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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Tours Missouri, Drawing Attention to the Statewide Opportunities the Rock Island Trail Can Deliver

Nonprofit brings 20 VIPs on tour of the Katy Trail and the Rock Island Spur, organizing meetings along the way with local elected officials and business owners to showcase the positive impact the future 144-mile Rock Island Trail can bring to the region

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.—As Missouri State Parks continues to debate the future of the 144-mile Rock Island Railroad corridor between Windsor and Beaufort, Missouri, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and its partners in the state, including Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. and the Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation, are committed to building support for the future trail and elevating the incredible value that it could deliver to the state.

“Missouri is an important leader in the rail-trail movement and an example of the power that trails have to deliver new economies to states across the country,” said Keith Laughlin, president of RTC. “We brought our annual Trailblazer Society ride to Missouri this year so that our most committed and influential members could see firsthand the role the Katy Trail has had in growing Missouri’s outdoor tourism economy—and the potential of the Rock Island Trail to significantly extend those economic benefits to more communities in the state.”

Since 2014, RTC has been working with partners on the ground to encourage first Ameren Corporation, the corridor’s owner, to railbank the 144-mile segment between Windsor and Beaufort for rail-trail conversion, and now to encourage the state of Missouri to accept the corridor from Ameren. The Surface Transportation Board has extended the deadline for a decision through February 2019. This undertaking to ensure the future of the Rock Island Trail is an important next step for the state’s trails movement, building upon decades of political advocacy and grassroots organizing in the name of trails, walking and biking across Missouri.

During the Trailblazer Society tour, which runs from June 24–28, RTC will showcase important milestones that have contributed to the state’s successful track record for trails. On June 28, riders will gather in Columbia, Missouri, for lunch with Mayor Brian Treece, City Council Member Ian Thomas and former mayor and Rail-Trail Champion Darwin Hindman, the latter of whom was a pivotal player in helping RTC secure more than \$25 million in federal funds for the city to implement a biking and walking pilot program that resulted in a 63 percent increase in biking and a 46 percent increase in walking over a four-year period. Later on June 28, riders will tour a portion of the Rock Island corridor in Eugene with permission from Ameren.

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“Missouri has been out front in the trails movement time and again; the Katy Trail was the first in the country to be railbanked, preserving the former railroad corridor as a recreational trail and an economic engine for the state. The state is known for proving what is possible in building a world-class state parks system and epic trails that draw international acclaim while also connecting people within and between communities. It is time for Missouri to live up to its reputation and build the Rock Island Trail, connecting to the Katy to create more than 450 miles of trail between Kansas City and St. Louis,” said Laughlin.

In addition to a focus on the 144-mile corridor between Windsor and Beaufort, RTC also supports the Rock Island Trail connection into Kansas City. In May, RTC announced that the Rock Island Rail Corridor Authority would receive a \$25,000 Doppelt Family Trail Development Fund (Doppelt Fund) grant for the 8-mile Greenwood Connector, which will help to complete the final western trail segment to connect the Katy to Kansas City via the Rock Island. In 2015, MORIT received a \$15,000 Doppelt Fund grant to support trail development on the Rock Island Line. The Doppelt Fund is part of RTC’s grant program designed to move forward critical projects that enhance health and transportation connectivity in their regions.

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.