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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Names Indiana Governor Eric J. Holcomb
Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion

Recognition spotlights Gov. Holcomb’s leadership to spur trail network development, delivering quality-of-life and economic benefits statewide

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) has named Indiana Governor Eric J. Holcomb as the next Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion for his leadership in accelerating trail development across the state. Among his accomplishments is the Next Level Trails program, an innovative state funding program that RTC says could provide a model for other states looking to accelerate trail development nationwide. Gov. Holcomb is the 40th honoree and the first acting governor to be recognized as a Rail-Trail Champion.

The Next Level Trails program is part of Gov. Holcomb’s broader Next Level Connections infrastructure directive, elevating the importance of trails alongside other infrastructure investments like roads, bridges and rail. The program emphasizes opportunities for investment in rural, suburban and urban communities, creating a level playing field for competitive grants and accelerating efforts to close gaps between trails across the state.

“Gov. Holcomb exemplifies steadfast leadership in fostering the development of Indiana’s trails so they may deliver powerful economic and quality-of-life benefits to all Hoosiers. He truly values the impact that trails have in our lives and our communities. He also understands that their impact grows exponentially as trails are connected to each other, within communities, and between towns, cities and states,” said Ryan Chao, president of RTC. “The governor has done more than simply believe in trails. His commitment by way of creating dedicated state funding for trail projects large and small is what sets him apart—and is a model for the nation.”

The impact of Indiana’s fast-growing trail system extends beyond the state. Indiana hosts 215 miles of the Great American Rail-Trail™, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s signature project and ambitious initiative to connect more than 3,700 miles of multiuse trails across the country.

In a recent interview with Rails to Trails magazine about his recognition as the 2021 Rail-Trail Champion, Gov. Holcomb commented on why it is important to fast-track trail development to maximize the potential of these trails and meet demand from Hoosiers statewide.
“When you look at vibrant communities, one thing in common—the common denominator—is outdoor amenities. People want to work where they want to live. Trails were that X-factor,” said Gov. Holcomb.

“We’re fully committed to continuing to build these trail connections throughout our entire state,” he added.

Gov. Holcomb’s Rail-Trail Champion award comes during “Indiana’s Year of the Trails,” which he proclaimed in October 2021. The year-long celebration runs from Oct. 23, 2021, through Oct. 23, 2022, to recognize that “connecting trail segments is a powerful tool for economic and community development that should be actively facilitated.” Indiana’s Year of the Trails creates an opportunity to bring trail users, business owners, nonprofits, local and state elected officials, and other stakeholders together to experience Hoosier trails and share the value of walking, biking and other nonmotorized infrastructure for all Indiana residents and visitors. Advocates are leveraging the year-long celebration and focus on trails to call for permanent funding for trail connectivity and maintenance under the Next Level Trails program at $10 million annually.

Since 2011, the Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champions Award has honored individuals who have made significant contributions to the rail-trail movement through their hard work, volunteerism and support—in short, those who have gone above and beyond in the name of trails. The award is named in honor of the late rail-trail philanthropist Jeffrey L. Doppelt. Learn more about the nation’s Rail-Trail Champions: rtc.li/trail-champions.

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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