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*Event photos and videos are available by request*

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**WORLD RECORD HOLDER, IAN MACKAY, SETS OUT ON 475-MILE SOLO TREK VIA WHEELCHAIR FROM D.C. TO OHIO ON GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL®**

*Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, United Spinal Association and Ian's Ride came together to celebrate the kickoff of Mackay's wheelchair trek on the Great American with a focus on creating more access to the outdoors for people of all abilities*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**—Ian's Ride, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and United Spinal Association (USA) gathered with members and supporters today on the National Mall to celebrate the launch of Ian Mackay's journey on the Great American Rail-Trail® from Washington, D.C., to Columbus, Ohio. Mackay, founder of Ian's Ride and an accessibility advocate, will travel 475-miles by power wheelchair on the [easternmost portion of the Great American](#) to raise awareness of the importance of and the need for more access to the outdoors for people with mobility impairments and other disabilities.

"Early in recovery from my injury, access to the outdoors brought me joy when I couldn't find it elsewhere. The Great American Rail-Trail is a great example of infrastructure designed for people of all abilities and I'm so excited to get my wheels on the easternmost 475 miles of it," said Mackay. "My philosophy is: community is the answer, we are stronger together and nature is the best medicine."

The event and Mackay's ride will showcase the importance of accessible outdoor infrastructure and the need for strategic funding that helps to connect trails and create safe spaces for people of all abilities to be active in the outdoors.

"We are thrilled to cheer on Ian as he sets off along the Great American Rail-Trail®," said Kevin Belanger, RTC's project manager for the Great American Rail-Trail. "The cross-country Great American Rail-Trail will provide direct access to trails and the outdoors for 50 million people within 50 miles of the trail across 3,700 miles between Washington, D.C., and Washington State. We hope it serves as an inspiration for what is possible when we prioritize accessibility in creating and connecting outdoor infrastructure."

Mackay's ride on the Great American Rail-Trail comes as several priorities are being pursued in Congress. RTC is championing funding for the [Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program](#), which would provide focused investment for connecting trail and active transportation infrastructure, creating seamless routes for walking, biking and wheelchair use that is separated from vehicle traffic. United Spinal is pushing for legislation to lift Medicare's "in-the-home" rule, which restricts Medicare coverage of wheelchairs and wheelchair components that are designed to function outside of a person's home, including outdoor environments.

“We are incredibly proud of Ian as he highlights outdoor accessibility, which is a topic that so many of our members are passionate about,” said Steve Lieberman, Director of Advocacy and Policy for United Spinal Association. “Our Outdoor Access Working Group has brought together wheelchair users across the country to advocate for greater accessibility in built infrastructure and natural infrastructure, to seek greater availability and better maintenance of adaptive equipment to enjoy the outdoors, and to continue to promote outdoor recreational opportunities among our community of wheelchair users across the United States. Ian continues to set the bar higher for all of us.”

At the event, Mackay and Belanger were joined by Monica Wiley, D.C. Chapter Advocacy Coordinator, United Spinal Association; Jeremy Buzzell, National Accessibility Program Team Coordinator, National Park Service; and Juliette Rizzo, RTC board member, disability advocate and former Ms. Wheelchair America. Dozens of supporters came out to celebrate Mackay’s ride and many rode alongside him in wheelchairs and on bikes from the National Mall to the C&O Canal Towpath trailhead in Georgetown. Mackay is welcoming members of the public and other advocates to join him for segments of the ride as [he travels along his route](#).

After a spinal cord injury from a bike crash in 2008 left Mackay paralyzed, the avid outdoorsman has relied on a power wheelchair and accessible trails to [stay connected to nature and his cycling community](#). Through his nonprofit Ian’s Ride, he raises awareness of accessible trails across the country. Mackay recently broke a [Guinness World Record](#) for the farthest distance—more than 184 miles—in 24 hours on a mouth-controlled power wheelchair. His current 12-day route follows the Great American Rail-Trail®, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s flagship project to connect the nation’s first cross-country, multiuse trail across 3,700 miles between Washington, D.C., and Washington State—Mackay’s home state.

Learn more about Ian’s Ride along the eastern end of Great American Rail-Trail: [iansride.com/great-american-rail-trail](http://iansride.com/great-american-rail-trail).

*[Ian’s Ride](#) is a nonprofit founded by Ian Mackay that advocates for more accessible trails for people with disabilities across the country.*

*Formed in 1946 by paralyzed veterans, [United Spinal](#) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization dedicated to empowering people with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), including veterans, to live successful and fulfilling lives.*

*Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Connect with RTC at [railstotrails.org](http://railstotrails.org) and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). Learn more about the Great American Rail-Trail at [greatamericanrailtrail.org](http://greatamericanrailtrail.org) and follow its progress on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) @greatamericanrailtrail.*