

# Millennium Trails: "Honor the Past, Imagine the Future".

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"Millennium Trails will be very tangible gifts to the future. We will walk on them and hike on them and bike on them. They will be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. But in an important way, they represent more than the tangible effect of the trail. They represent a commitment and an investment in the kind of country we want in the next century." --First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Millennium Trails Announcement Event, October 5, 1998, Baltimore and Annapolis Trail

To engage all Americans in marking the new millennium in ways that will leave a lasting legacy, President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton created a multi-program initiative with the unifying theme "Honor the Past, Imagine the Future." Millennium Trails is one of these programs, involving a partnership between the White House Millennium Council, the U.S. Department of Transportation, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and many other agencies and organizations (e.g., the American Express Company, the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Hiking Society, the American Association of Leisure and Recreation, Altrec.com, World T.E.A.M. Sports). This article will describe the major elements of the program and, hopefully, spark interest among AAPERD members and encourage them to become leaders in the growing trails movement.

The Millennium Trails initiative promotes trails as a means of preserving open spaces, interpreting history and culture, enhancing recreation and tourism, improving physical fitness, and connecting our daily lives with the natural environment. Under this initiative, more than 2,000 trails across America will be recognized, enhanced, or built as part of our nation's legacy for the new millennium. These include hiking trails, bicycle paths, greenways and scenic byways through rural and urban landscapes, and cultural and heritage trails that preserve and commemorate major events in our nation's history. The promise and challenge of Millennium Trails is to preserve and enhance a precious part of our national heritage for future generations of Americans to treasure and enjoy. The core of the initiative centers on trails in three categories: National, Legacy, and Community Millennium Trails.

## National Millennium Trails

Sixteen National Millennium Trails were designated by Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater on June 26, 1999, at the International Trails and Greenways Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The National Millennium Trails are visionary, ongoing projects that celebrate defining aspects of America's history and culture and the great diversity, complexity, and grandeur of our nation's trail system. In his conference speech, Secretary Slater said, "The National Millennium Trails connect our nation's landscape, heritage, and culture and demonstrate our national commitment to improving the quality of life for all Americans.

The 16 National Millennium Trails are:

American Discovery Trail--"From sea to shining sea" becomes a reality as the American Discovery Trail crosses the nation on a continuous line of existing trails, rail-trails, canal towpaths, forest lanes, and country roads. When complete, the trail will cover over 6,500 miles, connecting the past that we honor to the future envisioned in our imaginations.

Appalachian National Scenic Trail--This trail reaffirms our love and respect for the great beauty of our land. It is the nation's first major recreational trail--not a route of exploration, settlement, or trade, but rather a 20th-century recognition that we will have no trails in modern times unless we purposefully build and protect them. Stretching over 2,000 miles from Georgia to Maine, the Appalachian Trail is a narrow footpath traversing the Appalachian Mountains' ridgecrests and major valleys. The need to protect the Appalachian Trail from encroaching development led to the passage of the National Trails System Act in 1968.

The Cascadia Marine Trail--A water trail in the Pacific Northwest currently enjoyed by canoeists, kayakers, and other watercraft enthusiasts as they explore the beauty of Puget Sound and Mount Rainier. It follows the wake of inlets and coves that originally marked a Native American water trade system.

Civil War Discovery Trail--Identifies and thematically connects the battlefields, military routes, and sites of historic significance from the nation's most serious breakdown in domestic tranquility. It provides a lens through which contemporary Americans can view the war that tore the nation apart and offers lessons for a future without such rifts.

The East Coast Greenway--Sweeps the Atlantic Coast from Maine to Florida, connecting 15 of America's most populous states and virtually every major city on the eastern seaboard. When complete, it will incorporate scores of currently disconnected local trails and traverse a remarkable range of urban, suburban, and rural landscapes, providing recreation, transportation, and history lessons to millions of east-coast Americans.

The Freedom Trail--Connects 15 sites in old Boston that capture America's revolutionary history, including Faneuil Hall, where plans were laid for the famous "tea party," and Old North Church, watched closely one night by Paul Revere as he rowed with muffled oar to the Charlestown shore.

The Great Western Trail--Follows the spine of the Rocky Mountains and stretches across America on a north/ south axis from the Canadian to the Mexican border. It traverses lands managed by the federal government, five states, and the Navajo Indian Nation. Its unique design of parallel routes, accommodating trail users with different abilities, gives a wide range of Americans access to the beauty of the West.

Hatfield-McCoy Trail System--Uses an entirely new approach to trail building by forging a partnership between government agencies and the corporate owners of the coal fields in southwest West Virginia and surrounding states. Old railbeds, abandoned logging roads, and other unused routes that once transported the region's resources to industrial America will be recycled as a 2,000-mile trail system accommodating all-terrain vehicle riders, equestrians, mountain bikers, and hikers.

Iditarod National Historic Trail--Surveyed in 1908 by the U.S. Government, the Iditarod is America's only remaining frontier trail. Its 938 miles connect remote settlements, marking the path of the 1899 gold rush to Anvil Creek and the 1925 dogsled mission-of-mercy that brought lifesaving serum to diphtheria-ridden Nome, Alaska. Winter travelers move along the trail on sleds, snowshoes, snowmobiles, and cross-country skis. Warm-weather visitors and natives explore the trail via similar modes of conveyance, using watercraft where the trailway has melted.

The International Express--The Number Seven Train through Queens, New York, connects a series of immigrant neighborhoods and serves as a metaphor for the migration of people from all over the world to America. Pakistani, Irish, Romanian, African American, Italian, Korean, Hispanic, Indian, Argentinean, and other ethnic neighborhoods are available for exploration and cultural discovery on this route from Sunnyside to Flushing.

The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail--Stretches 1,200 miles from the Mexican border to San Francisco, marking the route of exploration and settlement taken by the Spanish as they claimed the Pacific coast.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail--Commemorates the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804-06), which covered 3,700 miles of American frontier from St. Louis, Missouri, to the mouth of the Columbia River in present-day Oregon. It opened the remainder of the continent to EuroAmerican settlement.

The Mississippi River Trail--Will follow the nation's largest river from Minneapolis to New Orleans when complete. Envisioned as a bicycling route that will touch upon the cultural, historic, and natural richness of the Mississippi River Valley, this trail will allow Americans to experience first-hand what Mark Twain described as the "body of the nation."

The North Country National Scenic Trail--Traces a narrow route through the unique topography of the northern rim states, connecting over 160 state parks, forests, and wildlife areas from New York to North Dakota. This footpath will provide hiking opportunities through seven states, eventually covering 4,600 miles.

The Underground Railroad--Follows multiple secret routes that originated in the South, intertwined throughout the North, and eventually led to Canada, the western territories, Mexico, the Caribbean, and freedom for those people held in bondage below the Mason-Dixon line.

The Unicoi Turnpike--Dating from the first millennium, this 68-mile trail carried the Cherokee people from the flatlands east of the Great Smoky Mountains to the hills of east Tennessee. It provided similar passage for European settlers in colonial and post-revolutionary times. In our day, the Unicoi leads hikers into remote trailside communities that still reflect Cherokee and Appalachian cultures.

#### Millennium Legacy Trails

Millennium Legacy Trails represent the spirit of individual states and regions and include many different kinds of pathways: rail-trails, greenways, historic and cultural trails, recreation paths, waterways, and alternative transportation corridors. The 50 Millennium Legacy Trails were formally announced in a ceremony at the White House on October 21, 1999. Nominations had been received from the governors of 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

#### Community Millennium Trails

Community Millennium Trails will include thousands of trails across the country that commemorate and interpret the communities they serve. Many trails in this category were made part of a grand Millennium Trails celebration on June 3, 2000, in conjunction with the annual National Trails Day events organized by the American Hiking Society.

#### Partners

To maximize the benefits of the initiative and to offer the best possible support to those trails receiving the Millennium Trails designation, an impressive group of corporate partners and other supporters has contributed to the program. The two largest grants, from the American Express Company and the National Endowment for the Arts, are discussed in detail below, along with the role of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

U.S. Department of Transportation. Since the passage of the landmark Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and its successor legislation, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century,

transportation funds have become the largest source of public-sector money for trails. Building on this momentum in trail construction, the U.S. Department of Transportation became the White House's primary partner in the Millennium Trails initiative. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater committed over \$5 million dollars for the program, including \$1 million for program management and more than \$4 million in funding for trail projects. These funds and other contributions were used to assemble the project's management team. Major support contracts were established with the leaders of America's trails movement, with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy as the lead nonprofit partner among a consortium that includes the American Hiking Society, American Trails, and the National Recreation and Parks Association .

American Express company. The American Express Company has been designated the Lead Corporate Partner of the program. The company has a distinguished record of support for the trails and greenways movement in America, and this new partnership expands on that commitment. American Express contributed \$500,000 in grants to the National Millennium Trails and selected Millennium Legacy Trails. These grants will help the managers of these trails in their efforts to preserve and expand their trail systems. Additional funds from this sponsorship have enhanced elements of the program itself, including the Millennium Trails web site.

National Endowment for the Arts. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has entered a cooperative agreement with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) to fund the creation of community-centered arts projects as essential components of the Millennium Legacy Trails. In recognition of the unique ability of trails to help us interpret our history and culture, the NEA, through the NASAA, will make \$10,000 grants available to all 50 Legacy Trails, enabling the trail managers to undertake any of a broad range of projects that will tell the stories of the trails and of the people who use them. In addition, the NASAA is conducting a national campaign to raise matching funds for this Art on Millennium Trails program.

In his remarks at the White House announcing this contribution, NEA Chairman Bill Ivey stated, "The National Endowment for the Arts is pleased to provide opportunities for artists to work with recreation and environmental groups, trail managers, and public officials in creating high-quality art on the designated Legacy Trails for the next millennium. These works will enhance America's communities and strengthen each state's cultural heritage." These projects--which may include functional and purely aesthetic works of art, interpretive cultural material, landscape art, distinctive trail markers, and the appropriate restoration of historic structures--have the potential to transform our national landscape. They will enable everyone to experience these trails, not only as a form of recreation, but also as a journey of discovery.

Other Partners. Other organizations, such as the American Association for Leisure and Recreation (AALR), are playing key roles in creating Millennium Trails and ensuring that this initiative continues into the future. The executive director of AALR has developed a book about the Millennium Trails, to be published by Sagamore Press. A portion of the proceeds from this book will go towards creating a long-term partnership between AALR and the American Hiking Society to cooperatively promote National Family Recreation Day and National Trails Day each year.

Additional help came from World T.E.A.M. Sports, which partnered with the Millennium Trails program to produce a coast-to-coast ride for disabled athletes, who traveled across America by trail to celebrate National Trails Day 2000 in St. Louis. Altrec.com, an internet company specializing in Outdoor recreation, is providing high-tech images for each of the 16 National Millennium Trails to enable viewers to see the incredible scope of these projects. National Geographic and National Public Radio are working with Altrec.com on this effort. The National Park Service has re-established the National Recreation Trails

designation program in order to continue the momentum created by the Community Millennium Trails initiative.

### Next Steps

Imagine a national network of trails connecting every community from coast to coast. While many people might think that such a goal is impossible, a successful model already exists. In England, an organization called Sustrans (Sustainable Transportation) began developing a national system of trails in the late 1980s. Their goal was to build a 5,000-mile National Cycle Network, with each mile-marker designed as a work of art honoring the past, present, and future of the communities along the trail. At the same time, England created a National Millennium Lottery that funded major national projects such as the Millennium Dome. Sustrans received more than [pound]43.5 million (or approximately \$63 million) from this lottery, and the National Cycle Network opened in 2000 as a result.

This project proves that national-scale projects are possible, and that the Millennium Trails effort is on the right path. While many of the National Millennium Trails (such as the 6,400-mile American Discovery Trail) will rival the size of the Sustrans project by themselves, there is hope that a fully connected national system of trails can be achieved. (For more information on the trails movement, see figure 1.)

Trails improve all aspects of our lives: environment, health, fitness, mobility, safety, economy, education, tourism, culture, and so on. Thus it is appropriate to celebrate the success of the Millennium Trails program, from its initiation in 1998 to the great events and projects that have occurred since then. Every person and organization now has the opportunity to become part of the trails movement.

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