

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

JUNE 24, 2014

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**SENATOR ANDY GARDINER RECEIVES
OUTSTANDING LEGISLATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Praised for determined support of trail system, investment in Florida's tourism economy

WASHINGTON, D.C. – State Senator Andy Gardiner is this week being heralded across the nation for his support of Florida's trail system and tourism economy.

Sen. Gardiner (R-Orlando), was awarded the Outstanding Legislative Achievement Award by one of America's most influential trails, biking and walking organizations, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Sen. Gardiner was a driving force behind securing funding to begin work on the Coast-to-Coast Connector, a project to link existing trails into a 275-mile network from St. Petersburg to Titusville. Governor Rick Scott earlier this month approved \$15.5 million to begin construction of the project as part of the 2014/15 state budget.

“The experience of places across America shows us that trails reap enormous economic, transportation and health benefits,” says Ken Bryan, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Florida state director. “But without visionary leaders that are willing to make the necessary investments, these benefits go unrealized. The people of Florida have a great champion in Andy Gardiner – one that cares about the success of Florida's businesses and the health of Florida's people, and is willing to stick his neck out to fight for them.”

Sen. Gardiner received a significant setback in 2013 when Gov. Scott vetoed funding for the Coast-to-Coast Connector project that Gardiner had worked hard to support.

“Rather than say ‘oh well, it’s a great idea but politically it will be too hard,’ Sen. Gardiner doubled down on the project and found another way to make it happen,” Bryan says. “By phasing funding for the project over a number of years, Gardiner was able to get construction underway while still being conscious of the fiscal needs of the moment.”

“There is no doubt that a 275-mile trail across Florida will soon generate tens of millions in visitor spending annually and repay its cost many times over. Sen. Gardiner deserves great credit for his vision, and his desire to make savvy investments in the state.”

Sen. Gardiner also oversaw improvements earlier this month of Florida’s State Transportation Trust Fund, which will allow state and local funds to leverage federal investment for the construction of biking and walking infrastructure.

“The communities of central Florida are united in their support of a trail connecting Florida’s two coasts, and responded to Gov. Scott’s veto in 2013 with resolutions of support and by allocating local funding to complete gaps,” Bryan says. “Sen. Gardiner responded to the call from his constituents, and he did so with great skill, enthusiasm and perseverance. The beneficiaries are the people and businesses of the region.”

The last recipient of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s Outstanding Legislative Achievement Award was Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater), who was instrumental in preserving the Greenways and Trails Program and securing funding sources for trail building.

“In many ways, all eyes are on Florida, in terms of trails and active transportation,” Bryan says. “On one hand, we have some of the most beautiful recreation areas in the country, but our communities top the list of the most dangerous places to walk and bike. It is a state of great contradiction, of tremendous potential and of missed opportunities. Amongst all this, Sen. Gardiner stands out as one of Florida’s most important leaders.”

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. For more information visit www.railstotrails.org.