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## **RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY STANDS WITH STATE LEADERSHIP IN OHIO TO TURN TRAILS VISION INTO REALITY**

*Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus, Ohio Department of Natural Resources Identify Action Plan to Connect State,  
Including Funding Commitments Necessary to Trail Vision*

**COLUMBUS**—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and the Ohio Trails Partnership (OTP) gathered with the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus and representatives from Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and TourismOhio to discuss strategies to move forward the new state trails plan—the [Ohio Trails Vision](#).

On Oct. 2, RTC, its partners and state elected officials discussed how to deliver the political leadership necessary to complete statewide trail networks outlined in the vision. ODNR Director Mary Mertz highlighted immediate and long-term strategies to implement the plan including convening a cross-agency working group that involves ODNR, ODH, Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and TourismOhio. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources also announced a financial commitment to improve the [trails.ohiodnr.gov](http://trails.ohiodnr.gov) website and develop a related app. The ODNR is also implementing plans to effectively support diversity and resources among volunteers, trail users and trail managers.

“Working together, Ohio’s state agencies and legislators are making big strides in pursuit of Ohio’s Trails Vision, thanks in large part to the bipartisan collaboration and leadership of the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus,” said Brian K. Housh, RTC’s Midwest Policy Manager. “This leadership is necessary as we seek to leverage trail, walking and biking networks to create healthy, thriving communities and it’s a model for the rest of the nation.”

In Ohio, communities and local partners are working together with RTC to complete networks of trails across the Buckeye State that safely connect people by bike or on foot to places within their communities, while also completing trail “spines”—like the Great American Rail-Trail that stretches more than 3,700 miles between Washington, D.C. and Washington State—building connections across counties, regions and states and delivering significant economic, health, safety, recreational and quality-of-life benefits for all Ohioans.

In response to the Oct. 2 event, Sen. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville) took to Twitter to announce that he was “very pleased” to spend his morning with the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus. He also encouraged constituents to explore the ODNR website and local trails near them. An avid trail user, he highlighted the legislative efforts to ‘build, promote and maintain’ trails in Ohio.

Sen. Sean J. O'Brien (D-Bazetta) thanked all those who came out for the Fall meeting of the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus. During the meeting, he stressed the importance of trails connecting people, places and opportunities. The [Western Reserve Greenway Trail](#) extends from Warren north through Ashtabula; he actively uses the trail to train for triathlons and credits it for community health and traffic reduction.

“A great deal of work has been accomplished on the strategy to make Ohio trails a national attraction,” Rep. Rick Perales (R-Beavercreek) posted on Facebook. Key segments of the existing portion of the

future 3,700-miles-plus [Great American Rail-Trail](#) go through his district, which includes the Village of Yellow Springs where RTC's Midwest Office is located along the nation's largest paved trail network.

Trails have a significant impact on transportation, particularly in urban areas. For example, in Columbus, both the [Olentangy Trail](#) and [Scioto Trail](#) head into downtown, providing people with opportunities to walk and bike to work. The [Little Miami Scenic Trail](#) stretches through communities between Cincinnati and Xenia and the Cleveland [Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail](#) connects the downtown area to the outer suburbs and the Emerald Necklace that takes people into suburban areas. The City of Oxford recently held a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the beginning of the next phase of the Oxford Area Trail System, which is being funded by a local levy.

Through its Trails Transform America campaign, RTC is advocating that states like Ohio pursue the creation of trail network and spines as strategic opportunities to deliver economic and quality of life outcomes for their residents, while urging Congress to pursue a visionary and transformative transportation bill that provides an increase in funding dedicated for active transportation, focused on completing trail and active transportation networks. In addition, RTC is calling on Congress to build upon thoughtful approaches to increase funding for the Transportation Alternatives Program included in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019 with a focus on improving program implementation, providing the policy direction necessary to ensure that all states invest in safe places to walk and bike.

Learn more about the [Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus](#) and the [Great American Rail-Trail](#) at RTC's website. Details on RTC's efforts to inspire a visionary transportation reauthorization bill and photos of today's event can also be found at [railstotrails.org/trailstransform](http://railstotrails.org/trailstransform) and on social media using the hashtag #TrailsTransform.

*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](#).*