Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Commits to Vision of Trails at the Heart of Healthy, Thriving Communities with Announcement of President-Elect

Ryan Chao will bring more than two decades of leadership working on issues of civic infrastructure, mobility and social impact to RTC’s mission to connect the nation by trail

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s (RTC) board of directors today announced that Ryan Chao, currently the vice president of the Center for Civic Sites and Community Change at the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey Foundation), will become the organization’s third president. Chao will join RTC on Jan. 28, 2019.

Chao brings to RTC deep expertise in a broad-range of issues that directly affect community health and well-being—from housing and finance, to mobility, social impact and civic infrastructure. In identifying Chao to lead the organization into its next chapter, the board is emphasizing the powerful role that trails, walking and biking play in creating healthy, thriving communities nationwide.

“The board is incredibly enthusiastic about the rich perspective that Ryan will bring to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the entire trails movement,” said Kate Kraft, RTC’s board chair and executive director of America Walks. “At RTC, we have long believed in the power of trails—especially connected trail networks—to deliver far-reaching benefits to communities. Ryan’s leadership will be powerful in engaging new sectors in the work to connect the nation by trail.”

As vice president of the Center for Civic Sites and Community Change, Chao oversaw the Casey Foundation’s multisector place-based strategies. Two projects of note for the trails movement include significant neighborhood transformation initiatives in Atlanta and Baltimore intended to link economic, educational and housing programs with outcomes focused on strengthening families and communities—communities that are also home to emerging trail networks, the Atlanta Beltline and the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network, an RTC TrailNation™ project.

“Across the spectrum of my work in community change, access to safe places to walk and bike has proven to be a common need in all types of neighborhoods. I am inspired by the opportunity to connect my passion for social impact, my expertise in community reinvestment, and the promise trails hold as critical civic infrastructure,” said Chao, RTC’s president-elect. “In its 32 years, RTC has made an invaluable impact on the country, making possible more than 34,000 miles of trail nationwide. I’m humbled and honored to lead the organization into its next chapter and to bring to this work a strong, diverse base of partnerships that can solidify trails as necessary infrastructure and vital community assets.”
In May, RTC announced the retirement of the organization’s long-time president, Keith Laughlin. Under Keith’s nearly two decades of leadership, RTC has grown to become the largest nonprofit organization in the country to advocate for trails and active transportation, expanding the organization’s mission to include a focus on connectivity—emphasizing the importance of connecting trails to create active transportation systems in every community across the country.

Chao’s leadership reinforces the organization’s role at the forefront of the active transportation movement, with powerful projects underway that have the potential to catalyze the development of trail networks nationwide, including:

- **TrailNation**—the organization’s trail network initiative, focused on building model trail networks in places that are diverse in geography, size and scope nationwide. These trail projects are designed to be replicated and prove what is possible when trail networks, walking and biking become central to our lives.
- **Trails Transform America**—the organization’s policy initiative to secure federal, state and local policies that prioritize public investments in trail networks, elevating the importance of trail networks as essential community assets.
- **Traillink.com**—the premiere trail-finding website and mobile app in the country, helping more than 7 million people annually explore trails and providing the foundation for RTC’s GIS database that seeks to account for every multiuse trail in the country and powers the organization’s vision of connectivity.
- **The organization’s research agenda**—dedicated to building the evidence base for trails walking and biking by focusing on connectivity and the value proposition that trails deliver to all types of communities.

In addition to his experience with the Casey Foundation, Chao served as executive director of the San Francisco Bay Area-based Satellite Housing, where he led the development of affordable housing communities; the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation; and the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone. Chao also is an alumnus of the Casey Foundation’s Children and Family Fellowship. Chao earned his bachelor’s degree in architecture from Washington University in St. Louis and an MBA from the New York University Stern School of Business.

*Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.*