

Timeline

1984



Pres. Reagan
establishes
National
Heritage Areas
for economic
development

2006



Pres. Bush
signs Freedom's
Frontier into law

2019



Pres. Trump
signs 6 National
Heritage Areas
into law

2022



Congress authorizes
all Heritage Areas with
private property
protections.
U.S. Senate, 100-0
U.S. House, 326-95

Outlaws, railroads, Union soldiers, the underground railroad carrying slaves to freedom, Fort Scott and Fort Leavenworth—these parts of the U.S. Civil War shaped Kansas. Today, heritage tourists visit *Bleeding Kansas* and open their wallets at Kansas restaurants, hotels and gas stations while they travel.

Freedom's Frontier (FF) spotlights what happened when Congress established Kansas as a territory next to the slave-holding state Missouri. Tourists step into the time of Jesse James's train robberies, Civil War battlefields, a Laura Ingalls Wilder cabin, Bonnie & Clyde adventures, Kansas City Jazz, and an underground railroad in an African-American city named for a Wyandot woman.

Pres. George W. Bush enacted FF to feature our nationally significant history. **We have no connection to 30x30, a federal land management plan, or private property.**

We promote economic-development-through-tourism using local control—with each historical site taking the lead in how to best tell their stories. Working with K-12 teachers, FF teaches students history on fieldtrips rather than with a text-book.

We promote and give funds to historical sites from Cherokee and Montgomery counties to Riley and Leavenworth counties. Many would otherwise lie off the beaten path. And, for every \$1 invested in FF, we return \$5.50 to the economy.

Like push pins dotting our region's map, our partners interlock to tell unique yet overlapping histories. **Each historical partner applies for membership—no property is ever opted into the area—and Freedom's Frontier is legally prohibited from interfering with private property, hunting or fishing rights.**

A non-profit, we work under a board of trustees of Kansans and Missourians, separate from the National Parks—yet able to promote our Kansas sites through their national advertising network.



