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CONTACT: Patricia Brooks, patricia@matchmapmedia.com, 202.351.1757

“COWBOY TRAIL” CONNECTION TO CHADRON MOVES FORWARD, ADVANCING NEBRASKA’S LINK TO NATIONAL GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL

Nebraska Northwestern Railroad, Northwest Nebraska Trails Association and City of Chadron finalize easement agreement to develop 5 miles of trail to complete Cowboy Trail connection into Chadron

CHADRON, Neb.—Today, Nebraska Northwestern Railroad, Northwest Nebraska Trails Association (NNTA) and Chadron Mayor Miles Bannan signed an easement agreement for the development of 5 miles of rail-with-trail alongside an active corridor to extend the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail (Cowboy Trail) into Chadron.

The easement is a step toward completing the 5-mile Cowboy Trail Extension which will connect downtown Chadron with the Nebraska Game and Parks’ Cowboy Trail, a 321-mile rail-trail conversion on the former Chicago and North Western Railway line across northern Nebraska. The link is a portion of Trail Gap 59 in the Great American Rail-Trail, the nation’s first cross-country multiuse trail. The active rail corridor is currently owned by Nebraska Northwestern Railroad. In 2019, RTC announced a \$65,000 grant to be shared between Cowboy Trails West, Inc. and the NNTA to move the Cowboy Trail closer to completion.

“The outcome of this easement signing will deliver so much benefit to the local community and nationally through the connection of Chadron to the cross-country Great American Rail-Trail,” said Kevin Belanger, manager of trail planning at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. “The Nebraska Northwestern Railroad’s collaboration shows what can be done through partnership.”

Earlier in 2020, the NNTA released a request for proposals to begin the engineering process that will eventually lead to construction to develop the trail miles.

“We are so thankful for Jim Collins and the Nebraska Northwestern Railroad for their willingness to grant us an easement so we can bring the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail and the Great American Rail-Trail to and through our community,” said Dr. Brittany Helmbrecht, president of the NNTA. “The proposed Cowboy Trail extension will provide a safe and accessible trail for our community to use, and we are looking forward to completing this project.”

In 2019, NNTA and the City of Chadron entered a Memorandum of Understanding on developing the trail connection, with NNTA taking the lead on fundraising and trail development and the City taking on ownership and maintenance responsibility. The Cowboy Trail, totaling 321 miles when complete, is one of the longest rail-trail conversions in the nation, spanning much of the state of Nebraska.

“Nebraska Northwestern Railroad is excited to be a part of the Cowboy Trail connection into Chadron. We see it as an opportunity to showcase what the town of Chadron has to offer and also showcase the railroad history that we have here in Northwest Nebraska,” said Jim Collins, general manager of Nebraska Northwestern Railroad. “It is our pleasure to work together with NNTA to bring this trail into Chadron and continue to support its westward journey.”

To learn more about the Great American Rail-Trail and to view the preferred route, visit greatamericanrailtrail.org and follow @greatamericanrailtrail and #GRTAmerican on Facebook and Instagram.

The Great American is a signature project of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 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](#).