



Media Advisory For: May 21, 2026

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**Veterans Embark on Cross-Country Trek on the Great American Rail-Trail,
Elevating Importance of Outdoor Infrastructure to Nation's Health**

Media are invited to May 21 send-off and America 250 celebration at the U.S. Capitol with Rails to Trails Conservancy, Warrior Expeditions, and members of Congress. Interviews and b-roll opportunities available.

WASHINGTON—On May 21, 2026, six veterans will gather at the U.S. Capitol before embarking on a bike ride across the country on the 3,700-mile route of the [Great American Rail-Trail®](#) between Washington, D.C. and Washington State. The outdoor expedition is the result of a partnership between Rails to Trails Conservancy, the nation's largest trails, walking and biking advocacy organization, and Warrior Expeditions, an outdoor therapy program that helps veterans transition from their wartime experiences through long-distance outdoor expeditions.

The ride is anchored by significant milestones in the country's celebration of the Semiquincentennial, with veterans departing Memorial Day weekend and arriving to the mid-point of the Great American Rail-Trail in Norfolk, Nebraska on July 3 for special America 250 celebrations. On Independence Day, the veterans will join RTC and Warrior Expeditions at Norfolk's annual Freedom Fest, honoring their service and the importance of outdoor recreation infrastructure, like the Great American Rail-Trail, in addressing the mental and physical health needs of the nation.

The veterans' journey on the Great American Rail-Trail takes place against the backdrop of RTC's 40th anniversary and at a time when public funding [for trails, walking and biking is under attack](#)—despite decades of progress and demonstrated impact in rural, suburban and urban communities nationwide. As Congress prepares initial drafts of the next federal transportation bill, which delivers the primary programs responsible for creating, connecting and maintaining America's trails, the Great American Rail-Trail is a demonstration of the need for stronger dedicated federal, state and local investment in this essential infrastructure.

WHAT: Send-off for the Warrior Bike Ride on Great American Rail-Trail

WHEN: Tuesday, May 21, 2026, 9:00 a.m. Eastern

WHERE: Capitol Reflecting Pool (Union Square, Area 15)
([See it on a map.](#))

WHO: Leadership from Rails to Trails Conservancy, Warrior Expeditions, members of Congress (invited), and participating veterans:

- Justin Abramo, New Port Richey, FL, United States Army, Combat Medic (Afghanistan)
- Jayson Goetz, Satellite Beach, FL, United States Air Force, Rescue Pilot (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan)
- Winston Hall, Elkhorn, NE, United States Army, Aircraft Mechanic (Vietnam)
- Mary Montigny, Portsmouth, RI, United States Navy, Seabee Technical Security Specialist (Iraq, Afghanistan)
- Patrick Smith, Patrick SFB, FL, United States Army, Infantryman (Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan)
- Mitchell Villafania, Hammond, LA, United States Army, Scout Pilot (Iraq, Afghanistan)

The Great American Rail-Trail, and the opportunity for these veterans to trek across the country by bike, is a result of forty years of advocacy and trail development spearheaded by Rails to Trails Conservancy in partnership with hundreds of local organizations, municipalities and state leaders. When RTC opened its doors in 1986, there were fewer than 1,000 miles of open rail trails, and the term was not a part of the American vernacular. Today, there are over 42,500 miles of multi-use trails, enough to lap the entire earth twice. More than 150 known multiuse trail networks are in development nationwide, with trail networks underway in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

The Great American is Rails to Trails Conservancy's flagship initiative to create a fully bikeable route across the country that is separated from vehicle traffic. The 3,700-mile route is nearly 56% complete and will serve more than 50 million people living within 50 miles of the route along with the millions who visit from across the country and the world. The Great American Rail-Trail is expected to unlock more than \$229 million in annual economic impact as it is fully developed. For more details, including photos and video for press use visit greatamericanrailtrail.org and follow @greatamericanrailtrail and #GRTAmerican on social media. For information about the Warrior Bike Ride, visit 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 and @railstotrails on social media.

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