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MARYLAND PARKS VOLUNTEERS HONORED IN NATION'S CAPITAL

Award comes as funding threatened for popular Recreational Trails Program

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Friends of Seneca Creek State Park and a group of Maryland volunteer trails organizations will be honored in Washington, D.C. next week at the 2013 Recreational Trails Program Awards ceremony.

Friends of Seneca Creek State Park is one of just 10 organizations across America to receive an annual Recreational Trails Program Achievement Award, to be announced at the Rayburn House congressional office building on Capitol Hill, June 4.

The award recognizes the Friends group's role in overseeing the construction of a new multi-use surface trail in Seneca State Park which addressed critical land degradation issues while providing access to the park for hikers, bikers and equestrians. Previously, the park had been riddled with unauthorized trails, which damaged the parkland and made management difficult. The new Seneca Bluffs Trail, built by local volunteer, organizations, now protects the Seneca Creek watershed from erosion and provides visitors with tremendous views of the stream below.

This significant improvement to Seneca Creek State Park was made possible by the Recreational Trails Program, a federal grant program funded largely by gas taxes paid by off-road vehicles. One of the few funding sources dedicated to the construction and maintenance of trails, the Recreational Trails Program provided more than \$15,000 for the new trail system, funds that leveraged the significant "sweat equity" investment of Montgomery County Road Runners, the Coalition for the Seneca Creek Greenway Trail, the Trail Riders of Today, and the Potomac Bridle & Hiking Trails Association.

The Recreational Trails Program also funded the expansion of a trailhead parking lot, greatly increasing the number of visitors the trail could accommodate. Serving the Seneca Creek

Greenway Trail, the Seneca Bluffs Trail, the Dry Seneca Trail and the C & O Canal Towpath Trail, the parking lot is a key asset in the burgeoning trails tourism economy in western Maryland.

“This project is a terrific example of what the Recreational Trails Program has been able to do for Maryland over the past 21 years,” says Marianne Fowler of the national nonprofit Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a member of the Coalition for Recreational Trails. “Recreational Trails Program funding leverages many millions in other private and public investments – investments not only in trails but in local economies, in main street businesses, and in recreational options for the people of Maryland.”

However, despite its bipartisan support and tremendous success since it was introduced in 1992, the Recreational Trails Program currently faces the threat of elimination. According to Fowler, state governors can leave the program of their own volition simply by notifying the U.S. Department of Transportation of that intention by August 31.

“Last year, Governor O’Malley kept Maryland in the Rec’ Trails Program, and it continued to make great things possible for the state,” she says. “We need him to do the same for 2014.”

“Maryland is lucky to have had a history of far-sighted leaders who could see the benefit that recreational trails bring to the state,” Fowler says. “Committing to the Rec’ Trails Program is one of the reasons why Maryland enjoys an outdoor recreation economy that generates \$9.5 billion each year in consumer spending, and directly supports 85,000 in Maryland jobs. This is exactly what federal funding programs should do – stimulate investment.”

Fowler says it is important that residents and businesspeople contact Governor O’Malley in the coming weeks to thank him for keeping Maryland in the program this year, and asking him to do the same for 2014.

“The governor needs to hear from his constituents that this is a program that benefits Maryland,” Fowler says. “Otherwise, the decision can be made to siphon these dedicated funds away from trails investments and into other programs. If this happens, we pull the rug out from underneath local champions like the Friends of Seneca Creek State Park, and their efforts to protect the state’s natural areas and encourage nature-based tourism.”

Urge Governor O’Malley to reaffirm his support for the Recreational Trails Program at www.railstotrails.org/SaveRecTrails

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit www.railstotrails.org.