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INDIANA'S NEW LEGISLATIVE TRAILS CAUCUS FOCUSED ON THE STATEWIDE IMPACT THAT REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORKS CAN DELIVER

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the Greenways Foundation join bipartisan trails caucus in calling for sustained funding to grow and complete Indiana's connected trail systems

INDIANAPOLIS—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and the Greenways Foundation today joined a bipartisan team of state legislators to launch the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus. Co-chairs of the new caucus, Rep. Carey Hamilton (D-Indianapolis), Sen. Dennis Kruse (R-Auburn), Rep. Anthony Cook (R-Cicero) and Sen. Eddie Melton (D-Gary) gathered their colleagues and representatives from public health, tourism, conservation and other stakeholder groups at the Indiana Statehouse to explore the impact that connected trail systems can deliver to the state.

The briefing highlighted the direct benefits of connecting trails in economic, health, safety and environmental terms, underscoring transformative trail projects currently underway—such as the Great American Rail-Trail, the nation's first cross-country multiuse trail, which will connect through Indiana, as well as efforts to create a network of signature trails in the greater Indianapolis region, including the National Road Heritage Trail. During the briefing, caucus co-chairs called on their peers to join them in spearheading efforts to invest in and connect the state's trail system.

"Trails caucuses, like what's forming in Indiana, have proven essential tools in generating legislative enthusiasm and momentum for trail networks in other Midwestern states, including Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan. Ohio's Legislative Trails Caucus is a strong case study—nearly 40% of state legislators have joined the caucus, representing a fairly equal number of Republicans and Democrats, which has helped to generate significant gains for trails, walking and biking in the state," said Brian Housh, Midwest policy manager for RTC. "These bipartisan groups involve state elected officials committing to create statewide trail networks to connect people, places and opportunities, supporting improvements in existing trails and ensuring smart planning for future recreational trail and active transportation systems."

The formation of the caucus comes in the midst of strong momentum for trails in Indiana, such as the Great American Rail-Trail, which was announced in 2019 and seeks to connect 225 miles of trail in the state, and Governor Eric Holcomb's Next Level Trails program, which has invested \$90 million—the largest infusion of state funding for trails in Indiana history—toward the development of regionally and locally significant trails. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Outdoor Recreation in coordination with the Indiana Department of Transportation is incentivizing collaborative efforts to accelerate trail connections to create healthy, thriving communities.

"Indiana's story of trails as fundamental to quality of life, economic development and tourism is a great success story. One that our neighboring states are following closely," said Mitch Barloga, president of the Greenways Foundation of Indiana. "As we move into the next chapter for trails and active

transportation in Indiana, we need to prioritize developing a comprehensive trails maintenance program and sustained funding to connect trails across the state.”

During the briefing, co-chairs of the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus expressed their excitement about the emerging bipartisan group of state legislators committed to trails and stressed their intention of maximizing quality of life for Indiana’s residents and visitors. Rep. Carey Hamilton highlighted the importance of working with constituents to develop a world-class statewide trails system that provides excellent recreational experiences and safe routes to encourage active transportation, which promotes public health and environmental sustainability.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

The Great American Rail-Trail, which connects 3,700 miles of trail between Washington, D.C., and Washington State, is a signature RTC project. RTC is providing the national leadership and on-the-ground support that is necessary to complete a trail of this scope—the work to organize people, plans and ideas; trail planning and community engagement; advocacy; and marketing. Explore the trail vision and the interactive map of the route at greatamericanrailtrail.org.

The Greenways Foundation is a charitable trust working to promote the growth, enhancement and use of Indiana greenways. To accomplish that, we solicit donations and make grants in support of greenway development, enhancement and operation. We have made it our practice to work closely with both citizen and government entities to establish linear parks in a way that maximizes resources. The Greenways Foundation has become the leading voice for these wonderful public amenities. Learn more at greenwaysfoundation.org.