The crown jewel of Milwaukee County’s trail network, the 125-mile Oak Leaf Trail is showing the way in southeastern Wisconsin.
Debby and Jim Sharpe
Canton, Massachusetts

Each issue we highlight a member or supporter of our national trail community. Special thanks to Debby and Jim Sharpe for supporting America's rail-trails!

What we do
We are retired, having sold our manufacturing business 10 years ago. Now we each spend one day per week caring for our 5-year-old grandchildren. Debby is chair of our town's Walk, Bike & Hike Committee and treasurer of our temple. Jim teaches entrepreneurship to executives and also serves as a mentor for young entrepreneurs.

Favorite inspirational quote
Debby: “Life is not fair.”
Jim: “A desk is a very dangerous place from which to watch the world.”—John le Carré

Person we admire
Peter Sargent, a college friend who owned a bike shop and introduced us to RTC and the East Coast Greenway Alliance. He and his wife, Karen MacGregor, first inspired us to bike with our children.

Favorite rail-trail in the country
Our most memorable rail-trail experience was on an RTC sojourn on the Great Allegheny Passage (gaptrail.org) with 300 of our new best friends.
We then continued, self-supported, on the C&O Canal Towpath all the way to Washington, D.C. We even spent a night in a lockhouse.
We arrived in D.C. on our 34th wedding anniversary very muddy. Our hotel organized a hose for us outside the front entrance!

Favorite rail-trail in Massachusetts
The Phoenix Bike Trail/ Mattapoisett Rail Trail, near our summer house in Mattapoisett. We’ve ridden it since our children were in a trailer, and this summer our grandchildren graduated from their trailer and pedaled it under their own power. We hope that within our lifetime it will connect all the way to the Cape Cod Canal along rail-trails.

A meaningful life story
Debby: My mother and siblings and I often biked around town when I was a kid. When I was 14, I headed out of town too far, and it was too late to ride back. I called my mom, who picked me up without complaint. I started riding farther with more planning. I’m still riding, usually with a plan.
Jim: I bought my first bike with money from my paper route and experienced freedom from my parents and the community. The hardest part was the steep hills in our neighborhood; only now do I realize they were actually just slight inclines!

Next big rail-trail trip—and why
We have a goal of riding coast to coast—but our many trips have left us with a gap in the middle, which is daunting. We’re thinking maybe Pittsburgh to Chicago next fall.

Why trails are so important to communities
They provide safe, scenic, relaxing walking and riding experiences for all ages and abilities. Their routes bring us along the “back part” of the cities and towns that have special character.

Why we support RTC
RTC helps make rail-trails happen!

FROM THE STAFF
Favorite Trail in the United States
Cindy Dickerson
Chief Operating Officer
My favorite trail is the Four Mile Run Trail, located just outside of Washington, D.C., in neighboring Arlington County, Virginia. Stretching for just 6 miles, this community trail isn’t the longest or most spectacular trail, but it’s my trail and that’s why I love it.
The trail mirrors my life—running as fast as I could along the trail in my fitness-focused years, to countless miles of leisurely pushing a stroller, to toddler and grade school years enjoying the playgrounds adjacent to the trail, then teaching my kids to ride their own bikes and learn all the rules of the trail.
These days, I find myself walking with my girlfriend for just a half-mile as she regains her strength after breast cancer treatment, or power walking in the early morning with my sister when she’s in town. I almost always see someone I know, but occasionally it’s quiet, and if I’m lucky I’ll spot a deer or two. But always, I leave restored and grounded as I make my way off the trail and back up the hill to my house.

FEATURED LETTER TO THE EDITOR
So Many Trails to Explore
This summer my husband and I did a bucket list vacation for five weeks—during which we rode a different rail-trail every day. It was just the best. We rode two different parts of the Katy Trail in Missouri, the High Trestle Trail in Iowa, the Mickelson Trail in South Dakota, and the list goes on.
We headed north after fabulous trails in Idaho, with our farthest point being Tofino, British Columbia. Leaving Tofino, we headed south through Oregon and Utah and then back to our home in Memphis. Our lodging ran the gamut from high-end B&Bs to modest cabins.
It was the best trip we could imagine, but so many people we have talked to think these trips are unattainable. Nonsense! It is something every family—anyone—can do!
P.S. When a moose crosses a bike trail right in front of you, getting a photo is most important!*
Bev and Terry Trojan
Memphis, Tennessee

Thank you, Bev and Terry, for sharing your inspiring story on America’s trails!
**DEPARTMENTS**

- **Left // I Support Rails-to-Trails Conservancy** Debby and Jim Sharpe (Massachusetts)
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- **Inside Back Cover // Featured Map** Oak Leaf Trail (Wisconsin)

**ON THE COVER:** Wisconsin’s Oak Leaf Trail near the Milwaukee Art Museum

Photo by Front Room Photography

**COVER STORY**

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The Way Forward
Milwaukee County’s Oak Leaf Trail

The Oak Leaf Trail is the crown jewel of the Milwaukee County trail system, connecting urban, suburban and rural neighborhoods with the region’s extensive system of green space and parks, local businesses, and some of the most notable cultural sites in Wisconsin.

*By Cory Matteson*

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**Trails Forecast: Resiliency and Repair**

As natural disasters continue to increase across the country, trail managers are recognizing the need for solutions to help mitigate the economic, environmental and infrastructural impacts and ensure long-term resiliency in their communities.

*By Scott Stark*

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**Tracie Sanchez: Connecting Trail Developers in Georgia**

As founder of the Georgia Trail Summit, Tracie Sanchez is creating and maintaining a collaborative environment for trail developers and stakeholders from across the state.

*By Danielle Taylor*

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**A View From ... Michigan’s Great Lake-to-Lake Trails**

Experience Route #1 in Michigan’s Great Lake-to-Lake Trails network—a 275-mile route connecting Lakes Michigan and Huron—through this snowy wonderland trail pictorial in honor of winter.

*By Laura Stark*

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**Destination New Mexico: Santa Fe Rail Trail**

Just like out of a Johnny Cash song—the Santa Fe Rail Trail will make you feel a little Wild West, with its stunning New Mexico landscapes, trestle bridges and colorful history from the days of the Royal Gorge Railway War.

*By Robert Annis*
With Rails to Trails magazine, we try to share the diversity of our country’s vast trails and the people behind them. But if there’s one thing you’ll find consistent in nearly every story, it’s how trails connect us. In the most literal sense, they serve as a means to get from place to place, and figuratively, trails grant us deep and meaningful connections to each other and to nature. As I conclude my first year at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), I’m grateful to have met and drawn inspiration from people all across America who are working to provide their fellow citizens with invaluable connections through trails.

In Milwaukee, at the center point of the Route of the Badger trail network—a developing 700-mile RTC TrailNation™ project in southeastern Wisconsin—the 125-miles-plus Oak Leaf Trail embodies the meaning of connectivity (see page 12). The trail provides a special connection to Milwaukee’s natural treasures, including its winding path along Lake Michigan. It connects the neighborhoods that give Milwaukee its personality and its soul. And it provides deep personal connections for the hundreds of thousands of people who explore the trail each year.

In Atlanta, the expansion of the Silver Comet Trail to connect with the Atlanta BeltLine (see page 4)—and the connections this expansive trail system will make across state and city lines, and between urban and rural communities—is inspiring. It’s a testament to the joy that trails bring and the enthusiasm that exists for their potential. This trail connection will unlock incredible opportunities for the estimated millions of people who use the trail each year, and the millions who have yet to experience it.

These trails, and what’s happening in all of RTC’s TrailNation projects and with the Great American Rail-Trail™, represent opportunities to connect the nation by trail in new and exciting ways. But in the midst of this momentum, trails and active transportation infrastructure face new and unexpected challenges. The last decade saw significant weather events that have become increasingly devastating and frequent. And the havoc these storms dealt to communities across the country also impacted their trails (see page 18).

For some, it will be a long road to rebuild. But it’s also an opportunity to consider the role that trails play in protecting our climate: By getting people out of their cars and into nature, we create new bonds to the outdoors, we decrease carbon emissions, and we increase physical activity. Trails are but one part of a systemic solution to climate change, but the role they play is one for which all of us in the trails movement can be proud.

I might be wrapping up my first year at RTC—but we’re all embarking on a new decade. For the trails and active transportation movement, there is much optimism about what the future holds. In every state and across more than 36,000 miles of multiuse trails, we see firsthand how trails are anchors in their communities—delivering health, climate and economic benefits. We see how trails connect people to each other and reconnect many with nature. We see how trails provide equitable opportunities for recreation and transportation. We see the power of connecting America by trail like never before.

See you on the trail!

Ryan Chao, President
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
What We’ve Been Up To

RTC Releases Transformative Vision for Active Transportation in America

In fall 2019, RTC publicly launched the results of its national study, “Active Transportation Transforms America,” which demonstrates the current and potential return on investment of trails and other active transportation infrastructure.

The study—which aggregates data about health cost savings, climate protection, mobility, and direct economic value of trails and other active transportation infrastructure—found: 1) a current annual return on investment from connected walking and bicycling infrastructure (including health, climate and economic returns) of $34 billion+; and 2) that improving infrastructure connectivity could grow the annual return to more than $138.5 billion.

RTC is urging supporters to tell Congress to invest in this vital infrastructure—with a focus on investing in trail connectivity within and between communities and states for maximum impact. Learn more: railstotrails.org/trailstransform.

Contact: Kevin Mills, kevin@railstotrails.org.

Study Finds Trails in Wisconsin Have $1.5 Billion Annual Economic Impact

On Dec. 3, 2019, in Madison, Wisconsin, RTC released the latest data about the health and economic benefits of trails in the state, which shows the annual net economic impact of trails in Wisconsin is as much as $1.5 billion, including direct trail-user spending of $868 million and health costs avoided of a $833 million.

The analysis of the impact of trails in the state is based on the Active Transportation Transforms America study methodology, which suggests that developing and completing trail networks, such as the 700-mile Route of the Badger TrailNation™ project in Southeast Wisconsin, has the potential to significantly maximize these outcomes.

The findings were released during a celebration for RTC’s 2019 Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion, Keith Laughlin, former president of RTC and the visionary behind the developing Badger project. Learn more: railstotrails.org/badger.

Contact: Willie Karidis, willie@railstotrails.org.

New York Puts Forth Historic Legislation for Statewide Trail Network

In November 2019, on the heels of a coordinated advocacy effort by RTC and Parks & Trails New York as part of the Trails Across New York Campaign, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation (passed by the state legislature in June) for a statewide trails plan that seeks to identify and fund projects that will have the greatest impact on connectivity. The plan will focus on leveraging—as a major spine for the network—the developing Empire State Trail, set for completion by 2020 and encompassing 750 miles.

With the potential to host 8.6 million visitors annually, the Empire State Trail could help compound the benefits of the state’s already burgeoning outdoor recreation economy, currently generating $41 billion in consumer spending per year. Learn more: pt ny.org/explore/empire-state-trail.

Contact: Andrew Dupuy, drew@railstotrails.org.

RTC Stands With State Leadership in Ohio to Turn Trail Vision Into Reality

In October 2019, RTC and the Ohio Trails Partnership gathered with the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus and representatives of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Health and TourismOhio to discuss strategies to move forward the new statewide trails plan: the Ohio Trails Vision.

During the event, RTC and partners discussed how to deliver the political leadership necessary to complete the state’s trail networks outlined in the vision—such as the 326-mile Ohio to Erie Trail, which connects millions of people, has a significant impact on transportation, and delivers economic and quality of life outcomes for residents along its path.

The state trails plan also seeks to hasten completion of the Great American Rail-Trail™, a 3,700-mile cross-country route that will connect the District of Columbia and 12 states, including Ohio, on a path between Washington, D.C., and Washington State.

Contact: Brian Housh, brianh@railstotrails.org.

State of Missouri Announces Historic Step for Future Rock Island Trail

In December 2019, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources announced that it had signed an interim trail-use agreement with Missouri Central Railroad Company (a subsidiary of Ameren) for the Rock Island Trail, a 144-mile proposed pathway connecting Windsor and Beaufort in Missouri. The agreement marks a historic step forward toward railbanking the corridor and providing transformative benefits to nearly two-dozen communities along the route.

Over the past five years, RTC mobilization efforts along with Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. and other local partners have helped demonstrate the overwhelming public support for the trail, which has included more than 30,000 comments in favor of the trail submitted to the state to date.

When complete, the Rock Island Trail would connect with the Katy Trail to form a trail system stretching more than 450 miles, and serve as a multiplier for the Katy’s economic impact, which is estimated to be $18 million+ annually.

Contact: Eric Oberg, eric@railstotrails.org.
Georgia’s Silver Comet Connector

The stars align as a project to connect the famed Silver Comet Trail to the developing Atlanta BeltLine moves forward.

BY LAURA STARK

The Silver Comet Connector is a project that just makes sense. Only a few miles separate two of the most important rail-trails in northwestern Georgia, the famed Silver Comet Trail (silvercometga.com) and the burgeoning Atlanta BeltLine (beltline.org), which rings the city. Connecting these two nationally recognized trails has been on the PATH Foundation’s radar for a long time, according to its executive director, Ed McBrayer, who cofounded the nonprofit in 1991 to develop multiuse trails in the Atlanta metro region.

Supporting PATH’s efforts to build the new rail-trail, the Connect the Comet (CTC) group has been advocating for the project’s completion since 2013. With PATH’s small staff and a lot of trail projects on the docket, the CTC volunteers help amplify the importance of the project to lawmakers and the general public.

In 2017, the CTC delivered a petition signed by nearly 4,000 citizens to the Georgia State Capitol to draw attention to the effort.

Given the success of the Silver Comet Trail over the past two decades, extending the trail down to Atlanta seems indisputable. The 61.5-mile pathway, stretching from Smyrna, Georgia, to the Alabama border, sees about 2 million travelers each year. McBrayer notes that there’s been so much enthusiasm for the trail that the parking area at its eastern trailhead in Cobb County, where the new connector begins, has already been expanded three times.

Across the state line, the Silver Comet’s seamless connection to Alabama's 33-mile Chief Ladiga Trail creates one of the longest paved rail-trail routes in the country. Together, the Silver Comet and Chief Ladiga trails, which pass through some of the most scenic landscapes in the South, were inducted into the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame in 2009. The connector project, which will tie into downtown Atlanta at Centennial Olympic Park, will provide the opportunity for city residents and tourists to reach this incredible asset without a car on a safe route that skirts under several busy roadways. Conversely, suburban Cobb County residents will be able to easily reach the city—a true conduit for meeting both recreational and transportation needs.

The cherry on top is that the new trail will also tie into a major park that’s slated to open in spring 2020. At 280 acres, the developing Westside Park at Bellwood Quarry will be Atlanta’s largest park once complete. The century-old mining pit, originally used to provide granite for the city’s streets, is being transformed into a water reservoir surrounded by beautiful green space. The striking setting has even been used as a filming location for The Walking Dead, The Hunger Games and Stranger Things.

“The original concept of the BeltLine was referred to as the ‘emerald necklace,’ and the idea was that the old rail alignment, the 22-mile loop, would run through these existing parks,” said Tony Aeck, the CTC liaison to PATH. “The addition of this significant park is like adding a brooch!”

Within the last year, pieces of the puzzle have been rapidly falling into place, and McBrayer estimates that the whole trail will be completed in three to four years. Having preserved rail corridor available to use for about half the trail’s length greatly speeds up its progress in the built-up metropolitan area.

“Georgia worked with CSX Railroad, and they were successful in getting 2.3 miles of unused rail line conveyed to the state, which gets the trail closer into the city and gobbles up some of that
"We have supported PATH all these years because we have seen how PATH trails make Atlanta a better place for everyone to live. They improve our quality of life, encourage healthy lifestyles and get people outside connecting with each other and our city."

Jim Kennedy, Chairman, Cox Enterprises/Chair, “Mile 300” Campaign

Learn more about the project at pathfoundation.org and connectthecomet.org.

10.6 miles,” McBrayer explained. “At the southern end, Atlanta BeltLine [Inc.] purchased an abandoned rail that runs out of downtown toward the Westside; it’s a little less than 2 miles long. Those two things together made us try to finish up the center of it and connect the dots to complete the trail.”

To buoy this work, PATH is rallying the support of the private philanthropic community. In 2021, the organization turns 30, and in recognition of the milestone, the organization launched the “Mile 300” campaign with the goal of reaching 300 miles of trail built by PATH during its three decades of service. So vital is the Silver Comet Connector to the region that it’s the centerpiece of the campaign. Already, $6 million has been donated by the Atlanta-based James M. Cox Foundation; in the press release announcing the donation, PATH trails were said to “make Atlanta a better place for everyone to live.”

McBrayer notes that there’s been no opposition to the Silver Comet Connector. “We’ve built so many trails in the metropolitan Atlanta area that everybody understands them now.”

PHOTO: Connect the Comet volunteers advocating for the trail
Winter Pumpkins

GIL BENNETT - OIL, 22" X 28"

Completed in 1908, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad—the Milwaukee Road—was America’s last transcontinental railroad. A latecomer to such service, the railroad had to traverse some of the most rugged and remote terrain in the Pacific Northwest. To do so, it installed more than 650 miles of electrified right-of-way and employed some of the largest electric locomotives of the mid-20th century.

Here, artist Gil Bennett portrays one of these, nicknamed the Little Joe, aided by three SD-40-2 diesels, in the Bitteroot Mountains near the Montana-Idaho boarder. Today this scene is part of the Route of the Hiawatha (ridethehiawatha.com), which connects the Idaho-Montana border to Pearson, Idaho. Adjoining trails can add up to 43 miles to create a trip through some of the most beautiful and remote rail-trail scenery in America. Of the painting, Bennett said, “I wanted to paint a Little Joe in the snow. I placed the time in the late 1960s–early 1970s, when Joes were paired with diesels to cut down on the time it took to change locomotives at electric serve endpoints.”

About the Artist: Gil Bennett (gilbennett.com) is acclaimed for his meticulous research and attention to detail in his art. His work reflects specific locomotives and trains set in the challenging environments in which they once operated day in and day out.
This painting portrays a scene that would have been typical of activity around a rural depot anywhere in mid-20th-century America. Commissioned by Chris Burger, a collector, it is based on a photograph Burger once took at the Mid-Continent Railway Museum in North Freedom, Wisconsin. Burger’s photograph did not include the gas-electric Doodlebug, but he’d always been a fan of them and asked the artist, John Winfield, to include it.

Because a Doodlebug would not have called on North Freedom, the decision was made to place the scene at the Eagle River, Wisconsin, depot on the Chicago & North Western’s (C&NW’s) former Ashland Division. That depot still stands and is at the north end of the 11.2-mile Three Eagle Trail ([3eagletrail.com](http://3eagletrail.com)) in northern Wisconsin. The trail extends, in two pieces, to Three Lakes.

The equipment portrayed, the locomotive, the gas-electric Doodlebug, even the depot and the people shown, are typical of what Eagle River and railroads of the pre-diesel era everywhere were like. And both Doodlebugs and locomotive No. 1385 worked in northern Wisconsin.

The entire scenario is a celebration of branch and short-line railroading and their role in knitting the nation together.

About the Artist:
John Winfield ([winfieldart.com](http://winfieldart.com)), who has been commissioned by working railroads, historical societies, book publishers and private collectors nationwide, is a career graphic artist. The work’s owner, Chris Burger, donated signed and numbered prints of this work to the C&NW Historical Society to give to members of its “400 Club,” who donated $400 or more to the organization.
Allegheny Portage Railroad

JAMES MANN - WATERCOLOR, 22" X 30"

The 36-mile Allegheny Portage Railroad was part of Pennsylvania’s 361-mile Philadelphia-to-Pittsburgh Main Line of Public Works. A canal and railroad project built between 1824 and 1834, it gave Philadelphia access to the Ohio River Valley. The railroad connected Hollidaysburg and Johnstown using five inclines on each side of the Allegheny Mountains. Stationary engines moved barges temporarily placed on wheel carriages up and down the mountains. A horse- or steam-powered railroad moved them between the inclines.

James Mann illustrates another historical feature of this operation, the 901-foot-long Staple Bend Tunnel, America’s first railroad tunnel, located on the west side of the Allegheny Mountains at the crest of incline no. 1. An unusual double-track turntable at the East Portal rotates a Norris locomotive and tender for a run east, while the horses that pulled the train through the tunnel rest. The completion of the Pennsylvania Railroad’s nearby Horseshoe Curve in 1854 brought an end to the Allegheny Portage Railroad in 1857. This setting is part of the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site near Gallitzin.

The 11.8-mile Path of the Flood Trail/Staple Bend Tunnel Trail (rtc.li/Path-Staple) provides access to the site and is intended in places for hiking or biking.

About the Artist:
James Mann (jamesmannartfarm.com) comes from a strong architectural background, “with impressionist tendencies.” He is partial to farming, farm machinery, locomotives and “the poetry of machinery in motion.”
On the Lake

CHRIS OLDHAM - WATERCOLOR, 13” X 17”

For artist Chris Oldham, this one’s personal. “I have pounded out quite a few miles on the Cotton Valley Rail-Trail (cottonvalleyrailtrail.org), depicted here,” said Oldham. He might add that the 12-mile trail connecting Wolfeboro with Wakefield, New Hampshire, is historic. Built in 1871, it was once the Wolfeboro Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad.

Unusual for the fact that rails are still in place on stretches of its route—the area between them filled to accommodate recreational use—the trail is promoted as ideal for four seasons of activity. The bucolic route features historical railroad structures, including the restored 1872 Wolfeboro depot, two short causeways over portions of Crescent Lake and Lake Wentworth as you depart Wolfeboro, and an old turntable in Sanbornville on the eastern end of the trail near Wakefield. Oldham’s art portrays a Boston & Maine freight running along Fernald Basin on Lake Wentworth, east of Wolfeboro. The route was acquired in 1985 by New Hampshire for use as a trail. Back to the personal: “I painted this picture for my wife,” Oldham said. “It depicts a location near where my mother lives and where my family has spent many happy days while visiting.”

About the Artist:
Chris Oldham (chrisoldhamart.com) is a self-taught artist who has loved drawing and painting his entire life, and has been “intensely interested” in trains since he was a boy. He strives to both evoke nostalgia for the railroad environment and capture the excitement of a passing train.
The 22.5-mile Henry Hudson Trail (rtc.li/Henry-Hudson-Trail) occupies remnants of the Central Railroad of New Jersey’s former Seashore Branch. Built over a 40-year period, between 1840 and 1880, the railroad became disused in the 1950s, allowing for the eventual creation of the trail.

The trail follows former right-of-way along the Raritan Bayshore, from the marina below the bluffs of Atlantic Highlands, seen here in the background. Also shown is a CNJ 4-6-0 Camelback locomotive hauling a passenger train north on a wood trestle. The trestle once served as one leg of a three-legged track “wy” that enabled turning trains at Atlantic Highlands-Sandy Hook to stop without a turntable. The trestle was demolished by a storm in the 1940s, and the Seashore Branch was rerouted inland along the coast, establishing the present-day route of the trail.

Divided into two sections near its midpoint by New Jersey’s Garden State Parkway, the trail is nonetheless continuous by virtue of an on-road route connecting the sections. It ends at Popamora Point Park in the town of Highlands, directly east of Atlantic Highlands.

About the Artist:
Andy Romano (trainutz.com), a retired California resident, has created many railroad paintings, including those featuring the Central Railroad of New Jersey. These celebrate his childhood memories of travel on the railroad’s Seashore Branch during summer vacations along the Raritan Bayshore.
Harriman’s Dream

SHAYNE STOAKES - ACRYLIC, 24” X 36”

Idaho’s 34-mile Railroad Right-of-Way Trail (rtc.li/Railroad-Right-Of-Way) runs between a campground near Ashton, Idaho, and the Montana state line southwest of West Yellowstone, part of a former railroad branch line created between Idaho Falls, Idaho, and West Yellowstone. The Harriman State Park in Island Park, Idaho, was originally part of the Oregon Short Line’s “Railroad Ranch.” It was established in the 1890s, when the Island Park Land and Cattle Company started grazing cattle there. Livestock was shipped over the trail’s former rail route to the Island Park siding, shown here, to graze in the spring, and was rounded up by horseback in the fall, sorted in the corals, and shipped by rail to market.

The setting shown here is adjacent to the trail. In 1908, the railroad’s owners approached E. H. Harriman, then chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, about buying the ranch. Harriman, noting the premium grazing land, amazing waterfowl and unbelievable fishing found there, purchased the property sight unseen. The last roundup occurred in fall 1971. The rail route beyond Ashton was disused in 1979, and the rails were removed in 1981. Today, trail promoters describe it as “encapsulating everything Idahoans love about Idaho.”

About the Artist:
Shayne Stoakes (railartbyshayne.com) intends for his work to inspire you to experience his scenes and to recall a simpler time. He witnessed this scene as a 6-year-old when he accompanied his grandfather to the site, and owns a restored Chevy pickup truck like the one that took them there.
The Oak Leaf Trail is the crown jewel of the Milwaukee County trail system, connecting neighborhoods with the area’s extensive green space and some of the most notable cultural sites in Wisconsin. Learn more: rtc.li/Oak-Leaf-Trail. (View a map of the trail on the inside back cover.)

Length: 125+ miles
County: Milwaukee
Endpoints: E. Michigan Street at N. Art Museum Drive (Milwaukee) and W. Brown Deer Road (Brown Deer) or W. Oakwood Road (Oak Creek)
Trail Uses: Walking, biking, inline skating, cross-country skiing; wheelchair accessible
On Nov. 2, 2019, I got on a bike and hopped on the red line, i.e., the South Shore Line, one of the seven main branches of the Oak Leaf Trail (rtc.li/Oak-Leaf-Trail) that stretches 125+ miles in two twisting loops in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. The frigid temps in Milwaukee meant that a full loop-de-loop was out of the question, but I wanted to see a part of what is considered the crown jewel of the county’s trail system, blending urban, suburban and rural scenery.

The Oak Leaf Trail envelops greater Milwaukee and leads riders and runners along much of the area’s “emerald necklace” of parks and green space. It also annually guides hundreds of thousands of trail users to signature spots like the Urban Ecology Center at Riverside Park, Milwaukee Art Museum and the Ghost Train—an art installation in the Village of Shorewood that twice nightly turns a trail bridge into a Twin Cities 400 locomotive of yesteryear.

The South Shore Line begins by a yacht club and a beer garden—more on that über Milwaukee detail shortly—and rolls along the coast of Lake Michigan through five of the county’s 150+ parks. I ventured to the northern entryway of the southernmost one, Grant Park, and was rewarded with a 20-mile round trip that passed through dense woodlands, hugged some shoreline and led to suburban Milwaukee. Even on a wintry day, I passed by more than one park bench occupied with people huddled together, gazing out at the Great Lake.

Then it was back to the afore-mentioned South Shore Terrace Kitchen and Beer Garden, where a fire pit thankfully roared on the last Saturday of the season. It was a great place to eat a cheeseburger topped with a bratwurst—because of course that’s on the menu in Milwaukee.

“The Oak Leaf is tied to so much Milwaukee activity,” said South Shore bartender Kathryn Humphreys, who helped plan the “Ride to Krampusnacht,” held on the Oak Leaf Trail in December. During this popular local event, Milwaukee residents deck themselves out in wicked costumes to commemorate the Alpine holiday when both Saint Nick...
and Krampus the Christmas demon visit kids. The plan called for a parade of costumed riders on bikes and even floats to take over a part of the trail that night en route from a coffee shop to a beer hall. Only in Milwaukee.

Her co-worker Katrina Kazik said her fitness club also uses the Oak Leaf to take regular midnight rides to Grant Park on “full-ish moons,” though no costumes are involved on those trips. No doubt, it’s a happening trail.

“I’ve been told that in the summer, the line to order a beverage at the Miller 1855 Bar at the South Shore Terrace can stretch seemingly the length of Lambeau Field, across the path of the Oak Leaf Trail and down to the edge of Lake Michigan. That’s set to improve next year, as the former bathhouse-turned-summer hotspot is the subject of an expansion project.

“We joke about this, but every year when we do the opening in March, it’s snowing like crazy but we get hundreds of people there,” said Milwaukee County Parks Director Guy Smith. Smith said that the beer gardens have become go-tos for many trail users, and the department’s mobile beer gardens make sure that many neighborhood parks become destinations.

**Connectivity = Mobility**

Like the park system, beer gardens were an early cornerstone of the Milwaukee experience, a key link to the German heritage that many of the city’s settlers shared. They shuttered during Prohibition and vanished for more than a century until 2012, when Milwaukee County Parks opened the first public beer garden in America at Estabrook Park.

The park is the southeastern starting point of the Zip Line, named for Harold “Zip” Morgan, an avid cyclist and longtime Milwaukee municipal director of athletics who in 1939 led a bike tour across 64 miles of what would become the 76 Freedom Trail, and then Oak Leaf Trail. (Jill Rothenbueler Maher’s 2019 book, "Milwaukee County’s Oak Leaf Trail: A History," and a recent Milwaukee Magazine article by Matthew Prigge chronicle that early ride in rich detail.) The Zip Line provides a traffic-free straight shot on a piece of converted former Chicago and North Western railway to Brown Deer Park, where trail users can continue to the Brown Deer Trail (rtc.li/Brown-Deer) and the Ozaukee Interurban Trail (interurbantrail.com).

“The No. 1 reason why people don’t ride is because they don’t feel safe,” said Noel Kegel, co-owner of Wheel & Sprocket with his sister Amelia, and a board member for Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC). “Trails offer low-stress, easy, safe places to ride. And that’s why we’re so big on expanding the trail network, making it better.”

On average, about 489,000 individual trips are taken annually on one lakefront segment in the densely populated Lower East Side of the Oak Leaf Trail, Smith said. And more than 356,000 individual trips were taken in the Shorewood (population 13,162) area, too.

“The Oak Leaf is definitely my go-to,” said Alex Zacher, a bike and ski technician at Ben’s Cycle in Lincoln Village. “I do the Hank Aaron Trail as a go-to as well. You want to go for a longer one, start here, go up north, hit up Tosa, check out the cute little downtown. Ride out to the lake, ride down south, ride back in. Very, very accessible. Easy to follow. Easy for people to understand. And you kind of get the wide breadth of the city.”

Tosa, by the way, is short for Wauwatosa, a neighboring city that Ben’s Cycle owner Vince Hanoski has been riding to with the same group for the past nine years.

“We brought someone as a guest and he said, ‘Let’s go (another) way.’ He was never invited back,” joked Hanoski.

On the Oak Leaf Trail, advocates and officials are having “very, very preliminary” discussions about possible trail options along the 30th Street industrial corridor, Smith said.

“I’ll be the first to say [the] 30th Street corridor [project] has to happen,” said Kate Nelson, chief sustainability officer at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. “With
PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CONNECTIVITY

The seeds that grew into the Oak Leaf Trail were arguably planted in the late 1800s, when Milwaukee’s leaders pushed for a substantial increase in park space.

“They were called sewer socialists,” said Noel Kegel, co-owner of Milwaukee’s Wheel & Sprocket. “Milwaukee had socialist mayors for about 50 years in the 20th century. And as part of the city planning, they wanted to integrate lots of green space. You had a tempering influence on that turn-of-the-century robber-baron tycoon industrialist. And then in the 1970s, the Oak Leaf Trail was envisioned to connect the green space.”

Viewed on its own, the Oak Leaf Trail runs an impressive 125+ miles through urban, suburban and rural portions of greater Milwaukee in what looks like a giant, droopy figure eight when viewed upon a trail map of the county.

But why view it on its own? The Oak Leaf Trail now offers westbound connections to Waukesha and beyond on the New Berlin Trail, northbound to the Ozaukee Interurban Trail and on to the Sheboygan Interurban Trail. And the Hank Aaron State Trail neatly divides the northern and southern segments of the Oak Leaf, providing an east–west connection to the trail. More connections are planned as Wisconsin—birthplace of what many consider the country’s first rail-trail, the Elroy Sparta State Trail—works to connect the 700-miles-plus Route of the Badger, a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy TrailNation Project™ in the southeast that will link these and other trails and enable Oak Leaf Trail riders to connect to Kenosha, Racine, Madison, Chicago and potentially beyond.

Finding the Way

Guy Smith began his career at the Milwaukee County Parks Department in 2004 as its first trails coordinator, a fitting position for someone who grew up in the city and rented inline skates with his brother at Veterans Park to cruise lakeside portions of the city’s sprawling Oak Leaf Trail.

For years, according to those interviewed, many found the area’s grandest trail hard to follow—or even find. The Oak Leaf Trail got its name in 1996 after two decades spent as the 76 Trail, and Milwaukee County Parks installed scores of directional signs on the trail as it grew and connected to others like the Hank Aaron State Trail (hankaaronstatetrail.org), Beerline Trail (rtc.li/Beer-Line-Trail) and Kinnickinnic River Trail (rtc.li/Kinnickinnic_River_Trail).

The signs helped point travelers in the right direction, but didn’t necessarily suggest the scope of something 700+ miles of trails running east–west from Milwaukee to Dousman and north–south from Sheboygan to Kenosha—with potential to build even bigger connections to Chicago, Madison and maybe even Minneapolis.

“It’s the opportunity to plan on a grand scale,” Willie Karidis, Route of the Badger project manager, said. “It’s very doable. People are working together. Cities are working together.”

And someday that connectivity could have a reach extending even farther afield—as the Oak Leaf is also included in the ambitious Route of the Badger (railstotrails.org/badger) regional trail system. When complete, the RTC TrailNation™ project will connect what we have on the East Side and downtown with the Oak Leaf Trail, we’re privileged to have this. And we couldn’t even imagine an East Side and downtown without it. So why would we not think that other communities deserve just as much of an asset and a green space and a connector?”
that had its own passport. In Smith's first years with the Parks Department, Noel Kegel's father Chris, parent of four, then-owner of the Milwaukee-based Wheel & Sprocket bike shop and a tireless cycling advocate, told him that the Oak Leaf could be so much more inviting.

"One of the first things he said to me is, 'We need to have a better wayfinding system for the Oak Leaf, and not only for our residents and folks that live in Milwaukee County, but for the visitors that we have from all over,'" Smith said.

Name a trail or bike group in Wisconsin and beyond—Wisconsin Bike Fed, People for Bikes, the League of American Bicyclists, the International Mountain Biking Association, Milwaukee County Trails Council—and Chris Kegel was likely a leader, member or supporter. Kegel could be a goofball, as his starring roles in Wheel & Sprocket's slapstick local TV commercials showed, but he strongly believed that a third of his job centered around advocacy. At the bike shop, a mantra developed: Bikes make the world better, so we need to make the world better for bikes. That included Milwaukee's signature trail.

"[My dad] made it very clear; trail systems like this only exist due to decades of planning and cooperation. It's the long game, he'd say. Plant the seeds, and in a couple of decades, you might get lucky and get a trail. This insight has always stuck with me."

Amelia Kegel on her father, trail advocate Chris Kegel, in a foreword for Jill Rothenbueler Maher's "Milwaukee County's Oak Leaf Trail: A History"

For bike commuters like Nelson, the Oak Leaf Trail provides a vital part of her path from her Bay View home to work, during which she feels like she's earned every lakefront sunrise she witnesses. Each fall, she leads new UWM students on an eye-opening introductory trail trip, proving to some commuters that a ride to class is worlds more feasible than finding parking on a city campus.

"I couldn't get through downtown and the East Side without the [Oak Leaf Trail]," she said. "I would have never attempted it, and I'm a firm believer that route is everything."

But when Nelson was in college during the late 1990s, she lived about 20 feet from the trail and didn't know it, she admitted. "You have an amazing trail that no one knew how to use," said Amelia Kegel. "Every year, the wayfinding was just something that we couldn't put our heads around."

Then, in the fall of 2016, Chris Kegel was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of liver cancer. A week after the diagnosis, over a thousand people gathered to ride 12 leisurely miles along the city’s Hank Aaron State Trail, a "slow roll" in his honor. He died the next February, and his obituary called for loved ones to donate to the Chris Kegel Foundation, "established by the family to continue Chris’ commitment to improving lives by providing greater access to bicycling."

The first major project that the Chris Kegel Foundation spearheaded can now be seen all along the Oak Leaf Trail—a set of 30 wayfinding signs, with more to come, that show trail users not only where they are, but all the places where a trip on the Oak Leaf can lead them. REI provided funding for four more wayfinding signs. All 34 were developed with input from the Milwaukee County Parks Trails Council, Wisconsin Bike Fed and Milwaukee
County Parks staff. At a June press conference in Lincoln Park, Milwaukee County Parks officials thanked the sign fundraisers, as well as Sprecher Brewery, which announced a Pedal to the Park series that provided funding for Oak Leaf Trail improvements. Then many attendees went for a group ride to check out the new kiosks.

“We spent a lot of time with our team over the years putting in improved signage, the actual trail signs,” Smith said. “What really came to fruition over the past couple of years under the leadership of [Chris Kegel’s daughter] Amelia and the foundation that they set up was they funded 30 new trail kiosk signs. They’ve continued to raise additional funds, and we’ve also appealed to other folks as a kind of challenge. Can you help us improve this?”

Milwaukee County Parks and the City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works recently teamed together with Toole Design to develop a unified design for wayfinding signs along 15 high-priority miles of city routes and Oak Leaf Trail. Amelia Kegel, who sits on the Milwaukee County Trails Council, said this second phase will help build an identity for each of the Oak Leaf Trail’s segments. A public survey of design options concluded in October, and the final design plan is scheduled to be in place by April 2020.

In a foreword for Maher’s book, Amelia Kegel wrote about how her dad coaxed her into joining him on early-morning weekend rides, and how amazed she was by their first trip on the Oak Leaf Trail when she was 10.

“I could not believe that there was a place where people could walk and ride in such peaceful bliss,” Kegel, now 32, wrote. “Over the years, we explored many of the different segments together. Along the way, he explained how these systems were created. He made it very clear: Trail systems like this only exist due to decades of planning and cooperation. It’s the long game, he’d say. Plant the seeds, and in a couple of decades, you might get lucky and get a trail. This insight has always stuck with me.”

On Nov. 1, 2019, she and I tromped through fresh snow in Milwaukee’s vast 628-acre Whitnall Park to a spot along the Oak Leaf Trail where one of the new wayfinding signs stands. On one side was a trail-encompassing map that depicted the trail like a subway system. Divided into 11 lines, connectors and loops, the system breaks down the Oak Leaf Trail into digestible, color-coded segments. We were on the orange Root River Line.

“I think it was my dad that just highlighted them one day,” she said. “It was like, ‘Let’s make this one the blue one, and this one the green one.’ Because you just have to make it easy for people. You have to make it palatable. [Riding] 120 miles to the average rider, it’s just overwhelming. I’m not going to do 120 miles, but I can do a 10-mile segment that goes along this area.”

Ian Everett, marketing and communications manager at Milwaukee County Parks, designed the signs with his home of London, England, and specifically the Under-ground transit system, in mind. “It’s what I used all the time,” he said. “People get a sense of pride of the line they go on, or their station. We wanted to develop that with the Oak Leaf Trail as well.”

The signs also include English and Spanish explanations of trail etiquette, as well as space for sign sponsors. Securing public-private partnerships in Milwaukee County, which faces a $28 million budget shortfall in 2020, is a key component of many projects there. Amelia Kegel said collaboration led to the project’s success. The foundation raised money for the signs, which were designed by Everett with the assistance of GIS experts who happen to be Wisconsin Bike Fed members.

“I really think Milwaukee is one of these towns where, when you do good and you do good with others, then things bubble up and magical things happen,” she said.
As natural disasters such as floods and tornados continue to increase across the country, trail managers are recognizing the need for new solutions to help mitigate the economic, environmental and infrastructural impacts and ensure long-term resiliency in their communities.
Not all of these events impacted trails, of course, but to trail-goers and the businesses that rely on them, storm-related damage is a big—and perhaps growing—concern.

Expert consensus is that a warming planet will invari-
ably lead to more extreme weather events, and Tom Sexton, northeast regional director for Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, notes that even setting aside big-picture climatic changes, modern trail engineers operate in a very different landscape, quite literally, than the railway engineers of yore. Every structure that water cannot penetrate—every road, parking lot, driveway and big-box store—in the entire watershed contributes to the amount of water that finds its way unchecked downhill. “The reason for these floods is likely based in climate change, but it’s exacerbated by water-imperVIOUS layers,” said Sexton. “It’s a two-part process.”

This one-two punch is putting trails and their infra-
structure to the test. “What we used to think of as once-
in-a-lifetime storms and floods are coming more often now, and trails are in the crosshairs,” said Sexton.

That’s true both across the country and in Sexton’s Northeast region. Referencing a recent federal study, Sexton noted that flooding is America’s most common disaster “and the crosshairs are pointing at trails.”

Half a country away, Trent Rondot of the Houston Parks Board said that even with his city’s efforts to promote green spaces and embrace the natural flood control abilities of its bayous, Houston experiences more frequent flooding these days. “As the city has grown and there’s more concrete and much less natural area to absorb water, we’re seeing more flooding now than we did 20 or 30 years ago. We basically have a 100-
year flood every single year,” said Rondot.

From hurricane-induced flooding to rivers overflowing their banks following torrential rains, trails across the country have suffered damaging storm after storm. These are a few of their stories—tales of disaster, recovery and resiliency.

In 2018, the most recent full-year picture, the United States suffered 14 separate $1 billion-plus weather and climate disas-
ters, the fourth-highest on record—and the top three all occurred within this decade.

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Water, Water Everywhere: Nebraska’s Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail

Nebraska was in the middle of what was categorized as a 500-year flood this March. A winter’s worth of heavy snowfall had blanketed the Wyoming and Montana watershed that feeds Nebraska’s Elkhorn River. “It got warm really quick and started melting the snow,” explained Alex Duryea, a recreational trails manager for the state of Nebraska. “That filled up our rivers, but we still had thick ice on them” that blocked the water from easily flowing downstream. Then came weeks of rain. “It was a perfect storm,” Duryea said. “It just all came at once.”

The Cowboy Trail, where it parallels the Elkhorn between the towns of O’Neill and Norfolk, was hard hit. “Limestone surfacing was washed away; deep cuts—two feet or so—were made in the trail down to the ballast. The water overwhelmed our drainages and culverts,” said Duryea. In one area that had been built up by the former railroad above the surrounding land, a 4-foot diameter culvert was completely blown out. “Now there’s a hole in our trail 100 feet long and 45 feet deep.”

And the water kept coming. “We had three or four more floods after we got the original FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] funding,” said Duryea. “May through August we kept getting more damage. We’d fix something but then it would erode away again. Every time I went out, there was something new.”

The flooding was a good test of the trail’s infrastructure, though. An important segment of the Great American Rail-Trail™ (greatamericanrailtrail.org), the Cowboy Trail has more than 200 bridges along its entire length, many of which are repurposed railroad bridges and most of which are wooden. “They were built to take the load of a train,” said Duryea. “They’re pretty stout—but they’re also a hundred years old.”

Duryea was happy to report that while many bridges sustained damage by debris hurtling along in the floodwaters, none were lost. Bridge approaches didn’t always fare so well, though: Duryea noted one span in particular where the sinuous Elkhorn shifted course, taking out the approach and necessitating a new river crossing. “We’ll have to build a bridge to get back to our old bridge.”

By late 2019, many lengths of the trail had been repaired to a usable condition, but most of the major repair work still lies ahead. Officials would like to permanently reroute parts of the trail particularly prone to flooding, but budget constraints render that more of a wish than a solid plan. With an estimated $9 million of damage, “It’ll be a few years until the trail is all put back to rights,” said Duryea.

Economics of Storms: Missouri’s Katy Trail

At 240 miles, the Katy Trail in Missouri spans nearly the entire breadth of the state. Not only the longest developed rail-trail in the United States, the 2007 Rail-Trail Hall of Fame inductee (railtotrails.org/hof) is also one of the oldest and a significant economic driver. Wineries, restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, hotels, bike shops and more line the route that draws an estimated 400,000 visitors a year. One study pegged the trail’s economic impact to Missouri at nearly $18.5 million a year, so when a third of the trail was left underwater this summer, it had a statewide effect.

According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the impact of the Katy’s flood-related closures was far-reaching, including businesses reporting significant financial losses, shops temporarily closing to mitigate the impact of the reduced number of trail users, and even the cancelation of a significant state-sponsored event, the Katy Ride, which is an economic driver for many small businesses along the route.

One of the thousands of businesses affected by the flooding was Kim’s Cabins on the western end of the trail, where the Rock Island Spur meets the Katy. Since opening the first cabin four years ago, owner Kim Henderson has steadily grown her business. The Katy, Henderson said, has been an economic lifeline. “It shows what can happen to a small town when the shoe factory is gone, when rail is gone,” she said. The message is one she’s also brought to the state capitol.
WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

Floods are often described as 100-year floods or 500-year floods as a reflection of the expected likelihood of their occurrence. If each year carries a one-in-five hundred chance of the devastating event taking place, the cumulative expectation is that the event will happen once in a 500-year span. These figures were developed from centuries of weather data, and while they’re meant to reflect statistical probabilities rather than calendar-based certainties, it’s becoming increasingly clear that global environmental changes are forcing a reconsideration of these measurements.

A recent study by Princeton researchers found that 100-year floods could become annual occurrences in New England; along the southeast Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico shorelines, they may happen every 30 years. “The historical 100-year floods may change to one-year floods in Northern coastal towns in the U.S.,” said Ning Lin, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Princeton University.

Marshall Shepherd, director of the atmospheric sciences program at the University of Georgia and a former president of the American Meteorological Society, said that 100-year floods are becoming frequent enough that the term “is pretty much useless now as a baseline for an extreme event.”

Business was good enough, in fact, for Henderson to leave her job as a town administrator for Windsor and devote herself full time to Kim’s Cabins. So when the Missouri River started overflowing its banks, Henderson took notice. Located a good 50 miles from where the trail takes its leave of the Missouri River and veers southwest, Henderson’s cabins weren’t in any direct danger from the floodwaters, “but as far as people visiting … I had people staying in three cabins on a Saturday night. They were going to ride the whole trail, but a few days before they were supposed to arrive, they called up. ‘There’s just too much damage,’ they said. ‘We’re not coming.’ And bam! They’re gone.”

It was a story that repeated itself time and time again as overnight guests canceled their plans to ride the Katy. And yet, Henderson considers herself one of the fortunate ones, and did what she could to support business owners not so lucky. “Two out-of-state bike clubs canceled their visits since they couldn’t access the entire length of the trail,” said Bell. “We took phone calls and social media inquiries from all over,” he continued. “The Tanglefoot is really popular, and people were eager to get back on it.” Bell lamented the impact its closure undoubtedly had on the local economy with the loss of business from would-be trail users.

Affecting Locals and Visitors Alike: Mississippi’s Tanglefoot Trail

One of Mississippi’s longest rail-trails and a 2019 Rail-Rail Hall of Fame inductee, the Tanglefoot meanders nearly 44 miles through the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Situated far enough inland that it’s spared the worst of hurricanes barreling in from the Gulf of Mexico, it’s nonetheless at the mercy of the local weather they often produce as a result. “When a hurricane comes in from the south, we get breakoff thunderstorms that produce tornados,” said Randy Kelley, executive director of the Three Rivers Planning and Development District. “And we seem to be having more of them in recent years.”

Having avoided any hurricane-induced storms in 2019, major springtime rainstorms wreaked havoc along the trail nonetheless. Culverts were destroyed, a bridge was washed out, sections of the trail collapsed, and waterlogged soil led to entire trees crashing down across the path. “Sycamores will hold up to anything,” said Kelley. “Oak trees, not so much. And the trail? It’s surrounded by oaks.”

Ronnie Bell, Three Rivers’ division director, explained it was a 22-mile stretch around the trail’s midpoint that took the brunt of the damage, including a section between Pontotoc and New Albany that’s heavily used by locals and visitors alike. “Two out-of-state bike clubs canceled their visits since they couldn’t access the entire length of the trail,” said Bell. “We took phone calls and social media inquiries from all over,” he continued. “The Tanglefoot is really popular, and people were eager to get back on it.” Bell lamented the impact its closure undoubtedly had on the local economy with the loss of business from would-be trail users.

“We basically have a 100-year flood every single year.”

Trent Rondot, Conservation and Maintenance Director, Houston Parks Board

PHOTO: The Houston Parks Board provides green spaces along the Bayou Greenways that provide complementary flood control by keeping the land water-permeable.
A writer and a rider, Colorado native Scott Stark enjoys combining the two as he explores trails across the country.

Executive Director Kelley stated that the local government has been supportive of rebuilding, "but we operate on a limited budget. A shoestring budget." He's looking forward to receiving FEMA funding, but says that the work done as part of a prison release program by inmates that demonstrate good behavior has been the saving grace of the trail. "If not for their support, we wouldn’t have a functional trail," said Kelley.

**Key to Resiliency: Texas’ Bayou Greenways**

Flooding isn’t the exception at the Bayou Greenways—it’s the rule; the trail system lining Houston’s bayous was built to be underwater at times. "We design our projects to anticipate flooding," said Chip Place, managing director of capital programs for the Houston Parks Board. "Accommodating floodwater is a natural function of a bayou," he explained, saying that Houston’s Harris County Flood Control District has added to and upgraded that functionality. "They’re engineered to serve a flood protection purpose." And the trails that make up the Bayou Greenways are all part of the plan.

"Runners may prefer a softer crushed-stone trail, but those surfaces just don’t hold up in floods," said Place. "Our typical surface is a 10-foot-wide concrete trail six inches deep with a substantial subgrade. It’s built to anticipate storms."

Listening to Place, one comes to understand that the history of Houston is a history of fighting against water. "Houston has always flooded—it’s a continuing saga," said Place. We had major floods back in the 1920s and 1930s that resulted in retention reservoirs west of town. Hurricane Harvey, the Memorial Day Flood, the Tax Day Flood, Hurricane Imelda—they all serve as soggy city milestones. "The water comes up and deposits silt. We clean it up and we’re back in business."

Trent Rondot, conservation and maintenance director for the Houston Parks Board, waxes enthusiastic about how well the Bayou Greenways was designed and engineered. Flood after flood, he said, "We’ve had no structural failures of trails or bridges. There’s mountains of silt and debris left behind. There are shopping carts and even cars. We lose trash can lids—but there have been no structural failures."

Rondot said that the widely varying nature of floods can make accurate budgeting difficult. "In an average year without a significant event, we spend $100,000–$200,000 in cleanup. When [Hurricane] Harvey hit, we spent $1.3 million." The solution for Houston has been two different funding pools: There’s the usual spending fund for routine cleanup after run-of-the-mill flooding, and a special reserve set aside each year and used to recover from catastrophic events. "But we’ve done enough flood cleanup by now that they are somewhat predictable," said Rondot.

Neither building nor maintaining Houston’s bayou-hugging trail network is cheap, concedes Place. "We’re spending $220 million to complete the Greenway," he said. "That could buy you 1 mile of freeway in Texas, but we’re getting 80 miles of trail finished with the money. When you do those kinds of cost comparisons, it’s not as expensive."

In addition to its trails mission, Place explained that the Houston Parks Board also works to purchase green space along its pathways. "We think of these as linear parks. They provide complementary flood control that keeps the land from becoming impervious to water." Place generally takes a less adversarial approach to managing storms, emphasizing the need to work with the land and let the bayous perform their natural sponge-like function. "We need to make room for the river, as the Dutch say. We think that’s a direction we should be going."
As founder of the Georgia Trail Summit, Tracie Sanchez created a collaborative environment for trail developers and stakeholders from across the state. Today, she continues to advocate for trails as a board member for the Georgia Trails Alliance (georgiatrailsalliance.org) and as tourism product development manager for the Georgia Department of Economic Development. She spoke with Rails to Trails magazine about trail developments in the Peach State and the importance of working together toward these common goals.

Why was the Georgia Trail Summit formed, and how did it form the Georgia Trails Alliance?
In 2013, I queried why Georgia didn’t have a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) chapter or champion for trail efforts. Kelly Pack, RTC senior director of trail development, suggested I hold a summit to round up the stakeholders, so I invited my trail family colleagues to help plan mobile workshops on the trail, classroom time and networking in a trail-friendly community where we could showcase local efforts. The Georgia Trail Summit is now an annual event to convene Georgia’s trail community and share knowledge, accelerate trail building progress and create connectivity.

Once the summit was off the ground, the summit board members updated our nonprofit name to Georgia Trails Alliance and our mission to policy, consulting and mapping. The summit is now facilitated by the Georgia chapter of the Trust for Public Land.

What are GTA’s biggest successes and long-term goals?
Our main success is in establishing a statewide network of organizations that share information and work together for the benefit of Georgia’s trails. We were also instrumental in updating Georgia Department of Natural Resources policy to allow Recreational Trails Program grant funding to be awarded directly to nonprofits.

Long term, Georgia is developing the best statewide trail network in the South. The Georgia Trails Alliance aims to provide information, training and advocacy to people who nurture and grow trails and lead the development of Georgia’s trail network.

Trail building has picked up significantly throughout Georgia due to your work. What benefits have you seen?
More communities are ready to implement trail networks and send elected officials to workshops to learn how. NIMBYism is declining, and trail builders’ phones are ringing off the hooks. MTB Atlanta has seen an increase in volunteers eager to serve on trail build or maintenance days. Additionally, the summit brought attention to water trails around the state and has served as a platform for communities to learn about developing successful water trails.

Construction is underway to connect the Silver Comet Trail and the Atlanta BeltLine into a 105-mile trail. How do you think this will impact the region?
We believe visitors will linger longer on lengthy trail systems, community events will activate the trails and spur exercise and other quality-of-life components, locals will discover trails suitable for a commute or a weekend staycation, and trailside-business development trends will increase the economic impact. The connection will likely empower Cave Spring, Rome and Chattanooga to connect to this trail network as well (see the Silver Comet Connector story on page 4).

What advice do you have for trail developers on working with/learning from fellow stakeholders?
Site visits—take stakeholders on field trips to trail communities to see the quality-of-life enhancements and economic impact. Also, community engagement remains a priority. One must involve the community not only to get buy-in but also to raise awareness of the data supporting trail trends.

Danielle Taylor is a freelance journalist who focuses on outdoor recreation, conservation, public lands and travel. Follow her work on adventureeditorial.com, Facebook @adventureeditorial or Twitter @adventureedit.
Michigan’s Great Lake-to-Lake Trails Route #1

BY LAURA STARK

It’s no secret that Michigan is a great trail state, hosting more than 2,400 miles of rail-trails, and developing exciting trail networks like the Great Lake-to-Lake Trails (greatlaketolaketrails.org), which is building momentum. The initiative includes plans for five routes connecting dozens of trails across the state. Showcased below are just a few of the many rail-trails to be explored in Route #1, which spans 275 miles across the entire Lower Peninsula from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron. And as a nod to winter, we thought we’d feature some of the snowy wonderlands to be found there this season.

The cross-state route gets off to a great start with the Kal-Haven Trail, which begins in South Haven on the shores of Lake Michigan. From there, the crushed-stone pathway heads 34 miles east, connecting a handful of charming Midwestern towns and traveling through open farmland and canopied woodlands on its way to Kalamazoo, where a refurbished caboose serves as a visitor center. In the winter, the trail—managed by the state’s Department of Natural Resources (michigan.gov/dnr)—can be enjoyed for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.
With vibrant Kalamazoo at its center and forested trail spiraling out to the city’s east, west and north, the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail offers the best of both worlds: a scenic quiet experience, plus lots of urban amenities. Operated as a Kalamazoo County Park (kalcounty.com/parks/krvt), the trail is a true outdoor gem; the nearly 21-mile paved pathway connects several parks and winds along its namesake river for much of its journey. When the snow hits, the trail is not plowed, so it offers a winter’s paradise for nonmotorized uses such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

A panoply of picturesque backdrops keeps this 26-mile rail-trail experience fun: lush woodlands, rolling farmland, creeks, small ponds, a chain of lakes, wildlife-rich marshes—it’s all here. Located in southeast Michigan, the Mike Levine Lakelands Trail State Park (michigan.gov/dnr), named after one of the state’s trail champions, is bookended by two small towns, Munith and Hamburg (north of Ann Arbor). In winter, it’s a popular spot for cross-country skiing.
Spanning 16 miles, the Clinton River Trail connects a handful of cities between Sylvan Lake and Rochester in the north Detroit metro area. Paralleling and frequently crossing its eponymous waterway, the rail-trail provides an escape into nature for residents by connecting them to parks and other green space. Celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2019, the trail is a well-established local favorite. Volunteers with the Friends of the Clinton River Trail (clintonrivertrail.org) often host outings on the pathway, including community events to ski, snowshoe or take a snowy hike in the winter.

The Huron Valley Trail offers a pleasant natural escape tucked into the Detroit suburbs. The 12-mile paved route forms a “Y” shape anchored by South Lyon (southlyonmi.org) on its southern end. Connecting several parks, this community gem provides access to many recreational amenities for residents and visitors, including sports facilities, picnic shelters, swimming opportunities and a golf course. With its close proximity to neighborhoods, it makes a great option for getting out of the house in the winter for a brisk walk or ski.
California

Richmond-San Rafael Bike and Pedestrian Path Opens Across the San Francisco Bay

BY BEN KAUFMAN AND MARY ELISE CONZELMANN, WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY AMY KAPP

In November 2019, trail advocates and residents in California celebrated the opening of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge bike and pedestrian path (rtc.li/Richmond-San-Rafael)—a new 5.5-mile, fully protected walking and bicycling trail paralleling I-580 and connecting the cities of Richmond and San Rafael in the San Francisco Bay Area. The new trail—coming after two decades of advocacy and more than a half-decade of development efforts—signifies an exciting milestone in California trail history, as people can now safely walk and bike between the North Bay and East Bay for the first time ever.

The new path also makes connections to several important segments of a proposed 2,700-mile trail network in development through the Bay Area Trails Collaborative (railstotrails.org/batc), a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) TrailNation™ initiative that aims to create a seamless regional trail system connecting all nine Bay Area counties and dozens of communities throughout the region.

A Key Connection

Despite the fact that four bridges provide east–west vehicle access across the Bay, only the Dumbarton Bridge—in the southern Bay area—was fully accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists before this year. Thus, the Bay has long represented a major barrier to people wishing to traverse the region by modes of transportation other than automobiles.

After years of advocacy from local active-transportation groups, including Bike East Bay and the Marin County Bicycle Coalition, the Bay Area Toll Authority approved the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge bike and pedestrian path project in 2015, and local advocates worked closely with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to help generate support for the project and ensure its implementation—culminating in a Nov. 16 opening.

“This is a major milestone for trail users in the region,” said Laura Cohen, western regional director for RTC. “Not only are we finally bridging the gap between the North and East Bay, but we’re taking a big leap forward in realizing our vision for a connected regional trail system serving the whole Bay Area.”

In addition to establishing key trail connections between the east and north sides of the Bay, the new pathway also closes a critical gap in the San Francisco Bay Trail (baytrail.org), a partially complete, 500-mile trail network that will ultimately circumnavigate the entire San Francisco Bay and comprise a major portion of the Bay Area Trails Collaborative’s regional network.

The western approach to the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge bike and pedestrian path in Marin County is one of 13 projects prioritized by the collaborative as critical for completing the larger trail network project.

Cultivating Project Success

When the Bay Area Toll Authority approved the trail in 2015, it did so as a four-year pilot project, during which the trail will remain open to cyclists and pedestrians 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to bolster evaluation efforts and measure usage for both commuting and recreation. Data collection and analysis efforts are being spearheaded by Caltrans and the University of California Partners for Advanced Transportation Technology (PATH) program.

Project partners are working to improve neighborhood access to the trail through connecting bicycle infrastructure projects, wayfinding signage and local bikeshare programs. In an effort to support increased bicycle usage along the new pathway, the City of Richmond is working with Gotcha Mobility to distribute 250 shared e-bikes to 25 local stations. These e-bikes will be available for short-term use for a fee, with discounts for low-income residents to ensure equitable usage.

Marin County is also exploring its own bike-share program with a plan that currently includes releasing 300 bicycles—including standard and electric-assist models—near Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit stops. The county is currently in talks with a number of companies, including several with systems compatible with Gotcha Bikes, which would allow customers to make one-way trips across the new bridge and dock on the other side.
Birmingham’s Civil Rights Heritage Trail

BY MAGGIE MCADEN

Birmingham’s Red Rock Trail System [freshwaterlandtrust.org] is a developing trail network in Jefferson County, Alabama, featuring beautiful green spaces, waterways and historical sites across 750 miles. Part of the trail system follows the Civil Rights Heritage Trail, which winds its way through downtown Birmingham (and neighborhoods west) and traces a route that includes some of the most important places and events in the American civil rights movement.

Kelly Ingram Park

The launching point for the Civil Rights Heritage Trail at Fifth Avenue North and 16th Street, Kelly Ingram Park was the site of many peaceful protests advocating for desegregation in Birmingham. During the Children’s Crusade of 1963, protestors were subject to police brutality that shocked the nation. Statues in the park pay tribute to civil rights activists and those who were victims of racial violence (birminghamal.org/listings/kelly-ingram-park).

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church

Established as the First Colored Baptist Church of Birmingham in 1873, Sixteenth Street Baptist Church at 16th Street and Sixth Avenue plays a crucial social and political role in the lives of black residents. During the civil rights movement, the church served as a space for lectures, meetings and rallies—hosting some of the most prominent minds of the day. On Sept. 15, 1963, the church was bombed by members of the Ku Klux Klan, killing four young girls—Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Denise McNair and Carole Robertson—and injuring more than 20 other people. A wave of donations led to the church’s reopening in June 1964, and it now serves as a lasting symbol of hope and strength in the fight for equality (16thstreetbaptist.org).

Birmingham Negro Southern League Museum

Located just off the 16th Street South Trail between First and Second Avenues, the Birmingham Negro Southern League Museum is home to the country’s largest collection of Negro league baseball artifacts, documenting its impact on Birmingham, Alabama and the baseball world. Created in 1920, the Negro Southern League served as a stepping-stone to the Negro American League and Negro National League. Discriminatory policies kept major league baseball racially segregated until 1947, when baseball legend Jackie Robinson officially broke the major league “color line” by playing his first game with the Brooklyn Dodgers (birminghamnslm.org).

Fourth Avenue Business District

The Fourth Avenue Business District, located between 15th and 18th Streets North, was a thriving commercial center of Birmingham in the first half of the 20th century, hosting black-owned businesses, restaurants and entertainment hubs. Highlights include the Pythian Temple, the Carver Theater and the Colored Masonic Temple, which once housed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Booker T. Washington Library, the latter of which was Alabama’s first public library open to African Americans. Currently under revitalization (www.urbanimpactbirmingham.org), the district is seeing new businesses emerge alongside mainstays like Nelson Brothers Café, which opened in 1943.
It was with a sense of adventure that I began my journey on New Mexico’s Santa Fe Rail Trail (rtc.li/Santa-Fe-Rail-Trail), which takes a 16.1-mile north-south trajectory between Santa Fe and Lamy. Starting at the train depot and the revitalized Railyard retail and entertainment district in Santa Fe, the trail winds its way across a few busy intersections, past the requisite brewery and several infrastructure projects. As I pedaled along the paved trail and took in the history surrounding me, Johnny Cash’s “One More Ride” popped into my mind.

“Oh the clickety clack of the railroad track is callin’,
If a man could know where the Santa Fe goes when she gets under steam,
And the big loud bell that bongs farewell to hear her whistle scream,
She’s bound to go where there ain’t no snow a fallin’ …”

A few hundred yards after reaching Rabbit Road, the Santa Fe turns to dirt and the tempo changes. What had been a steady rhythm gives way to gradual diminuendos and dramatic crescendos, more like an Explosions in the Sky song. The trail pitches up and down, curves and undulates—with a surface more appropriate to walking and mountain biking. The grade never rises much above 4 percent, but the dirt becomes loose and sandy in the low washes, I felt my bike fishtail and was immediately grateful for its wide, knobby tires.

The views outside of Santa Fe rapidly change from industrial buildings to high-dollar suburban homes to miles of sage and juniper in every direction. The trail continues to run alongside the rail line as well as old, multistory trestle bridges. Less than a dozen miles outside of town, there’s a definite Wild West feeling; it can be hard to tell if it’s the 19th or 21st century. I feel like I should be wearing a 10-gallon hat and not a bike helmet.

Eventually trail users make their way down to the town of Lamy and Eldorado, a subdivision that holds the distinction of being the largest solar-powered community in the United States. Not too far from the trail, riders can stop by the historic Legal Tender saloon, which also houses the Lamy Railroad & History Museum.

I was in Santa Fe and the surrounding area only for a day—and not traveling with my bicycle. Luckily next door to the trail was Ecomotive Electric Bikes, an hourly rental shop. I panicked briefly to arrive and find the shop closed, but owner Pam Sawyer was quickly on the scene. In a matter of minutes, I was astride a 7-speed electric cruiser as Sawyer gave me a few helpful trail hints.

“It’s almost impossible to get lost,” Sawyer said, obviously knowing my reputation. “The trail follows the tracks the entire way.”

Of course, less than a mile later I did lose the trail, needing to backtrack to a busy intersection where the rail line veered diagonally. Less
heated feud between the Sante Fe and its competitor, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. Disputes over right-of-way led to armed conflicts between the workers of the two companies, in what became known as the Royal Gorge Railway War. It took federal intervention to stop hostilities in 1880, two years later.

Although the railway almost always was an important mover of freight and raw materials, the Santa Fe was best known for its passenger service. It was the first railroad to introduce domed passenger cars, giving tourists a more expansive view of the scenery. It’s since ceded its passenger service to Amtrak, but both the New Mexico Rail Runner commuter service and the Santa Fe Southern tourism line use at least part of the rail line today.

Back to the Future

I saw quite a few smiling faces during my ride, and I’d see many of them again at the Railyard. The popularity of the trail has coincided with the revitalization of the area surrounding the train depot. “When I first came to Santa Fe, [the Railyard] was a dead zone that people avoided,” Rogers said. “That’s all changed now. There’s always something going on.”

While I missed the farmers market, held each Saturday morning, I did manage to get my daily serving of hops at the Second Street Brewery. A massive REI anchors the Railyard development, giving trail users a place to purchase last-minute essentials.

“The trail follows the tracks the entire way.”

Pam Sawyer, Owner, Ecomotive Electric Bikes
Accessing the Trail
To reach the Rabbit Road trailhead in Santa Fe, head south on South St. Francis Drive until you pass under I-25. Take a right heading west on Rabbit Road and follow for about a half-mile until you reach the railroad tracks and a small parking lot on the left. At the southern end, outside of Lamy, the trail and railroad tracks can be picked up near Cerro Alto Road off Highway 285.

You can find other trailheads with parking at the trail intersections with Nine Mile Road, Avenida Vista Grande and Avenida Eldorado. Users can also access the trail at Spur Ranch Road, but there are no facilities.

What to See
Reminders of the Old West are everywhere along the dirt section of the trail: century-old railroad trestles, miles of juniper and sage. It’s like you’re in the middle of a movie Western. As trail users head north, the scenery gradually becomes more modern, culminating in the hip Railyard development at the northern terminus, which features arts and entertainment, dining, shopping and residential services (railyardsantafe.com).

Where to Stay
The closest hotel to the trail is also one of travelers’ favorites. The Santa Fe Sage Inn (santafesageinn.com) oozes New Mexico charm, and guests love the expertly curated local tap list at its Social Kitchen and Bar. More budget-minded travelers should check out the Motel 6 (motel6.com). The Trailer Ranch RV Park (trailerranch.com), located just a mile or 2 from the trail, offers full hookups and free wifi.

Breweries
Second Street Brewery (secondstreetbrewery.com) has two locations right off the trail—at the Railyard and at its flagship brewery at Second Street and San Mateo Road. The Agua Fria Pilsner is a great refreshing beer after a day on the trail, while hopheads will like the dank 2920 IPA.

Where to Eat
Start your day off right with a trip to Sky Coffee (skysantafe.com) for a local favorite Who’s donut and a cup of java. The stuffed portabella sandwich and the free-range fried chicken are two of the specialties at Boxcar (boxcarsantafe.com). Want to combine dinner and a movie? The Violet Crown Theater (santafe.violetcrown.com) allows you to chow down on burgers, green-chile enchiladas or polenta while enjoying first-run blockbusters.

Where to Rent
Ecomotive Electric Bikes (ecomotivebikes.com) is located at the Railyard train depot at the northern terminus of the Santa Fe Rail Trail. Mellow Velo (mellowvelo.com/rentals/) and the Broken Spoke (rental.brokenspokesantafe.com) offer standard bikes for rent, while Bike N Sport (nmbikensport.com/demos-rentals) gives customers the option of either a standard or electric bike.

Robert Annis is an Indianapolis-based freelance writer specializing in cycling and outdoor travel. When he’s not hunched over a keyboard, you are likely to find him pedaling the back roads and trails of the Midwest or traveling around the globe. Find examples of his work on robertannis.contently.com.
New Hampshire

Meet the Mastermind Behind the Granite State’s New Cross-State Adventure Trail

BY LAURA STARK

With a panoply of backdrops and a grab bag of surfaces—including crushed stone, hard-packed dirt, cinder, ballast, grass and even paved road—travelers on the Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail (crossnewhampshire.org) are sure to experience many delights and challenges along the way, but never, ever boredom. “Adventure” is right there in the name, though less experienced riders or families can choose sections of the 83-mile route between Woodsville, New Hampshire, and Bethel, Maine, that aren’t as intense.

New Hampshire resident and mastermind behind the trail, Marianne Borowski, noted, “You need to have a bit of a sense of humor in some places.”

Borowski, a retired biochemist, drew inspiration from New Hampshire’s neighbor, Vermont, and its 91-mile cross-state route that now ties into this one. By combining the two, the truly intrepid can travel a whopping 174 miles. Having experienced the Cross Vermont Trail (crossvermont.org), she asked its organizers if anyone was working on continuing a trail from where their route ended at the Connecticut River, into New Hampshire and across the Granite State. Upon hearing that no one was, Borowski jumped in wheels first.

“I think the route compares very well with some of the nicest scenery that I’ve seen on routes all around the country,” she enthused. “We have mountains, we have babbling brooks and rocky rivers, moose and bears, wildflowers and lupine fields, spectacular fall foliage—all these great things that a lot of people don’t see because they don’t head up that far north. I think it’s a gem, and by putting this route together, what I’ve seen already are people saying, ‘I might go ride that for a long weekend.’”

Borowski has received positive feedback from dozens of enthusiastic riders who have explored the new trail. Although the route is stitched together with some sections on backcountry roads (and a small fraction on busy roads), Borowski aimed to incorporate as much off-road trail as possible. With lots of bicycling experience—both on-road and off-road—she prefers the latter, stating, “There’s something about being on a recreation path or a rail-trail that I just find great because I can look around, I can relax, I can chat with someone riding next to me and not always be looking in my rearview mirror wondering if the cars are seeing me and worrying about the traffic.”

Stretching across the state’s North Country region, the journey from the Vermont border to just over the Maine line includes two rail-trails: the Presidential Rail Trail (friendsofthepresidentialrailtrail.org), tucked into the picturesque Presidential Range of the White Mountains, and the Ammonoosuc Rail Trail (rtc.li/ammonoosuc-rail-trail), which parallels its lushly forested namesake river. Both add an equestrian option to the adventure, as well as cross-country skiing and snowmobiling in the winter.

So far, just a few signs are up marking the Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail—and more are coming—but, in the meantime, those interested in checking out the route can visit the trail’s website, which has been up and running for only about two years, to find detailed cue sheets and maps.

As its one-woman champion, the project has been a true labor of love for Borowski, and she is thrilled to see the idea catching on. “The town of Lisbon is very supportive of this; they thought it was a good idea because they see where bicycling brings in tourism and it would be good for the local businesses,” she shared. “It’s a little town, but it’s a perfect place to grab a lunch and sit down in the park by the river. To see that they were excited about this cross-state trail going through their town really felt good to me. They get it!”

Laura Stark is a lead writer and editor for Rails to Trails magazine.

Photos: (Left) Marianne Borowski; (right) the Presidential Rail-Trail is part of the cross-state route.
Wisconsin’s Oak Leaf Trail

The Oak Leaf Trail in Milwaukee County connects neighborhoods, green space and cultural sites along a path of more than 125 miles, and makes up a significant portion of the 700-mile Route of the Badger, a developing Rails-to-Trails Conservancy TrailNation™ project connecting seven counties in southeastern Wisconsin. (Read the cover story on page 12.) Learn more: rtc.li/Oak-Leaf-Trail or railstotrails.org/badger.
Join us on April 18, 2020, for Opening Day for Trails, the national kickoff celebration for the spring trail season.

Find an event happening near you! railstotrails.org/openingday