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CONTACT: Patricia Brooks, patricia@matchmapmedia.com, 202.351.1757

The Impact of Trails for People, Places and the Planet Centerpiece of Nationwide Celebration

Rails to Trails Conservancy calls on Americans to walk, bike and be active outside in a demonstration of the transformative health, economic and climate benefits of trails

WASHINGTON—Rails to Trails Conservancy’s annual nationwide celebration of trails, hosted on April 27, 2024, underscored the importance of connected walking and biking infrastructure to the well-being of people, places and the planet. Findings from the event, collected as part of RTC’s annual ‘Celebrate Trails Day,’ showcase the return on investment that’s possible as the nation’s more than 41,000 miles of multiuse trails are connected into trail networks that make it safer and easier for people to be active outside where they live.

Celebrate Trails Day, which the organization facilitates annually on the fourth Saturday of April, invited thousands of people across the country to get outside on trails in their community for events and activities that encouraged physical activity, stewardship, community engagement and opportunities to swap out a routine car trip for a walk or a bike ride, helping to lower their individual carbon footprint. Many of the more than 240 events that took place aligned with emerging trail and active transportation networks across the country, creating an opportunity for communities to learn more about these infrastructure developments and to experience the benefits of creating connected trail and active transportation systems. These events also showcased the impact of connected trail systems, which have the potential to deliver more than \$138 billion to the economy each year in health cost savings, climate savings and direct spending.

“Celebrate Trails Day creates a unique opportunity to show off the many ways trails are essential to communities across the country,” said Ryan Chao, RTC’s president. “Thousands of people got outside with us to send the message that when we connect trails, good things happen. We have space to move our bodies and be active outside, which is good for our physical and mental health. We support our local economy and create new connections in the neighborhoods where we live. And we can get around safely without a car.”

This year, a survey conducted by RTC of people’s participation in Celebrate Trails Day found that each logged an average of 102 mins of physical activity on the trail—achieving more than two-thirds of the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In total, RTC estimates that over 20,000 people took part in Celebrate Trails Day, generating more than 2.1 million minutes of physical activity nationwide.

In response to Celebrate Trails Day, people universally reported mental health benefits of time spent being active on the trail (97% of people agree that using trails makes a difference for their mental health and well-being) and the majority say that having events or programming on the trail motivates them to be physically active (85%). More than three-quarters (78%) indicate that they’ll use trails as part of their everyday routine (e.g., going to the store, school, work or for exercise) and 76% of respondents indicated they chose to swap a car trip for a walk, bike

ride or other active transportation on Celebrate Trails Day and at other times in their day-to-day routines.

“Everyone gains from staying active and should have safe and convenient access to trails. It’s also great when these places include green space, welcome all ages and abilities, and include activities like culturally inclusive programs,” said Ken Rose, MPA, physical activity and health branch chief at the CDC. “Good walking and biking trails can help us stay physically and mentally fit by making physical activity a part of our routine. They also bring communities closer together by giving us spaces to meet up and socialize.”

The CDC reports that only about 1 in 4 adults fully meets the physical activity guidelines for aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities, and increasing physical activity is one of the best things we can do for our health. Connected trail and active transportation infrastructure makes it possible for more people to incorporate physical activity into routine, everyday activities, like getting to work or school or running errands. Outcomes from Celebrate Trails Day underscore the impact of park, trail and greenway infrastructure interventions—combined with additional interventions, such as events and programming in these spaces—to increase awareness, enhance access and encourage participation as outlined in recommendations by the Community Preventive Services Task Force to increase physical activity.

Celebrate Trails Day comes this year at a time of unprecedented opportunity for trails, walking and biking, in part made possible by the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and illustrates the widespread demand and benefit of dedicated and sustained investment in the nation’s trail networks. RTC’s recent analysis at the end of 2023 found 150 known multiuse trail networks nationwide, with trail networks underway in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. At least half of Americans (49.75%) live in a county that is home to a developing trail network.

Survey results for Celebrate Trails Day represent 1,748 responses gathered via SurveyMonkey between April 27 and May 5, 2024. Active minutes were calculated using the estimated number of participants in Celebrate Trails Day, and the average time reported spent on trails on Celebrate Trails Day.

Celebrate Trails Day is made possible because of the support of RTC’s partners and sponsors.

Celebrate Trails Day is the annual celebration of the spring trail season, recognized on the fourth Saturday in April. The national celebration is organized by Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong. RTC is dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Follow #CelebrateTrails on social media for updates and connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [X](#) (formerly Twitter) and [Instagram](#).

Active People, Healthy NationSM is a national initiative led by the CDC to help 27 million Americans become more physically active by 2027. Learn more from the initiative about strategies to increase physical activity, including providing access to safe places such as trails.