



STATE OF INDIANA

THIRD FLOOR STATE HOUSE
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204

INDIANA LEGISLATIVE TRAILS CAUCUS CO-CHAIRS

CAREY HAMILTON

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200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

May 28, 2020

Dear Governor Holcomb,

In regards to the funding cuts you announced late last week, we certainly understand the need to look very critically at the budget during this extraordinary time. However, as Co-Chairs of the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus, we write to respectfully request the release of \$30 million in state funding for the second round of Next Level Trails applications as a critical response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We are all painfully aware of the negative impacts on health and economy caused by the current pandemic and appreciate your leadership during these challenging times, which require thoughtful allocation of state resources to keep our Hoosiers safe.

Since many of us have been asked to stay home to inhibit the spread of the virus, our state has experienced a surge of trail users. The reasons for this are numerous and expected, and further emphasized by State Health Commissioner Kristina Box on March 26, when she encouraged Hoosiers to spend time outdoors to support their mental and physical health. Trails are more important than ever; the increased demand for this critical infrastructure for safe recreation, exercise and transportation will continue.

This surge has also been noticed by the Department of Natural Resources, which is currently compiling data to track this increase in trail usage from the same time periods in 2019. The DNR has reached out to trail managers and funding agencies throughout the state to collect this information, and we encourage you to take a close look at this data. Dramatic increases are being recorded across the United States; an analysis of 31 trail counters for the week of March 16–22, 2020 by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) found a nationwide trail usage increase of nearly 200% from that same week in 2019. This increased usage of our outdoor recreation amenities underscores the importance of funding construction and maintenance of our trails.

Notably, trail projects bring more jobs per dollar invested than does road construction, and broadband initiatives can be combined with trail construction for added value and cost savings. Investments in trails secure lasting economic benefits for our Hoosier communities as local businesses develop along the trails and our state attracts more visitors.

Taken together it is clear that there has been no better time in our history than today to continue trails funding so that more of our Hoosier residents can take part in these tremendous quality of life amenities. In addition, we encourage you to keep on schedule with releasing the remaining funding in the third NLT round this summer to further address the health and economic impacts caused by COVID-19.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to collaborating with you to grow our Indiana trails network for the benefit of all Hoosiers.

Sincerely,

Carey Hamilton
State Representative
House District 87

Anthony Cook
State Representative
House District 32

Eddie Melton
State Senator
Senate District 3

Dennis Kruse
State Senator
Senate District 14