



CONGRESSWOMAN JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN

PUERTO RICO - AT LARGE

H.R. 4218 – Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act

The *Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act* would authorize a study on the feasibility of establishing a national scenic trail in Puerto Rico. The proposed Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail would run from the Cabezas de San Juan Nature Reserve in Fajardo to Morrillos Peninsula in Cabo Rojo, following a system of trails and potential trails through El Yunque National Forest, the Sierra de Cayey and Cordillera Central mountain ranges, and the dry forests along the Island's southwestern coast.

The proposed trail would therefore connect public lands and highlight Puerto Rico's unique ecosystems and landscapes—including tropical rainforests, mountain ridges, cave systems, canyons and rivers, bioluminescent and hypersaline lagoons, mangroves, coral reefs, dry forests, and sandy and rocky beaches—while promoting conservation, tourism, outdoor recreation, and economic development across the Island.

Work has already begun on the [Noreste \(Northeast\) Trail](#), an approximately 40-mile trail running from the Cabezas de San Juan Nature Reserve in Puerto Rico's northeastern coastline to El Yunque National Forest. The *Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act* would build on these efforts to study the feasibility of expanding this route to establish a scenic trail system that crosses the Island from the northeastern to the southwestern coast.

The *Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act* is supported by the following organizations: Para la Naturaleza (Puerto Rico Conservation Trust), Foundation for Puerto Rico, and Love in Motion Foundation.

Background on National Scenic Trails:

National scenic trail are one of the four types of trails authorized by the National Trails System Act of 1968. These primarily non-motorized routes—which display significant physical characteristic of U.S. regions—are designated by Congress and can be backpacked from end-to-end or hiked for short segments. They provide for outdoor recreation and for the conservation and enjoyment of the significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass. There are currently 11 national scenic trails across the United States.

National scenic trails may intersect both federal and nonfederal lands. They are administered by either the Department of the Interior (through the National Park Service or the Bureau of Land Management) or the Department of Agriculture (through the Forest Service). While there is usually only one administering agency, multiple federal agencies, state and local governments, private groups, and individuals may own and manage lands along a national scenic trail. The National Trails System Act authorizes the administering agency to enter into cooperative agreements with state or local governments, landowners, private organizations, or individuals for

trail development, operation, and maintenance. Additionally, when adding individual trails to the system, Congress has often included specific land acquisition provisions, such as authorizing federal acquisition only from willing sellers. Administering agencies may regulate the use of federally owned portions of the national scenic trails, but trail uses on nonfederal lands are typically controlled at the state and local levels.

However, prior to establishing a national scenic trail, Congress typically enacts legislation authorizing a study of the route for potential inclusion in the National Trails System. The studies address both the suitability (i.e., characteristics that make the proposed trail worthy of designation as a national scenic trail) and the feasibility (i.e., physical and financial viability) of adding the trail to the system. The ***Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act*** would therefore be the first step in the process for the potential designation of a national scenic trail on the Island.