



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** September 10, 2020

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## **Indiana's First Legislative Trails Caucus Summit Highlights Critical Response to COVID-19 Crisis**

*Republican and Democratic state legislators recognize need for strategic investments in walking, biking and trail infrastructure to promote public health and economic recovery*

**INDIANAPOLIS**—The newly formed Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus held its first summit on Wednesday in collaboration with Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's largest trails and active transportation advocacy organization, and the Greenways Foundation, which promotes trails in the state.

"Developing trails in Indiana is very important to a growing number of Indiana citizens. Being healthy and in good physical condition increases productivity and reduces health care costs and adds to family quality of life," said Sen. Dennis Kruse (R-Auburn).

The Indiana Trails Caucus is a group of state legislators—republicans and democrats from the House and Senate—committed to creating a statewide trails network that provides significant health, economic and other quality of life benefits for all Hoosiers. Kruse co-chairs the caucus with Rep. Carey Hamilton (D-Indianapolis), Rep. Anthony Cook (R-Cicero), and Sen. Eddie Melton (D-Gary). The co-chairs virtually gathered the 18 other Caucus members as well as representatives from public health, natural resources, transportation and other stakeholder groups to discuss trails as a critical response to the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

"Trails are promoting mental well-being at a time when residents all across our state are relying on outdoor recreation to keep them healthy. State legislators can do our part to provide and maintain places for safe activities," said Cook.

Hamilton emphasized the economic stimulus associated with new trails, underscoring the transformative trail projects currently underway.

"Hoosiers are excited about the Great American Rail-Trail, the nation's first cross-country multiuse trail, as well as revitalization efforts in communities across the state that feature walking and biking infrastructure as catalytic initiatives, spurring economic revitalization and improving quality of life," said Hamilton.

The trail programs of the Departments of Natural Resources and Transportation were reviewed alongside funding approaches recommended by the Indiana Bicycle Trails Task Force to help frame the discussion informing the Caucus's 2021 Legislative Platform.

“Despite, or more likely, due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus has quickly grown to 25 members, representing nearly 17% of the entire legislature and a balance of republicans, democrats, representatives and senators,” said Brian Housh, RTC’s Midwest policy manager. “I am excited that these state elected officials are committed to creating and maintaining statewide trail networks that connect people, places and opportunities. The Hoosier State is well-positioned to realize significant and sustainable health and economic benefits.”

The formation of the Caucus comes in the midst of strong momentum for trails in Indiana, such as the Great American Rail-Trail, which was announced in 2019 and seeks to connect 225 miles of trail in the state, and Governor Eric Holcomb’s Next Level Trails program, which has committed to investing \$90 million—the largest infusion of state funding for trails in Indiana history—toward the development of regionally and locally significant trails. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Outdoor Recreation in coordination with the Indiana Department of Transportation is incentivizing collaborative efforts to accelerate trail connections to create healthy, thriving communities.

“Indiana’s story of trails as fundamental to quality of life, economic development and tourism is a great success story. One that our neighboring states are following closely,” said Mitch Barloga, President of the Greenways Foundation of Indiana. “As we move into the next chapter for trails and active transportation in Indiana, we need to prioritize developing a comprehensive trails maintenance program and sustained funding to connect trails across the state.”

*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](http://railstotrails.org) and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*

*The Great American Rail-Trail, which connects 3,700 miles of trail between Washington, D.C., and Washington State, is a signature RTC project. RTC is providing the national leadership and on-the-ground support that is necessary to complete a trail of this scope—the work to organize people, plans and ideas; trail planning and community engagement; advocacy; and marketing. Explore the trail vision and the interactive map of the route at [greatamericanrailtrail.org](http://greatamericanrailtrail.org).*

*The Greenways Foundation is a charitable trust working to promote the growth, enhancement and use of Indiana greenways. To accomplish that, we solicit donations and make grants in support of greenway development, enhancement and operation. We have made it our practice to work closely with both citizen and government entities to establish linear parks in a way that maximizes resources. The Greenways Foundation has become the leading voice for these wonderful public amenities. Learn more at [greenwaysfoundation.org](http://greenwaysfoundation.org).*