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The Center Square

Tennessee

Bipartisan group of lawmakers supporting new scenic trail

By By Kim Jarrett | The Center Square,

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(The Center Square) – Democrats and Republicans from three states are supporting a 287-mile trail that would include Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina.

The lawmakers are asking for a feasibility study on the Benton MacKaye National Scenic Trail. U.S. Rep. Chuck Fleischmann, R-Tenn., said Wednesday the trail deserves a national scenic designation.

"The Benton MacKaye Trail is an invaluable part of my district in East Tennessee that thousands of Tennesseans and Americans hike each year, and the trail connects some of the most beautiful and pristine parts of Tennessee with Georgia and North Carolina," Fleischmann said.

The trail that winds through the Southern Appalachian Mountains was completed in 2005, according to Bob Cowdrick, president of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, which has supported its development since 1980, according to the bill.

"This study would help protect our storied outdoor heritage for future generations, support local economies, and provide a wide array of recreation opportunities for everyone from day hikers to thru-hikers and solo trekkers to families," Cowdrick said.

The trail's path is made up of 95% of federal land. It passes through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests. It begins at North Georgia's Springer Mountain and ends at North Carolina's Mount Sterling, according to the Benton MacKaye Trail Association.

The bill is cosponsored in the House by Democrats Steve Cohen of Tennessee and Lucy McBath of Georgia. Rep. Chuck Edwards, R-N.C., is also a cosponsor. Republican North Carolina Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd are cosponsoring it in the Senate with Rep. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga. The bill is currently in the House Natural Resources Committee.