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2020 Progress on Cross-Country Great American Rail-Trail Includes \$4 million in New Funding and 2,000 Miles Completed

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy points to enduring commitment and progress for the Great American as reinforcement of the health and economic value that trails deliver nationwide

WASHINGTON—As the 2020 trail construction season comes to a close in much of the country, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), alongside Great American Rail-Trail™ partners on the 3,700-mile route, celebrate a year that saw significant new investments and miles completed for the nation’s first cross-country multiuse trail.

More than \$4 million in public and private funds were secured in 2020 for projects along the route. In addition, more than 20 miles of trail along the Great American corridor were completed, bringing the total on-the-ground mileage of the developing trail system to over 2,000.

“This year has proven how vital projects like the Great American Rail-Trail are to the country. Millions of people have found their way outside on trails as a way to cope with the pandemic,” said Ryan Chao, president of RTC.

“As the Great American Rail-Trail connects more towns, cities, states and regions, this infrastructure serves as the backbone of resilient communities, while uniting us around a bold, ambitious and impactful vision. Looking ahead, we’ll be working hard alongside our partners to advance trail development; there are 80 miles of new trail in the pipeline now and hundreds of miles to build overall. Closing critical gaps in the trail has the potential to deliver significant economic value to the people and places along the route, which will be so important as we move beyond the pandemic,” said Chao.

As local, state and federal officials turn their attention to economic recovery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Great American is a powerful, national demonstration of the role that trails and active transportation play in spurring regional economies while contributing to healthy, safe and equitable communities.

According to a recent national study by RTC, the country’s trail economy generates more than \$34.1 billion annually, and could grow to more than \$138.5 billion each year as the connectivity of trails and active transportation routes improves. The total local spending impact of the nation’s rail-trails is \$10.6 billion annually, which could grow to as much as \$21 billion annually—illustrating the potential for the Great American to deliver jobs and revenue to the many rural towns and small cities along its route.

“We need to continue working on getting [trails] started in communities, and we need funding for the state of Indiana to get ... trails started, maintain ones that we have and connect the others,” said Sen. Dennis Kruse (R-Auburn), co-chair of the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus, in a recorded video statement acknowledging the economic impact of trails on the state.

RTC shared the progress made on the Great American Rail-Trail [during a virtual event](#) that showcased noteworthy trail developments in nine states along the route, including Maryland, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana and Washington. Since the project was introduced in 2019, 50 miles have been completed along the developing route and new trail projects have begun or are complete in 10 out of 12 Great American states. In addition, a total of \$18.4 million in public and private funds have been secured to advance local Great American projects.

“When we talk about [trails] from a national frame, and we talk about how Ohio is connected to [the Great American Rail-Trail], that’s important. That’s a big deal for us to be a part of that,” said Rep. Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati), co-chair of the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus, in a recorded video statement.

Introduced in May 2019, the Great American spans 3,700+ miles across 12 states between Washington, D.C., and Washington State. The trail is the most ambitious in RTC’s portfolio of TrailNation™ projects—the organization’s initiative to encourage the rapid replication of regional trail networks across the country. The Great American will serve 50 million people living within 50 miles of the trail, as well as millions of additional visitors from around the world. Explore the Great American at greatamericanrailtrail.org, and connect with the #GRTAmerican via social media @greatamericanrailtrail.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by building a nation connected by trails. As trails continue to serve as vital resources for health and wellness for Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, RTC is urging everyone to practice safe and responsible trail use and self-care at all times. RTC continues to provide up-to-date resources and information at railstotrails.org/COVID19. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Explore the nation’s trails at TrailLink.com, RTC’s trail-finder website and app.