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## **“INDIANA’S YEAR OF THE TRAILS” LAUNCHES WITH A POWERFUL MESSAGE: CONNECTED TRAILS ARE ESSENTIAL TO STATEWIDE PROSPERITY**

***State legislators join trail users, business owners, advocacy groups and local elected officials in calling for permanent and dedicated funding to connect and maintain the state’s trails.***

**INDIANAPOLIS**—The Indiana [legislature has designated](#) and Gov. Eric Holcomb has proclaimed 2021-2022 as “Indiana’s Year of the Trails” recognizing that “connecting trail segments is a powerful tool for economic and community development that should be actively facilitated.”

This legislative action was brought forward by co-chairs of the state’s bipartisan legislative trails caucus, Reps. Carey Hamilton (D, 87) and Tony Cook (R, 32), and Sens. Dennis Kruse (R, 14) and Eddie Melton (D, 3), with the intention of showcasing the critical value that the state’s trails deliver and the need to guarantee funding to connect and maintain the state’s trail system. In addition, the legislative trails caucus is focused on building the political support to implement the recommendations in the [2021 Indiana State Trails Plan](#), including the development of the state’s Visionary Trail System.

In past statements about the burgeoning statewide trail network, Rep. Hamilton has emphasized that Indiana’s Visionary Trail System is a “tremendous asset,” stressing the “great opportunity to preserve, expand and promote it.” Sen. Kruse has recognized that “trails bring people together, as they not only connect physical locations but also represent the bonds that create communities.” In communicating his support for trails, Gov. Holcomb has highlighted that “these projects are a transformational investment in quality of life for communities across [the] state and a valuable tool for economic development.”

Indiana’s Year of the Trails creates an opportunity to bring trails users, business owners, nonprofits, local and state elected officials, and other stakeholders together to experience Hoosier trails and share the value of walking, biking and other non-motorized infrastructure for all Indiana residents and visitors. The year-long celebration launches with a ribbon cutting for the Erie Trail Extension along the route of the Great American Rail-Trail in North Judson on Friday, Oct. 22, followed by a series of events across the state through the weekend, including on the Nickel Plate Trail, Cardinal Greenway and in Fort Wayne. Find an event or take action at [rtc.li/indiana-yearofthetrails-event](https://rtc.li/indiana-yearofthetrails-event).

“Indiana’s Year of the Trails creates a meaningful opportunity to foster community around the trail network that’s growing across the state,” said Brian Housh, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s (RTC’s) Midwest policy manager and a lead organizer behind the initiative. “It gives us a chance to celebrate iconic projects like the Great American Rail-Trail™, which will connect hundreds of miles of trail in Indiana and will bring significant economic, health, recreational, safety and other quality of life benefits to Hoosiers. This all sets up the next legislative session well, when caucus members will be working with trail stakeholders to secure permanent funding for the Next Level Trails program, supporting connectivity and maintenance.”

Indiana’s Year of the Trails comes at a time of strong momentum and opportunity for trails in Indiana, such as the [Great American Rail-Trail](#), a signature RTC project announced in 2019 that will connect 3,700 miles of trail between Washington, D.C., and Washington State, seeking to connect 225 miles of trail in the state. In addition, the year-long effort will showcase Gov. Holcomb’s [Next Level Trails program](#), which has committed to investing \$150 million toward the development of regionally and locally significant trails, and calling for permanent funding for trail connectivity and maintenance under the program at \$10 million annually.

“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 building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Connect with RTC at [railstotrails.org](http://railstotrails.org) and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*

*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).*