



rails-to-trails conservancy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 21, 2021

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

New Data Reveals Banner Year for Trail Use

Analysis finds that close-to-home access to trails and the outdoors continues to be important for people's well-being

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's largest trails advocacy organization, today released an analysis of national trail count data for 2021, finding that trail use remained significantly higher than 2019 levels.

Nationwide, RTC's trail counters showed an average increase in trail use of 36% compared with 2019, marking a second year of record-setting trail use across the country. In 2020, as pandemic-related lockdowns were commonplace, RTC's trail counters showed an average nationwide increase in trail use of 51% compared to 2019.

"As we wrap up 2021, we continue to see evidence that access to nature and the outdoors is a critical component of our well-being—especially during times of heightened and chronic stress that we've all faced for nearly two years," said Torsha Bhattacharya, Ph.D., research director at RTC. "While we've always celebrated trails as vital to healthy, thriving communities, consistently high levels of trail use show us how important trails are to our physical and mental health, and how critical trails are in encouraging even more people to get outside."

As the nation continues to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, experts regularly point to the outdoors as the safest space to gather and participate in activities. While trails have always provided essential access to the outdoors for millions of people in the U.S., the pandemic brought sharp focus to the importance of these public spaces in our communities with more people seeking spaces to be active outside in their own neighborhoods.

In an ongoing RTC poll, which has been running since September 2020, nearly all respondents say that they are getting outdoors the same or more than they did previously (95%), and the majority say that having access to outdoor spaces has reduced their stress (67%). Nearly half of people say that since the pandemic they now consider trails and outdoor spaces to be very important (47%).

"It is inspiring that trail usage has remained high even as other places for social interaction and exercise have opened back up to the public," said Bhattacharya. "The sustained interest in trails, walking and biking, and finding opportunities to be active outside close to home speaks to the appreciation for trails we're seeing across the country."

A report released earlier this year by the [Outdoor Industry Association](#) about outdoor participation during COVID-19 found that those who participated in an outdoor activity for the first time during the

pandemic did so close to home and chose an activity with a low barrier to entry, like walking, running, biking or hiking—all activities that are well-suited to the nation’s nearly [25,000 miles of rail-trails](#), which can be found in every state. The research also suggests that maintaining and growing participation in outdoor activities will require increased access to nearby outdoor spaces and programs that encourage everyday activities like walking, running, biking and hiking.

RTC also reports that in 2021 more than 10 million people have been connected to trail information and trail maps via its national trail-finder website, [TrailLink™](#). The number of people who visited TrailLink in 2021 follows a record-setting 2020, when site analytics demonstrated 60% growth in traffic between March 15, 2020, and March 15, 2021.

RTC continues to encourage those who visit the nation’s trails and outdoor spaces to share the trail and recreate responsibly, following guidelines to keep yourself and others safe while working to maintain access to the nation’s natural spaces. Learn more at railstotrails.org/sharethetrail.

RTC’s national trail count program represents data collected from 42 [Eco-Counters](#) located on geographically diverse multiuse trails across the country. The data is downloaded and analyzed weekly. Trail organizations and municipalities interested in sharing their data with RTC’s national trail count program can contact Torsha Bhattacharya at torsha@railstotrails.org. More information about trail counts is available at railstotrails.org/trailcount.

RTC’s opinion poll was conducted between Sept. 2020 and Dec. 2021 among 1,930 participants on SurveyMonkey. The poll is ongoing.

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](#).