

rails to trails

Spring/Summer 16

Inspiring Movement

THE CIRCUIT TRAILS

**RTC
Celebrates
30 Years**

**Baltimore's
New Greenway
Trails System**

**Destination:
Rail-Trail
Hall of Fame**

**Sparking
a New Era
of Health,
Community
Building and
Stewardship
in Greater
Philly**



rails to trails
conservancy



I SUPPORT

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Name: Charles Pekow

Where I live: Bethesda, Maryland

Age: 62

What I do: Freelance writer—I have covered the gamut, from education to foreign policy and environmental issues. These days, I write much about outdoor recreation, mainly bicycling and fishing. I'm also an avid news reader. Most weekends when the weather allows, you can find me on a bike trail or at a festival.

How long I've been a member of RTC: Since RTC opened. I am a charter member.

Latest or greatest accomplishment: A big reward comes when you know you've made a difference to someone or to the world. For me, sometimes just publishing an article can do that.

A meaningful life story: Be careful what you wish for. I rode my first bike with training wheels. Neighborhood kids a year or two older would ridicule me. So I nagged my parents to remove the training wheels. Eventually, they did, and I immediately changed my mind and felt terrified of having to balance on two wheels. They put me on the bike, and I made it all the way down to the bottom of the sloping driveway, where I crashed into a telephone pole. If I hadn't hit the pole, I would have gone into the street and would have had to hope no car was coming.

Inspirational quote: "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." When faced with adversity, turn it around and make something out of it.

My favorite rail-trail: The Washington & Old Dominion Trail in Northern Virginia takes you through or past an amazing variety of communities, historical sites and natural environments in its 45-mile run, with every type of bike shop and restaurant along the way. You pass new and old, urban and rural, forest, farm and prairie all on one nearly straight and pretty flat line.

My favorite cycling experience of all time: Maybe it hasn't happened yet. But some experiences I enjoy so much that I repeat them every year. These include riding up and down the Intracoastal Waterway trail in the winter in Palm Beach, Florida, and riding up and down Chicago's Lakefront Trail in summer.

Why I support RTC: I know the joy and value of trails for exercise, fun and transportation. What better use could we make out of abandoned railroad lines than turning them into trails? Even before it became fashionable or RTC was born, I saw the value of it. I grew up on Chicago's North Shore and often cycled on the Green Bay Trail, both for recreation and transportation. Maintenance of this converted rail-trail was left up to local jurisdictions that didn't—or weren't always able to—take care of it very well. I saw that communities must do more than just build a trail. I knew the people who founded RTC and trusted them, and I can see the results of the work RTC does in my community.

Add your unique voice to the rail-trail movement by becoming a member of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Learn more at railstotrails.org, or call 202.331.9696 for info.

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BY LAURA STARK

On the cover: A runner on the Manayunk Canal Towpath in Philadelphia, part of the developing 750-mile Circuit Trails network
Photo by Laura Pedrick/AP Images

Oh, How Far We've Come

When Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) opened its doors in 1986, we were aware of 250 miles of open rail-trail in America. Today, there are more than 22,000 miles enjoyed by tens of millions of Americans every year. As we celebrate our 30th anniversary in 2016, I have had cause to ponder the reasons for the success of America's rail-trail movement.

A major catalyst for rail-trail development can be traced to 1980, when Congress deregulated the U.S. railroad industry, permitting the discontinuation of unprofitable routes. As a result, tens of thousands of miles of excess rail corridor were removed from service in the ensuing decades. In 1983, Congress expressed concern about permanently losing thousands of miles of rail corridor by creating "rail banking," a policy tool to preserve inactive corridors for future rail use, while permitting interim trail use.

From our founding, RTC's program work has focused on two related activities: **policy advocacy** and **trail development**. This dual role has defined RTC from the beginning, giving us the unique identity of a Washington-based national organization that also has capacity to work at the local level.

Our initial policy work focused on influencing the implementation of the new railbanking statute. Those efforts expanded in 1991 when the federal transportation bill provided significant funding for trail development for the first time through creation of the Transportation Enhancements and the Recreational Trails programs. For the last 25 years, RTC has been a steadfast defender of this funding, which has been critical to the success of our movement.

With regard to trail development, in our first decade, RTC acquired inactive corridors. The concept was so new that if we didn't do it, it wouldn't have happened. With the passage of time and the growing visibility of successful rail-trails, our primary role shifted to responding to growing demand for technical assistance from local pioneers seeking to navigate the rail-trail conversion process. This shift has been critical to the growth of our movement because it permitted us to be catalysts in hundreds of communities, rather than narrowly focusing on just a few.

In the early years, most rail-trails were in rural areas, and the primary benefits were thought to be corridor preservation, recreation and protection of open space. Today, rail-trails traverse the American landscape, providing benefits to rural, suburban and urban communities. And those benefits have expanded to include transportation, economic development, public health and high quality of life.

With thousands of miles of trails on the ground, the most exciting opportunity in the coming years is connecting individual trails into regional trail networks. But, as that rich topic is worthy of more than a final paragraph, I will return to it in the next issue of the magazine.

In closing, I must state the obvious. The amazing success that we have enjoyed over the last 30 years would not have been possible without the steadfast support of our members and the hard work of local partners. Together, we can celebrate both past successes and a bright future.

Happy trails!



Keith Laughlin, President
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



LAURA PEDRICK/AP IMAGES

rails to trails

The magazine of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors to build healthier places for healthier people.

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Keith Laughlin

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Over the years, some pretty cool covers have graced *Rails to Trails* magazine. Here are a few of our favorites.



As RTC celebrates its 30th anniversary, we thought it would be fun to pull some of our favorite Members Network letters from over the years.

We kick things off with part of a letter from a Saratoga, California, member titled "Hats Off," published in the Summer 2001 issue. We agree with Ginny and wish to extend the magazine's gratitude to the entire RTC community for 30 years well done.

Hats Off [to you, RTC!] Summer 2001

Hats off to the RTC team for an outstanding and most inspiring endeavor. You can be extremely proud of what you've accomplished. You deserve to go down in history for making a significant difference in the quality of life today and in the future.

Ginny Babbit
SARATOGA, CALIF.

Tiny Trail Builder Summer 2004

My 5-year-old grandson, Justin, and I love riding on Grant's Trail in Missouri. Justin also loves trains and construction sites. The other day he was playing with his Thomas the Tank Engine toys and Bob the Builder toys. As he was scooping up a rail track with scoops, he looked up to me and said, "Look, Grandma, I'm building a bike trail."

Nancy Collis
ST LOUIS, MO.

Making Trails Ready for Homecoming Summer 2007

I am a huge fan of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and can't wait to get back to the States to enjoy the new trails being completed while I'm gone. Having served in Germany, my wife and I spent countless hours enjoying their intercon-

nected bike trails that connect every single neighborhood in Stuttgart.

Since returning to the States, we enjoy watching as the trails around our apartment become more connected every day. We also appreciate the legislative push that got bike lanes on new federal roads and bridges, which are often a block to connected trails.

However, in 11 months in Afghanistan, I haven't ridden a bicycle one time. We've been on a small (100 yards x 100 yards) forward operating base in the Dasht-e Margow (Desert of Death) with little room to ride. I can't wait to get back to the States where you can ride anywhere you like on rail-trails, and enjoy the countryside without war, mines or 130-degree heat. Thank you very much for improving the trails so they'll be ready for my family and me when I get back home.

Irving Gray
HELMAND PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

Yea for 'Neigh' Spring/Summer 2008

While riding in Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge in Mississippi, I encountered some horseback riders approaching me. Even from a distance of some 100 yards, the horses became agitated. I got off my bike and moved slowly, walking like a regular person, to let the animals settle down. Perhaps this might be considered worrying about nothing; but I did not want to risk a rider being thrown and cracking his skull on a rock. So, I took my rest break early and had a very pleasant five-minute conversation [with the horseback riders]. The riders explained that their horses had never seen a cyclist before and were understandably fearful; my new friends were quite appreciative of the courtesy.

This brief moment of goodwill cost me nothing. There are many reasons to be neighborly and a few reasons to be antagonistic. We can get along with each other and share the trail.

Sean Harrington
STARKVILLE, MISS.

50-State Salute

Spring/Summer 2010

As a public school teacher I had free time in the summers, so I started bicycling in the summer of 1983. I was 40 years old, and that was shortly before RTC was born. My first ride was a Chequamegon National Forest loop in Wisconsin, carrying gear in panniers and covering 190 miles in three days.

With inspiration from RTC, the miles I bicycled, roads I covered and trails I rode increased each year. On retiring from Rosemount Middle School in 2001, I continued to increase the miles I bicycled and ventured farther from the Midwest—including taking my bicycle on Amtrak trips to California, Florida, New York and Utah.

During the last eight years, I have bicycled more than 3,200 miles per year. In 2003, on the 110-mile Mickelson Trail in South Dakota's Black Hills (featured in the inaugural [1998] issue of *Rails to Trails*), I celebrated 20 years of bicycling and completing the equivalent of a bike ride around the Earth—24,890 miles. When I realized I had bicycled in 18 states, I decided I would bicycle in all 50. I researched trails in *Rails to Trails* magazine as well as in RTC guidebooks and online at **TrailLink.com**.

I am excited to report that as of January 2010, my mission is accomplished! Earlier this year, I rode the River Mountains Loop Trail in Boulder City, Nevada, making Nevada state number 50.

Douglas Oines
NORTHFIELD, MINN.

We'd like to hear from you. Write to "Members Network," *Rails-to-Trails Conservancy*, 2121 Ward Ct., NW, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20037. Or email: magazine@railstotrails.org. Letters may be edited for publication.

EYE ON:

Baltimore's Greenway Trails Network

By Katie Harris

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. painted a visionary picture for Baltimore in his comprehensive *1904 Report Upon the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore*. His blueprints for Baltimore's park system, which focused attention on the three stream valleys (Gwynns Falls, Jones Falls and Herring Run) and other natural features unique to the city, are a shining example of successful urban planning. More than a century later, these stream valleys, including trails that parallel the waterways, are cherished by Baltimore residents and remain among the city's greatest assets. And now, they are also pieces of a new vision for a connected Baltimore.

In 2015, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) formed the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network Coalition, bringing public agencies, nonprofit organizations, private firms and public health agencies together to help connect Baltimore's existing trails and create new safe avenues for non-motorized travel around the city. When complete, the network will encompass 30 miles of bike and pedestrian-friendly routes that weave through the stream valleys and along Baltimore's popular waterfront, the Inner Harbor.

Currently, the trails in this network



Gwynns Falls Trail in Baltimore, Maryland, part of the city's developing greenway network



DESIGN BY DANIELLE MARKS AND RTC/JIM BROWN

Trail network under construction: Baltimore Greenway Trails Network

Location: Baltimore, Maryland

Used railroad corridor: Multiple, including the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad and possibly Norfolk Southern

Length: Approximately 30 miles

Surface: Gravel and paved

are not connected. "Our goal is to take trails and pathways that stretch between Baltimore's open spaces and attach them by completing gaps and taking advantage of existing infrastructure," says Jim Brown,

RTC's trail development manager and lead organizer for the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network Coalition. The result will be a seamless system of pathways unimpeded by barriers such as highways and thoroughfares that present safety issues for bikers and walkers and cause obstructions, both real and perceived, to links between city neighborhoods.

The coalition hopes the greenway project can help reverse the urban fragmentation found in older portions of the city. "This trail network is a really equitable way to break down [the] physical and cultural barriers," Brown says.

The western side of the trail network is composed of the Gwynns Falls Trail, which extends from Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park south to Middle Branch Park. From Leakin Park in the west to Druid Hill Park—northeast of the Mondawmin neighborhoods—in the east, the auto-centric Gwynns Falls Parkway will be the main connector. Traffic-separated facilities will be built so that walkers and bikers can navigate the east-west connection without having to rely on a car.

"Connecting the greater Mondawmin neighborhoods between Leakin and Druid Hill parks so that residents have better access means a lot to me personally, because these are neighborhoods that have historically been underinvested in," says Liz Cornish, executive director of Bikemore (bikemore.net), Baltimore's bicycle advocacy organization. "They are some of our

trail tales

oldest neighborhoods, with beautiful historic homes, but they also have some real challenges in terms of things like public health indicators.”

From Druid Hill Park, the network will extend to the Herring Run Trail—the northeast anchor for the trail system—past Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore Museum of Art. Then the network will head south on the completed Herring Run Trail to the Highlandtown neighborhood, a former industrial and residential area experiencing a resurgence in technology, art, investment and development through building retrofits.

A trail connection through Highlandtown to the waterfront has yet to be made. But a north-south utility corridor kissing the southern end of the Herring Run Trail, in conjunction with an unused rail line segment, presents great potential for making this connection. Coalition plans are in the works to turn the corridor into the southeastern-most segment of the greenway network. Called the Highlandtown Highline, this pathway extends south past Highlandtown and then swings west toward the Inner Harbor.

The pathway's name pays homage to the southeast Baltimore neighborhood through which it runs, and hints at the well-loved High Line linear park in New York City. “When you think about what’s going on in that neighborhood now, there is so much untapped potential that could be brought to life if there was better connectivity,” Cornish says.

“A lot of the neighborhoods in Southeast are really diverse and really thriving,” says Chris Ryer, executive director of Baltimore’s Southeast Community Development Corporation (southeastcdc.org). “The trail will be a vital part of this vibrant neighborhood.”

Baltimore’s revitalization story is just beginning to unfold. As the city redefines itself through the creation of a world-class trail system, the possibilities for improved health, economic development and a better-connected citizenry are endless. For more information, visit railstotrails.org/baltimore.

Iconic Trail Inspires 50 Years of Family Tradition

By Laura Stark

“Back then, off-road trails were kind of a new thing,” says retired teacher Sue Wakefield, recalling her first trip on Wisconsin’s Elroy-Sparta State Trail. The year was 1973, only a few years after the Elroy-Sparta—widely regarded as the oldest rail-trail in the U.S.—had opened and a time when the rail-trail movement was still new.

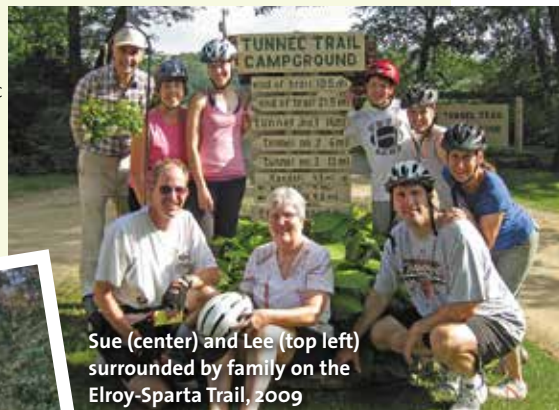
Rails-to-Trails

Conservancy didn’t open until more than a decade later, in 1986.

With Wakefield on the trail that day were her husband, Lee, and their young son Tom, then 4. It was the first of many trips on the trail and the start of a tradition for the Midwestern family spanning decades and generations. The Wakefields began their ride at the eastern end, in Elroy, traveling about 15 miles to Wilton, with Tom fitting snugly between his mother’s arms in a front-mounted child seat.

In addition to the trail’s beauty, one thing from those early adventures that stands out in Sue and Lee’s memory is the genuine hospitality shown by the small towns along the way. On the morning of their second travel day, Lee recalls being invited to a free pancake breakfast hosted by the Lions Club in Wilton. To this day, the club continues to host a pancake breakfast every Sunday, from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Impressed by the trail, the Wakefields returned a few years later with a church group, and over the years shared the experience with other family members in a continuing series of bike trips from the 1980s to the 2000s. Being off road with



Sue (center) and Lee (top left) surrounded by family on the Elroy-Sparta Trail, 2009



Sue and Tom, 1973

a comparatively level railroad grade, the trail proved ideal for the mixed ages and abilities of various riders, including Sue’s nieces, who experienced their

first ride on the Elroy-Sparta in 1995 when they were 7 and 10. As adults, the girls shared the trail with their significant others, and Tom—that little boy who rode on his mom’s bike back in 1973—has now traveled the trail with his own son.

Today, the trail spans 32 miles and ends in Sparta, which calls itself the “Bicycling Capital of America” due to the trail. Along its path, the Elroy-Sparta showcases all the unique charms of a rail-trail: a restored depot, a cherry-red caboose and—perhaps its most famed attraction—three dramatic tunnels dating back to the 1860s.

Still enjoying trails at 75, Sue laughs at the memory of herself in her 20s meeting a 65-year-old rider and thinking, “Wow! He’s still riding a bike!” Biking has been an excellent form of exercise for her and Lee and—having just celebrated their 50th anniversary in February—they’re looking forward to exploring more rail-trails this summer.

Share Your Trail Tales with RTC



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YEARS

From Preserving Rail-Trails to Creating

THOM CARROLL

COURTESY LOCAL MOTION

When Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) opened its doors in 1986, there were 250 miles of known rail-trails in America. In just three decades, the move-

ment has grown to more than 22,000 miles of completed rail-trails and 8,000 miles of projects in progress.

But the full story of the rail-trail movement did not begin in the 1980s with the creation of RTC. That story begins in the 19th century with the creation of the intercontinental railroad.

This connected rail system offered Americans the first real freedom of mobility by linking people and places across North America—and serving as the backbone of transportation and commerce for more than 100 years.

Since the 1950's, automobiles, trucks and airplanes have eclipsed the railroads as the primary modes of transportation. As a

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Celebrates 30 Years

September 25

MAY THEILGAARD WATTS

publishes famous *Chicago Tribune* letter on trails.



ISABEL WASSON

May Theilgaard Watts (1893-1975) was a Chicago-based writer and naturalist who dedicated her life to connecting people to the outdoors—in a time of increasing urbanization. In September 1963, Watts published a letter in the *Chicago Tribune* imploring the city to build a trail on the disused Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Railway. “We are human beings,” wrote Watts. “We need a footpath. The right-of-way of the Aurora electric road lies waiting.”

Her letter inspired an outpouring of public support, and by 1967, the first trail signs had been posted. One of the first rail-trail conversions in the U.S., the 61-mile Illinois Prairie Path helped lay the blueprint for thousands to follow.

1963



COURTESY RTC

January 1

4R Act (Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act) is signed into law; 4R includes a little-noticed section creating a rail-trail grant program.

1976



ERIC REISCHL PHOTOGRAPHY

1965

Wisconsin purchases a piece of right-of-way that becomes the Elroy-Sparta State Trail.

It's widely acknowledged to be oldest in America.

1968

October 2 National Trails System Act is signed into law. The Appalachian and Pacific Crest trails are the first to receive “scenic” status under the act.

Pacific Crest Trail





THOM CARROLL



COURTESY MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

By Amy Kapp Evolution of the Rail-Trail Movement ing Healthier Communities

result, thousands of miles of rail corridor fell into disuse and could have been lost forever. But through the hard work and determination of a spontaneous army of visionaries, hundreds of these corridors were preserved as today's rail-trails, providing a new type of mobility for millions of people.

And this powerful story is far from over. Today, individual rail-trails are being joined into interconnected trail networks that connect people and places, just as the railroads once did. As RTC celebrates 30 years in 2016, it is a timely opportunity to look back on our achievements as well as forward to the

emerging trail systems that are shaping America's future.

Birth of RTC and a New Golden Age

According to RTC Co-founder Peter Harnik, the origins of the rail-trail movement began not with a bang, but as an intriguing idea that quietly took hold in

To learn more about the history of RTC and view an extended, interactive timeline, go to railstotrails.org/30th.

1989

Congress amends the National Trails System Act to create railbanking.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RAILBANKING AND THE BIRTH OF A 450-MILE TRAIL NETWORK

In the early 1980s, Congress amended the National Trails System Act (1968) to create railbanking, whereby disused rail corridors could be preserved for future use through interim conversion into trails. The first application filed resulted in the 33-mile Sauk Rail Trail in Iowa. In 1986, Missouri Gov. John Ashcroft filed a railbanking application for what became the nationally renowned 238-mile Katy Trail.

The railbanking act received challenges regarding its constitutionality. In a 1996 ruling for the case *Preseault v. United States*, which concerned a tract of land in Burlington, Vermont, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in favor of railbanking. The land in question became the Burlington Bike Path—later the Island Line Trail.

In 2015, RTC and trail advocates in Missouri mobilized to successfully railbank 144 miles of corridor—now part of the in-progress, 200-mile-plus Rock Island Trail System. When complete, the system will connect with the Katy Trail to form a 450-mile-plus loop across Missouri.

1983

By the beginning of 1989, RTC had more than 7,000 members, and the completion of the Hart-Montague Trail marks 200 known rail-trails in the U.S.



COURTESY JOEL MIKKELSEN

1986

February 1

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy officially opens its doors; there are 250 known miles of open rail-trails in the U.S.

1988

With assistance by RTC, the 61.5-mile Silver Comet Trail and 33-mile Chief Ladiga Trail pair begins to take shape in Georgia and Alabama. The trail projects help spark the southern rail-trail movement.

October 4

President Ronald Reagan signs the National Trails System Improvements Act of 1988, securing the government's interest in federally granted rights of way.



WHITE HOUSE PHOTO/LAMY



ALEX BALENSZ

the Midwest in the 1960s and eventually spread across the country. By that time, the railroad industry was in serious decline; between 1930 and 1970, an estimated 38,000 miles of rail lines were abandoned (by 1990, the number had jumped to 103,000 miles). People started exploring the unpaved corridors on foot, and the lasting moniker “rails-to-trails” began to take hold. The Cathedral Aisle Trail, a short walking path built on an abandoned rail corridor in an old hunting preserve, quietly materialized in South Carolina in 1939, but multi-use rail-trails did not come into being until the 1960s, with the Illinois Prairie Path and the Elroy-Sparta State Trail in Wisconsin.

Concerned about the potential perma-

nent loss of the country’s rail corridors, Congress amended the National Trails System Act in 1983 to create “railbanking,” a process by which inactive corridors could be preserved for future rail use through interim conversion to trails. A year later, a group of conservation and outdoor professionals, biking and walking advocates, and railroad history buffs started meeting in Washington, D.C., over brown bag lunches to explore ways to mobilize.

Harnik, a veteran of the environmental conservation movement, is credited with writing the first funding proposal for RTC. David Burwell, a lawyer for the National Wildlife Federation—as well as RTC’s co-founder and first president—

shopped the proposal around to funders. Philanthropist Larry Rockefeller and the National Wildlife Federation responded with startup funding, and attorney Charles Montagne of Covington & Burling provided pro bono legal support.

In the Spring 2006 *Rails to Trails* article, “A Trip Down Memory Trail: 20 Years of RTC,” author Kristen Fletcher writes about the early years, stating: “RTC faced no shortage of skeptics.”

“We were told that people would never support a trails organization,” Burwell recalled in the article. “We felt that the counter argument was that this was not just trails but our national railroad heritage ...”

And through grassroots efforts,



WILL HARRISON

PUSHING THE LINE: FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR AMERICA'S TRAILS

December 18
The first dedicated federal funding for trails is introduced in the federal transportation bill.

Since its creation, RTC has collaborated with legislators to push for federal support for trails. On Dec. 18, 1991, President Bush signed ISTEA (the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) into law, which introduced the Transportation Enhancements (TE) and Recreational Trails Programs. TE (now Transportation Alternatives) is currently the largest federal source of funding for trails and walking and biking projects in the U.S.

Over the years:

- June 9, 1998: ISTEA reauthorized as TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century)—increases funding for TE.
- Aug. 10, 2005: SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act) signed into law—introduces the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program and Safe Routes to School.
- June 29, 2012: MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act) reduces federal investment in active transportation; RTC continues to mobilize.
- Dec. 4, 2015: FAST Act signed into law—helps ensure innovative trail financing is more accessible to small/rural communities.

1991

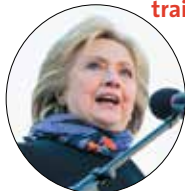


1996

March 7
RTC wins a President’s Council on Sustainable Development award.

1998

October 5
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton launches the National Millennium Trails Program and partners with RTC and others to recognize 2,000 trails across U.S.



CRUSH/USH/THINKSTOCK

2000

August 16
RTC launches its national trail-finder website, TrailLink.com.



LAURA STARK



COURTESY RTC

2003

September
After TE is put under fire in the House, RTC works with Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.) and Rep. Tom Petri (R-Wis.) to help restore TE funding. The amendment passes by a vote of 327 to 90.

RTC's supporter base would continue to strengthen. "We were like Paul Revere on the telephone," quoted Harnik.

"Over the next decade, RTC helped inventory rail lines and assisted groups from coast to coast in building trails," writes Fletcher. "Rail-trails became part of the American language and landscape."

Rail-Trail Renaissance

In 2001, when Keith Laughlin left his position in the White House Council on Environmental Quality to become the second president of RTC, there were 11,500 miles of known rail-trails in the U.S. Laughlin remembers substantial support for the movement at that time, which had successfully fought back many

attacks on railbanking in previous years.

"When I arrived, RTC and our movement were healthy due to the leadership of David and Peter. There was strong support, both among the public and in Congress, for rail-trails," Laughlin states. "We also had a well-defined legislative agenda, which focused on protecting federal trail funding and railbanking. Those were the 'dual pillars' that were essential to our success in the 1990s and vital to keeping trail building going in America."

But despite RTC's past achievements—including its participation in the landmark case, *Preseault v. United States*, in which a 1990 Supreme Court decision unanimously upheld the constitutionality of railbanking—Laughlin says there were

always new challenges.

In September 2003, RTC played a central role in successfully defending Transportation Enhancements, the primary source of federal trail funding since its creation in 1991. Under attack in the House, RTC's collaboration with Rep. Tom Petri (R-WI) and Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN) to secure House votes against its elimination resulted in a dramatic 327 to 90 victory.

"That was a watershed moment. It demonstrated the strong bipartisan support we had in Congress and set the stage for our victories in the transportation bill in 2005," says Laughlin.

The 2005 bill not only preserved Transportation Enhancements, but created



August 10

The new federal transportation bill introduces the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program to test active-transportation investments in four U.S. communities. The program will avert 85.1 million vehicle miles between 2009 and 2013.

2005

June

RTC works with Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.) and others to successfully protect TE, which is again under fire.

July 1

RTC launches the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame.

2007



2004

October

"To build healthier places for healthier people" is added to RTC's mission.

2006

January 1

RTC launches its national mapping initiative.



2008

October

RTC presents its Active Transportation for America report to Congress. The report quantifies for the first time the national benefits of walking and biking.

To learn more about the history of RTC and view an extended, interactive timeline, go to railstotrails.org/30th.

the Safe Routes to School Program and the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program, both of which helped to create and promote safe biking and walking infrastructure for children and adults.

The major victories in 2003 and 2005 did not mean the battle for trail funding was over, however. RTC would go on to fight for trail funding in 2007, 2012 and 2015—and today, advocacy remains a core focus of the organization's activities.

The Future Starts Now

"We started with a focus on building individual trails. But now that more than 22,000 miles of rail-trail stretches across the American landscape, it's time to focus on how we connect individual trails into seamless trail systems," says Laughlin.

An important example is the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network, a 35-mile loop development project that RTC is leading in collaboration with local partners. When complete, the project will link urban trails to neighborhoods, transit, employment centers, Baltimore's popular "Inner Harbor" and prominent city parks (*featured in Eye On, p. 4*).

"It's a smaller regional project serving an urban population—including many underserved communities—and it can serve as a model for other similar projects around the country," says Laughlin.

RTC also has taken a leadership role in larger regional projects, including the Circuit—a 750-mile trail system in the Greater Philadelphia/Camden Area (*read more in this issue's Cover Story, p. 12*); the

Route of the Badger, a 400-500 mile trail system in Southeastern Wisconsin connecting rural and urban communities; and the Bay Area Trails Collaborative, a partnership of 40-plus organizations that are seeking ways to unite their trails into a 1,000-mile network.

Perhaps the largest trail development project on RTC's leadership agenda is the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition, which is creating a regional trail network through 48 counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and New York. When complete, the Industrial Heartland Trails will span more than 1,450 miles.

Laughlin mentions one final project—T-MAP (Trail Modeling and Assessment Platform)—which is not a system, but

May

RTC launches the **Urban Pathways Initiative**, in which 25 U.S. cities are connected for the sharing of best practices in trail promotion and access.

June

RTC donates more than 12,000 miles of trail map data to the **Google Biking Directions project**.

2009



Met Branch Trail in Washington, D.C.

COURTESY RTC



Opening Day for Trails 2015 in Concord, California

RTC/BARRY BERGMAN



LAURA PEDRICK/AP IMAGES

2012

February

RTC takes a lead role in the **Circuit Trails Coalition**, which is creating a 750-mile multi-use trail network in Greater Philadelphia.

March

RTC launches **Opening Day for Trails**.

a set of analytical tools that will help to create regional trail systems. This three-year initiative, launched by RTC in 2014 in collaboration with a national team of researchers, combines data, research and information technology to create the country's first tools to measure trail-system connectivity, demand and economic impact.

For Laughlin, RTC's continued focus on technology helped propel RTC forward in the past decade and will be a key-stone of its successful future.

"When we launched our mapping initiative in 2006 and started to inventory all the rail-trails in America, it was the beginning of RTC's use of information technology to forward our work," says Laughlin. "Due to our GIS map-

ping project, our TrailLink website now attracts 7 million trail users per year."

He adds, "Building upon the success of TrailLink, T-MAP focuses on the innovative use of information technology to advance the creation of regional trail systems. With such tools, we will remain on the cutting edge of innovation, which helps us to achieve our mission of creating 'healthier places for healthier people' through trails. Our ultimate goal is to improve the economic and environmental health of American communities and the personal health of the people who live there. To achieve this, we will reconnect America with trails in the same way that railroads once connected people and places."



The scenic 238-mile Katy Trail in Missouri was made possible in part by the railbanking process, which RTC fought to protect in the early years of its existence.

WILSON HURST

January
RTC accepts a leadership role in the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition, which is working to create a 1,450-mile trail network through Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and New York.

February 11
RTC and the Partnership for Active Transportation unveil the Safe Routes to Everywhere policy platform calling for increased investment of healthy active-transportation infrastructure and policies.

June
RTC launches the T-MAP initiative to create the U.S.' first modeling tools to measure trail-system connectivity, demand and potential impact.



June
RTC takes the helm to create the Bay Area Trails Collaborative, a 40-organization coalition working to create a 1,000-mile world-class regional trails network.

October 10
With local partners in Wisconsin, RTC develops a vision for the Route of the Badger, a 400-mile-plus trail network that will create vital connections in the southeast part of the state.

2014



Jones Falls Trail in Baltimore, Maryland

JEFF LA NOUE

2015

November

RTC takes the lead in the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network Coalition to create a 35-mile loop of urban trails connecting neighborhoods, transit, parks and Baltimore's waterfront.

2016

February 1

RTC celebrates its 30th anniversary with more than 160,000 members and supporters and more than 22,000 known miles of rail-trails in America.

To learn more about the history of RTC and view an extended, interactive timeline, go to railstotrails.org/30th.

THE CIRCUIT TRAILS:

By Heather Mistretta

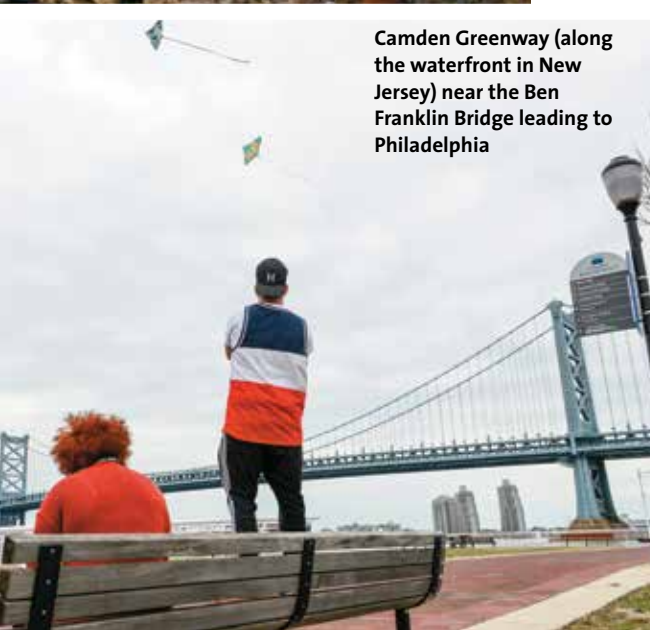
SPARKING
A NEW ERA
OF HEALTH,
COMMUNITY
BUILDING
AND
STEWARDSHIP
IN
GREATER
PHILLY

Schuylkill Banks
Boardwalk along the
Schuylkill River in
Philadelphia





LAURA PEDRICK/AP IMAGES



Camden Greenway (along the waterfront in New Jersey) near the Ben Franklin Bridge leading to Philadelphia

Imagine being able to walk out your door and have the opportunity to bike to work, visit world-class cultural sites, stroll along a wooded pathway for bird watching, go for a morning jog or walk with a friend to Bartram's Garden, the oldest living botanical garden in America—all the while in a safe environment absent of traffic. That vision, shared by many, is becoming a reality, thanks to the concerted efforts of a group of like-minded individuals in Pennsylvania and New Jersey committed to connecting and revitalizing communities.

For the past five years, a web of approximately 30 multi-use pathways known as the Circuit Trails (railstotrails.org/circuit-trails) has been growing throughout the Greater Philadelphia area, with long-term plans to stretch 750 miles across nine counties (Philadelphia, Chester, Montgomery, Delaware and Bucks in Pennsylvania; Burlington, Gloucester, Camden and Mercer in New Jersey). The aim of the project is to strengthen the region by providing healthy transportation and recreation opportunities that enhance neighborhoods and increase access to jobs, community destinations and green space.

Currently at 300 miles, the Circuit Trails is like no other system in the country—connecting urban, suburban and rural communities in a 2.5-million-acre area. By the time it is complete, which is expected to be in 2040, more than 50 percent of the region's population (about 3,199,450 people) will live within a mile of the Circuit Trails. Additionally, the system will connect to the East Coast Greenway, enveloping a 3,000-mile off-road route that spans as far north as Calais, Maine, and as far south as Key West, Florida.

The trails, which course along unused rail lines and old towpaths, as well as canals, rivers and streams, are already stimulating economies. According to a bicycling and pedestrian safety report published by the New Jersey



THOM CARROLL

Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration in 2013, active-transportation-related infrastructure, businesses and events were estimated to have contributed more than \$497 million to the New Jersey economy alone in 2011. Individual trails in Pennsylvania counties have long proven to exert a strong economic impact; for example, a 2009 RTC study of the Schuylkill River Trail—a major component of the Circuit Trails—was found to have had a direct economic impact of \$7.3 million in 2008.

As the Circuit Trails network grows, it is providing many benefits, ranging from greater access to services and waterways for underserved communities, to the creation of new businesses, to increased opportunities for healthy lifestyles.

Foundation of an Idea

Leading this massive effort is the Circuit Trails Coalition, which began as discussions among a small group of individuals with a shared vision of growth for the Philadelphia-Camden, New Jersey, region. It was formally created in 2012 with initial funding from the William Penn Foundation. The collaboration has since ballooned to include some 65 nonprofit organizations, foundations and agencies.

Those associated with the project are sensitive to the diversity of populations they are serving, from urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia, the fifth-largest U.S. metropolitan area, to rural areas of Bucks County and small waterfront neighborhoods in Camden. And their commitment has been contagious: Coalition members have raised tens of millions of dollars in funding and generated widespread support from local leaders and residents.

The effort received a big boost in 2010 when the coalition procured a \$23 million TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation.



Schuylkill Banks trail in Philadelphia

LAURA PEDRICK/AP IMAGES

Individuals who were part of the coalition's early years credit the grant not only with creating a new era of regional trail development, but also with serving as a catalyst for additional funding. That funding includes a \$10 million grant awarded later in 2010 by the William Penn Foundation—which to date has contributed more than \$25 million to the project.

"The [TIGER] grant made trails really relevant as green transportation infrastructure," says Sarah Clark Stuart, chair of the coalition and executive director of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. "It catapulted trails to the forefront and resulted in a cascade of trail development."

"For the very first time, a number of advocates and officials came together, realizing that by standing together we could do better," says Pennsylvania Environmental Council Executive Vice President Patrick Starr, who also serves as Pennsylvania vice chair of the Circuit Trails Coalition. "Attaining that grant lit a fire under the process. This unlocked the William Penn funding."

Just last June, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)

voted unanimously to support dedication of federal and private dollars to 11 Circuit Trails segments in Pennsylvania by approving a new "line item" for the Pennsylvania Transportation Improvement Program that designates \$5 million in federal transportation dollars for trails construction.

The coalition also has attracted the attention of local officials, including mayors of both of the anchoring cities within the Circuit Trails: newly elected Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and Camden Mayor Dana Redd.

In his inauguration speech this January, Kenney urged his audience to "make every Philadelphia neighborhood the best it can be." He added, "For the one in four people in this city living in poverty, an effective public transportation system can make the difference of whether or not they can afford to go to a job interview."

Similarly, in Camden, Joseph Meyers, chief operating officer for the nonprofit Cooper's Ferry Partnership, says, "Mayor Redd is leading the transformation in Camden, and her administration has facilitated the collaboration in our community."

Residents have made the Circuit Trails

their own. That includes Jonathan DeHart, a 56-year-old air quality specialist for the U.S. Navy who—for seven years—rode his bike 20 miles each way from his home in Glenside to his workplace at the former Navy base in the Pennsport section of southeast Philadelphia, taking advantage of the Schuylkill River Trail along the way. (*Schuylkill* is a Dutch word for "hidden or skulking creek.")

"Those rides helped me clear my head. I really looked forward to the ride to work, breathing in the fresh air and interacting with others. I also really looked forward to the ride home. Not sure driving commuters would have the same sentiment," says DeHart, who still bikes along the trails, now mainly for recreation, and sometimes logs 60 miles or more in outings with his son.

DeHart is not unlike many trail users in the area. According to the DVRPC 2012–2013 Household Travel Survey, 3.8 percent of Philadelphians reported using a bicycle as their primary means of transportation to work—nearly double the number for bicy-



LAURA PEDRICK/AP IMAGES

cle commuting nationwide recorded in an American Community Survey released in 2014. Philadelphia remains the most-biked city among those with a population of at least 1 million. The DVRPC survey also revealed that 27 percent of the bicycle trips were made by those in households with incomes of less than \$35,000—suggesting the potential importance of the Circuit Trails for underserved communities.

Happy Trails to You, Philadelphia ... and Beyond

Nestled amid a river, a dog park and a community garden, and flanked by a bridge and a park, is the 135-mile Schuylkill River Trail. To a transcendentalist, it is a dream. To a realist, it meets all practical needs. And to a humanitarian, it feeds the souls of others and serves as a conduit for underserved neighborhoods. Trail observers nationwide agree: In 2015 the trail was named the Best Urban Trail in America in *USA Today's* 10 Best Readers' Choice poll.

"Part of what I love is that it's so many things to so many different people," says Danielle Gray, director of marketing and development for the Schuylkill River Development Corporation, a nonprofit that builds and maintains the trail's tidal river section between the Fairmount Dam and the Delaware River.

A major component of the Circuit Trails network, the Schuylkill River Trail has a rich history of coal mining, transportation and even an environmental cleanup that began in the late 1940s and was funded in part by money left for that purpose in Benjamin Franklin's will. Placards presenting the history as well as important watershed information are displayed at the Schuylkill Banks, a venue for educational tours and school trips.

The corridor is the region's most heavily used multi-use recreation and commuter trail. It is also undergoing an expansion to extend more than 60 miles, including a 26-mile stretch from Philadelphia to Phoenixville. It ultimately will reach Reading, Pennsylvania.

The most recent addition to the Schuylkill River Trail was the Manayunk Bridge Trail, a crucial link between the Manayunk Bridge, built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1902, and the Cynwyd Heritage Trail in Lower Merion. The Manayunk section of Philadelphia is just three blocks (uphill) from the Manayunk Canal Towpath, near the Schuylkill River in the Roxborough-Manayunk area.

Chris Linn, DVRPC manager of environmental planning, says that most people

use the trail for recreation but that the Kelly Drive leg, south of the Manayunk Bridge in the northeast part of the city, is used more for commuting. Linn estimates that this direct route into the downtown area sees an average of 500 people a day, about 75 percent of them during the morning commute.

"This network acts as the spine of a non-motorized transportation system. As a result, the efficacy of transportation as a whole is improved," Linn says.

Perhaps less known but no less important to the Circuit Trails system is the Merchantville Bike Path, a 0.75-mile trail in a small town that traditionally has grown in tandem with the growth in transportation. The Camden County, New Jersey, town has always been responsive to the changing needs brought by innovation, first becoming a borough in 1874 to accommodate the advent of the railroad. It saw more growth in 1914, when construction of the Ben Franklin Bridge opened the area to automobile traffic. Now Merchantville is proposing an extension of the Merchantville trail to give county residents access to the Ben Franklin Bridge and Philadelphia—and to provide Philadelphia residents with an off-road route to Camden attractions including Adventure Aquarium, the museum battleship *USS New Jersey* and Campbell's Field stadium.

"When the trail is complete, it will provide a first-class recreation and non-motorized transportation corridor to access many attractions not only in Camden, but also across the river in Philadelphia," says Elizabeth Sewell, trail development manager for RTC's northeast region. "These trail segments to the east and west of the Merchantville Bike Path are vital to the development of the Circuit Trails through Camden and Burlington County."

Farther south is the Camden Greenway, a network of connected trails in Camden County anchored by a series of trails in Cooper River Park. A 4.3-mile section of the Camden Greenway opened last

Schuylkill Banks
Boardwalk in
Philadelphia

LAURA FEDRICK/AP IMAGES



October. The Cooper River Trail, which now consists of 7.7 linear miles and 5.5 miles of loop trails along with three municipal and five county parks, eventually will connect Cherry Hill, New Jersey, to the Ben Franklin Bridge.

"It serves perhaps the most diverse population, from some of the poorest areas of the nation to some of the most affluent neighborhoods," says Camden native Olivia Glenn, who is the South Jersey metro regional manager for the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the newly appointed New Jersey vice chair of the Circuit Trails Coalition.

Glenn says she is looking forward to the transfer this year of the 25-acre Gateway Park, in an underserved east Camden neighborhood, from the Delaware River Port Authority to the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority. The goal is for the New Jersey Conservation Foundation to manage and improve the park and to provide public access via the park to the Delaware River.

Gateway Park residents "can enjoy their open space and love of nature without the danger," Glenn says.

Similarly, a waterfront park to be built in north Camden is "all resident driven," says Sue Brennan, Camden native and senior project director at Cooper's Ferry Partnership. The partnership is gearing up to begin construction this spring or summer on the park, which will enhance access to both the Circuit Trails and to waterways. The project is slated to be completed by January 2017.

THOM CARROLL



Cadence
Youth Cycling
program race

CY MARAMANGALAM

Youth Biking Program Isn't Just About Two-Wheeling

Cadence Youth Cycling (CYC) is a perfect example of the multifaceted goals of the Circuit Trails. Hosted by the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, CYC engages disadvantaged urban youth through cycling. The program offers opportunities for leadership and civic engagement not readily available to the students elsewhere. Young participants are encouraged to talk to local officials about the viability of the Circuit Trails, which helps generate support for the trail network while helping the youth build community advocacy skills.

The program's engagement of young people "goes well beyond the bicycle. Everything on the bike translates to every aspect of their lives," says CYC Program Manager Cy Maramangalam. "It's an avenue that connects our students to areas they've never been [to]." This includes an outing to the Amish farmland in Pennsylvania for a brief respite from urban living; a trip to Washington, D.C., to speak to senators; and travel to Seattle for the Youth Bike Summit.

Cadence Youth Cycling also has worked closely with RTC through several partnership programs: Cycle Squad, Circuit team and All-Star team. RTC helps CYC with its youth education and stewardship training programs on waterways.

Maramangalam says, "RTC has been pivotal in providing watershed education to our youth." A scavenger hunt highlighting how the water interacts with the trails helps to round out their education.

Sixteen-year-old Tamia Santiago discovered her love of cycling two years ago through CYC, and she has been pedaling

toward success ever since. "Every opportunity she gets, she'll jump right into it," says Maramangalam, adding that she became a member of the All-Star team in her first season with CYC and has embraced every other program since.

As a result of her perseverance, Santiago

was named to CYC's Youth Advisory Committee, the voice for the group, and the Philadelphia Bicycle Advocacy Board, which seeks to advise the mayor on ways to promote and protect recreational and professional cycling in Philadelphia.

Eighteen-year-old Allen Williams is a Philadelphia native who stepped outside of the city for the first time only after joining CYC. For the past four years, he has been a pivotal participant in the Youth Advisory Committee. He's now a senior in high school with a perfect 4.0 GPA. He plans to study biomedical engineering in college and become a doctor. Along with Santiago and others, Williams had the opportunity to meet with the former Philadelphia mayor, Michael Nutter, last summer to discuss the CYC program and advocate for its completion. Nutter has been an ardent supporter of the Circuit Trails since its inception.

In addition to supporting CYC, RTC helps lead several Circuit Trails initiatives to improve health, engage youth, promote the Circuit Trails and study the network's impact. The health initiative has made great strides within the region's health care

community and specifically through the Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania, which included the trail network in its recent Community Health Needs Assessment.

RTC also collaborates with several youth-based organizations to engage youth in the Circuit Trails, including Simple Cycle, a nonprofit community-powered bike shop and faith-based organization in Philadelphia. Another is Neighborhood Bike Works, which since 1996 has been using bicycling programs to provide educational, recreational and career-building opportunities for urban youth in underserved Philadelphia neighborhoods. Both implement youth cycling programs.

As the Circuit Trails network continues to grow and reach more people and places, public outreach grows in tandem. The ongoing success of the network depends on these initiatives. From Kidical Mass Philadelphia, a movement seeking to promote family-friendly bike rides, to the Women Bike PHL, a grassroots effort of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia aimed at building community and getting women out to bike, these programs combine with the Circuit Trails to enhance lives in the Greater Philadelphia area, both now and going forward.

Heather Mistretta is a Spring Lake Heights, New Jersey-based professional writer, and co-founder and president of Women & Girls Education-International. She loves being active outdoors and tackling new challenges. Learn more about Mistretta at pressingreleases.com.

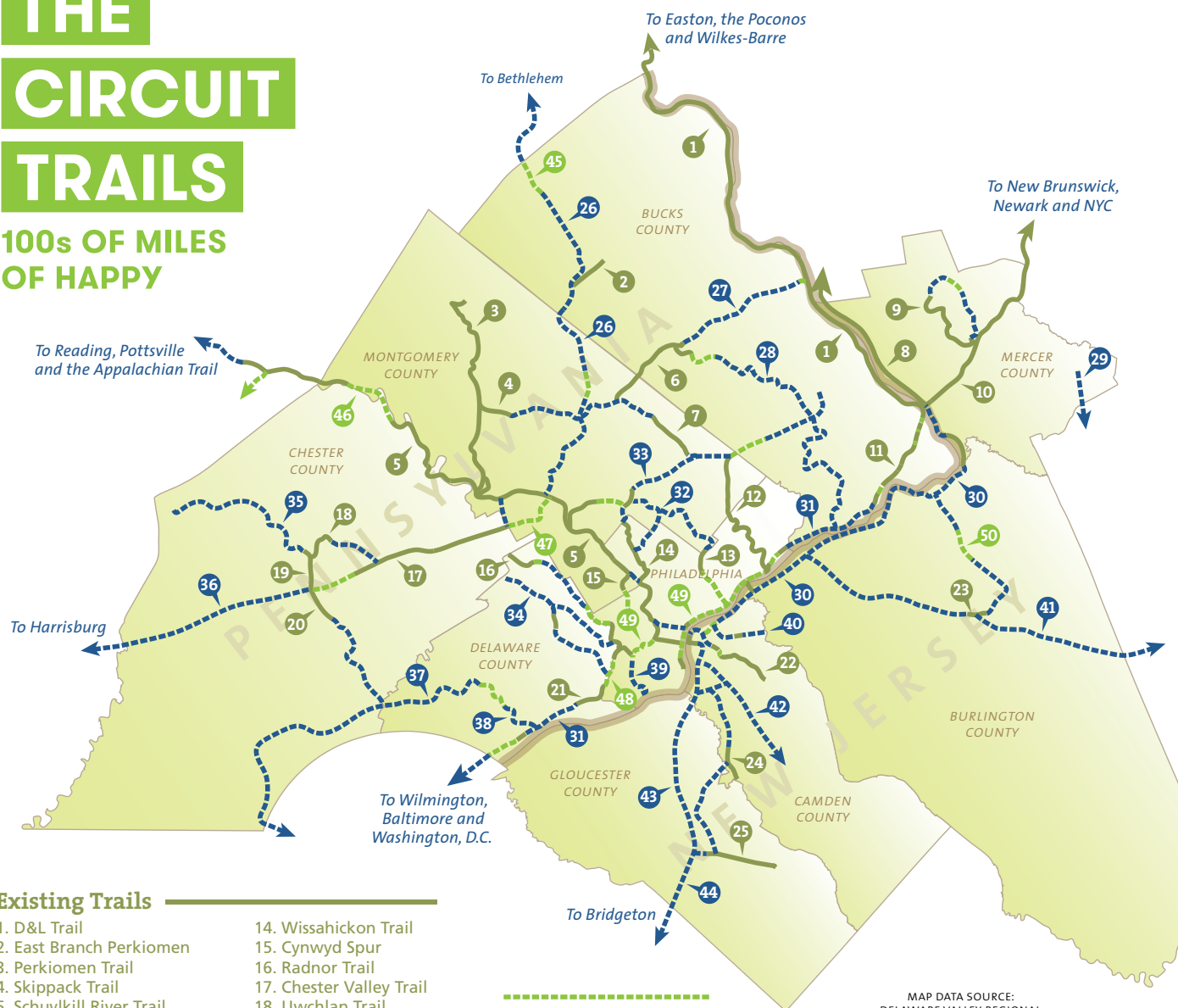


Manayunk
Canal
Towpath in
Philadelphia

LAURA PEDRICK/AP IMAGES

THE CIRCUIT TRAILS

100s OF MILES
OF HAPPY



Existing Trails

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. D&L Trail | 14. Wissahickon Trail |
| 2. East Branch Perkiomen | 15. Cynwyd Spur |
| 3. Perkiomen Trail | 16. Radnor Trail |
| 4. Skippack Trail | 17. Chester Valley Trail |
| 5. Schuylkill River Trail | 18. Uwchlan Trail |
| 6. 202 Parkway Trail | 19. Struble Trail |
| 7. Powerline Trail | 20. Brandywine Trail |
| 8. D&R Towpath | 21. John Heinz NWR Trail |
| 9. Lawrence - Hopewell Trail | 22. Cooper River Trail |
| 10. D&R Canal (ECG) | 23. Pemberton Trail |
| 11. D&L Trail (ECG) | 24. Blackwood Rail Trail |
| 12. Pennypack Trail | 25. Monroe Township Bike Path |
| 13. Tookany-Tacony Creek Trail | |

Planned Trails

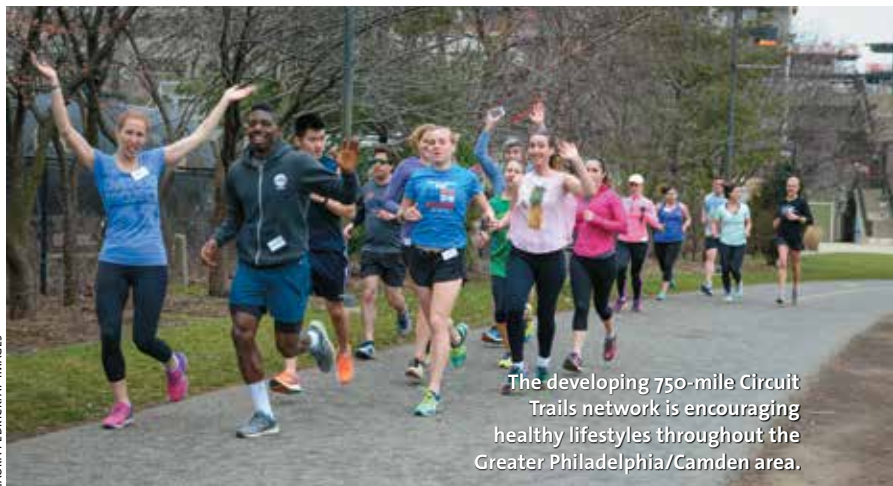
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 26. Liberty Bell Trail | 35. Struble Trail |
| 27. Doylestown - New Hope Connector | 36. Chester Valley Trail |
| 28. Neshaminy Creek Trail | 37. Octorara Trail |
| 29. Union Trail | 38. Chester Creek Trail |
| 30. Delaware River Heritage Trail | 39. Tidal Schuyl Trail |
| 31. East Coast Greenway | 40. Merchantville Trail |
| 32. Cresheim Valley | 41. Rancocas Greenway |
| 33. Cross County Trail | 42. East Atlantic Bikeway |
| 34. Darby Creek Trail | 43. Gloucester County Light Rail with Trail |
| | 44. Bridgeton Rail Trail |

Trails in Progress

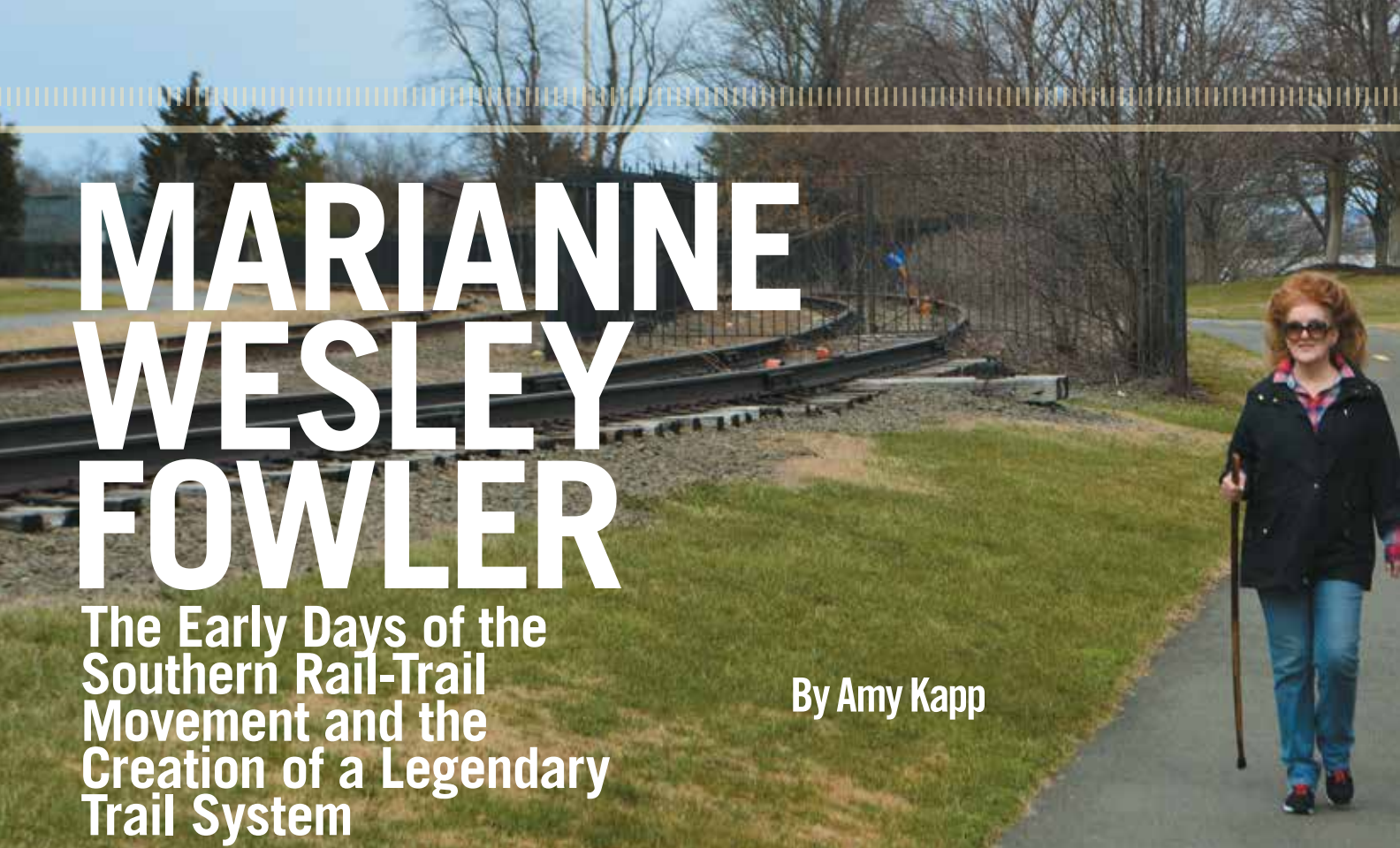
- 45. Upper Bucks Rail Trail
- 46. Schuylkill River Trail
- 47. Chester Valley Extension
- 48. Cobbs Creek Trail (ECG)
- 49. East Coast Greenway (ECG)
- 50. Kinkora Trail

MAP DATA SOURCE:
DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION

MAP DESIGN BY
DANIELLE MARKS



The developing 750-mile Circuit Trails network is encouraging healthy lifestyles throughout the Greater Philadelphia/Camden area.



MARIANNE WESLEY FOWLER

The Early Days of the Southern Rail-Trail Movement and the Creation of a Legendary Trail System

By Amy Kapp

When Marianne Wesley Fowler came to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) in 1988, tasked with launching a formal rail-trail movement in the South, the region had just a few known rail-trails. She did not know that in less than three decades, the South (where she grew up) would have a burgeoning trail network, her first project would become a legendary trail system, and her advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill would help secure and protect hundreds of millions of dedicated federal trail funds.

As RTC's senior strategist for policy advocacy, Fowler continues to generate Congressional support for trails today. In 2014, RTC presented her with a Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion award in recognition of her contributions to the national rail-trail movement.

Rails to Trails magazine recently sat down with Fowler to discuss the inspirations and sweat equity behind the early days of her work and the creation of the legendary Silver Comet and Chief Ladiga trail system.

Why was the South a focus of RTC's work in the early days?

When I came for my interview, RTC's director of trail development at that time, Peter Harnik—who's also a co-founder—had a big map on one of the walls with pins in two colors: One color marked completed rail-trails, and another marked rail-trail projects. The pins were distributed all over the U.S.—except for in the southern states. You could see a few pins in Virginia and Florida and one in South Carolina, but other than that, the region was completely blank.

I remember thinking to myself, "Oh my—another area where the south is running behind the rest of the country! I hope I get this job, because I have to do something about this!"

How did you first get involved in the creation of the Silver Comet and Chief Ladiga Trail?

On my first day of work, Peter handed me a "Notice of Intent to Abandon" for a rail corridor in Alabama that stretched from Piedmont to just over the Georgia border. He said, "You have to make this a rail-trail." So I started making calls to potential local supporters. I called Information, which provided a phone number for the mayor of Piedmont. But when I called, I

was told I'd reached the Bennett Lumber Company, which I had noticed in some paper work was the same company that was opposing the abandonment. The mayor happened to be the owner of the company! When I finally managed to get in touch with him, he told me, "We don't do rail-trails," and that the rail line was too important to be abandoned anyway.

But it was abandoned, and after that, people in Piedmont started to take an interest in turning it into a rail-trail. I held a public meeting, during which an impeccably dressed man in a white suit came in and sat down. After a few minutes of hearing me talk, he suddenly stood up and belted out, "I know this little lady! She called me on the telephone and told me the line was going to be abandoned! We better listen to her—because she knows what she's talking about." And from that point on, he was one of the biggest supporters of what became the Chief Ladiga Trail.

Why do you think he changed his mind?

I think he saw me up there in front of everyone, officiating, and I had been correct about the abandonment as well—and I guess the combination just convinced him I knew what I was doing.



Fowler on the Mount Vernon Trail
in Northern Virginia

EU GRIFFEN

Then what happened?

Around the same time, I had also gotten involved in the transformation of a disused corridor in Georgia, running from Rockmart to a place no one on the organizing committee had ever heard of, which the paperwork called Etna. We couldn't find it on a map. One rainy afternoon, a local organizer, Brenda Burnett, and I had the Georgia state trails coordinator drop us off where we thought Etna would be, and then we trudged along the corridor through the Georgia mud searching for it. Unfortunately, it started to storm even harder, and we were almost blinded by the rain. We almost missed Etna—which it turned out was just a gray utility box with the letters “Etna” stenciled on it. That corridor became the Silver Comet Trail.

The Georgia Rails Into Trails Society [GRITS] became very active, and we went through the process of convincing the Georgia Department of Transportation to put the corridor into public ownership.

The first section of the Chief Ladiga opened in the mid-1990s, and the first section of the Silver Comet opened in 1998. In 2008, the completed trails were

finally connected—creating one of the longest rail-trails in the country. If you had told me 30 years ago that a 94.5-mile trail connecting Anniston, Alabama, with Smyrna, Georgia, would have been possible, I wouldn't have believed it.

What were some barriers that impeded Southern rail-trail development historically?

The first barrier was lack of familiarity. There simply weren't that many rail-trails, and we had to explain to people what they were and their value. Another huge hurdle was people's hesitations about having trail users riding and walking so close to their property. Some adjacent landowners thought that once the railroads closed, the land would automatically revert back to them, which wasn't necessarily the case.

Historically, the South has not been a place with a lot of public amenities. The states haven't had much money to spare over the course of their development—and some people questioned whether or not rail-trail development was the best way to spend limited public dollars.

But an important strategy for successful rail-trail development is choosing targets of opportunity. You focus on those that are going to get you the best play, the best exposure ... places that are central to the thinking in a state. That's what made the Silver Comet Trail—which is located just outside of Atlanta, Georgia's state capital—such an important early target. And knowing that the Chief Ladiga was being developed, and that it could meet with the Silver Comet at the state border to create a continuous system, was very compelling.

How did you manage to generate public support?

I made the most of the few wonderful trail examples we did have in the South, such as the Virginia Creeper and W&OD. They became my models, and we organized trips so people could visit and experience them for themselves.

Another very important tactic was gaining support from key local influencers—people who were recognized for

their wisdom or leadership. And most of the local leaders really “got it.” They were active citizens and professionals that felt rail-trails were needed in their communities.

After you got the support, were there any other major roadblocks? And how did you manage success?

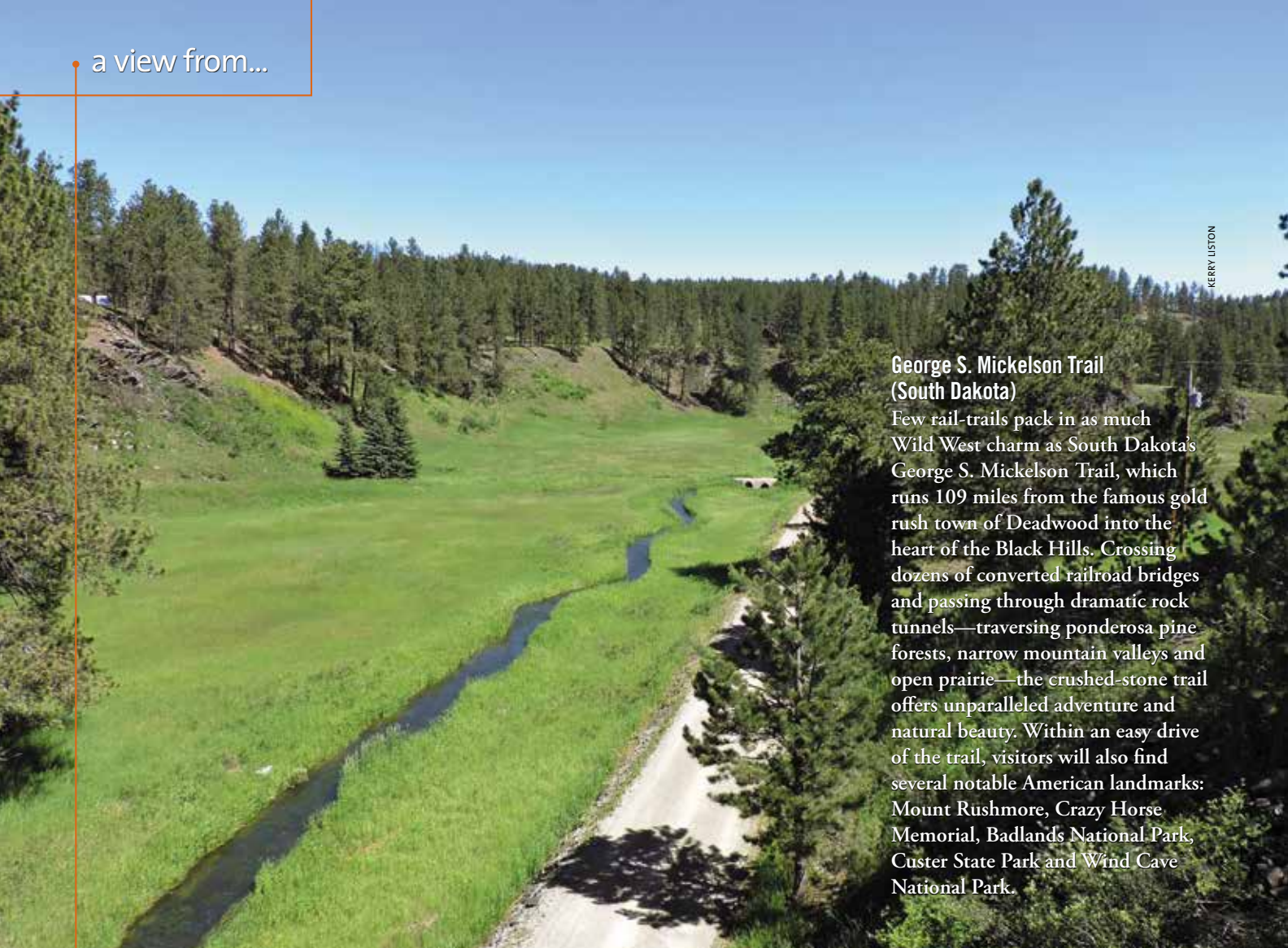
Once we managed to generate public support—a major roadblock was the lack of available funding to support the rail-trail projects. This was true for the South more than for any other region in the U.S.

After about two years, I was promoted to government affairs manager, and my work took a new focus: advocating for federal trail funding. My aid for the South became indirect, but we knew if rail-trails were going to be successful in the U.S., and in the South in particular, there needed to be a steady flow of money available for communities—a source of funding that was dedicated to these types of projects.

The nation's first trail funding in the federal transportation bill was introduced 1991, and over the past 25 years, we've worked hard to try and grow these funding sources and defend them from attack.

It really took that kind of kindling to light a fire for the southern movement, because there were so few other funding sources available for trails there. At first the momentum was slow, but rail-trails started to come and then kept coming. Now we have so many great national examples like the Medical Mile in Arkansas, the first rail-trail in the country a medical community took responsibility for to promote local health, or the Pinellas Trail in Florida, which became a national example of how trails can create safe walking and biking connections in busy urban areas.

Up until a generation ago, almost every southerner had a farm in the family and maintained ties to a more rural way of life. For many southerners living in an urban context now, rail-trails are a new way to reconnect with the outdoors. As generations pass—trails are becoming more important.



KERRY LISTON

George S. Mickelson Trail (South Dakota)

Few rail-trails pack in as much Wild West charm as South Dakota's George S. Mickelson Trail, which runs 109 miles from the famous gold rush town of Deadwood into the heart of the Black Hills. Crossing dozens of converted railroad bridges and passing through dramatic rock tunnels—traversing ponderosa pine forests, narrow mountain valleys and open prairie—the crushed-stone trail offers unparalleled adventure and natural beauty. Within an easy drive of the trail, visitors will also find several notable American landmarks: Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse Memorial, Badlands National Park, Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park.

THE RAI

Since 2007, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) has been inducting exemplary rail-trails—singly or in pairs—into its Rail-Trail Hall of Fame. Of the nearly 2,000 rail-trails in the U.S., 29 inductees are included in this special group. These Hall of Fame rail-trails represent nearly every environment—from downtown urban corridors to pathways stretching across wide-open prairie, along coastlines or through mountain ranges. Many are pioneers of the movement, inspiring trail development across the nation and revolutionizing how trails can enrich communities along their route.

Among their ranks are some of the country's first and longest rail-trails, destination hotspots that have served as catalysts for economic development and healthy lifestyles, and pathways that have helped inspire regional trail development and define the cultural identity of their local areas. Trails such as the Elroy-Sparta and Great Allegheny Passage are American icons—and all in the Hall of Fame serve to inspire trail lovers coast to coast. Here are some national treasures from the list—with images that highlight their beauty, majesty and power to captivate.

Learn more about these and other trails on TrailLink.com.

Longleaf Trace (Mississippi) ▶

The second-longest rail-trail in Mississippi (just behind the Tanglefoot Trail, a newcomer), the nearly 41-mile Longleaf Trace offers mile after mile of the South's natural charms on its way from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg to the quaint town of Prentiss. The sweet fragrances of honeysuckle and wisteria linger along the paved pathway, while dogwood and magnolia trees show off their blossoms. The trail's namesake longleaf pine trees, some more than 100 feet tall, also line the serene and scenic rail-trail, which traverses several bridges and tunnels.



By Laura Stark

L-TRAIL HALL OF FAME

PHILLIP HUSSONG, COURTESY HENNEPIN COUNTY



JAKE LYNCH

Midtown Greenway (Minnesota) ▲

The 5.5-mile Midtown Greenway cuts a lush green swath through the southern neighborhoods of Minneapolis, only minutes from downtown. Nestled in an early 20th-century railroad cut, it also bypasses the street traffic crossing overhead on more than two dozen historical bridges. On its west end, the greenway connects to pathways looping around the scenic Chain of Lakes region—described in the late 1880s as “a necklace of diamond in settings of emerald”—and, on its east end, the beautiful Martin Olav Sabo Bridge and the Mississippi River. The trail is located only two blocks from the city’s Metro light rail system, opening up opportunities for trail users to connect to popular hot spots like the Mall of America and Target Field, home of the Minnesota Twins baseball team.

Washington & Old Dominion Railroad Regional Park (Virginia)

▶ The W&OD, one of the best-loved trails in the Washington, D.C., region, spans 45 paved miles from Arlington, just outside the capital, into rolling Virginia countryside, where grazing horses and cows dot the landscape. Much of the trail is heavily wooded, yet restaurants and shops are never far as the trail winds through Vienna and later Herndon; an old caboose and train depot can also be explored in both towns. Ashburn offers the chance to see a working quarry, and historical Leesburg, which has a Colonial feel, has a charming downtown that's worth a linger. At trail's end in Purcellville, travelers will find Victorian-era buildings and a cheerful yellow depot dating back to 1904.

MATTHEW CULBERTSON



Little Miami Scenic Trail (Ohio) ◀

At 73 miles and fully paved, the Little Miami Scenic Trail is a jewel in the 330-mile network of trails in Ohio's Miami Valley. Beginning just outside Cincinnati and heading northeast, the trail connects dozens of friendly towns on a picturesque path through parks and nature preserves, tranquil countryside and lush forests. Trail users can visit the restored railroad depots in Morrow, Xenia and Yellow Springs; cross a stunning iron trestle in Corwin; and visit the archaeological site at the Fort Ancient State Memorial.

JAMES WELTER



COEUR D'ALENE OLD MISSION STATE PARK

Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes and Route of the Hiawatha (Idaho) ▲

While not connected, combining the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes and Route of the Hiawatha in Idaho's Panhandle into a multi-day biking adventure will provide more than 80 miles of some of the most jaw-dropping scenery in the country. Highlights of the experience include crossing Lake Coeur d'Alene on the Chatcolet Bridge; views of the Palouse Prairie; mountain vistas from several sky-high trestles; and passage through 10 tunnels, among them the 1.6-mile-long Taft Tunnel. Along the way, travelers may even spot a moose, coyote, bird of prey or black bear in this rugged, remote region.



A Legacy That Connects Us All

By designating a portion of his IRA to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, John Ellicot is ensuring that his grandchildren and others will enjoy a healthier, safer future on America's trails.



Learn how you can include RTC in your legacy plans.
railstotrails.org/heritagecircle

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Show Me the (Trail) \$\$

RTC continues to pursue investment in rail-trails at all levels of government in the U.S. to ensure these essential assets are created and protected. As the organization celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2016, *Rails to Trails* magazine is taking a brief moment to spotlight this work, which often takes a backseat in our coverage of the American rail-trail movement, but which has been critical to its growth and evolution.

“Since the early days of RTC, the organization has worked tirelessly to ensure adequate public investment in these essential pathways,” says Kevin Mills, senior vice president of policy at RTC. “Today, our work continues at the federal, state and local levels to enable regions to build the trail networks they need—to connect people and places, and provide healthy outdoor recreation for all.”

Here’s a quick look at RTC’s funding priorities for the future and why they’re important to America’s healthy trail future. Learn more at railstotrails.org.

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP): Federal Trail Funding

What it is: To put it simply, it’s the single largest federal funding source for trails in the U.S. The current pot stands at \$835 million dollars per year, making up only about 1.5 percent of federal transportation spending.

How it’s currently distributed: Fifty percent is allocated to each state’s department of transportation who can choose priority projects. The other 50 percent is split proportionally to: urban areas of more than 200,000 people via metropolitan planning organizations (who decide priority projects for themselves); urban areas of 5,001 to 200,000 people; and areas with 5,000 or less people.

Background: RTC helped ensure the inclusion of the program in the 1991 federal transportation bill as “Transportation

Enhancements (TE).” Since 1992, thousands of trail building and enhancement projects have been made possible through these funds. Sections of the famous Pinellas Trail in Florida, Chief Ladiga Trail in Alabama and Olympic Discovery Trail in Washington have all been funded in part through TE/TAP funds.

Why it’s a legislative priority: “The Transportation Alternatives Program has been the backbone of trail building in the U.S. for nearly 25 years,” says Mills. “The federal dollars not only have directly helped to build most of our favorite rail-trails, but they leverage many other resources and have seeded a cultural shift in which trail networks are now understood as essential community assets.”

TE/TAP has been constantly under attack by various members of Congress over the years. RTC has mobilized to help increase or protect TE/TAP funds in every federal transportation bill since 1991—including increasing TE in 1998, and restoring it following an attack in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2003.

In 2012, Congress reduced TE allocations in the federal transportation bill and consolidated it into TAP with two other programs: the Recreational Trails Program and the Safe Routes to School program. In 2015, although some congressmen sought to eliminate TAP, the legislation instead made a symbolic structural change by moving TAP from a standalone program into a broad transportation program (as a subprogram). The new legislation also gave urban regional transportation agencies the ability to transfer out half of their TAP funds to other uses, representing a new vulnerability for TAP. The program did see an immediate increase from \$820 million to \$835 million per year—and another \$15 million increase to \$850 million per year for the 2018 to 2020 fiscal years.

According to Mills, maintaining the program intact was a real political victory in a bitterly divided Congress, and RTC remains dedicated to protecting and growing TAP going forward. However, the marginal gains are inadequate to meet the



ADRIAN CABRERO

burgeoning national demand for active-transportation funding, so RTC also is working to grow and diversify the options communities have to fund trails, cycle tracks and sidewalks.

TIFIA: Building Active-Transportation Networks

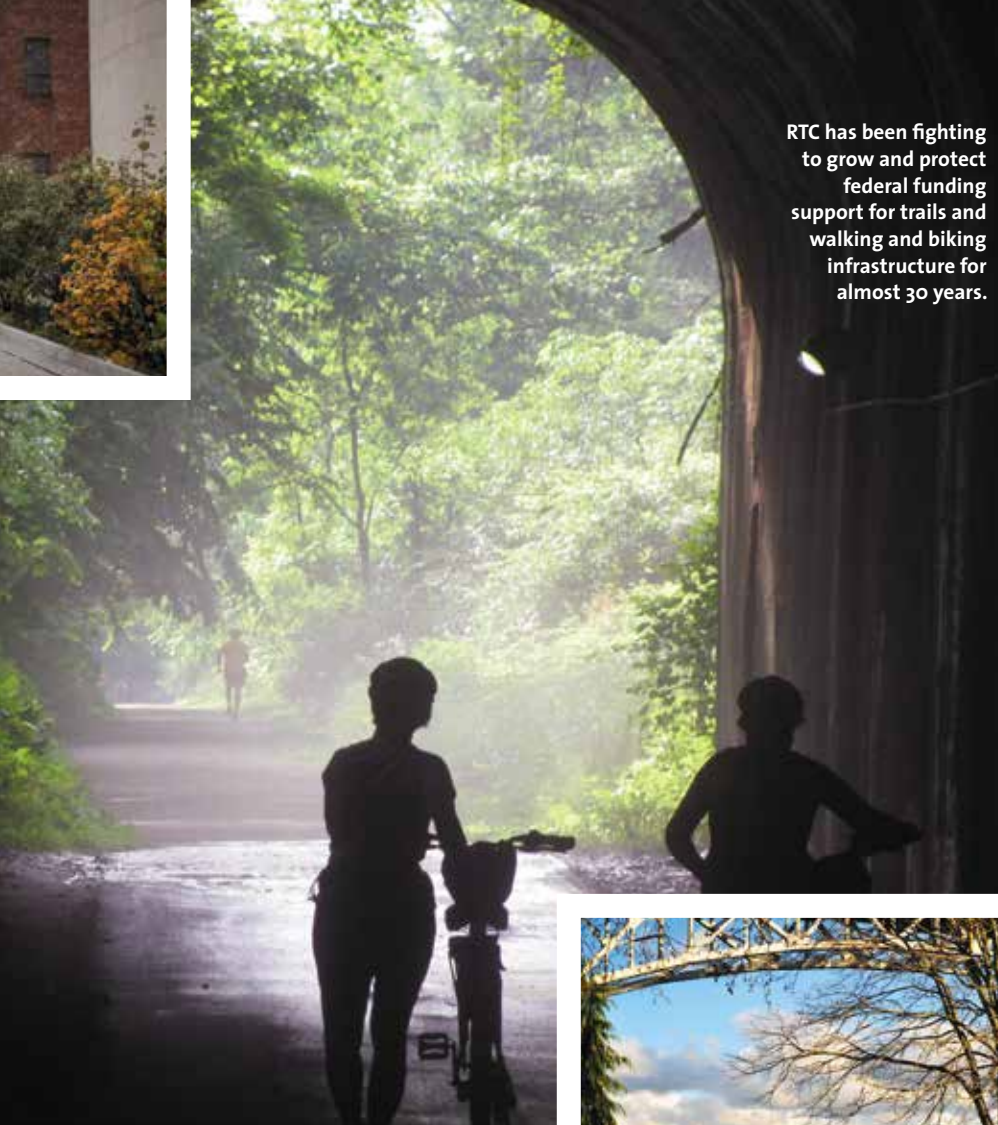
What it is: The Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Investment Act (TIFIA) is a federal program—also included in the federal transportation bill—that provides low-interest loans, lines of credit and loan guarantees for transportation projects, including trails, and biking and walking infrastructure.

How it’s currently distributed: Via an application process managed by the U.S. Department of Transportation

Background: The minimum threshold for TIFIA loans has historically been \$50 million or more for urban/suburban projects and \$25 million for rural projects. In 2015, RTC successfully advocated for improvements to the act in the federal transportation bill that would make TIFIA accessible to communities looking to build out their trail and active-transportation networks.

In a nutshell—the changes to the act included: 1) lowering the threshold to \$10 million for projects involving local governments; 2) enabling projects to be bundled together to reach the threshold; 3) permitting funds to be used to finance State Infrastructure Banks, which can in turn more easily finance rural projects; 4) streamlining the application process for low-risk projects; and 5) allotting at least \$2 million per year for application fee waivers for small projects.

Why it’s a legislative priority: “We’re reaching a point in the trail movement where people understand that trails aren’t just ‘nice to have,’ but are essential community assets,” says Leeann Sinpatanasakul, advocacy coordinator



RTC has been fighting to grow and protect federal funding support for trails and walking and biking infrastructure for almost 30 years.

RTC's State and Local Initiative

What it is: A focused effort by RTC to encourage more investment at the state and local levels in balanced transportation systems that include trails, and biking and walking infrastructure.

Why it's a legislative priority:

"Traditionally, states and localities have focused their limited transportation budgets on road development. Unfortunately, TAP has not grown sufficiently to keep up with the demand for more active-transportation infrastructure," says Drew Dupuy, RTC's manager of policy outreach. To make up for the declining buying power of federal

transportation programs—trail builders are innovating to accelerate the completion of trail networks—particularly at the state and local level, where there is the greatest motivation to get networks in place.

RTC is taking active steps to establish partnerships with more state and local groups to share best practices, such as the use of gas taxes, to help fund biking and walking infrastructure—a strategy traditionally used by many states only to fund road development.

RTC is also working with partners at the state level to help advocate for more state-funded active-transportation programs, like California's massive Active Transportation Program, established in 2013, or Florida's Water and Land Legacy Conservation program, passed in 2014—both of which are expected to allocate hundreds of millions of dollars to active transportation projects over the next 20 years.

"Many people can't or choose not to drive," says Mills. "Our goal is to ensure states and localities are not just investing in one mode of transportation, but in balanced transportation systems that serve the mobility and recreation needs of everyone in their communities."

for RTC. "We want to help communities build connected biking and walking networks, and they need funding to make that happen."

According to Sinpatanasakul, bicycle and pedestrian projects typically cost much less than the previous \$50 million threshold; but, in many cases, much more than what is available through TAP funding. Additionally, she says that the long and complicated application process for TIFIA funds—which can require several lawyers and consultants to complete—has served as a barrier for many communities.

"These reforms to TIFIA will give communities of all sizes opportunities to access TIFIA funds, which will help them to connect trails into seamless networks and create safe routes for people to walk and bike on an accelerated schedule," she states.

While Sinpatanasakul says TIFIA may not be right for every commu-



nity, those communities that are able to take advantage of TIFIA financing can also use innovative ways to pay back the funds. For example, the Chicago Riverwalk is paying back its TIFIA loan over a period of 35 years with funds raised from rent and fees from tour boats, private boat docking, charter boats, leases, sponsorships and advertising.

RTC now has plans to educate trail advocates on how to take advantage of this new tool, reach out to local communities who want to build their trail networks and, over the next couple of years, aid communities who are applying for TIFIA credit assistance for the first time.

What We've Been Up To

■ **In the Northeast:** In 2012, RTC accepted a leadership role in the **Circuit Trails Coalition**—a 65-member-strong collaboration of organizations in the Greater Philadelphia-Camden area working to create a 750-mile regional trail system. To date, 300 miles of the network have been completed, and 50 miles are currently in development. The 135-mile Schuylkill River Trail is serving as a major artery for the system, and new connections via the recently opened Manayunk Bridge Trail, developing Copper River Trail and proposed Merchantville Bike Path extension have the potential to connect people in the most underserved communities to major employment, education and cultural centers. *Read more in this issue's cover story on p. 12.* Contact: Mary O'Connor, mary@railstotrails.org.

■ **In the Mid-Atlantic/Baltimore, Maryland:** Launched in 2015, the **Baltimore Greenway Trails Network Coalition** represents an unprecedented opportunity to create an "Emerald Necklace" for the city of Baltimore. Phase one includes the creation of a 30-mile-plus loop of existing trails, inactive rail lines, parks and protected on-road facilities linking together the Gwynns Falls, Jones Falls and Herring Run stream valleys. A future proposed loop and spoke network will connect residential neighborhoods, the downtown business district, former industrial areas, transit hubs, universities, cultural anchors, stream valleys, urban coastal wetlands, parks and public spaces. *Read more in this issue's Eye On feature on p. 4.* Contact: Jim Brown, jim@railstotrails.org.

■ **In the Mid-Atlantic/Midwest:** In 2014, RTC joined the leadership team of the **Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition**. The vision is to create a 1,450-mile network of trails connecting 48 counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and New York. When complete, it will be the largest destination system in the country. Approximately 48 percent of the trail system has been built; major

trails include the 81-mile Ohio & Erie Canalway Towpath, the 72-mile North Bend Rail Trail in West Virginia and the 46-mile Montour Trail in Pennsylvania. RTC is collaborating with municipal governments, local nonprofits and planning agencies to create this trail network that will help to revitalize the rust belt. Contact: Eric Oberg, eric@railstotrails.org.

■ **In the West:** In June 2014, RTC created the **Bay Area Trails Collaborative**, a coalition comprising more than 40 organizations working to create and maintain a world-class regional trail system of more than 1,000 miles in the San Francisco Bay Area. At present, roughly 50 to 75 percent of the project is complete. The network includes several large, regional systems such as the Bay Area Ridge Trail, California Coastal Trail, Bay Water Trail and San Francisco Bay Trail. The latter is one of the largest in the network, which will one day traverse more than 500 miles and connects 47 cities. The group is advocating for increased funding at the state and regional level and will shortly release a new report, *Trails Count!*, which analyzes technologies for counting bicycle and pedestrian users and makes recommendations to create a regional picture of trail use in the Bay Area. Contact: Laura Cohen, laura@railstotrails.org.

■ **In the Midwest:** In October 2014, RTC helped launch the **Route of the Badger**, a massive effort to create a 400- to 500-mile trail network in Southeastern

Wisconsin, spanning from Racine to Milwaukee and west to Madison. RTC is building a coalition of stakeholders to implement this shared vision of a fully integrated system that connects residents to jobs, shopping centers, educational institutions and recreation areas, while also serving as a major bicycling destination that generates tourism dollars and new economic development opportunities. Connections will be made between very urban and more rural routes such as the popular Milwaukee-based 13.5-mile Hank Aaron State Trail, 30-mile Ozaukee Interurban Trail and 52-mile Glacial Drumline State Trail. Contact: John Siegart, john@railstotrails.org.

■ **In Florida:** RTC has worked over the past several years to establish a trail network and advocacy alliance in the Miami region—a project combining state policy work and local trail development initiatives. Implemented with talented and enthusiastic local partners and an expanding list of funders, the system will feature many popular trails, including: the long awaited Ludlam Trail; the much talked about Underline; the ever-evolving Miami-River Greenway; the Biscayne-Everglades Greenway (which connects two national parks); the redevelopment-oriented Flagler Trail; and many others. These projects will continue to offer more active-transportation solutions and support healthy development in Miami-Dade county, one of the most culturally diverse cities in the country. Contact: Ken Bryan, ken@railstotrails.org.

ANNOUNCEMENT

A new era for trail development

In 2014, in partnership with a team of researchers and 12 U.S. Cities, RTC launched the three-year Trail Modeling and Assessment Platform (T-MAP) project, which will create the country's first national modeling tools to measure trail-system connectivity, demand and potential impact. The information generated by these new tools will enable communities to precisely forecast the returns on investment—related to health and transportation—stimulated by trails, greenways and active-transportation infrastructure. Contact: Tracy Hadden Loh, tracy@railstotrails.org. Learn more at railstotrails.org/TMAP.

Destination: America's Next Top Rail-Trail

BY LAURA STARK

To access an extended version of this article with bike rental info, go to railstotrails.org/trailblog.

View from the Walkway Over the Hudson in New York

the longest rail-trail in the state and, if it wins the competition, would take a proud place as the first trail from Colorado to enter the Hall of Fame.

For much of its length, the trail closely parallels the Roaring Fork River, and animals can often be spotted along the riverbank. It's common to see deer, elk, heron and bald eagles; you may even spot a black bear or mountain lion. In winter, the river valley provides a critical range for deer and elk, so a small trail section between Basalt and Carbondale is closed from November to April; during those months this section is rerouted to the road.

For a bite to eat, a not-to-miss stop along the trail is the quirky and lively Woody Creek Tavern (woodycreektaVERN.com), located in the town made famous for being the residence of the late American writer Hunter S. Thompson. History buffs will want to visit the Glenwood Railroad Museum (glenwoodrailroadmuseum.org), which showcases railroad artifacts, old photographs and a large-scale model railroad. Just a half-mile from the trail's western end, the museum is housed in the Glenwood Springs station, built in 1904 and still serving Amtrak trains.

GETTING THERE: Fly in to Aspen/Pitkin County Airport (ASE) (Sardy Field), roughly 3 miles from downtown Aspen and the eastern end of the trail. You can also get there by train; Amtrak makes regular stops at the Glenwood Springs station (413 Seventh St.). The Rio Grande Trail can be accessed from several places along its route; the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) website features a detailed map with parking locations. RFTA also provides bus service to several key communities along the trail: Aspen, Snowmass Village, Basalt, Carbondale and Glenwood Springs. Many of these stops are within a half-mile of the trail. The buses are equipped with bike racks, and there's a surcharge of \$2 to take bikes aboard.

MORE INFO: rfta.com/trail-information ►

In recognition of this year's 30th anniversary of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, we are conducting a public vote for the 30th addition to our Rail-Trail Hall of Fame. Inductees into this prestigious trail group are selected on the basis of such merits as scenic value, high use, trail and trailside amenities, historical significance, excellence in management and facility maintenance, and community connections, as well as geographic distribution. Here's a list of our nominees, highlighting what makes each a great trail to visit.

Vote for your favorite in June! Look for the voting announcement on our website, railstotrails.org/30th.

Rio Grande Trail (Colorado)

The Rio Grande Trail is quintessential Colorado, featuring a sparkling river, rustling aspens and scented pines against a backdrop of towering mountains. Even better, this bounty of beauty is easily accessible, with several communities dotting the route and a relatively gentle slope (no more than 4 percent) running downhill from the famed ski town of Aspen to Glenwood Springs. At 42 miles, nearly all paved, it's



COURTESY RFTA

AARON SCHMIDT



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Shelby Farms Greenline (Tennessee)

Family outings don't come much better than excursions on the Shelby Farms Greenline, which offers an easy bike ride or walk on a paved, level route that begins in midtown Memphis and heads nearly 7 miles eastward. The trail is shady and quiet, with a wide, unpaved shoulder on each side. Since opening in 2010, the popular pathway, which sees as many as 200,000 users annually, has helped inspire a new culture of biking and walking in Memphis.

Anchored by Shelby Farms Park (shelbyfarmspark.org), the Greenline provides a unique connection to nature for city dwellers. One of the largest urban parks in the country, Shelby Farms spans a whopping 4,500 acres and abounds in woodlands, wetlands and lakes. The park even contains a herd of buffalo! The young and young at heart will enjoy its immense and whimsical Woodland Discovery Playground, horseback riding stables, disc golf and zip-lining courses, watercraft rentals and hiking trails.

Building on the positive momentum of the Greenline, Shelby County and Shelby Farms Park Conservancy broke ground last summer on a 4-mile eastward extension of the trail. Once it reaches the former railroad depot in Cordova (expected to happen in fall 2016), the corridor will cover 10.5 miles, making it the longest rail-trail in the state. If added to the Rail-Trail Hall

of Fame, it also will be noteworthy as the first rail-trail in Tennessee to make the list.

GETTING THERE: Memphis International Airport (MEM) is less than 20 miles from the trail. The Greenline is accessible from multiple points, but many visitors will want to start on its east end in Shelby Farms Park (500 N. Pine Lake Drive). To get to the park from the west: Take Interstate 240 to the Walnut Grove exit and go east to the third stoplight. The park is on both sides of the road. Turn left at the light. From the east: Follow Walnut Grove or Mullins Station Road until you see signs for the park.

MORE INFO: shelbyfarmspark.org/shelbyfarmsgreenline

Hudson Valley Trail Network (New York)

Offering an unforgettable experience of beauty, adventure and charm, the Hudson Valley Trail Network encompasses the Walkway Over the Hudson, Hudson Valley Rail Trail and William R. Steinhaus Dutchess Rail Trail.

The magnificent Walkway Over the Hudson provides a journey through the sky. The longest elevated pedestrian bridge in the world, it spans just over a mile across the Hudson River and yields dramatic views of the river more than 200 feet below and of the surrounding New York countryside.



KRISTINA QUINONES

A glass-walled elevator takes visitors on a 70-second ride back to the ground, where they can catch the Dutchess Rail Trail on the river's east bank. The trail winds through Poughkeepsie and continues southeast for 13 miles, ending at the restored Hopewell Depot (hopewelldepot.org), which serves as a visitor center and museum. A unique feature of the trail is its Military Mile, honoring the five branches of the U.S. military—Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy and Marines—through special signage.

On the Walkway's west side, travelers will find the quaint hamlet of Highland, with its charming shops and eateries. From there, the Hudson Valley Rail Trail heads northwest through hardwood forests and rock cuts and under two picturesque stone-arch bridges. After nearly 4 miles, it ends in the town of Lloyd. Two cabooses along the route, one dating from 1915 and the other from 1926 (this one housing historical exhibits), present a tangible connection to the trail's railroad past.

Together, the three rail-trails, totaling 18 paved miles, provide an easy and spectacular way to experience the Hudson Valley.

GETTING THERE: The Hudson Valley trails are about a two-hour drive from New York City. They also can be reached by train; take Amtrak or a Metro-North train (the Hudson Line) from Grand Central Station in Manhattan to Poughkeepsie. The Walkway Over the Hudson is a few blocks from the station (about a 15-minute walk). If flying in, the closest major airport is Stewart International Airport (SWF) in Newburgh, about 25 miles from the trail system.

MORE INFO: walkway.org, hudsonvalleyrailtrail.net and dutchesscountytrails.com

GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail (South Carolina)

In the backyard of two major Southern cities, Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., Greenville's Swamp Rabbit Trail is an easily accessible treasure in the foothills of



COURTESY GREENVILLE COUNTY PARKS

and an art gallery downtown.

Although more of a country cousin, Banks, at the other end of the trail, sees its share of tourists too. Here, the trail's first few miles offer a contrasting openness, as farm fields in subdued earth tones unfurl under a canopy of clouds. This fertile landscape—the Tualatin Valley—is well known for its wine, especially pinot noir. Find a list of local vineyards online (tualatinvalley.org/wineries-vineyards) to plan a wheels and wine vacation.

Mid-trail, visitors will cross L.L. Stub Stewart State Park (oregonstateparks.org). A variety of recreational amenities and camping options (tent sites, rustic cabins, RV hookups) in a postcard-perfect setting make this 1,800-acre park immensely popular.

Another highlight of the route is the Buxton Trestle, spanning 735 feet and curved so you can't see the other end from the start. Rising 80 feet above Mendenhall Creek, this railroad relic is an impressive sight from above or below. A dozen other trestles dot the route as well.

GETTING THERE: Portland is about a 45-minute drive away. The closest major airport is Portland International Airport (PDX). The trail has six trailheads with parking between Banks and Vernonia: Banks, Manning, Buxton, Tophill, Beaver Creek and Vernonia.

MORE INFO: oregonstateparks.org

the Blue Ridge Mountains. Following the course of the scenic Reedy River, the paved pathway covers nearly 20 miles, including passage through the beautiful campus of Furman University.

With a relatively flat surface, safe and pleasant environment, and numerous neighborhood connections, the trail provides a convenient way for people of all ages and abilities to exercise, a point encouraged and promoted by its primary corporate sponsor, the Greenville Health System. Highlights of the corridor include the spectacular waterfalls of Greenville's Falls Park, a pair of fighter jets displayed in Cleveland Park, and the wildlife-abundant forests and wetlands of Lake Conestee Nature Park.

Since opening in 2009, the trail has kept business hopping in the two towns it connects, Greenville and Travelers Rest. With 500,000 users annually, the trail is the most-used recreational asset in Greenville County. It has spurred the opening of more than 40 new businesses, some with nods to the thriving biking culture via such names as Swamp Rabbit Cafe and Grocery (swamprabbitcafe.com), Swamp Rabbit Brewery & Taproom (theswamprabbitbrewery.com) and Tandem Crêperie & Coffeehouse (tandemcc.com). If picked for the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame, this successful community connector would be the first trail in South Carolina to achieve such an honor.

GETTING THERE: The trail is about a two-hour drive from Atlanta and Charlotte. Greenville-Spartanburg International

Airport (GSP) is about 14 miles from the trail. Amtrak's Greenville Station (1120 W. Washington St.) is only about a half mile from the Swamp Rabbit. Drivers will find no shortage of parking in the numerous parks along the route, and the trail is easy to reach from Highway 276, which it loosely parallels.

MORE INFO: greenvillerec.com/swamprabbit

Banks-Vernonia State Trail (Oregon)

A thread of black in an emerald blanket, the Banks-Vernonia State Trail weaves its way between two peaceful towns in the foothills of northwest Oregon's Coast Range, less than an hour's drive from Portland. Most of the 22-mile paved pathway is enveloped by the tall trees that attracted the lumber industry in the early 1900s—a verdant mix of Douglas fir, maple, cedar and alder.

At its northern end, you'll find the Vernonia Pioneer Museum (vernonia-or.gov/Recreation/Museum.asp), which tells the story of that lumber history. The town, no longer revolving around the large mill that once thrived here, is reinventing itself as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts. Visitors will find charming restaurants, coffee shops, bed-and-breakfasts



TAD REEVES

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Photo courtesy of Cooper's Ferry Development Association

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