

CHANGEMAKERS FOR TRAILS SERIES

Power in Numbers: Building Grassroots Partnerships in Your Community

November 5 & 6, 2025



Historic Battlefield Trail, Texas | Photo by Brandi Horton

Technical Support

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- Log out and back into the webinar
- Listen by phone: +1 309 205 3325 US; meeting ID: 812 7903 9718
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Types of Advocacy

There are different ways to engage with decisions makers and have an impact

- **Everyday advocacy and online engagement:** introducing your network to trails, sharing on social media, telling your story about why trails matter
- **Community advocacy and events on trails:** events and activities where you live, organizing supporters (petitions etc.), attending community meetings
- **Direct advocacy:** attending meetings with elected officials (city council, county meetings, agency discussions); engaging elected officials (local, state and federal); letters to the editor and press

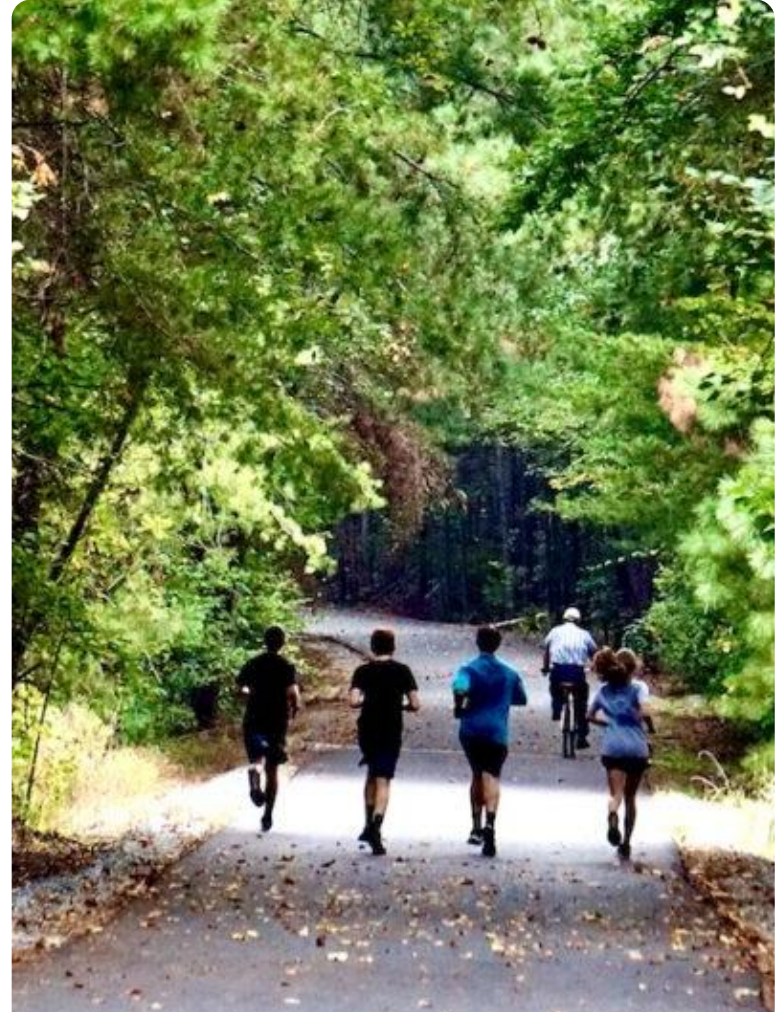


Why Grassroots Partnerships Matter for Advocacy

Grassroots change is core to progress and change—not just for trails but for all types of advocacy

Many movements for change started in small communities and grew:

- Mothers Against Drunk Driving
- Recent campaign to build support for public lands
- Parent Teacher Associations



North Carolina's Thermal Belt Rail Trail | Photo by Willie Lowe

How to organize in your community.

You can start with a core group.

Could be friends or neighbors focused on a shared goal and shared values

Map out your relationships.

How are you already connecting to decision makers?

Partner with other groups.

Are there people in the community already doing this work that you can partner with?

Grow your contacts.

Consider how you can grow by using social media, email, events and more

Take action, together.

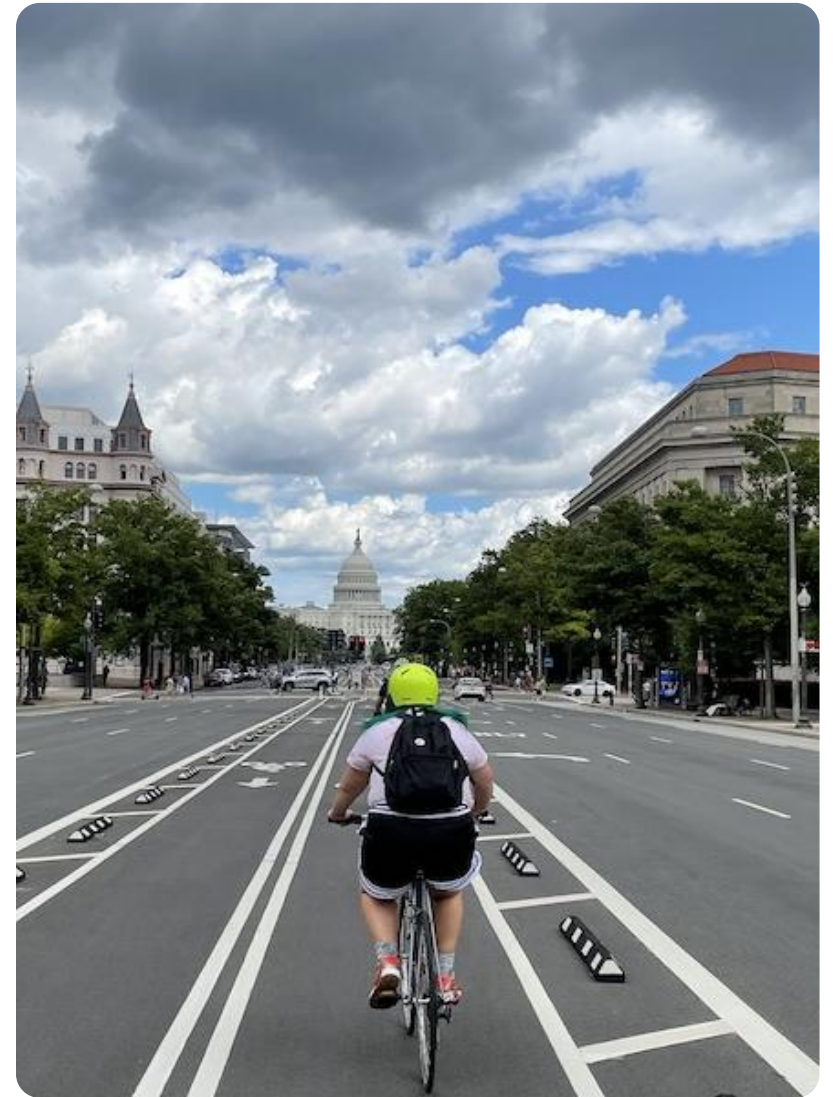
Plan a trail event with your elected officials, start a petition, meet with your officials, speak at an upcoming meeting

Creative Partnerships for Trail Development

Build partnerships where everyone can benefit

- Universities
- Utilities
- Public Health Stakeholders
- Economic Development and Tourism Offices

Different motivations to build trails but same goal and shared values



This work matters, and it matters now.

- Threats to federal programs that support trail development.
- We need to grow partnerships, expand who advocates and advocate in new places.
- Renewal of federal transportation bill makes this critical and timely for ongoing trail investments.
- Decision makers need to hear about this from many different people to inspire change.
- No large corporate entity supports trails, walking and biking—this movement is people powered.
- Our outreach can inspire change—our collective advocacy is necessary to maintain progress.



West Rail Trail

Brownsville, Texas



Brownsville, Texas



In 2008, it was decided to move west rail line out of town.

The county wanted to build a tollway in the ROW.

People started to talk and organize....petitions signed, speaking to elected officials







What do you do? How? When?

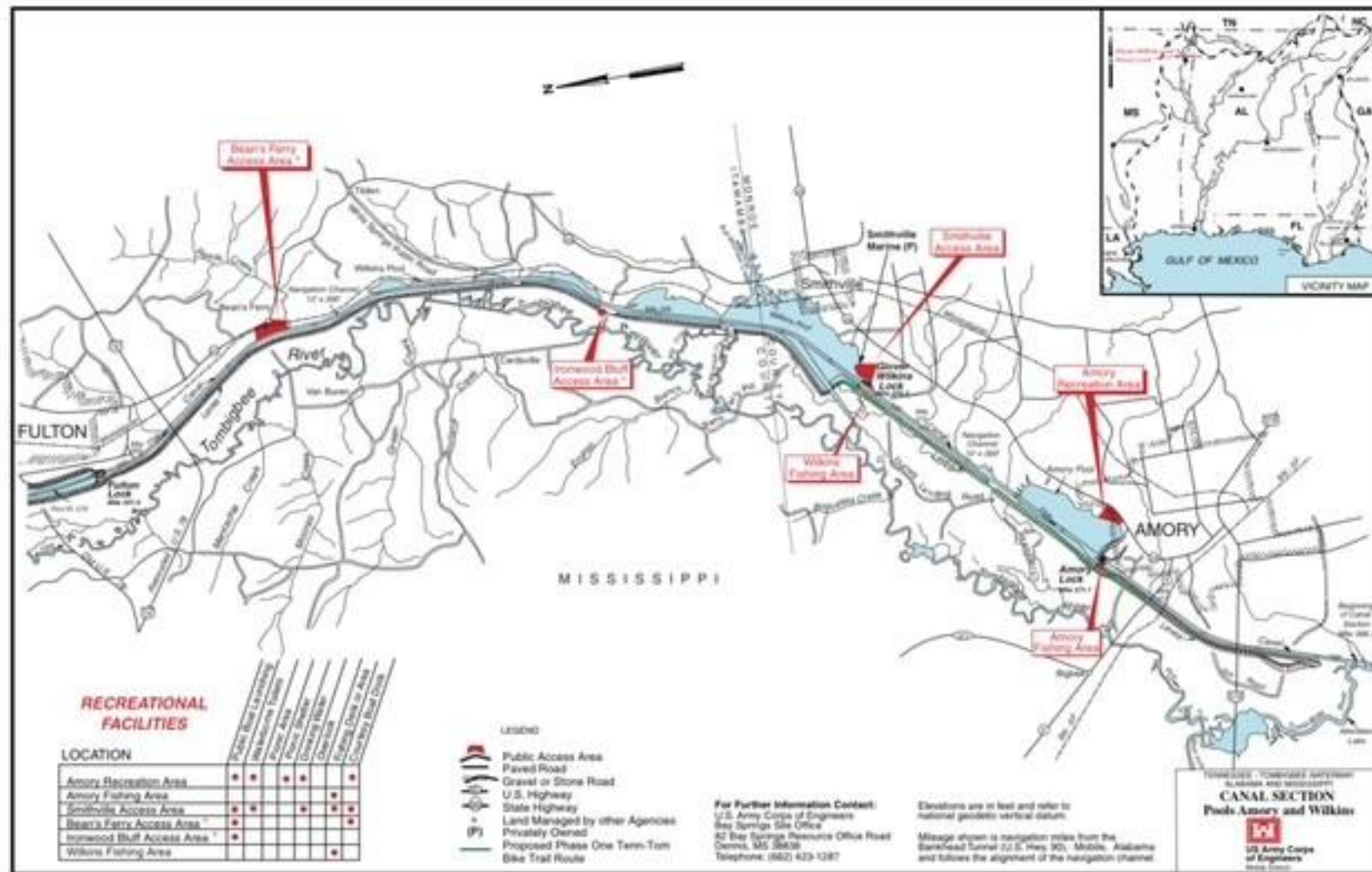
- THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT
 - BUILD CONSENSUS
- IDENTIFY ALL THE REASONS WHY THE PROJECT IS A GREAT IDEA
 - SEE IF YOU CAN IDENTIFY A KIND EAR ON THE COUNCIL
 - (FIND OUT WHAT THEY LIKE, WHAT THEY FIGHT FOR)
- AIM FOR THEIR HEART.....THEY WILL WORK HARDER AND FASTER IF IT HITS THEIR HEART
- PLAN PUBLIC MEETINGS, SOCIAL GATHERINGS, THINK ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA/YARD SIGNS/T-SHIRTS
- SCHEDULE PEOPLE TO KNOCK ON DOORS OR HAVE A FARMERS' MARKET BOOTH OR COLLECT SIGNATURES AFTER CHURCH.
 - NEVER BE AFRAID TO ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS.....ALL THEY CAN SAY IS "NO". (TIMING)



Tenn-Tom Bike Trail

Monroe County, Mississippi









Unique Moment for Advocacy

Decisions about trails are being made at all levels of government

- **Federal:** Next federal transportation bill being drafted now—your members of Congress need to hear from you!
- **State:** States will convene legislatures soon--help advocate for state funding for trails by engaging with your state legislators.

Federal and state governments take cues from each other – keep trails top of mind for all; we need to be loud and persistent!



Congressman Eugene Vindman (D-VA-7) at Great American Rail-Trail event in Washington, D.C.

RTC's Role

- Bringing people together around a shared vision: a nation connected by trails
- Providing resources to help individuals and groups achieve their trail vision: one-on-one technical assistance, Trail-Building Toolbox, TrailNation Playbook
- Network of partners: TrailNation Collaborative
- Events to focus advocacy around: Celebrate Trails Day
- Advocacy best practices



The Metropolitan Branch Trail, Washington DC

Changemakers Action Plan

Here are 4 things you can do to influence how our federal, state and local officials prioritize trails

1. Meet with your federal representatives or their staff in the district (RTC will help!)
2. States will convene legislatures soon--help advocate for state funding for trails
3. Send a message to your elected officials through our petition
4. Invite your local, state or federal officials to join you out on the trail—AND AMPLIFY IT!



Speakers at a rally for the Rock Island Trail in Missouri | Photo by Brandi Horton

What's Next?

Take Action Today:

- Using social media (tag @railstotrails)
- Letters to the editor and storytelling
- Attend community meetings
- Organize events on the trail
- Meeting with elected officials and leaders

Changemakers for Trails:

- Additional trainings: Celebrate Trails Day Advocacy Webinar early 2026
- Save the Date for Celebrate Trails Day 4/25/26
- Sign up to be part of the team to attend key meetings with elected officials
- Resources and training tools:
[Railstotrails.org/advocate](https://railstotrails.org/advocate)



Thank You!