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**TENNESSEE PARKS VOLUNTEERS TO BE HONORED IN NATION'S CAPITAL**

*Award comes as funding threatened for popular Recreational Trails Program*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Friends of Beaman Park, a nonprofit organization that works to protect and promote this much-loved natural and cultural resource in Nashville, will be honored in Washington, D.C. next week at the 2013 Recreational Trails Program Awards ceremony.

Friends of Beaman Park is one of just 10 groups across America to receive a Recreational Trails Program Achievement Award at the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill, June 4.

The award recognizes the group's role in overseeing the construction of a new handicap-accessible trail and boardwalk at the Beaman Park Nature Center, part of their mission to make Beaman Park available and accommodating to all Tennesseans as well as the many out-of-state tourists that visit the park each year.

The construction of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) certified trail and boardwalk, as well as the addition of interpretive signage, has greatly improved the capacity of Beaman Park as a local attraction and an asset for the state's booming outdoor recreation economy.

This significant improvement to Beaman Park was made possible by the Recreational Trails Program, a federal grant program funded largely by gas taxes paid by off-road vehicles. One of the few funding sources dedicated to the construction and maintenance of trails, the Recreational Trails Program provided \$85,000 for the new trail system and signage, funds that leveraged the significant "sweat equity" investment of 13 Nashville volunteer organizations, who provided more than 1,500 hours of volunteer labor valued at over \$25,000.

"This project is a terrific example of what the Recreational Trails Program has been able to do for Tennessee over the past 21 years," says Marianne Fowler of the national nonprofit Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a member of the Coalition for Recreational Trails. "Recreational Trails Program

funding leverages many millions in other private and public investments – investments not only in trails and parks but also in local economies, tourism-related businesses, and in recreational options for the people of Tennessee.”

However, despite its bipartisan support and tremendous success since it was introduced in 1992, the Recreational Trails Program currently faces the threat of elimination. According to Fowler, each year state governors can leave the program of their own volition simply by notifying the U.S. Department of Transportation of that intention by August 31.

“Last year, Governor Haslam kept Tennessee in the Rec’ Trails Program, and it continued to make great things possible for the state,” she says. “We need him to do the same for 2014.”

“Tennessee is lucky to have had a history of far-sighted leaders who could see the benefit that investments in recreational trails bring to the state,” Fowler says. “Committing to the Recreational Trails Program is one of the reasons why Tennessee enjoys an outdoor recreation economy that generates \$8.2 billion each year in consumer spending, and directly supports 83,000 in Tennessee jobs. This is exactly what federal funding programs should do – stimulate investment.”

Fowler says it is important that Tennesseans contact Governor Haslam in the coming weeks to thank him for keeping Tennessee in the program this year, and ask him to do the same for 2014.

“The governor needs to hear from his constituents that this is a program that benefits Tennessee,” Fowler says. “Otherwise, the decision can be made to siphon these dedicated funds away from trails investments and into other programs. If this happens, we pull the rug out from underneath local champions like the Friends of Beaman Park, and their efforts to protect the state’s natural areas and make them accessible for all Tennesseans.”

Urge Governor Haslam to reaffirm his support for the Recreational Trails Program at [www.railstotrails.org/SaveRecTrails](http://www.railstotrails.org/SaveRecTrails)

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*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. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org).*