



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Paola Tejada Lalinde, paola@railstotrails.org, 240.506.3188

RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY HELPS TRAIL USERS TO SAFELY GET OUTSIDE THIS WINTER DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

With trail use surging nationally, new data from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy shows people are getting outside 50% more than before the pandemic, significantly reducing stress.

WASHINGTON, DC— As COVID-19 cases rise this winter, public health officials are underlining the importance of continuing to find ways to be active, especially outside where the risks associated with COVID-19 tend to be lower. Health experts point to the role of physical activity in building a healthy immune system, in addition to other physical and mental health benefits. A recent Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) study shows that trails are also serving as destinations for socializing outdoors, with 50% of people reporting that they use trails to connect with their friends and family.

With public transportation and [transit continuing to limit service in many metropolitan areas nationwide](#), many people are also relying on trails as walking and biking routes for essential trips. RTC has [tracked record-breaking numbers](#) of trail users in 2020, with an increase of 80% in trail use in early November compared to the same time last year. As communities turn to active transportation, research shows that [investments in connected active transportation infrastructure](#) can bring unique opportunities to create good jobs and meet mobility needs of underserved communities and historically disinvested populations.

“This exceptional increase in outdoor activity is a pattern being seen in towns and cities around the country,” said Brandi Horton, a spokesperson for RTC. “We are living through an exceptional public health and economic crisis, which is testing our resilience. Trails have so much to offer in response, whether it be a means to commute to a job, spend valuable socially-distanced time outdoors with family and friends, or be in nature, which is proven to improve our well-being just by being present. From being active to doing crafts with kids, to reflecting and refueling — there are dozens of ways to enjoy the trail experience at no cost. Anytime you’re out on the trail, though, we urge you to follow public health guidelines, share the trail and recreate responsibly.”

The pandemic has changed people’s perception of trails, with 48% saying they now find trails to be very important.

During a Facebook Live event to encourage safe trail use during winter and COVID-19, Dr. Jim Sallis, distinguished professor emeritus of family medicine and public health at the University of California, San Diego and RTC board member, encouraged people to get outdoors “to stay well, to build up your resilience in the event you might get infected so you’re better able to resist the infection. If your immune system is working better, if your inflammatory system is working better, if you are psychologically in a better mood, a better place—all those are generally helpful [to stave off COVID-19].”

Cold weather and darker days introduce new challenges for less experienced trail users and can make it harder for even the most enthusiastic trail user to be motivated. Experts recommend planning ahead, practicing social distancing,

dressing in layers, wearing headlamps and face covers, and following trail safety and etiquette guidelines when getting out on the trails this winter.

RTC is providing free tools and resources to the public for getting safely outdoors, gearing up for outdoor activities in cold weather, and finding trails close to home:

- RTC has a regularly updated library of COVID-19 resources and blog posts with tips, advocacy toolkits, and information on safe trail use and how to #RecreateResponsibly. RTC's content is available as a resource and for reprinting as appropriate.
- RTC conducts and publishes weekly analyses of national trail usage based on data gathered from trail counters distributed across the country.
- RTC's Trail Moments initiative captures voices from around the country on how trails have impacted the lives of Americans during the pandemic. Discover their inspirational stories and explore more on social media using #TrailMoments.
- RTC's TrailLink app and website is a free trail-finder resource with information on nearly 40,000 miles of trails nationwide, giving people immediate access to trails close to home so they can learn more about the trail before they go and plan ahead.

For more information on RTC's COVID-19 resources, visit RTC's website.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation's largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.