



rails-to-trails conservancy

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Momentum for Great American Rail-Trail™ Builds With \$15.6 Million in New Funding

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy points to trail use, critical trail projects, and significant new investment as evidence that Great American Rail-Trail is generating immediate impact for the people and places it connects

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) today celebrated momentum for the Great American Rail-Trail, the developing 3,700-mile trail that will be the nation’s first walkable, bikeable route across the country, entirely separated from vehicle traffic.

The trail is a signature project of RTC, which pointed to significant new public and private investments, alongside the completion of critical trail projects and increased public interest, as evidence of the impact it is generating for the people and places it connects.

“As the country continues to emerge from the pandemic, we have seen increasing interest in the Great American Rail-Trail,” said RTC’s lead trail planner for the project, Kevin Belanger. “People from all over have reached out to share their excitement about experiencing the route. States and communities are investing their infrastructure dollars in advancing key projects. But maybe most important, the trail is serving its purpose as a platform for telling the stories of the nation’s history and heritage and providing space for people to reflect, connect and find solace and joy.”

2021 marked the highest annual investment made to date in Great American Rail-Trail projects. An estimated \$15.6 million in public and private funds were invested in planning and trail development. Since the trail was announced in 2019, more than \$34 million have been invested in projects that fill critical gaps along the route. This new funding will continue to create linkages between rural, suburban and urban communities, with the potential to generate significant returns on investment.

“As we fill more gaps along the Great American Rail-Trail, we’re able to unlock more and more of the economic development and community benefits it promises to the towns and cities it serves,” said Liz Thorstensen, RTC’s vice president of trail development. “We know that trails generate billions of dollars each year in economic activity for the country. Looking ahead, we’re planning to release new research in 2022 that will specifically illustrate the current and potential economic and social benefits of the Great American, so that people have the evidence and tools to back up what we all know—that this iconic trail will be transformative for communities and the nation.”

RTC shared the progress made on the Great American Rail-Trail in 2021 [during a virtual event](#) that included: appearances by [Whitney Washington](#), a first-time long-distance rider, and Jay Waters, a rider with the veterans’ outdoor therapy program [Warrior Expeditions](#), who spoke about their experiences on

the trail; updates from the [Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission](#) on the significant impact of connections like the Renslow Trestle and the Beverly Bridge on the Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail, a host trail of the Great American; and a powerful example of [state leadership in Indiana](#), with a focus on the statewide Next Level Trails Program, to advance significant trail projects with dedicated funding. The event also showcased the story of a developing trail along the Great American Rail-Trail in Nebraska, [the Northern Cheyenne Healing Trail](#), which serves as a place for reflection, honoring the members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe who led the breakout from Fort Robinson in 1879.

Introduced in May 2019, the Great American spans 3,700+ miles across 12 states between Washington, D.C., and Washington State. The trail is 53% complete, with 60 miles having been added to the route since 2019 and 120 miles in the pipeline for development. The Great American will serve 50 million people living within 50 miles of the trail, as well as millions of additional visitors from around the world. Explore the Great American at [greatamericanrailtrail.org](#), and connect with the #GRTAmerican via social media @greatamericanrailtrail.

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](#) and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).