



2021 Recreational Trails Program Annual Report

FHWA-HEP-22-008



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

*A report on the use and benefits of Federal Recreational
Trails Program funds across the United States
Covers the period of Federal FY 1993 – FY 2020*

Ghost Town Trail harvest, PA
Photo Credit: Cory Shoff

Cover Photo: Tahoe East Shore Trails, NV
Photo Credit: Karen Mullen

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Executive Summary

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that provides funds to the States for recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses.

Importance of RTP

There are a variety of issues that are increasingly impacting the RTP and the greater trails industry. None are more pressing than the persistent, growing issue of the trail maintenance backlog on public lands.

This backlog negatively impacts every aspect of trails management, including wildfire fighting and active management of the nation's public lands. The backlog affects access for millions of Americans to recreation opportunities and for rural communities who depend on these amenities for their livelihoods and economic prosperity.

Use of RTP Funds

States may use RTP funds for a variety of project types and expenditures which fall under eight categories of permissible uses:

- Trail maintenance and restoration
- Trailside and trailhead facilities
- Equipment for construction and maintenance
- Construction of new recreational trails
- Acquisition of trail corridors
- Assessment of trail conditions
- Safety and environmental education
- Administration

RTP funding is highly leveraged by community and State funds, as well as contributions from organizations and businesses. Of the projects completed between FY 1993 and FY 2020, total funds apportioned in the RTP was nearly \$1.5 billion with additional matching funds of \$1.1 billion, showing that each RTP dollar was matched by 73 cents with other funds. Further program efficiencies are seen by the use of youth conservation and service corps working in cooperation with private contractors, agency or community staff, and volunteers.

RTP Database

The RTP Database provides an online record of RTP project data. This database contains a list of projects and photos which can be searched by: State, County, Congressional District, Trail Name, Project Name, Permissible Use, Managed Use, Land Ownership, Year Awarded, and keywords.

This data is voluntarily provided by the States and the District of Columbia and its accuracy is subject to the quality of the data reported and the timeliness of the reporting.

National Benefits

RTP funding has become an essential element in the development and management of the nation's trails, and is the only Federal funding stream to specifically address the trail maintenance backlog on Federal, State, and local public lands. The RTP supports the development of statewide trails programs, and supports larger public priorities to support equity, economic development, climate change mitigation and resiliency, and safety:

- Community connections and health
- Cost effectiveness
- Economic development
- Habitat improvement
- Partnership development
- Public land maintenance
- Safe recreation
- Trails for all (including equity and accessibility)
- Workforce development

This report demonstrates the many, varied, and beneficial results of the RTP in States across the country.



*Granite Tors Boardwalk, AK
Photo Credit: Wendy Sailors, AK DNR*

Funding and Administration

The RTP is a Federal-aid assistance program of the FHWA that apportions funds to States by statutory formula. This unique program provides funds to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for motorized and nonmotorized recreational trail uses. A State Recreational Trails Advisory Committee or Council representing both motorized and nonmotorized recreational trail users provides public input on policies and project selection.

The RTP embraces the “user-pay/user-benefit” philosophy of the Highway Trust Fund, which collects an estimated \$281 million per year in motor fuel excise tax from nonhighway recreational fuel use. These funds represent a portion of the motor fuel excise tax collected from nonhighway recreational fuel use in each State: fuel used for off-highway recreation by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway light trucks.

Each State develops and manages its own program of project selection and grant administration, in partnership with communities, agencies, and nonprofit organizations. For FY 2020, the Federal government authorized \$82.4 million for the RTP.



Project Requirements

States are required to use 40 percent of their RTP funds for diverse recreational trail use, 30 percent for motorized recreation, and 30 percent for nonmotorized recreation. The 40-30-30 calculation takes place after accounting for State administrative costs. A small State exclusion exempts Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Rhode Island from the 30 percent motorized and nonmotorized requirements.

The specifics of how to apply this formula to project selection is up to the States, and varies around the country. States with large proportions of Federal land sometimes fund backcountry projects for both motorized

and nonmotorized use to achieve diversity. Others may fund projects with adjacent paved and unpaved trail surfaces for diverse nonmotorized activities, or trails with both snowmobiling and summer all terrain vehicle (ATV) use.

The Federal funds generally provide up to 80 percent of the project cost (with higher amounts permitted in States with a higher percentage of public lands), and require project sponsors to provide the remaining amount in matching resources (generally at least 20 percent). Some project sponsors provide more than 60 percent of the funds from non-Federal sources.

Legislative History

The RTP was created by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, and reauthorized in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (1998); Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (2005); Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (2012); and the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (2015); and included in extensions for each Act. Current authorization extends through FY 2021.

Managed Uses

Managed Uses include a wide variety of both motorized and nonmotorized trail activities that are appropriate to recreational trails. The RTP legislation defines the term “recreational trail” as “a thoroughfare or track across land or snow, used for recreational purposes,” and includes the following activities:

- A. Pedestrian activities, including wheelchair use;
- B. Skating or skateboarding;
- C. Equestrian activities, including carriage driving;
- D. Nonmotorized snow trail activities, including skiing;
- E. Bicycling or use of other human powered vehicles;
- F. Aquatic or water activities; and
- G. Motorized vehicular activities, including all-terrain vehicle riding, motorcycling, snowmobiling, use of off-road light trucks, or use of other off-road motorized vehicles.

The tables on the next three pages provide an overview of the historic funding of the RTP and a more detailed breakdown of FY 2020 funding.

Table 1: Apportionments All States, All Fiscal Years

The obligation rate represents the percentage of funds committed to projects compared to the funds available. The obligation rate for the overall Federal-aid highway program averages about 95 percent over time. The obligation rate for the RTP has trended in the 87 percent range.

There are many reasons why the RTP has a lower obligation rate. Most Federal-aid highway funds, including the RTP, are available for a total of four fiscal years (current fiscal year, plus three more years), which gives States flexibility to determine priorities over several years. The obligation authority for the Federal-aid highway program is usually lower than the apportionments, so some States give priority to other Federal-aid highway programs. Several States report that they select projects on two-year cycles (even-numbered years tend to have lower obligation rates). Other States report that they delay project selection and implementation when there is uncertainty about the reauthorization of the program, or take time to implement the program after each new authorization act.

The difference in the totals in Table 1 on this page and Table 3 on page 7 is due to the different sources providing the information and the manner in which a State obligates its funding (e.g., some States obligate funds every other year). The source for the data in Tables 1 and 2 is the Federal Highway Administration Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty. The data source for Tables 3 (page 7) and 4 (page 17) is information voluntarily provided by the States and the District of Columbia for the RTP Database (<https://www.rtpinfo.org>).

Additionally, the RTP Database does not currently have complete data for all States; data collection and validation for the RTP Database is an on-going effort. Data will be regularly entered into the Database as it is received from the States and the District of Columbia.

Apportionments (FY)	RTP Funding	Obligated
1993	\$7,275,000	\$5,696,543
1994	\$0	\$1,581,335
1995	\$0	\$0
1996	\$14,688,000	\$11,595,075
1997	\$14,688,000	\$16,256,403
1998	\$29,550,000	\$14,691,339
1999	\$39,400,000	\$33,750,926
2000	\$49,250,000	\$44,161,037
2001	\$49,250,000	\$44,826,248
2002	\$49,250,000	\$47,586,188
2003	\$48,929,875	\$44,915,197
2004	\$57,656,952	\$43,957,595
2005	\$59,160,000	\$43,459,118
2006	\$68,468,400	\$57,983,555
2007	\$74,160,000	\$65,913,964
2008	\$79,160,000	\$62,787,840
2009	\$84,160,000	\$81,113,236
2010	\$84,160,000	\$52,908,922
2011	\$96,570,196	\$88,649,335
2012	\$78,569,033	\$68,360,434
2013	\$79,212,744	\$65,371,220
2014	\$80,741,889	\$64,842,044
2015	\$80,741,889	\$71,980,520
2016	\$82,365,802	\$68,808,853
2017	\$82,365,802	\$83,165,826
2018	\$82,365,802	\$72,579,414
2019	\$82,365,802	\$105,969,383
2020	\$82,365,802	\$57,439,844
FY1993-2020 Totals	\$1,636,870,988	\$1,420,351,394
FY1993-2020 Obligation Rate		86.77%

Table 2: Funding per State for FY 2020

This table shows the number of selected projects, apportionments, and obligations per State for FY 2020. The apportionments are based on the amount each State received in FY 2009. In that year, half of the funds were distributed equally among all States, and half were distributed in proportion to the estimated amount of off-road recreational fuel use in each State: fuel used for off-road recreation by snowmobiles, ATVs, off-road motorcycles, and off-road light trucks.

This table also shows obligations by State. Obligations are the Federal government's legal commitment to pay or reimburse the States or other entities for the Federal share of a project's eligible costs.

Several States reported that their FY 2020 plans were impacted by the potential for a rescission of funds included in the FAST Act. Some States accelerated obligations so funds would not be rescinded; others delayed obligations because their States wanted to obligate other highway funds. The FY 2020 Appropriations Act repealed the FAST Act rescission.

¹ State opted out of the RTP: CT

² State did not provide funding and match information for FY 2020: TN

³ State did not select projects in FY 2020, but obligated or deobligated funds for projects selected in prior years: FL, NE, RI, VT, WA

⁴ Negative amount represents deobligated funds: CA, NE, OR, RI

Source: Federal Highway Administration Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/funding/apportionments_obligations/recfunds_2019.cfm)

* RTP Net includes 1% return to FHWA for program administration under 23 U.S.C. 133(h)(5)(B).

State	# 2020 Projects	FY 2020 Apportionment	FY 2020 Obligation
Alabama	8	\$1,732,289	\$94,931
Alaska	23	\$1,512,643	\$1,170,242
Arizona	22	\$1,915,514	\$1,908,724
Arkansas	12	\$1,479,029	\$1,448,997
California ⁴	8	\$5,698,627	-\$14,248
Colorado	13	\$1,575,735	\$499,895
Connecticut ¹	0	\$0	\$0
Delaware	1	\$896,623	\$481,788
Dist. Columbia	2	\$816,847	\$605,349
Florida ³	0	\$2,576,507	\$1,818,362
Georgia	15	\$1,722,736	\$1,028,144
Hawaii	9	\$950,859	\$848,850
Idaho	29	\$1,693,454	\$1,502,813
Illinois	15	\$1,510,044	\$2,395,855
Indiana	5	\$1,189,692	\$2,167,758
Iowa	7	\$1,361,069	\$1,433,522
Kansas	18	\$1,370,407	\$1,152,889
Kentucky	12	\$1,410,151	\$578,022
Louisiana	15	\$1,502,467	\$1,230,196
Maine	16	\$1,428,314	\$846,970
Maryland	16	\$1,112,384	\$650,253
Massachusetts	28	\$1,174,862	\$765,488
Michigan	9	\$2,825,415	\$1,326,461
Minnesota	35	\$2,391,888	\$2,119,205
Mississippi	13	\$1,348,305	\$795,931
Missouri	11	\$1,646,765	\$290,654
Montana	45	\$1,590,638	\$1,494,448
Nebraska ^{3,4}	0	\$1,205,213	-\$219,436
Nevada	17	\$1,344,370	\$1,270,222
New Hampshire	22	\$1,255,265	\$1,255,265
New Jersey	18	\$1,214,489	\$1,115,637
New Mexico	10	\$1,415,533	\$1,811,337
New York	8	\$2,182,510	\$181,181
North Carolina	20	\$1,597,424	\$1,836,164
North Dakota	13	\$1,120,562	\$908,432
Ohio	11	\$1,655,132	\$1,878,275
Oklahoma	9	\$1,769,212	\$116,882
Oregon ⁴	18	\$1,594,051	-\$225,276
Pennsylvania	8	\$1,971,353	\$1,606,595
Rhode Island ^{3,4}	0	\$856,384	-\$251,469
South Carolina	18	\$1,199,108	\$901,600
South Dakota	7	\$1,125,821	\$991,689
Tennessee ²	0	\$1,624,207	\$9,156
Texas	22	\$3,954,874	\$2,856,073
Utah	44	\$1,546,233	\$1,252,110
Vermont ³	0	\$1,017,730	\$884,682
Virginia	5	\$1,511,889	\$3,567,118
Washington ³	0	\$1,867,407	\$1,867,407
West Virginia	13	\$1,297,964	\$1,550,512
Wisconsin	50	\$2,146,076	\$1,957,948
Wyoming	18	\$1,459,731	\$1,676,237
Total to States	718	\$82,365,802	\$57,439,844
2020 Obligation Rate			69.74%

Table 3: Funding by State, FY 1993-2020

This table shows the number of projects funded plus the amount of funding by State for Federal FY 1993-2020.

This table shows the total RTP funds obligated by each State during the period. In addition, the “Total Other Funding” column shows how much additional match was provided by project sponsors. Note that the matching funds are generally higher than the 20 percent minimum required by RTP—from 1993 through 2020, States matched each RTP dollar by 42 cents in other funds. In eight States the match is higher than the total RTP funds apportioned.

Since FY 1993, nearly \$1.5 billion in RTP funds generated nearly \$1.1 billion in other funds, resulting in a total of over \$2.5 billion for trails: 58 percent from Federal funds and 42 percent from other sources.

¹ State opted out of the RTP: CT

² State is missing data from prior year(s): DC, MI, NJ

³ State did not provide funding and match information for FY 2020: TN

This data is voluntarily provided by the States and the District of Columbia for the Recreational Trails Program Database (<https://www.rtpinfo.org>), and its accuracy is subject to the quality of the data reported and the timeliness of the reporting.

State	# FY 1993-2020 Projects	Total RTP Funding	Total Other Funding
Alabama	386	\$35,633,223	\$11,651,405
Alaska	552	\$20,579,420	\$6,040,197
Arizona	355	\$28,335,037	\$7,676,055
Arkansas	410	\$23,004,407	\$10,341,354
California	417	\$71,527,011	\$42,220,704
Colorado	511	\$25,023,713	\$27,664,524
Connecticut ¹	369	\$19,178,479	\$11,921,480
Delaware	157	\$15,471,370	\$7,286,295
Dist. Columbia ²	44	\$9,531,335	\$2,158,403
Florida	279	\$40,402,099	\$32,138,037
Georgia	370	\$36,795,974	\$27,008,472
Hawaii	1,624	\$15,530,913	\$3,939,385
Idaho	800	\$29,628,573	\$24,475,812
Illinois	346	\$39,100,857	\$18,401,648
Indiana	176	\$25,898,064	\$7,780,039
Iowa	150	\$34,901,228	\$19,326,521
Kansas	390	\$24,032,446	\$14,208,701
Kentucky	561	\$22,260,722	\$20,755,068
Louisiana	436	\$28,065,846	\$28,553,020
Maine	781	\$19,927,540	\$9,993,278
Maryland	958	\$24,321,622	\$8,464,192
Massachusetts	708	\$23,619,224	\$22,216,326
Michigan ²	343	\$45,461,563	\$27,999,881
Minnesota	614	\$40,706,284	\$69,497,770
Mississippi	344	\$28,313,295	\$6,689,088
Missouri	376	\$30,905,081	\$29,662,704
Montana	1,101	\$27,144,744	\$19,975,478
Nebraska	158	\$23,379,256	\$10,370,536
Nevada	421	\$21,473,200	\$10,988,099
New Hampshire	857	\$16,597,544	\$16,457,302
New Jersey ²	882	\$23,699,453	\$44,942,430
New Mexico	217	\$20,561,553	\$7,126,249
New York	476	\$41,386,181	\$17,134,306
North Carolina	637	\$37,813,369	\$40,503,409
North Dakota	322	\$19,842,154	\$5,805,907
Ohio	344	\$29,001,646	\$27,743,173
Oklahoma	331	\$32,500,592	\$17,296,192
Oregon	486	\$26,205,466	\$23,487,376
Pennsylvania	429	\$41,651,629	\$23,685,142
Rhode Island	403	\$7,127,004	\$2,948,694
South Carolina	329	\$20,943,443	\$6,862,463
South Dakota	422	\$24,517,447	\$13,023,907
Tennessee ³	270	\$22,797,853	\$6,719,730
Texas	596	\$75,221,941	\$23,984,909
Utah	681	\$32,791,120	\$63,960,673
Vermont	1,433	\$16,629,658	\$25,954,596
Virginia	329	\$29,225,999	\$11,255,705
Washington	725	\$30,717,071	\$48,754,107
West Virginia	346	\$18,253,099	\$4,774,102
Wisconsin	919	\$30,653,730	\$75,649,103
Wyoming	552	\$28,408,351	\$17,660,607
Totals	26,123	\$1,456,698,829	\$1,065,134,554
Percent Share of Funds		57.6%	42.4%

RTP Database

The goal of the RTP Database is to provide comprehensive, up-to-date project data on recreational trails projects in all 50 States and the District of Columbia over the RTP program's entire life-cycle. The online RTP Database (<https://www.rtpinfo.org>) for FY 1993-2020 includes more than 26,000 projects that have received nearly \$1.5 billion in funding. These projects have been matched with nearly \$1.1 billion in funds and contributions.

*Pine Street Woods new trail sign, ID
Photo Credit: Katie Cox, Kaniksu Land Trust*



RTPINFO.ORG

SUPPORTING TRAILS

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

STATE - BY - STATE

The RTP Database promotes program transparency by providing a central repository for project data that may be used by the FHWA, Congress, the States, RTP administrators, project managers, and the public.

In 2016, FHWA contracted with KMS Enterprises, Inc. (which subcontracted with American Trails and Arch Systems LLC) to develop, operate, and update a searchable RTP Database to be available on a website, and to provide annual reports on RTP funding. An average of 1,000 new records are annually entered into the Database as the States, District of Columbia, and other sources voluntarily provide this information.

Database users can search by State, County, Congressional District, Trail Name, Project Name, Permissible Use, Managed Use, Land Ownership, and Year Awarded. Reports can be printed from the search results. Users can view a record of the project for more information.

USA

Recognizing outstanding use of funding from the Recreational Trails Program.

PROJECTS
26,123+

ENSURES EQUIVALENT SUPPORT FOR ALL TRAIL USER TYPES BY REQUIRING A DIVERSE DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS

40% for diverse recreational trail use (more than one user type)

30% for motorized recreation use only

30% for nonmotorized recreation use only

Funding is based on off-highway fuel taxes generated in each State to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses. The Annual Report highlights some of the best projects across the U.S.

35%

FUNDING REDUCES BACKLOG MAINTENANCE AND REHABILITATION PROJECTS

MAINTENANCE FUNDING

\$552 M

TOTAL RTP FUNDS

\$1.5 B

TOTAL MATCHING FUNDS





\$1.1 B

VISIT RTPINFO.ORG FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SEARCH OF THE DATABASE AND PHOTO LIBRARY

Enabling DOT Priorities

USDOT Strategic Goals

The [U.S. Department of Transportation Strategic Plan for FY 2018-2022](#) established the DOT's strategic objectives:

-  **Safety:** Reduce Transportation-Related Fatalities and Serious Injuries Across the Transportation System.
-  **Infrastructure:** Invest in Infrastructure to Ensure Mobility and Accessibility and to Stimulate Economic Growth, Productivity, and Competitiveness for American Workers and Businesses.
-  **Innovation:** Lead in the Development and Deployment of Innovative Practices and Technologies that Improve the Safety and Performance of the Nation's Transportation System.
-  **Accountability:** Serve the Nation with Reduced Regulatory Burden and Greater Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Accountability.

This report demonstrates how the RTP relates to these strategic goals and exhibits innovative projects and partnerships in the program by using the above symbols to represent each goal, and describing how each project example supports innovations in the appropriate goal areas.

RTP Excellence Awards

The Coalition for Recreational Trails (CRT), a federation of national trail-related organizations, hosts an annual achievement awards program to recognize outstanding trail projects funded by the RTP.

The winners are recognized each year in Washington, DC during the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable's Great Outdoors Month in early June. The awards are part of the Coalition's ongoing effort to build awareness of RTP accomplishments. Award winners are selected from projects nominated by public agencies, State administrators, organizations, or project sponsors. Find out more at [RecTrails.org](#).

Any project listed in this report that has recently won one of these prestigious awards will be signified with the symbol to the right.



COVID-19 Pandemic Creates Huge Demand for Trails

Trails and outdoor spaces are seeing major spikes in use across the country, as individuals and families look to these assets for daily physical activity and mental respite in the wake of COVID-19. As America's business, social, and cultural hubs shuttered their doors to weather the coronavirus pandemic, many public health experts have discussed the importance of being active in the outdoors—as long as people maintain a safe physical distance.

Dramatic increases in visitation are being recorded across the United States; an analysis of 31 trail counters for the week of March 16–22, 2020 by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy found a nationwide trail use increase of nearly 200 percent from that same week in 2019. This surge in trail use forced trail managers to take fast action to help mitigate the damage caused by dramatic increases in new trail users, and to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among their constituents while encouraging careful and conscientious trail use.

The RTP serves as a resource to agencies across the country for developing public outreach campaigns and funding the staff needed to maintain and repair trails damaged through this surge in use. The RTP provides a consistent source of funding to address America's huge trail maintenance backlog. Further examples of how the pandemic influenced program and project activities are noted throughout this report.

RTP Promotes Innovation

Technology Implementation and Accessibility

RTP projects are encouraged to use the best in technological innovation. For trails, this may mean using cutting-edge technology, using recycled materials, and using amenities that minimize energy and repair. To trail managers, this is key to reducing expenditures on maintenance by better design of trails and the use of appropriate materials and structures.

Project Example: Google Maps Partnership with Arizona State Parks, AZ



Take a virtual hike on an Arizona State Park trail with Google Maps! Over six weeks, staff hiked more than 200 miles carrying the Trekker, which weighs 45 pounds and includes 15 individual lenses to capture a 360-degree view of each trail and park. The data will help visitors understand the difficulty of trails, topography, and what to expect to see along the route, as well as the accessibility of the trail and the layout of the park. The project also had the added value of identifying any trails in need of maintenance or repair in the park system. Google has now processed and uploaded this park data to the existing Earth and Maps databases for free use by the public. The information can also afford people the opportunity to take a virtual tour of a trail without having to physically climb or travel.



Photo Credit: Arizona State Parks, AZ

Trails as Powerful Land and Habitat Restoration Tools

2020 saw a variety of dramatic natural disasters across the country. Whether unprecedented flooding in the midwest, wildfires in the west, or hurricanes in the south, lands are under unprecedented natural pressure. Trails in general, and the RTP in particular, have proven to be powerful tools in mitigating these disasters. Trails projects have been implemented to provide new emergency evacuation routes, access corridors for fire fighting and emergency crews, tools for controlling the flow of water and sediment over fire-denuded landscapes, and focusing impact on sensitive and recovering habitats.



Photo Credit: Ron McDonell, Friends of Cow Mountain, CA

Project Example: Fountain of Youth Trail Restoration and Reroute, California

Friends of Cow Mountain is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, based in Ukiah, California, that works to improve the recreation experience at South Cow Mountain off-highway vehicle (OHV) area, a 25,000 acre property managed by the Bureau of Land Management out of the Ukiah Field Office. South Cow Mountain is home to headwater streams that flow west to the Russian River watershed and east to Clear Lake. The Russian River is home to steelhead and salmon which are listed on the Federal threatened and endangered lists. Clear Lake is home to the Clear Lake Hitch, a fish listed on the State endangered list, which spawns in creeks flowing out of South Cow Mountain. The trail maintenance work performed by Friends of Cow Mountain supports work to save these vital species by reducing sediment discharged into streams where spawning takes place. South Cow Mountain was heavily damaged in the 2018 Mendocino Complex Fire which burned 460,000 acres. The work of Friends of Cow Mountain has supported the goal of reducing sediment discharge into streams due to vegetation loss in the fire.



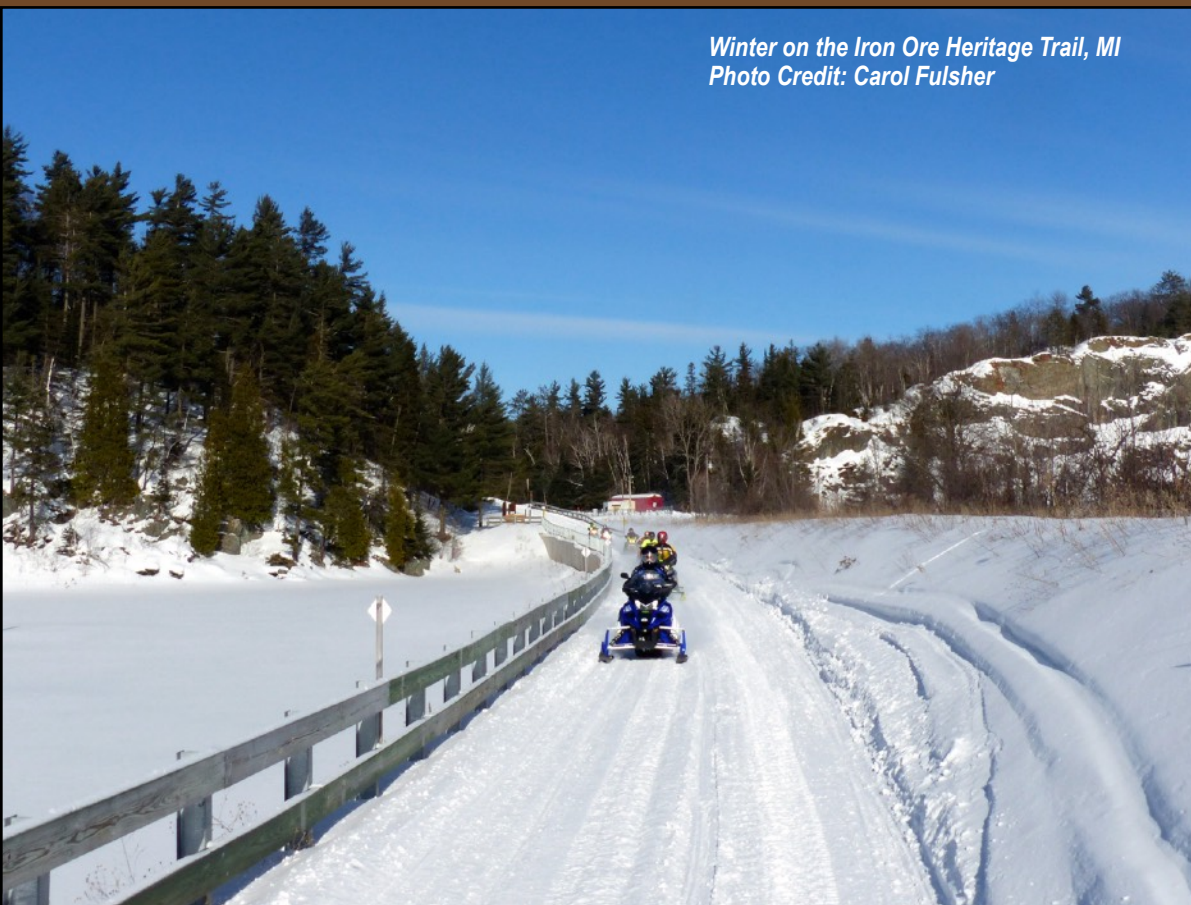
Permissible Use of RTP Funds

The RTP legislation identifies eight categories of permissible uses for how States may use RTP funds. The following pages provide details and examples for each use.

The categories are:

- (A) Trail maintenance and restoration*
- (B) Trailside and trailhead facilities*
- (C) Equipment for construction and maintenance*
- (D) Construction of new recreational trails*
- (E) Acquisition of trail corridors*
- (F) Assessment of trail conditions*
- (G) Education for safety and environmental protection*
- (H) Administration*

*Winter on the Iron Ore Heritage Trail, MI
Photo Credit: Carol Fulsher*



Permissible Use A:

Trail maintenance and restoration

Maintenance and restoration of existing trails, including trail rehabilitation or relocation. This category may also include maintenance and restoration of trail bridges and other trail-associated features.

Project Example: Incline Flume Trail Maintenance, Nevada



The Incline Flume Trail maintenance project provided an opportunity to repair the Tahoe Basin's most family friendly trail, while also providing the missing connection between the Rim Trail, Flume Trail, Tunnel Creek, Tyrolian Downhill, and the shared use path on State Route 28. This project allowed U.S. Forest Service (USFS) adoption and corrective maintenance of about 7 miles of the Incline Flume Trail. Standardization and maintenance of trails to USFS Class 3 standards under agreed interagency management action was a key milestone of this project and included signage indicating significant environmental and heritage resources in the trail corridor.



Photo Credit: Nevada Division of State Parks



Photo Credit: Neal Hamilton, SCPRT

Project Example: North Augusta Greenway, South Carolina

The North Augusta Greenway was established in 1995 and connects residents and visitors to North Augusta City Hall, River Golf Course, Riverside Village, Riverview Park and Activities Center, Hammond Hill Pool, and the Arts and Heritage Center. The trail is popular for cyclists, as well as walkers, but it is also a designated Transcontinental Bluebird Trail by the North American Bluebird Society. The community has benefitted from the resurfacing project, and the use of the trail has recently skyrocketed (since the COVID-19 public health crisis began). Based on data pulled from the section of trail that was resurfaced, there were 6,658 trail users in February 2020, compared to 19,209 trail users in April 2020.



Permissible Use B:

Trailside and trailhead facilities

Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages for recreational trails. Typical eligible work includes parking areas, toilets, horse and vehicle unloading facilities, providing appropriate signage, and seating.

Project Example: Pearl Island Trail Project, Wisconsin



The Pearl Island project is a corridor that runs three miles from the City of Brodhead between the mill race and the Sugar River to the dam that forms Decatur Lake. It's a little over 80 acres with trails that run through wooded areas from the mill race to the Sugar River. The project began in 2011 by volunteers with no grant at that time. With the RTP grant and great community support, the volunteers have been able to install benches, a pit toilet and shelter house, picnic tables, piers for canoes and kayaks, a beautiful bridge, and parking areas. Careful consideration has been taken to protect the many native plants in the area, and several native plant sites have been added along the project.



Photo Credit: Richard Vogel, Brodhead Public Works, WI

Permissible Use C:

Equipment for construction and maintenance

Purchase and lease of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment. Examples include snow trail grooming equipment, mechanized trail building equipment, vehicles for trail maintenance, and other equipment to help maintain the trail surface, drainage, and adjacent vegetation.

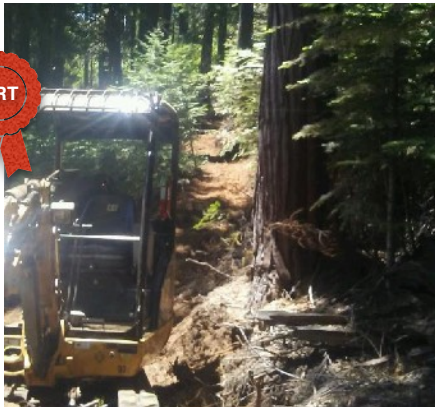


Photo Credit: Sarah Chamberlin, USFS

Project Example: Cal-Ida Equipment Purchase and Rough Cut Trail, California

The Cal-Ida Trail is a new 20-mile multiuse motorized single-track trail connecting the Cal-Ida area to the greater Downieville trail system. The connection will successfully link the Hall's Ranch trail to the Chimney Rock trail. The RTP grant scope includes 20 miles of rough cut trail construction which will be completed with various partners and equipment. The grant also includes the purchase of a trail dozer and a mini excavator. Forest Service crews will primarily cut tread with this equipment and clear brush along approximately 18 miles of trail, and Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship crews will rough cut tread with a mini excavator on an additional 3 miles of trail.



Permissible Use D:

Construction of new recreational trails

Construction of new recreational trails is the largest category of expenditures in most States, and includes paved and unpaved trails, water trails, snow trails, and bridges. The needs of local communities, agencies, and trail users are reflected in the great variety of trail construction that has been accomplished.

Project Example: Milan Trail Huggers Nash Stream Bridge, New Hampshire



The Milan Trail Huggers used RTP funds to construct a 10x90 foot bridge over Nash Stream in Stark, NH. This ATV Club hired an engineer at its own cost to design the bridge for this location. This project constructed 1,909 feet of new trail to connect existing ATV trails using this new bridge. The resulting new trail is 15 feet wide with five feet for ditching on either side. The bridge is dedicated to the memory of James Herbert who volunteered for the Milan Trail Huggers for many years before his death. The club built picnic tables and a new picnic area at their own expense after the project was completed.



Photo Credit: Alexis Rudko, Bureau of Trails, NH



Photo Credit: Garry Merritt, TX

Project Example: Violet Crown Trail, Texas

The Violet Crown Trail (VCT) will be the first regional trail system in Central Texas. The VCT is now 13 miles long running from Zilker Park to Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Travis County, Texas. The VCT will connect scenic natural areas to neighborhoods, shopping centers, a library, and public parks, becoming the longest trail of its kind in Central Texas. Once fully complete, the trail will extend 30 miles and provide a unique recreational experience as it passes through the urban wildlands of the Barton Creek Wilderness Park, the City of Sunset Valley, City of Austin Water Quality Protection Lands, and eventually into Hays County.



Permissible Use E:

Acquisition of trail corridors

Acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property. RTP funds are often used to acquire easements and property to develop recreational trails or recreational trail corridors. This category may include acquisition of old road or railroad bridges to be converted to trail use. Acquisition of any kind of interest in property must be from a willing landowner or seller.

Project Example: Cane Creek Mountains Natural Area, North Carolina


 Cane Creek Mountains Natural Area is a new nature park that provides public access to Alamance County's largest State natural heritage area. The property contains four miles of streams and supports Piedmont Monadnock Forest, Dry-Mesic Oak-Hickory Forests, as well as low elevation seeps. The area contains plants and animals found nowhere else in Alamance County. The mountain range is also home to the highest peak in North Carolina east of Greensboro at 987 feet. Visitors enjoy rolling piedmont hills, abundant creeks and streams, and some of the best views in the county. The park ensures the protection of this important natural resource while providing public access and recreation opportunities.



Photo Credit: Anna Bowland, Alamance Parks, NC



Photo Credit: Peter O'Toole, Disciples of Dirt, OR

Project Example: Thurston Hills Natural Area Trail Project, Oregon

After many years of pursuing land acquisitions on the edge of Springfield, Oregon, and with the passage of a bond measure by local citizens, the Willamalane Park and Recreation District was able to acquire land sought for outdoor recreation trails. They approached local mountain bike advocates, the Disciples of Dirt, to enter into an agreement to pledge volunteer time for a RTP grant to build multiuse and mountain bike specific trails at Thurston Hills Natural Area. Volunteers, brought into the project by the RTP grant pledge, were excited for the opportunity to back up their pledge and set to the task, spending winter and early spring months building trail. When it became apparent that a steeper section trail was more suited to be built with machinery, the local bike club put up the funding to do so. The end result of these efforts added 1.5 miles of trail to the three miles that had been originally planned.



Permissible Use F:

Assessment of trail conditions

Assessment of trail conditions for accessibility and maintenance. This category authorizes specific projects to assess trails to determine the level of accessibility for people who have disabilities, to develop programs to provide trail access information, and to assess trails for current or future maintenance needs.

Project Example: Sustainable Trail Maintenance, Colorado


 Colorado Fourteeners Initiative is studying the conditions of more than 30 Fourteen Peaks trails. Baseline inventories are occurring on 16 routes that were not inventoried in 2011-13. Updated inventories are occurring on 12 routes initially assessed in 2011. Compact trail counters will be placed on 10 routes to integrate hiking use levels into the condition monitoring assessments.



Photo Credit: Colorado Fourteeners Initiative. CO

Permissible Use G:


Education for safety and environmental protection

Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection. A State may use up to five percent of its apportionment each fiscal year for the operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection as those objectives relate to the use of recreational trails.

Project Example: Gwinnett Countywide Trails Master Plan, Georgia






Photo Credit: Beth Tucker, Kimley-Horn (on behalf of Gwinnett County and Gwinnett Trails), GA

 The Gwinnett Countywide Trails Master Plan was developed between 2017 and 2018 and began implementation in 2019. Gwinnett County is currently the second most populous county in Georgia with more than 936,000 residents and also has a minority-majority population. By 2050, it is estimated Gwinnett could grow to as many as 1.5 million residents, making it the most populated county in the state. To support an increasingly dynamic and diverse community, efforts must be made to expand and improve transportation options to sustainably accommodate this growth. The Trails Plan seeks to nearly triple the trails mileage in the County and will include both transportation and recreation trail facilities.

Project Example: Maricopa Trail Volunteer Stewardship Program, Arizona



Photo Credit: American Conservation Experience, AZ

 The Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation's RTP grant contained funding to hire approved and qualified youth corps crews and multiple hitches of trail maintenance services and skills, with support and assistance from the Foundation's volunteers and nonprofit partners. The Back Country Horsemen of America, for example, have several county-wide partnering community teams of mule and horse packing experts. They work with youth corps groups to transport supplies, tools, and equipment for week-long overnight hitches. This partnership makes it possible to do trail work on segments of the Maricopa Trail that are located on remote lands.  

Permissible Use H:

Administration

Payment of costs to the State incurred in administering the RTP program. In addition to staff time to administer the program and grants, other activities related to recreational trails are eligible under this category, including costs related to the State recreational trail advisory committee—newsletters, websites, or other communications.

Project Example: State Trails Program, Maryland



Photo Credit: Cheryl Ladota, MDOT SHA, MD



 The Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) makes every effort to ensure the transparency and accessibility of the RTP as part of their customer service focused approach to the use of administrative funds. This program builds close supportive relationships with sponsors which leads to improved project success. MDOT SHA contributes additional funds for administration to leverage grant management capability. The importance of this is driven by the fact that Maryland regulations are stricter than the Federal requirements so effective administration is crucial to program success. This innovative program provides hands-on assistance through each step of the workflow, leading to project success. 

Table 4: RTP Database Trail Project Work by Permissible Use for Federal FY 1993 - 2020

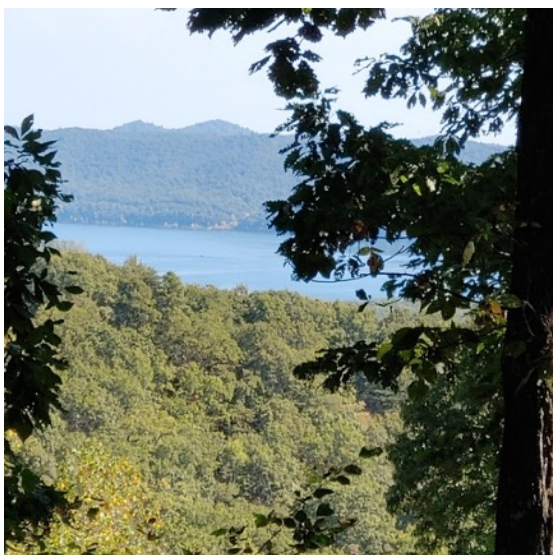
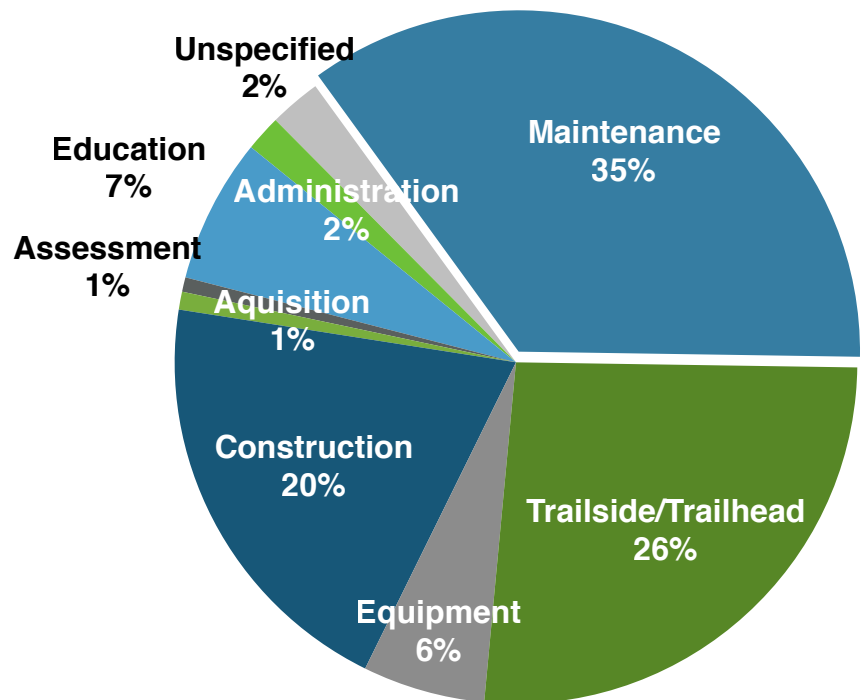
RTP funds may be used for projects within eight permissible use categories. The table shows the number of projects funded within each category since the inception of the program. Some categories are broken down further to specify the project type. Project types within the categories show the variety of projects funded.

Many projects are listed under more than one category, so a total would double or triple count many projects. Maintenance and restoration projects are the most common projects, followed by trail facilities, and new trail construction.

Education funds are used for many kinds of projects such as signs, video guides, interpretive kiosks, safety brochures, and training programs. Many of these products are for trailheads and interpretation that are specific to an individual trail, and training is typically an event in a specific venue. States are also sharing educational curricula, OHV safety campaign materials, and designs for standard signs.

The source for the data in Table 4 is information that the States provided for the RTP Database (<https://www.rtpinfo.org>).

A. Maintenance and Restoration	18,353
Trail Restoration/Rehabilitation	6,592
Trail Relocation	645
Trail Grooming	2,285
Trail Maintenance	6,740
Bridge Restoration/Rehabilitation	1,173
Bridge Relocation	67
Bridge Maintenance	851
B. Trailside and Trailhead Facilities	13,675
Trailhead Work	2,906
Parking	1,941
Signs	4,428
Restrooms	1,195
Accessibility Features	857
Access Ramps	575
Other Trailhead and Trailside Facilities	1,773
C. Equipment for Construction and Maintenance	3,020
D. Construction of New Recreation Trails	10,519
Trail	8,617
Bridge	1,902
E. Acquisition of Trail Corridors	441
F. Assessment of Trail Conditions	357
G. Education for Safety and Environmental Protection	3,575
Publications (Maps and Brochures)	737
Safety Programs	1,182
Environmental Programs	1,070
Other Educational Programs	586
H. Administration	890
I. Unspecified (project permissible use not self reported by States)	1,271



Northern Terminus of the Sheltowee Trace located in the Daniel Boone National Forest, KY
Photo Credit: Yvonne Thompson

National Benefits

A review of RTP-funded projects reveals the many benefits of providing quality trails in communities and across Federal, State, and local public lands. This section highlights important benefits and identifies examples of how trails support aspirations for maintaining the health of people as well as the environment, encouraging rural economic activity, and providing jobs and education across the U.S.

Examples of how RTP funding supports larger public priorities include increased:

- *Community connections and health*
- *Cost effectiveness*
- *Economic development*
- *Habitat improvement*
- *Partnership development*
- *Public land maintenance*
- *Safe recreation*
- *Trails for all*
- *Workforce development*

*MoPac Equestrian Trail Bridge, NE
Photo Credit: Kirk Nelson, State Trails Administrator*



Community Connections and Health

Public health researchers have been working hard to explore the effects of trails on communities. According to a [study](#) released in 2020 by the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, there is scientific evidence that trail use by youth from under-resourced communities is lacking and that there is strong support and opportunity for program development.

In addition to providing recreation and health benefits, trails and greenways can function as nonmotorized transportation corridors to help pedestrians and cyclists access schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. In every State, cities, towns, and counties are working to plan and build interconnected networks of trails. These routes tie in with open spaces as well as the built environment.



*Highlands Trail bridge connects trails to 4 States, NJ
Photo Credit: Kylie Yang*



The Highlands Trail-Long Pond Ironworks Bridge Replacement is an excellent example of how trails can improve community connections. The project site had been the location of bridges all the way back to the 1800s, when the furnaces adjacent to the bridge were used to process local iron ore. This legacy was interrupted when Hurricane Irene washed out the bridge in 2011. The missing bridge posed an immediate safety hazard, as it was located in a popular area close to historic ironworking furnaces, waterwheels, and other historic buildings. The only existing way around the river was a three-mile detour to the north side of Monksville Reservoir, involving a walk along busy Passaic County Route 511.

With the loss of this bridge, three major hiking trails were cut off and made impassible including the Highlands Trail which connects Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. This bridge forms an important connection not only for the Highlands Trail, but also for the Hasenclever Iron Trail which connects the iron furnaces with historic Ringwood Manor. Long Pond Ironworks and Ringwood Manor are both on the National and State Registers of Historic Places, and the Highlands Trail is one of only fifty to be designated as a Millennium Legacy Trail.

Cost Effectiveness

Because RTP requires significant matching resources for grants, project sponsors aim to design trails that provide maximum benefit for their cost. Trail planners are working with new technologies and creative use of materials. Trail managers are working to find equipment that is fuel efficient, low maintenance, and environmentally friendly. In recent years, managers of backcountry trail systems have relied increasingly on mechanized trail building equipment which manufacturers have improved to cause less resource disruption while building a more stable and sustainable trail tread. Trail crews and volunteers have provided the fine-tuning required to finish the projects.

Trails and parks are vulnerable to climate change effects such as damaging floods, wildfires, and other events. It is essential that trail planners, designers, and builders focus efforts on making trail projects resilient to these forces. RTP funding offers key opportunities to mitigate and respond to severe weather events.

A great example of how the RTP supports accountability and cost effective use of public funds can be seen in the partnership with the Biggest Little Trail Stewardship group maintaining and upgrading trails within the Peavine Mountain trail system on USFS property near the City of Reno in Northern Nevada. Due to inadequate initial design and construction, major sections of the trails were having significant run-off and erosion issues. The worst sections were completely rebuilt using corridor reroutes. Other sections received light maintenance including tread repair, drainage solutions, and de-berming incised tread. The equipment purchased through a previous RTP grant was used to cut in the reroutes and decommission the existing trail. Great Basin Institute and Nevada Conservation Corps Crews provided hand labor for finish work.



*Nevada Conservation Corps crews at work on the Peavine, NV
Photo Credit: Nevada Division of State Parks*



Economic Development

Trails contribute to the economy by providing construction and maintenance jobs, attracting tourists and visitors, and providing business for outfitters, guides, and tour companies. One major benefit of trail tourism is that it is money spent in rural towns and in more economically disadvantaged areas. The impacts of trail use and related activities have been documented in many studies, which show that local businesses especially benefit from trail users. Many studies are available from organizations such as American Trails, the East Coast Greenway, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and many others.



West Portal Blue Ridge Tunnel, VA
Photo Credit: Nelson County

For example, the amazing Blue Ridge Tunnel Rehabilitation and Trail Project in Virginia will serve as a huge economic driver for the region. The trail will be a key bicycle and pedestrian connection for communities on both sides of the Blue Ridge Parkway. It will tie the City of Waynesboro to the Village of Afton in Nelson County, and

-  eventually to Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville as the region's greenway network develops.
-  It will be a transformative economic development project for the City of Waynesboro's East Main Street corridor, low-income area, and designated Opportunity Zone that has recently shown potential as a craft beverage and outdoor recreation hub. Once completed, it will create an integrated system of pedestrian and bike friendly travel and recreational opportunities for residents for the entire region.

Habitat Improvement

An important aspect of trail development is creating a positive experience for visitors while preserving the important natural resources that plants and animals depend on. In many RTP-funded projects, this process goes further in improving the habitat along the trail corridor. RTP funding is also commonly used for projects involving acquisition of land for habitat and ecological connectivity. Best practices for trail development also include mitigation of impacts, revegetation of disturbed areas, use of recycled materials, and reduction of erosion. Often the environmental work is done by volunteers and conservation corps crews, which also provides opportunities for education about environmental issues.

In the Urban Woods and Prairies Initiative in North Dakota trail development was completed at three nature parks which are all critical to restoring riparian habitat along the Red River in Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN for the benefit of urban wildlife and local community members. The three nature parks within this project (Forest River, Heritage Hills, and Orchard Glen) are popular natural areas for both Fargo-Moorhead citizens to use for hiking, biking, running, birding, photography, and fishing. Therefore, Audubon Dakota and the land owning entity, Fargo Park District, decided to partner to develop this 5.4 mile crushed gravel trail system within the three nature parks.



Urban Woods and Prairies, ND
Photo Credit: Char Binstock

Partnership Development

RTP funds contribute to the success of trail projects by encouraging effective partnerships. For many trails, the key requirement is cooperation among jurisdictions, such as a rail-trail that passes from town to town. In many cases the partnership is between public and private interests that bring volunteers and citizens groups together to assist in building and maintaining trails managed by different levels of government.

Another benefit of trail project partnerships is in bringing together agencies with different missions, such as parks, health, transportation, and education. Project sponsors find common ground by developing funding partners of businesses, trail clubs, and a variety of nonprofit organizations.

The Shawnee Trail Conservancy, a 501(c)3 trail advocacy organization in southern Illinois, engaged officials at the USFS/Shawnee National Forest in a public-private partnership to use RTP funding to improve access to public lands for hikers, backpackers, and equestrians. The project also enhanced public safety, improved trail conditions, and decreased impacts to water quality within the Candidate Wild and Scenic-Big Grand Pierre Creek. This public-private partnership used \$200,000 in RTP funding between 2014 and 2018 in completing this work and pooled resources to increase recreational access to public lands.



Trail dozer cutting new trail, IL
Photo Credit: Chad Deaton, USFS



Public Land Maintenance

One of the RTP's originally stated purposes was to address the huge trail maintenance backlog in the U.S. Land managers use trail projects as opportunities to engage volunteers and habitat specialists in improving natural habitats. Benefits include restoring degraded stream corridors, routing trails to avoid sensitive wildlife habitat, and removing invasive plants.


Just as communities and transportation systems are vulnerable to major damage, so are trails and parks. All trails need maintenance, but extreme weather events as well as heavy visitor use will require rebuilding. Damage from wildfires and resulting erosion have affected many miles of trails on public lands. RTP funds have been used to promote trail resiliency and address needs such as:

- Climate change mitigation
- Wildfire damage
- Trees blown down across trails
- Erosion damage and washed-out culverts
- Flooded trail and greenway corridors
- Bridges needing replacement or rehabilitation



Old Dudes on Dirt Bikes members prepare for a work day, TX
Photo Credit: Jeff Raymer

The quintessential example of RTP funds enhancing the quality of public land access can be seen at the Multiple Use Trail (MUT) system in Sam Houston National Forest. This system provides the only legal riding opportunities for OHVs on National Forest land in the state of Texas. The MUT is composed of 85 miles of trails open to

-  OHVs, bicycles, equestrians, and hiking. Separated into two near equal length trail systems by the northern end of Lake Conroe, the MUT offers a network of loops and trail options. Kelly Pond Trailhead offers free overnight camping with picnic tables and expanded parking for trailers or motor homes.

Partnerships play a critical role in the success of trail sustainability measures and management principles. As the number of visitors continues to increase, the USFS relies on cooperating partners such as local trail users, the Trail Riders of Houston, the Sam Houston Trails Coalition, local businesses, and Texas Parks and Wildlife to manage the trail system effectively. This trend toward fostering positive partnerships is critical to the long-term sustainability of all trails on National Forest lands as budgets and staff continue to decline.

Safe Recreation

As with all transportation programs, safety is a vital component. The sheer variety of trail types and recreation goals means that some trail activities do include strenuous efforts, journeying into remote country, and all the risks of the natural world. The goal for backcountry land managers is to reduce hazards and to warn trail users of dangers.

At the other end of the spectrum of trail activities are highly constructed urban trails. To make trail recreation more inclusive, planners are emphasizing routes that are easier to get to and safe to use. At the same time, people who are not outdoor enthusiasts are being courted by health interests who want to encourage more active living and social interaction. Another element is the aging population of active seniors who need safe facilities to participate in recreational activities.

To address these issues, many States use RTP funds for educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection. Safety is a key part of the training and resources provided by States and organizations for planning, managing, and promoting water trail facilities. OHV and snowmobile training and educational materials have been an important type of RTP expenditures in the safety area. The popularity of boating and designated water trails has also brought attention to safety issues on these water-based corridors.

The Viking Greenway is a publicly accessible natural surface trail on the 300-acre campus of the Latta School District. This community amenity promotes active living and outdoor recreation along with environmental stewardship and education. The trail's route traverses campus conservation areas that include woodlands, meadows, and even a boardwalk and overlook that engages the user with a pond habitat. Educational signs teach users of all ages about active living, reforestation, power, water, wildlife, meadows, walkability, and the benefits of connecting with nature. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the trail's value to the community is evident as a safe way to interact with the natural world for physical, mental, and emotional well-being.



Viking Greenway trailhead signage, SC
Photo Credit: Amanda Morrell, Stantec

Trails for All




The RTP has significantly contributed to a long-term trend to make communities, trails, and recreation facilities more available to all Americans. This means improving trails for persons with disabilities, but also understanding the needs of older people, families with children, and those who are new to trail activities or lack affordable access to trail opportunities.

As the demographics of residents and visitors evolve over time, public land managers are seeking ways to make trails more available to the public. Many RTP projects are seeking to connect with underserved populations, provide opportunities for public input on parks and facilities, and to involve a variety of disciplines in larger corridor planning.



Hardened surface trail improves access, DE
Photo Credit: David Bartoo DNREC

The Bryan's Field and Whitely Farms Trails are major trail loops in the Possum Hill Area of White Clay Creek State Park in Delaware. Situated between Paper Mill, Thompson Station, and Corner Ketch Roads, this area of the park hosts over 12 miles of natural surface trail that



 has been a favorite single-track trail destination for pedestrians and bikers for years. This trail loop system historically offered limited accessible opportunities. This  phase two project was a critical component to expanding hardened surface accessible single-track trail options for visitors. Project work realigned and upgraded 5,650 feet of three-foot-wide trail to address long standing erosion problems, improve accessibility, expand existing accessible trail, and create necessary links and updates to the local trail network. 


Workforce Development

Across the country, young people are exploring opportunities in the trail building and management industry to find long-term careers in resource management and outdoor recreation. Youth and conservation corps are important programs for teaching many of the needed skills, from familiar hand tools to heavy mechanized equipment. Corps members learn valuable lessons in working with different agencies and learning the skills required to be quality employees. In particular, corps organizations work to recruit and train economically and educationally disadvantaged young adults.

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, Section 1524, requires the DOT to encourage the States and regional transportation planning agencies to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with qualified youth service or conservation corps to perform appropriate projects. These projects include pedestrian and bicycle, transportation alternatives, and recreational trails.

Many RTP-funded projects involve young adults in entry-level positions. Besides construction techniques, those working on trail projects learn many other valuable skills, such as crew leadership and supervision, project management and logistics, environmental review requirements, and tracking accomplishments, materials, and future needs.

The Monadnock Trail Improvement Project worked with the Student Conservation Association (SCA) NH AmeriCorps to complete five 11-day hitches to address high priority maintenance issues, as outlined in the Monadnock State Park Management Plan, on the most trafficked trails within the park. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (Forest Society) commissioned a trails assessment that identified areas of highest need, and from that came the project priority list that informed the need for RTP funding and the SCA's scope of work.  

There is a great deal of wear and tear on trails within Monadnock State Park as it is claimed to be one of the most hiked mountains in North America. The majority of the 100,000 annual visitors begin their journey at park headquarters and head up the White Dot Trail before descending the White Cross Trail back to the parking lot. This high use has led to a very wide and eroded trail corridor that reaches 20 feet in width for stretches and has user-created braided side-paths that weave around challenging and high congestion spots. Hikers on the two trails must navigate exposed tree roots, slippery steep rock slabs, and jumbled rocks resembling a dry stream bed created by the heavy erosion of soil. These trail conditions have led to hiker injuries and recurring medical evacuations. With this concentrated use, the impetus of this work was to improve hiker safety and overall visitor experience. 



White Dot Trail staircase and crew, NH
Photo Credit: Zach Colatch, SCA

Nationwide Training and Research

FHWA uses one percent of the RTP funds for administrative, research, technical assistance, and training expenses. Expenditures include funds for the RTP website, which links to many [publications](#) developed through the U.S. Forest Service over the past 20 years, and the RTP database and annual report. In FY 2020, FHWA also supported:

- National Trails Training (American Trails)
- National Trails Day (American Hiking Society)
- Snowmobile Safety and Access (American Council of Snowmobile Associations)
- Off-Highway Vehicle User Training Ethics, Safety, and Access (Tread Lightly! with the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council)
- National Scenic and Historic Trails Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Program (Bureau of Land Management)
- National Trails System Information, Corridor Protection, and Training (Partnership for the National Trails System)
- Youth Service and Conservation Corps Workforce Development (The Corps Network)
- Forest Service Trail Training and Management
- Research on electric bicycles, trails and resilience, and tribal development of trails.



A packed workshop on trail maintenance at Thurston Hills Nature Area, OR
Photo Credit: Fraser MacDonald, Willamalane Park and Recreation District

National Trails Training

[American Trails](#) supports the National Trails Training Partnership, which includes a trails training website and information center (with the largest known [trail resource library](#)), supports monthly trail training webinars, and promotes trail accessibility. In 2020, starting in April, increased options for training were offered, including weekly [Advancing Trails Webinar Series](#) webinars in place of monthly webinars for the remainder of the year to assist with the many conferences that had been canceled or postponed due to COVID-19. In total, there were 34 webinars offered free to the public. Each webinar served 600-1,100 attendees. American Trails also built a searchable [Business Directory](#) of more than 2,300 businesses, organizations, and agencies across the nation. Recent efforts have begun a “[TrailsTraining.org](#)” website that will offer a collaborative platform providing the most up-to-date and relevant training opportunities, core competencies, best practices, research, and thought leadership in the greater trails industry.



Photo Credit: American Trails

National Trails Day

The [American Hiking Society](#) coordinates planning, outreach, and reporting for [National Trails Day](#) (NTD) each year. NTD increases public awareness, maintenance, and use of all kinds of trails—including recreational trails in and around urban and suburban areas used for transportation. In 2020, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, NTD was planned as a virtual event and promoted to 1.74 million individuals, 4,700 former event hosts and land managers, and 835 media contacts. Historically NTD has a social media reach of nearly 19 million people, a more limited reach occurred in 2020 as promotion was limited immediately before and through NTD to provide space conversations occurring online and in public spaces around racial justice.



Photo Credit: American Hiking Society

Snowmobile Safety and Access

The [American Council of Snowmobile Associations](#) (ACSA) operates a [snowmobile safety and resource information center](#), maintains a best practices library, identifies training opportunities, and develops and revises snowmobile safety and access materials. It hosts hundreds of downloadable education resources for snowmobilers and trail managers. One highlight of FY 2020 education product development included the production of five new 30-second Video Public Service Announcements (PSAs) addressing Impaired Operation, Speed Kills, Avalanche Safety, Ice Safety, and Trespass. The Video PSAs were posted on YouTube as well as the ACSA website and Facebook and were shared on the websites and social media sites of State Associations and Snowmobile Clubs across the snowbelt States — resulting in over 25,000 views.



Photo Credit: American Council of Snowmobile Associations

Off-Highway Vehicle User Training Ethics, Safety, and Access

[Tread Lightly!, Inc.](#) operates [Tread Trainer](#), a train-the-trainer OHV user ethics training program. In 2020, Tread Lightly! trainings and messaging educated 170,538 individuals in 43 States about responsible, sustainable OHV use. Participants were taught off-highway ethics through online courses, online and in-person trainings, and attended events where the Tread Lightly! educational messages were shared. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tread Lightly's in-person impacts were substantially impacted and education efforts were redirected to have a greater online presence.

The [National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council](#) (NOHVCC) operates an OHV safety and resource information center, maintains a best practices library, identifies training opportunities, and develops and revises OHV safety and access materials. In 2020, NOHVCC's [online resource center](#) was accessed over 120,000 times. NOHVCC's most read article in 2020 was [For Those Who Choose to Ride During "Social Distancing" – Some Guidelines](#). These were the first guidelines directed at OHV enthusiasts dealing with recreation during a pandemic of which NOHVCC is aware. With in-person meetings limited, NOHVCC engaged the OHV community through 12 webinars on topics related to safe and responsible OHV use. NOHVCC also heavily participated in National Trailer Safety Week to improve roadway safety by closing the gap of communication between trailer manufacturers, dealers, and end-users of trailers.



Photo Credit: National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council

National Scenic and Historic Trails Inventory, Assessment, and Monitoring Program

The [Bureau of Land Management](#) (BLM) completed a methodology and field guide to inventory and monitor trails, focusing on National Scenic and Historic Trails. This methodology can help all kinds of trails, and assist State grantees and Federal Land Management Agencies in the administration of their recreational trail programs by contributing to research and technical assistance. The final methodology and field guide technical report is available in [BLM's Technical References Library](#) under National Scenic and Historic Trails Management.



Photo Credit: American Trails

National Trails System Information, Corridor Protection, and Training

The [Partnership for the National Trails System](#) (PNTS) continued a two-year project to build organizational and agency capacity to administer, protect, manage, and sustain National Scenic and Historic Trails. As part of this work, PNTS, in collaboration with FHWA and other partners, developed a “connectivity analysis” to identify gaps in trail protection, and prepared a draft trail protection handbook, a draft status report on trail protection, and a series of [case studies](#) that illustrate how partners can work together to enhance public access and safety by providing permanent off-road routes for national trails. As a result of Covid-19, PNTS held its first virtual workshop, which was attended by more than 200 national trail administrators, managers, and volunteers from across the country. PNTS pivoted its Trail Apprentice Program to introduce 23 young professionals to potential career paths in trails and public lands. Finally, PNTS published [Pathways Across America](#), a magazine that provides news and information about National Scenic and Historic Trails.



Photo Credit: Partnership for the National Trails System

Youth Service and Conservation Corps Workforce Development

Service and Conservation Corps were resilient in an unprecedented year, and many accomplished critical trail and transportation work safely and efficiently within their communities. [The Corps Network](#) (TCN) provided guidance and resources to State transportation and recreation partners and Corps on how to strengthen existing relationships and make new connections in these challenging times. TCN developed a new toolkit, *Trail and Transportation Projects for Service and Conservation Corps*, to provide the institutional knowledge and framework needed for RTP-specific contract and agreement negotiations. Some Corps used this guide to help develop new RTP proposals, pursue education award grants, and revise their financial and agreement processes to better align with State program standards. In cases where projects and agreements were cancelled or postponed due to COVID, many Corps found ways to remain engaged with their partners while providing meaningful experiences for their members through RTP education grants. These grants provided new trail-related training experiences and certifications to Corpsmembers. Additionally, TCN hosted more than 10 virtual webinars, teleconferences, and presentations to disseminate information on topics such as how to develop strategic partnerships with Corps, how to engage a Corps in project planning and implementation, how to develop career pathways for Corpsmembers, and how to start a Corps program with a State Department of Transportation. The Trails and Transportation page on TCN’s Website (<https://corpsnetwork.org/our-impact/trails-and-transportation/>) continues to grow with additional documents, recorded presentations, and Corpsmember project videos. In 2020, the webpage received 500+ unique views and an average of three minutes of page engagement per visitor.



Photo Credit: Fresno EOC Local Conservation Corps

Forest Service Trail Training and Management

FHWA began a new Interagency Agreement with the [U.S. Forest Service](#) to enhance trail planning, design, project development, construction, maintenance, and operation through the development and dissemination of trail training and management materials. The USFS developed many other [trail publications and resources](#) under previous agreements. The new agreement supports: trail program and information management to develop training and skill competencies, trail maintenance and field skills to achieve sustainable motorized and nonmotorized trails, and volunteer and partner management, coordination, and certifications. The training and information management will help trail managers improve safety (both on trails and where trails cross highways or transportation infrastructure), infrastructure (through resilient and sustainable trail practices), innovation (through the development of, and training in, emerging and contemporary techniques), and accountability (through improved information management, and an improved ability to maintain trail infrastructure).

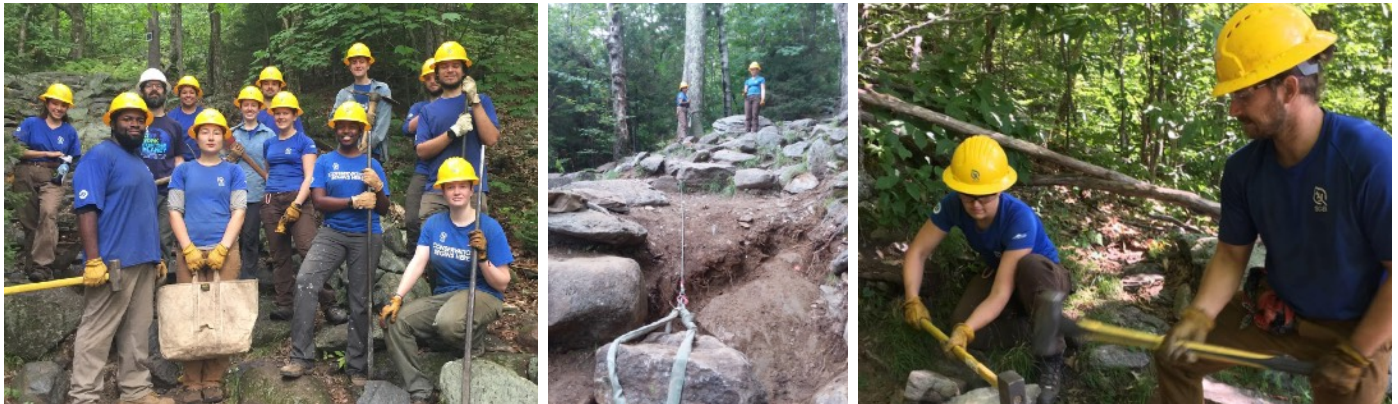


Photo Credit: Student Conservation Association

Research

In 2020, FHWA began trail research funded in part through RTP administrative funds.

- **Electric bicycles (ebikes):** This project will identify existing and potential impacts related to ebike use in a variety of contexts, including on trails, public lands, and urban, suburban, and rural areas. It will study ebike safety, ridership trends, regulation practices, and impacts to infrastructure and natural resources. Case studies will include ebikes in relation to accessibility, equity, freight, health, and tourism. This project will inform additional ebike research funded through FHWA's Federal Lands Highway Program.
- *Trails and Resilience* will investigate how trails can be designed to be resilient to natural hazards (floods, fires, other natural disruptions), and how trails can be designed to support emergency response and recovery (access, evacuation, search and rescue, staging).
- *Tribal Development of Trails and other Dedicated Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure* will provide information and resources for Tribes. Some Tribes have used RTP funds to provide safe transportation and access to outdoor recreation. The research includes information on the health and economic benefits of trails, funding, partnerships, and resources for trail planning. This research will be informed by and contribute to the Federal Lands research on Making Transportation Planning Applicable in Tribal Communities.



Photo Credit: Gwyneth Moody, Chattahoochee River National Water Trail, GA

Conclusion

The RTP funding has been an essential ingredient in creating and improving over 26,000 trail-related projects nationwide, including urban greenways, nature centers, and horse, hiking, mountain bike, and motorized trails, as well as snow and water routes. States are able to add miles of trails and provide funding for maintenance and restoration of existing trails on Federal, State, and local public lands through grants to local project sponsors.

In response to the worldwide pandemic, people are seeking out trails in extraordinary numbers. Demand for both trails and parks is surging, and the need for more green space close to home in every community is clear. The RTP has provided much needed funding for local and State agencies to respond effectively



*Building our workforce through technical trail construction, WA
Photo Credit: Northwest Youth Corps*

The RTP provides the most consistent source of funding needed to address the trail maintenance backlog in the U.S. Without this program, the nation's trail infrastructure would not serve to enhance health, enjoyment, and transportation options for all Americans.

Projects using RTP funds also illustrate a variety of ways that these trails address the DOT strategic goals:

- Safety, by providing well-maintained trails and education;
- Infrastructure, through projects that connect communities and enhance public lands across America;
- Innovation, through trail assessment and communication technology, and through public-private partnerships and workforce development; and
- Accountability, by sharing best practices for trail management and effective program delivery.

For FY 2020, the Federal government authorized \$82.4 million for the RTP. These funds come from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, which collects an estimated \$281 million per year in motor fuel excise tax from nonhighway recreational fuel use. These funds represent fuel used in recreational activities with snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway light trucks. Each State develops and manages its own program of project selection and grant administration, in partnership with communities, agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

A review of RTP-funded projects reveals many benefits to employment, environmental education, health, resource conservation, and community development. The program has encouraged productive cooperation among agencies and jurisdictions, facilitated healthy outdoor recreation, and supported economic activity in communities.

Like other Highway Trust Fund programs, the RTP provides benefits to nearly every county in the United States. It is also the foundation for State trail programs across the country. Every State has established its own initiatives to develop and improve trails for all users. The RTP Database and Image Library have many examples of RTP-funded projects gathered from all States and the District of Columbia, categorized by State and by permissible use, that demonstrate the value of these projects.

RTP funding is highly leveraged by matching funds from agencies, organizations, and businesses. Total RTP funding has been nearly \$1.5 billion with additional matching funds of \$1.1 billion, showing that each RTP dollar was matched by 73 cents with other funds. Further program efficiencies are seen by the use of youth conservation and service corps working in cooperation with private contractors, agency or community staff, and volunteers.

In every State, diverse user groups have joined in support of local as well as regional efforts to meet the trail needs of all users. Because the funds are distributed for both motorized and nonmotorized trail work, all trail interests have incentives to cooperate and learn from each other.

All of these trends are helping create a climate for improving the design of trails, while exploring innovative materials, technology, and techniques. Through RTP-supported training, the expertise of organizations and individuals is being made available to project sponsors in every region.

Resources

For more information on many topics related to RTP funding as well as technical resources on trails of all types, see the following resources.

Recreational Trails Program

Recreational Trails Program Database: <https://www.rtpinfo.org>

The Recreational Trails Program website for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/

FHWA guidance and policies for RTP: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/guidance/

For policies and funding in every State, see the State RTP Administrators List to find program contacts and websites: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/rtpstate.cfm

The Coalition for Recreational Trails gives awards each year for outstanding projects funded through State RTP grants: <https://www.americantrails.org/communications/awards/crtAwards>

Accessible Trails

FHWA guidance to provide best practices for trail accessibility, and trail design, construction, and maintenance:

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/guidance/accessibility_guidance/

U.S. Forest Service trail and outdoor facility accessibility guidelines:

<https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility/>

More resources on accessible trails: <https://www.americantrails.org/resources/query/?trails%5B%5D=665>

Trail Planning, Development, and Management

For many resources on trail planning, design, construction, management, accessibility, funding, training, for both motorized and nonmotorized trails, see the National Trails Training Partnership Resources and Library on the American Trails website: <https://www.americantrails.org/resources/planning-design>

Youth and Conservation Corps

FHWA Youth Workforce Development Resources:

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/guidance/youth_workforcedev.cfm

FHWA Youth Service and Conservation Corps Questions and Answers:

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/qandas/qayscc.cfm>

A guide to transportation funding programs for service and conservation corps; “Building the Future: A Guide for Utilizing the Recreational Trails Program to Partner with Service and Conservation Corps”:

[https://corpsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Building-the-Future RTP-Partnership-Guide 5.13.19.pdf](https://corpsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Building-the-Future_RTP-Partnership-Guide_5.13.19.pdf)

More about opportunities with Corps nationwide at The Corps Network:

<https://www.corpsnetwork.org>

**Trails provided a light at the
end of the tunnel for a
challenging 2020**



*West looking east tunnel interior of the Blue Ridge Tunnel
Rehabilitation & Trail Project, VA
Photo Credit: Nelson County*

Technical Assistance

Recreational Trails Program Database Website: <https://www.rtpinfo.org>

Technical Questions: Call the number or send an email to the address below.

RTP Database Technical Assistance Section

American Trails

P.O. Box 491797

Redding, CA 96049-1797

(530) 605-4395 | info@recreationaltrailsinfo.org

Website issues: Write to webmaster@recreationaltrailsinfo.org

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