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Ahead of Memorial Day Weekend, Veterans Launch Therapeutic Bike Ride Across the Country on Great American Rail-Trail

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Warrior Expeditions team up to highlight the mental and physical health benefits of time spent outside.

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and Warrior Expeditions were joined by members of Congress at the U.S. Capitol to celebrate the departure of six wartime veterans as they embark on a cross-country bike ride to process and heal from the mental health impacts of their deployments. The riders began their journey at the eastern endpoint of the Great American Rail-Trail, RTC's flagship project to connect a cross-country, multiuse trail, and will conquer 3,700 miles before reaching their ultimate finish in La Push, Washington, later this summer.

"When we introduced the Great American Rail-Trail four years ago, we knew that this grand vision to connect a trail across the country would capture the imagination of the nation," said Ryan Chao, president of RTC. "The veterans who have taken part in this ride previously have shared that the journey has brought solace and healing, alongside hope that comes from connecting with the people, places and rich heritage that makes up the American landscape. Their experience is an inspiration and we're proud that the infrastructure we're helping to build can support their expedition."

Warrior Expeditions is a nonprofit organization that emphasizes the therapeutic value of long-distance outdoor expeditions to help veterans transition from their wartime experiences. Veterans apply to be included in one of several expedition teams, including long-distance hikes, paddles and the Warrior Bike, which exclusively takes place on the Great American Rail-Trail. As part of the program, psychologists partner with Warrior Expeditions to research [and publish the effects](#) of long-term outdoor and wilderness experiences, like the Warrior Bike Expedition, on combat veterans.

"Warrior Expeditions is excited to support another group of veterans along the Great American Rail Trail for the third consecutive year," said Sean Gobin, founder and executive director of Warrior Expeditions. "These rides allow our veterans to find peace and healing in nature while simultaneously experiencing a cross section of America. We also very much appreciate RTC's work to make the route better and better each year."

Veterans participating in the 2023 Warrior Bike include Stephanie Buffett of Riner, Virginia (United States Air Force, deployed to Afghanistan); Timothy Davis of Lake Zurich, Illinois (United States Air Force, deployed to Afghanistan); Brittany Greene of Tacoma, Washington (United States Army, deployed to Afghanistan); Aaron Ledbetter of Cottage Grove, Oregon (United States Army, deployed to Afghanistan);

Charles Sonnenberg of New Braunfels, Texas (United States Air Force, deployed to Iraq); and Jared Thomas of Huntington, West Virginia (United States Army, deployed to Afghanistan).

“I’m hoping that this journey enables me to deepen my understanding of myself and my connection to the world. I anticipate working through a continuous series of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual challenges that have the potential to become significant personal growth opportunities,” said Brittany Greene, former U.S. Army CBRN Officer from Tacoma, Washington.

Over the next several months, media are encouraged to follow the journey as the veterans traverse the Great American Rail-Trail, making stops in Maryland, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and Washington. For more details about the Great American Rail-Trail, including photos and video for press use, visit greatamericanrailtrail.org and follow @greatamericanrailtrail and #GRTAmerican on social media.

Editors and Producers Note: B-roll and photos of the event, courtesy of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, are available upon request by contacting Patricia Brooks, patricia@matchmapmedia.com.

Warrior Expeditions is a veteran nonprofit outdoor therapy program that helps veterans transition from their wartime experiences through long-distance outdoor expeditions.

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 and @railstotrails on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/railstotrails), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/railstotrails) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/railstotrails).