MINNESOTA OFF-ROAD GROUP TO BE HONORED IN NATION'S CAPITAL

Award comes as funding threatened for popular Recreational Trails Program

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Coalition for Recreational Trail Users (CRTU), a local nonprofit organization heralded for the conservation of natural areas in Minnesota while also promoting all modes of recreational trail use, will be honored in Washington, D.C. next week at the 2013 Recreational Trails Program Awards ceremony.

The CRTU, made up of state-wide snowmobile, motorcycle and ATV groups, is one of just 10 organizations across America to receive a Recreational Trails Program Achievement Award, to be announced at the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill, June 4.

The award recognizes CRTU’s role in a groundbreaking new effort to educate school students in Minnesota about the safe and responsible use of off-road vehicles. Last year, CRTU volunteered to be the local agency for a pilot program of the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC), with the aim of spreading a positive message in schools about the importance of staying on the trails when off-roading, in order to prevent land degradation and reduce accidents.

A colorful and compelling poster series distributed to Minnesota schools distributed this message to more than 20,500 students. The NOHVCC judged the pilot program to be so successful that it has now expanded its offering of posters and outreach to students in the state.

This education campaign was funded by the Recreational Trails Program, a federal grant program funded largely by gas taxes paid by off-road vehicles. One of the few sources dedicated to the construction and maintenance of trails, the Recreational Trails Program provided more than $11,500 for the poster campaign, which was contracted to a Minnesota firm.
“This project is a terrific example of what the Recreational Trails Program has been able to do for Minnesota over the past 21 years,” says Marianne Fowler of the national nonprofit Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a member of the Coalition for Recreational Trails. “Using relatively small amounts of money, the Recreational Trails Program enables local organizations to promote the benefits of trail use and build and maintain trails in their state. Campaigns like this one are critical in fostering a new generation of Minnesotans that not only have access to a wide range of recreation options in their own backyard, but that also understand that top-notch trail systems are a huge part of the state’s tourism economy.”

However, despite its bipartisan support and tremendous success since it was introduced in 1992, the Recreational Trails Program currently faces the threat of elimination. According to Fowler, each year state governors can leave the program of their own volition simply by notifying the U.S. Department of Transportation of that intention by August 31.

“Last year, Governor Dayton kept Minnesota in the Rec’Trails Program, and it continued to make great things possible for the state,” she says. “We need him to do the same for 2014.”

“Minnesota is lucky to have had a history of far-sighted leaders who could see the benefit that investments in recreational trails bring to the state,” Fowler says. “Committing to the Recreational Trails Program is one of the reasons why Minnesota enjoys an outdoor recreation economy that generates $11.6 billion in consumer spending and directly supports 118,000 Minnesota jobs. This is exactly what federal funding programs should do – stimulate investment.”

Fowler says it is important that Minnesotans to contact Governor Dayton in the coming weeks to thank him for keeping Minnesota in the program this year, and ask him to do the same for 2014.

“The governor needs to hear from his constituents that this is a program that benefits Minnesota,” Fowler says. “Otherwise, the decision can be made to siphon these dedicated funds away from trails investments and into other programs. If this happens, we pull the rug out from underneath local champions like the Coalition for Recreational Trail Users, and their efforts to keep Minnesotan school children safe, healthy, and enjoying the outdoors.”

Urge Governor Dayton to reaffirm his support for the Recreational Trails Program at www.railstotrails.org/SaveRecTrails
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation’s largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit www.railstotrails.org.