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CONTACT:
Katie Harris
Campaigns and Media Coordinator
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
202.974.5134
kathryn@railstotrails.org

Deb Hubsmith Named 2015 Rail-Trail Champion

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The late Deb Hubsmith is the recipient of the 2015 Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion award. This designation places her among a special group of visionaries in the United States who’ve made remarkable contributions to rail-trails.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) notified Deb of this designation shortly before she passed away in August 2015 after a two-year battle with acute myeloid leukemia. A set of benches located above San Francisco Bay—south of the Cal Park Tunnel—will bear an inscription honoring Deb’s memory and her selection as Rail-Trail Champion.

Hubsmith was a passionate, persistent and amazingly gifted champion for the many advances the nation has seen in trails and bike/ped policy and practice over the past 20 years. From her position and experience as a leader of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition in California, which she helped found in 1998, Hubsmith worked with the late Congressman Jim Oberstar and other advocates to craft a legislative agenda to advance walking and biking nationwide. Building on federal transportation legislation, she helped define a number of programs that would carry the bike/ped movement beyond the individual project stage to one of safe active-transportation systems for people of all ages and abilities.

In 2000, Hubsmith worked tirelessly on the implementation of the Safe Routes to School Pilot Program in Marin County. Her dream to ensure a fully funded national program would follow in 2005 with the passage of a Safe Routes to School Program in Congress’ SAFETEA-LU transportation legislation.

She was also vital to the passing that same year of the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program (NTPP), for which Marin County served as one of four test communities, and helped form and serve on the NTPP working group charged with guiding the initiative to completion.

"Deb was a friend and tireless advocate who never relented in her drive to make Marin County and all of America a healthier place,” said Rails-to-Trails Conservancy President Keith Laughlin. "I have fond
memories of working closely with Deb and the late Rep. Jim Oberstar to create both the federal Safe Routes to School Program and the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program.”

Hubsmith’s persistence and gifts in the field helped lead to the founding in 2005 of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, for which she served for many years as executive director. Under her direction, the group evolved from an all-volunteer organization to a coalition with 30 staff across the country, a $3 million budget and more than 700 partners. Safe Routes to School programs now operate in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., and more than 15,000 schools have received federal funding for these programs.

There are few for whom it can be claimed that they were “necessary” to the advocacy efforts that brought walking and biking to the fore in American communities. Deb Hubsmith stands among them, and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is proud to name her as this year’s champion.

To learn more about the Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champions, visit railstotrails.org/trailchampions.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), a nonprofit organization with more than 160,000 members and supporters, 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, RTC’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.