

On the TRAIL GOVER

BY PAM DROOG JONES

Governor Bob Taft bikes on a Clean Ohio Trail in Akron, Ohio.



Call them Green. They are governors who advocate, build and/or use trails, including rail-trails. Some take a user's approach to trails, such as Bob Taft (R-Ohio), who bicycles on a trail near the governor's residence every day, or Tim Pawlenty (R-Minn.), who runs and skates on trails near his home in Egan, Minn. Others, such as Jennifer Granholm (D-Mich.), Jeb Bush (R-Fla.) and Ted Kulongoski (D-Ore.), use trails less often but have been just as successful in enabling trails to thrive. Granholm has launched three initiatives that encompass the statewide trail system, Bush's Florida Forever land acquisition program assures future trail development in his state and Kulongoski's love of the outdoors has boosted statewide interest in recreational trails and waterways.

All of these governors are making a real difference in the trail-related activities and services their states offer today and will be able to offer in years to come.

GOVERNORS ON THE TRAILS

Governors who are avid bicyclists or inline skaters are bound to support trails in their states. After all, they want to travel on scenic and safe routes just like other trail enthusiasts.

Ohio Governor Bob Taft put his pedal to the path and in November 2000 won approval from voters for a Clean Ohio Trails Fund (see sidebar). The \$400 million bond program preserves green space and farmland, revitalizes blighted neighborhoods, and enhances outdoor recreational facilities, including trails.

"The governor kept his promise and got it on the ballot. It's been a real shot in the arm for trail development in Ohio," says Rhonda Border-Boose, director of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) Ohio field office.

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Over four years, the Clean Ohio Trails Fund will provide \$25 million in grants to communities and organizations for trail development. The ultimate goal of the program, administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, is to create a statewide network of interconnected recreational trails all Ohioans can access within 10 minutes.

The state currently has 521 miles of rail-trail, and another 514 miles have been proposed. "A lot of the money awarded through the Clean Ohio Trails Fund has gone to rail-trail projects or to projects that will link to rail-trails," says Border-Boose.

In Minnesota, Governor Tim Pawlenty and his family frequently skate together on the trails near their home, which are part of the state's vast and interconnected trail system. "It's a great way to spend time together while enjoying Minnesota's natural resources," says Pawlenty.

Calling upon his own trails experience, Pawlenty has encouraged public-private partnerships to acquire, build and manage Minnesota's trails. Since taking office in 2002, he has backed development of 367 local and regional trail projects through grants totaling \$74 million. Pawlenty also is committed to supporting Minnesota's 1,107-mile statewide trail system and has proposed funding for trail rehabilitation.

Minnesota also has a snowmobile trail system—20,000 miles of it—which Pawlenty supports with funding through snowmobile registrations.

GOVERNORS AND TRAIL POLICIES

Even governors who aren't frequent trail users initiate trail-friendly policies. Governors Jennifer Granholm (see sidebar) of Michigan and Jeb Bush of Florida have consistently supported programs and legislation to enhance trail development in their states.



Governor Jennifer Granholm during her State of the State address this year.

Granholm, an occasional trail user, "has placed trails right at the top of the agenda," says Nancy Krupiarz, director of RTC's Michigan field office.

Michigan already ranks second in the nation in rail-trail miles, with 1,319. Granholm has proposed three initiatives that will directly benefit trails, including rail-trails. In 2003 she formed the Land Use Leadership Council and convened Michigan's first-ever Transportation Summit. Both invited public input, and the final reports from both programs included recommendations targeting increased trail use and access throughout the state.

“People want to live in healthy, walkable and safe communities, and rail-trails provide easy access to beautiful walking and biking paths.”

The Cool Cities Initiative, which Governor Granholm launched in 2003 as part of her economic development plan, aims to attract and keep young professionals in Michigan through enhanced quality of life. “Every local Cool Cities forum has had bikeable/walkable communities as the number-one goal,” Krupiarz says. As a result, Governor Granholm directed the Department of Labor and Economic Growth to start a Bikeable/Walkable Communities initiative in April 2004.

Florida trail-users also benefit from governor-sponsored initiatives. First, in 1990 Governor Martinez signed into law Preservation 2000, a 10-year, \$3 billion program that led to public acquisition and protection of more than 1.25 million acres of land. Then in 1999, Governor Jeb Bush renewed the program for another 10 years and another \$3 billion under the name Florida Forever. The state has purchased another million-plus acres under this plan.

Thanks to these two programs, more than 4,000 miles of trails cross Florida on public lands, from cities and villages to beaches and forests. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Greenways and Trails receives \$4.5 million annually from Florida Forever to extend and enhance the state’s greenways and trails, including 35 rail-trails totaling some 360 miles.

Since Florida had a billion-dollar budget surplus this year, the state covered Florida Forever’s land purchases with general revenue funds instead of bonds. “It’s nice that Governor Bush, seeing the surplus, decided to pay for Florida Forever directly instead of issuing debt,” notes Ken Bryan, RTC Florida field office director. “That shows the program is important to him.”

GOVERNORS BUILDING TRAILS

Governor Ted Kulongoski of Oregon is a lifelong outdoorsman, which shows in his policies toward the envi-

TALKING TRAILS: Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm

RTC: What is the role of rail-trails in the future of a healthy, active America?

Gov. Granholm: People want to live in healthy, walkable and safe communities, and rail-trails provide easy access to beautiful walking and biking paths. We also know that our lifestyles are far too sedentary and this is contributing to some chronic, but preventable, health problems. Trails are accessible to everyone. They do not require a gym membership or fancy equipment to use. Just strap on a comfortable pair of shoes or jump on a bike and you’re off.

RTC: Do you use trails yourself?

Gov. Granholm: Rail-trails are a great resource for our whole family. We have always been a very physically active family and rail trails provide us with easy access to hours of great exercise and family fun. We have used trails for biking, jogging and walking the dog.

RTC: How do trails (rail and otherwise) fit in the Land Use Leadership Council, Transportation Summit and Cool Cities initiatives?

Governor Granholm: Trails are a critical component of all of those initiatives. The Land Use Leadership Council recommended that the state should support efforts to create and maintain “livable urban areas ... by creating inner-city trails and pathways.” That is exactly what we are doing with the Cool Cities program. For example, Alpena will be creating a River Walk in their downtown, and the Jackson Arts Armory project contains a trail that connects the Armory to the rest of the city. In Detroit, Eastern Market will—I hope—begin to become more connected to the city through transformation of the Dequindre Cut. Trails can truly connect people to nature, to culture and to commerce.



Governor Granholm presides over the Mackinac Bridge Walk in 2003.



Minnesota is home to a variety of trails that offer entertainment and enjoyment to thousands of people each year. Whether it's biking, running or rollerblading, these beautiful trails have something to offer most everyone and are an important part of our first-in-the-nation quality of life.

—Governor Tim Pawlenty, Minnesota

ronment in general and trails in particular. "The governor has given his support to a number of important trail projects," says Sean Loughran, Oregon Parks & Recreation Department trails director. Several of these projects tie into Kulongoski's goal of creating one new state park every year for 10 years. For example, when it opens in November 2005, Fort Clatsop National Memorial will be accessible by the 5.5-mile Fort to Sea Trail. Loughran says Kulongoski has worked closely with the Oregon congressional delegation to expand the park's boundary and fund the trail.

In addition, the governor has announced an initiative aimed at creating the recreational Willamette Water Trail, featuring a canoe/kayak trail along this historic waterway. Then there is the Bear Creek Greenway. After 20 years of development, Kulongoski put \$1.5 million on the table to complete it—at last.

"My hope is that this is just the start of many good things to come in Oregon," says Loughran.

Freelance writer Pam Droog Jones lives in central Missouri and enjoys riding on the Katy Trail with her family.

Ohio Governor Bob Taft

RTC: What is the role of rail-trails in the future of a healthy, active America?

Gov. Taft: I think the development of new rail-trails is essential to a healthy, active America. All across Ohio we've seen tremendous growth in public interest in outdoor recreation and especially in trails—not just single trails but networks of trails that connect with each other and connect community attractions.

RTC: Tell us about some specific trails you have promoted for development.

Gov. Taft: We're doing all we can both with Clean Ohio and with our transportation funding through the set-aside for non-highway purposes to develop an Ohio to Erie trail across the state, from Cincinnati to Columbus to Cleveland. It's about 50 percent completed and includes rail and canal towpaths. We add to it each year. In Licking County east of Columbus there's a network of trails that virtually goes across the entire county. As a result, about 140,000 people have been able to use trails not just for recreation, but also to get around. And in

the Cuyahoga Valley south of Akron they've completed about 40 miles over towpath trails that are very scenic and go past abandoned locks. This area is special because it's where a third of Ohio's population lives and now have access to a trail.

RTC: Besides having an impact on Ohio residents, how do trails affect you?

Gov. Taft: For me as governor, bicycling Ohio's trails is a great getaway. Bicycling is my number-one form of recreation. I try to ride my bicycle every day for exercise at least 30 minutes. From the governor's residence in five minutes I can get to a short trail along Alum Creek. I use that trail a lot, and it connects to another one that goes almost to downtown Columbus along a large multilane highway. It's a great way to get downtown. In fact I've ridden my bike to work many times, usually on Saturdays. On weekends I pick longer trails.

Out on the trails I see all kinds of people—families with little kids, walkers, rollerbladers. One morning on the trail in Knox County I saw

five or six Amish teenage girls rollerblading along in their long, flowing, pastel-colored dresses. It was like an apparition.

RTC: What is the long-term benefit of the Clean Ohio Trails Fund?

Gov. Taft: I am such a believer in building these corridors I set aside \$25 million over four years for trail projects throughout Ohio. I believe as the population becomes more urban and suburban, and more active and health-conscious, the demand for trails will increase. Also I believe trails are an important asset for us because they encourage people to stay in the state for their travel and tourism experiences.

RTC: How has Rails-to-Trails Conservancy helped in trail development?

Gov. Taft: When we're developing a trail it's an opportunity and a challenge to get all the constituencies involved in planning, development and maintenance, and RTC is a very strong and active partner in that.