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## **FIVE YEARS OF PROGRESS ON GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ELEVATES NATIONAL IMPACT OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE**

***Rails to Trails Conservancy marked fifth anniversary of iconic national trail alongside Warrior Expeditions, REI Co-op, members of Congress and state offices of outdoor recreation with call to fully fund the federal Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program***

**WASHINGTON**—Rails to Trails Conservancy, the nation’s largest trails, walking and biking advocacy organization, today marked five years of progress toward completing the country’s first cross-country trail with a celebration and call-to-action at the U.S. Capitol.

RTC pointed to the far-reaching demand from people for safe spaces to walk, bike and be active outside, and communities leveraging outdoor recreation for economic development, as key factors in the need to create dedicated, sustainable federal funding sources to connect trail and active transportation systems nationwide.

“The Great American Rail-Trail represents the potential of active transportation infrastructure that connects the nation,” said Ryan Chao, president of Rails to Trails Conservancy. “It magnifies the opportunity for connected trail systems to deliver economic prosperity, quality of life and safe mobility to millions of Americans. It also makes clear the significant need we have to create dedicated and sustained funding so we can adequately invest in creating, connecting and maintaining trails and walking and biking infrastructure in every community.”

The Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program is a new program that provides dedicated funding for the planning and construction of safe and connected active-transportation networks and long-distance spine trails. The program was authorized in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and received its first appropriation in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 federal funding bill. RTC, Congressional champions and partners across the country are continuing to advocate for full program funding in the FY 2025 federal budget.

At the anniversary event, RTC was joined by partners at Warrior Expeditions, REI Co-op, members of Congress and state offices of outdoor recreation in celebrating the progress that’s been made to connect the trail, as well as the tangible benefits it provides to the 50 million people who live within 50 miles of its route and the millions who will use it from around the world.

Since the route for the Great American Rail-Trail was introduced in 2019, more than 100 miles of new trail have been completed and more than \$148 million in federal, state, local and private funding has been invested to advance this vision. Nearly 6% of the remaining route to be completed—160 miles—is in development currently. A recent study conducted by Headwaters Economics found that when the cross-country trail is complete, it is expected to unlock more than \$229 million in spending each year in the communities it serves.

“The Great American Rail-Trail will make a real and reliable economic impact in Wyoming. Not only do its travelers go at a slower pace than a minivan headed through to Yellowstone, but the route is designed to send people into small communities all across the state. That adds up to a projected \$13.2 million in visitor

spending every year,” said Patrick Harrington, manager of Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, a division of Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources.

The event showcased the mental health benefits of increasing access to nature and the outdoors, serving as the launchpad for a team of veterans with Warrior Expeditions. The outdoor therapy program helps veterans transition from their wartime experiences through long-distance outdoor expeditions, and a team is riding the route of the Great American Rail-Trail in its entirety this summer.

“After sacrificing so much for the country we love and its way of life, there is no better way to gain an appreciation for our nation’s natural beauty and diverse communities than by biking across it. Peddling nearly 4,000 miles over three months is an awe-inspiring experience as you pass through so many protected lands—and it restores one’s faith in humanity from the hospitality and generosity of local communities along the way,” said Sean Gobin, executive director of Warrior Expeditions.

The veterans, Brandon Blankenship of Weeki Wachee, Florida (U.S. Army, Cavalry Scout, 2002–2008), KP Haueter of Green Ridge, Missouri (U.S. Air Force, Airlift Navigator, 1983–2007), Michael Kohler of Josephine, Texas (U.S. Army, Engineer, 1995–2015), Callie Leaver of Auburn, Alabama (U.S. Army, Military Police, 1987–2022), Allen Megginson of Winston Salem, North Carolina (U.S. Army, Cavalry Scout, 2003–2007), Suzanne Williamson of Milford, Pennsylvania (U.S. Army, Logistics, 1987–2014) and John Wirth of Rapid City, South Dakota (U.S. Army, Infantry, 2001–2022), will travel from Washington, D.C., to Washington State across the proposed route of the Great American, drawing attention to the trail’s development and the potential it represents for the well-being of the people and places it serves.

The Great American Rail-Trail is Rails to Trails Conservancy’s flagship project to connect a cross-country, multiuse trail, stretching 3,700 miles across 12 states between Washington, D.C., and Washington State. For more details about the Great American, including photos and video for press use, visit [greatamericanrailtrail.org](http://greatamericanrailtrail.org) and follow @greatamericanrailtrail and #GRTAmerican on social media. For information about the Warrior Bike Ride, visit [warriorexpeditions.org](http://warriorexpeditions.org).

*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](#).*

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