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Battlefield Trail Extension Sparks Momentum For Caracara Trails Vision

Public and Private Investments Spurring Development of Cameron County's 428-mile regional trail network

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the City of Brownsville and the National Park Service were joined today by dozens of regional partners and participants of Challenge-RGV, the county-wide effort to inspire healthy eating and active living among residents, in celebrating the groundbreaking of the Battlefield Trail Extension. The project, a 1.8-mile extension to the City of Brownsville's Historic Battlefield Trail, is the first phase in a plan to connect Brownsville with Los Fresnos by trail and is a project intended to increase access to public lands in the region.

The Battlefield Trail Extension was funded with a \$2 million grant from the Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation (Legacy Foundation) to jumpstart Cameron County's efforts to create new opportunities for physical activity and active transportation in a part of the country facing significant rates of chronic disease and poverty. It is the first of six Caracara Trails catalyst projects that are intended to accelerate development of the 428-mile trail network, which is poised to deliver significant health and economic benefits to the region. For example, the development of the trail network is expected to generate a 22 percent increase in physical activity to Cameron County residents and an annual health care cost savings of as much as \$12.3 million. Construction of the trail network alone is expected to deliver a total economic impact of more than \$173 million.

"As we break ground on the Battlefield Trail Extension, we're marking a turning point for the health, wellness and economic potential of our region," said Rose M.Z. Gowen, M.D., Brownsville city commissioner and a board member of RTC. "The Caracara Trails vision is already bringing new investment to Cameron County in the form of federal and private grants. Already, you can see families and friends out on the trails, having fun while building new routines in their lives around physical activity. Soon, we will connect Brownsville to Los Fresnos by trail, beginning with this trail extension. Our trail network vision and all that it can deliver for the health and economic growth of our region is being realized with each investment, each mile of trail built and each person who gets out for a walk, a run or a ride."

At the groundbreaking, officials from Brownsville, Los Fresnos, Port Isabel, Cameron County and the University of Texas (UTHealth) School of Public Health outlined progress being made on regional trail infrastructure projects that are beginning to build out the Caracara Trails Vision, including Brownsville to Los Fresnos Connect, a 2.5-mile trail project funded by a federal Transportation Alternatives grant, and the 1.1-mile Los Fresnos Hike and Bike Trail, funded by the Legacy Foundation and a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department grant. Together, with the Battlefield Trail Extension, these projects complete the connection between Brownsville and Los Fresnos. Other projects featured include the South Texas Eco-Tourism Center, funded by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department grants on Laguna Vista property, and the Arturo Galvan Coastal Park, funded by the Legacy Foundation and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department grants.

Currently in development through a partnership with RTC; the Legacy Foundation; UTHealth; the cities of Brownsville, Harlingen, Combes, Los Fresnos, Los Indios, Port Isabel, Rio Hondo, San Benito and South Padre Island; the towns of Laguna Vista and Rancho Viejo; and other nonprofits and public agencies, the Caracara

Trails will ultimately connect the Lower Rio Grande Valley by trail. This 428-mile trail network vision includes 230 miles of multiuse trails, 120 miles of U.S. Bicycle Routes and 78 miles of paddling trails.

The Caracara Trails is one of RTC's TrailNation™ projects, designed to prove what is possible when you connect people and places by trail. For more information on the Caracara Trails, visit caracaratrails.org.

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 creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).