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**Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Releases Latest Research on Net Economic Impact of Trails in Wisconsin during Ceremony for 2019 Rail-Trail Champion Award**

*Former RTC President Keith Laughlin recognized as steward of rail-trail movement and Route of the Badger trail network visionary, a project that can maximize the \$1.5 billion annual economic impact of Wisconsin's trails*

**MILWAUKEE**—In the city that is the center point of the Route of Badger, southeastern Wisconsin's 700-mile landmark regional trail network and a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) TrailNation™ project, RTC today released the latest data about the health and economic benefits that trails deliver to the state.

A state-based analysis of RTC's report, *Active Transportation Transforms America*, found that the net economic impact of trails and active transportation annually in Wisconsin is as much as \$1.5 billion, including direct trail user spending of \$686 million and health costs avoided of \$833 million. This analysis reveals Wisconsin's role in contributing to a national trail and active transportation economy of \$34.1 billion. RTC's report also found that as infrastructure connectivity improves, in part through trail and active-transportation network development like the work underway with the Route of the Badger, the economic contribution of active transportation infrastructure nationwide has the potential to be more than \$138.5 billion each year.

"This research is powerful because it proves that connecting trails and walking and biking infrastructure can bring incredible benefits. There are quantifiable benefits when we convert short trips to walking and biking—but it takes connected and convenient infrastructure to realize those benefits," said Ryan Chao, president of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. "The current active transportation economy in Wisconsin is significant. Now we have the evidence to make the case for the role that trails and trail networks like Route of the Badger have in realizing big goals for the region around physical health, quality of life, tourism and the economy."

These findings were released during a celebration for RTC's 2019 Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion, Keith Laughlin. As former RTC president, Laughlin is being recognized for his role in growing the trails movement, which now represents more than 36,000 miles of trails nationwide and a grassroots community of more than 1 million. Laughlin's visionary leadership to create a nationwide network of trails—including his role in conceptualizing the Route of the Badger through analyses of open trails and the existing corridors and rights-of-way that could connect them—has been central to the success of the movement and RTC's work to create healthier places for healthier people.

"A decade ago, Keith posed an innovative thesis to the trails movement: If we connect completed trails into a 'network,' it could create benefits much greater than the sum of its parts—related to health, economic development, tourism, mobility and conservation. From that idea TrailNation was born, and the inspiration to connect trails across the country truly began to take hold," said Chao. "Now, we have

the evidence to prove that Keith’s thesis is spot on—and it has inspired infrastructure that is creating healthier places for healthier people.”

In honor of his achievements, RTC made a gift in Laughlin’s name to Madison’s Southwest Commuter Path—a 5.6-mile trail that embodies his vision of trails as essential to healthy people and places. Following the route of the Illinois Central Railroad branch, the trail is an essential resource in moving people throughout the community, connecting the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus with neighborhoods surrounding the state capitol.

Since 2011, the Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champions Award has honored more than 35 individuals who have made significant contributions to the rail-trail movement through their hard work, volunteerism and support—in short, those who have gone above and beyond in the name of trails. The program is supported by Jeff Doppelt, a philanthropist from Great Neck, New York.

Learn more about the Route of the Badger at [railstotrails.org/badger](http://railstotrails.org/badger).

### **“Active Transportation Transforms America” Methodology**

To determine the net economic impact of trails and active transportation in Wisconsin, RTC applied the methodology used to calculate the national figures for health cost savings and local spending impact. The net health cost savings was determined by applying the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s cost savings associated with increased physical activity (\$630 to \$1,437 in 2019 dollars) to 10% of Wisconsin’s population (5.8 million according to the U.S. Census 2018 population estimates), based on findings from the National Household Travel Survey that indicates 10% of the U.S. population meets physical activity guidelines through walking and biking. Local trail spending was calculated using RTC’s 15-years-plus dataset of localized trail-spending studies, which finds average direct spending at trail-oriented and trail-adjacent businesses of \$5 million to \$7 million. These figures were then multiplied by the 98 open rail-trails in Wisconsin that are accounted for in RTC’s database of rail-trails nationwide.

Download the “Active Transportation Transforms America” report and view the methodology for the national study at [railstotrails.org/atta](http://railstotrails.org/atta).

*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](http://railstotrails.org) and [@railstotrails](#) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*