

CONGRESSIONAL ALLIES CHAMPION RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM ON EVE OF THE 114TH CONGRESS

October 6, 2014 – An integral part of connecting people with their Great Outdoors in a fun and healthy way is America's wonderful system of trails. Tens of thousands of miles of recreational trails crisscross all 50 states. A key resource for building, improving and maintaining trails for all enthusiasts is the Recreational Trails Program (RTP).

The RTP applies the "user-pay/user-benefit" philosophy of the Highway Trust Fund, which uses federal gasoline taxes paid by motorists to fund the nation's highways. Similarly, the RTP returns a portion of the federal tax on fuel used for non-highway recreation to the states for trail projects. Each year, \$85 million is available to state trail programs. It is the foundation for state trail programs, and unites all trail interests by requiring states to have representative trails advisory committees and assuring funding for both motorized trail activities and non-motorized trail activities. Tens of thousands of trail projects have been supported since the creation of the program under ISTEA in 1991. RTP funds have been leveraged by hundreds of millions of dollars of matching support from other sources for trails. And while RTP funds have added smiles to tens of millions of American faces for the fun experiences provided, RTP-funded projects are also proven contributors to better health – physical and mental – and to the economic vitality of countless communities.

When Congress last enacted major surface transportation legislation, the RTP was retained despite major efforts to reduce the number of federal surface transportation programs by three-quarters. This success was due not only to strong congressional champions but also to the efforts of trail enthusiasts and advocacy organizations united through the Coalition for Recreational Trails (CRT). Through letters, calls, email and meetings, the trails community explained to Members of Congress how the RTP supports a wide variety of trail uses, enhancing access to the outdoors and improving the health and well-being of people in their districts and states.

Now, the 114th Congress is on the horizon. Once its members take office, they will begin to act on a new national surface transportation program. Many of the elements discussed will be divisive along party and geographic lines, but the RTP will continue to enjoy broad, bipartisan support.

Proof came in June 2014 at the CRT Annual Achievement Awards. Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle and from across the country expressed their strong support for RTP projects in their districts and states.

Congressman Bill Shuster (R-PA) – Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee – praised an RTP-funded project in his district saying, *"This beautiful structure...provides access for people with disabilities and is sure to enhance trail usage in the area by all who enjoy the great outdoors."*

Senator David Vitter (R-LA) – Ranking Member on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee – hailed RTP-funded improvements made to trails in The Russell Sage Wildlife Management Area saying, *"Sawyer Trail is important because it provides over 2 miles of ATV*

and UTV access for the northern part of the area...all of these improvements will enhance accessibility for people with disabilities and assist in the maintenance and rehabilitation of Sawyer Trail.”

Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) – Ranking Member on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee – praised the RTP’s contributions to her home state saying, *“Alaska is home to considerable natural beauty, and recreational trails afford Alaskans and those visiting our great state the opportunity to appreciate Alaska’s many scenic phenomena.”*

Congresswoman Ann McLane Kuster (D-NH) described the positive effects of the RTP on her district saying, *“...the trails have become an instant hub for outdoor activity...I applaud the efforts of the Friends of the Northern Rail Trail in Merrimack County to make some of the beauty more accessible to those living in and visiting the region.”*

Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) also welcomed the impact of an RTP-funded project in his home state saying, *“The trailhead facility...is hugely popular among the locals and has become a significant source of tourism to the region.”*

Other key Members of Congress also expressed their support for the RTP, including Senators Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Mark Begich (D-AK), Jim Risch (R-ID), Pat Toomey (R-PA) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI); as well as Representatives Vance McAllister (R-LA), Lou Barletta (R-PA) and Dan Benishek (R-MI).

The RTP – from its inception – has benefited all trail interests and unified the trail community at both the state and national levels and our Congressional allies are well aware of those outstanding benefits. As we prepare for the new Congress, allies both old and new will be needed to ensure the RTP is included in any new national surface transportation legislation Congress enacts.

New information about the future of the RTP will be posted at www.funoutdoors.com as it becomes available. For access to the database of 20,000 RTP-funded projects, and to find one near you, visit <http://www.recreationaltrailsinfo.org/>. For more information on the RTP, including information on funding for each state, go to http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/overview/.

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