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Professional Cyclist Ayesha McGowan and Disability Advocate Juliette Rizzo Join Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Board

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation’s largest trails organization, today announced two new members joining its board of directors. Professional cyclist and founder of the platform A Quick Brown Fox, Ayesha McGowan, and disability advocate and former Ms. Wheelchair America, Juliette Rizzo, will bring their expertise and advocacy to the organization’s board, helping make progress toward its vision of trails connecting everyone, everywhere and emphasizing its commitment to inclusion and representation on the nation’s trails.

“At RTC, we’ve always believed that communities are healthier and happier when trail networks are central to their design; it’s fundamental to our purpose. At the same time, we know that many people don’t have access to trails and safe places close to home where they can walk, bike and be active outside,” said Ryan Chao, RTC’s president. “As our organization emphasizes the importance of inclusion on our nation’s trails, we are pleased to have two national leaders in this space join our board. We are thrilled to welcome Ayesha McGowan and Juliette Rizzo to help drive this work moving forward.”

Ayesha McGowan is the first African American woman in the professional world of road cycling, a dedicated influencer and role model for Black women and girls—and an advocate for anyone underrepresented in bicycling and the outdoors. McGowan has become a persistent advocate for diversifying the bicycling world—employing her broad social media presence to educate audiences about cycling and provide insights into life as an endurance athlete. McGowan is sponsored by Liv Cycling, the only comprehensive cycling brand in the world dedicated solely to women. Having raced for the brand for several years, she joins the roster at the WorldTour level with today’s announcement of her joining the Liv Racing WorldTeam as a satellite rider.

“Creating spaces that are welcoming for Black and Brown people is important to me. People often see cycling only as an exclusive sport that requires fast speeds and fancy gear. There hasn’t been enough focus on the everyday rider, many of whom are women and People of Color,” said McGowan. “By joining the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy board, I look forward to working with the team to create more inclusive spaces for everyone to ride bikes and, with it, bringing more diversity to our nation’s trails and the world of cycling.”

Juliette Rizzo is a widely recognized and visible champion, national spokesperson and enthusiastic advocate for disability rights. She is deeply committed to educating the public and bringing mainstream visibility to issues that impact the disability community, including the accessibility of active transportation infrastructure like sidewalks and trails. Rizzo leverages her lived experience and her national platform to amplify her message of inclusive health and wellness. She is a leader in the movement to create safe mobility for people of all abilities and has joined RTC previously in elevating trails as spaces where everyone can be active.
outdoors, including at the 2019 launch of the organization’s signature project, the Great American Rail-Trail™.

“My advocacy is focused on removing barriers to physical activity and safe mobility for people of all abilities. By bringing my lived experience and my expertise in accessible community design to leaders across the country, I open their eyes to the often overlooked challenges that people may encounter when trying to navigate the transportation network where they live and work,” said Rizzo. “Rail-trails and multiuse trails are a more accessible solution in many ways, separated from vehicle traffic and promoting mobility for all types of users. I look forward to using my platform to elevate rail-trails as a solution for active living and transportation.”

McGowan and Rizzo join RTC’s board as the organization begins to implement a new strategic plan focused on building a nation connected by trails—reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. With trail use surging in 2020, rising over 50% compared with the year prior, the organization is focused on sustaining and growing its impact through and beyond the pandemic. The organization’s plan prioritizes strategies that deliver at national scale; that increase the diversity and representation of the trail movement, reducing disparities in opportunity and access to trails and the outdoors; and that are responsive—to the needs of the movement and the country in a time of continued uncertainty and need.

Learn more about RTC, its board of directors and its strategic plan: railstotrails.org/about.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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