



EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:
Dec. 15, 2022

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RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY ANNOUNCES PROGRESS AND RECORD YEAR IN INVESTMENTS TOWARD COMPLETING GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®

Since 2019, \$75.8 million in public and private funds have been invested in the Great American Rail-Trail, the nation's first cross-country multiuse trail, which is now 54% complete.

WASHINGTON—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) today shared progress made in 2022 along the Great American Rail-Trail®, the organization's signature project that will connect 3,700 miles of multiuse trails between Washington, D.C., and Washington State, including milestones related to funding and new trail mileage.

"This past year, we've seen firsthand how a grand national vision like the Great American Rail-Trail can have a significant impact on the hundreds of communities it connects," said Kevin Belle, RTC's project manager for the Great American Rail-Trail. "Local officials and advocates have leveraged their trails' connections to the Great American Rail-Trail to unlock previously out-of-reach funding. They've invoked the Great American Rail-Trail to build state coalitions and new momentum to tackle difficult gaps in the route. And they've welcomed dozens of people who are riding the trail, navigating the unfinished portion, and spreading the message that this trail is already bringing new economic opportunity to the people and places it serves."

Among major accomplishments along the trail this year include the following:

- **Critical investments were made.** In Nebraska, a historic vote by the state legislature funded \$8.3 million to construct the MoPac Trail, completing the last trail gap between Lincoln and Omaha. Total new funding for the Great American Rail-Trail in 2022 was \$31.2 million, the most in one year since the project was introduced in 2019.
- **New study demonstrates economic potential of the Great American Rail-Trail.** The study estimates that each year the trail could generate more than \$229.4 million in visitor spending, \$104 million in labor income and \$22.8 million in new tax revenue.
- **The grand opening of the Beverly Bridge in Washington.** The opening of the historic bridge connected a major gap in the 285-mile Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail across the Columbia River, creating more than 50 continuous miles along the Great American in Washington State.
- **The first new miles of trail in Illinois opened.** This year, the Grand Illinois Trail marked the first new miles completed in the state along the Great American (2.5 total), extending the trail eastward from East Moline.
- **Indiana's "Year of the Trails" generated new momentum.** 2022 marked Indiana's "Year of the Trails," with a focus on securing new dedicated and recurring funding for trails in the state. RTC drew focus to the call to action by celebrating Gov. Eric J. Holcomb and Rep. Carey Hamilton as Rail-

Trail Champions—with both making commitments to accelerate the completion of the Great American in their state as a strategy to boost economic and quality-of-life opportunities.

- **Trail experiences highlighting accessibility.** World record holder Ian Mackay, founder of Ian’s Ride and an accessibility advocate, traveled 475 miles by power wheelchair on the easternmost portion of the Great American to raise awareness of the importance of, and the need for, more access to the outdoors for people with mobility impairments and other disabilities.

“The progress we’re celebrating on the Great American Rail-Trail is a snapshot of what it takes to achieve a major national project like this—building new segments of trail, creating the political energy and motivation to fund trail development and trail maintenance, and bringing people out on the trail so that we can prove how important it is to deliver quality of life and opportunities to be active outside for everyone,” said Belle.

The progress being highlighted by RTC comes as Congress is finalizing the fiscal year (FY) 2023 appropriations bill, and the Administration identifies its FY 2024 budget priorities, in which RTC is advocating for funding for the **Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program**. This new program, which was created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will make dedicated federal grants available to connect trails and other active-transportation infrastructure at a larger scale, helping to complete significant gaps in trail and active transportation systems and long-distance biking and walking routes—like the Great American Rail-Trail—far more quickly than what is possible with current funding programs.

When complete, the Great American Rail-Trail, a signature project of RTC, has the potential to 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.