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This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete Country Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area Bill Approved

Call it serendipity. As Utah was celebrating its heritage on Monday, July 24, with Pioneer Day celebrations, the U.S. House of Representatives was passing a bill establishing the National Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area.

The national designation recognizes the history, architecture and culture along "the heritage highway," and includes U.S. Highway 89 from Fairview to Kanab, the Boulder Loop (state highways 12 and 24), the All-American Road (highway 12) and the six counties through which the route passes: Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Wayne, Garfield and Kane.

For many Sanpete County residents, the bill's passage was indeed a historic event. People like Mt. Pleasant's Monte Bona, executive director of the Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance, and Gary Anderson of Utah State University's Extension, have spent years working on the measure and Bona even helped draft the original bill.

"It's very rewarding that the bill establishing the Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area was finally approved, and the fact that it happened on Pioneer Day makes it an even more momentous," says Bona. The bill underwent several renditions in the past six years and survived three sessions of Congress. "Now we can really move forward to honor our pioneer heritage," he says.

Bona says that the cities and towns in the six-county area are the best remaining example of how Mormon pioneers colonized the west. "The heritage area includes countless examples of rich cultural and architectural history shaped by the early settlers," he says.

Bennett also expressed joy over the bill's approval, saying it will mean increased economic opportunities for many Utah communities along Highway 89, as well as heightened recognition "of the remarkable and inspiring stories of the Mormon pioneers."

There are 27 such designated areas in the country. Traditionally, areas that attain national heritage designation enhance their heritage tourism opportunities.

The bill specified that up to \$10 million may be spent on development of the heritage area, including activities such as historic preservation of buildings and signage, but no more than \$1 million per year. Funds are matched on a 50 per cent basis.

A management plan must be written and submitted to the U.S. Department of Interior before major projects are started, Bona says. The Heritage Highway 89 Alliance will be



working to forge partnerships with local governments, businesses and private organizations to achieve the goals of the heritage bill.

The bill, which whose chief sponsor was Sen. Bob Bennett, passed the Senate last July, now goes to the president for signature. Rep. Chris Cannon helped see the bill through the House.

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