

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM TALKING POINTS

BACKGROUND

- The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) was created in 1991, reauthorized in 1998, and again in 2005. The RTP has an excellent record of effective use of federal funds over two decades.
- RTP applies the “user-pay/user-benefit” philosophy of the Highway Trust Fund, returning federal tax on fuel used for nonhighway recreation to the states for trail projects. Program implementation is consistent in practice with other expenditures from the Highway Trust Fund. Although the gas tax supporting the Fund is paid primarily by gas-using vehicles, resources are shared with other users of both surface transportation facilities and recreational trails -- the goal of each being a balanced system.
- Project categories eligible for funding are many and varied, giving states the flexibility they need to administer state trail programs. A few examples include: trail maintenance and restoration; new trail construction; and trail construction and maintenance equipment. State administrative and educational program costs are capped at 7% and 5% respectively.
- Half of all funding is apportioned to the states equally. The remaining 50% is apportioned among eligible states based upon nonhighway recreational fuel use in each of those states during the preceding year.
- Thirty percent of funds are to be spent for uses relating to motorized recreation; 30% are to be spent for uses relating to nonmotorized recreation. In addition, 40% shall be used for projects that facilitate diverse trail use.
- RTP is the foundation for state trail programs across the country. It leverages hundreds of millions of dollars of additional support from other sources for trails, encourages productive cooperation among trail users, and facilitates healthy outdoor recreation and associated, badly needed economic activity in countless communities.
- Over 20 years, RTP funding has grown to represent a more equitable portion of the total fuel taxes paid by nonhighway recreationists, although that portion is still less than 42% of the total taxes paid annually by nonhighway recreationists. More than 13,000 funded projects have been documented nationwide. The last year of SAFETEA-LU (multi-year transportation authorization legislation) funded RTP at \$85 million. Since 1991, the RTP has received almost \$906 million in federal funding.

TRAIL COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Eliminating dedicated funding for the RTP, as the Senate transportation bill (MAP-21) currently does, violates the user-pay/user-benefit philosophy undergirding the nation’s surface transportation program and converts a legitimate user fee into an unfair tax, with recreationists subsidizing commercial and private highway users. At the same time, it will seriously damage, if not destroy, the balanced system of trails for all users that the RTP has allowed the states to develop and maintain. Organized trail planning and development will simply vanish in many areas of the country.
- The de facto elimination of the RTP, which is what the Senate bill’s elimination of dedicated funding will actually accomplish, represents a substantial new tax on motorized recreation enthusiasts. Ending dedicated funding for RTP takes these gas taxes away from the people who pay them. Ending dedicated funding for RTP is bad public policy and just plain wrong.

TRAIL COMMUNITY REQUESTS

- As a user-pay/user-benefit program, dedicated funding for the RTP should be included in the Senate transportation bill (MAP-21). Will you support Senator Amy Klobuchar’s amendment (co-sponsored by Senators Michael Bennet, Richard Burr, Jim Risch, Bernie Sanders, Jeanne Shaheen, Debbie Stabenow, and Mark Udall) on the Senate floor to include dedicated funding for the RTP in the bill?

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COALITION FOR RECREATIONAL TRAILS

The Coalition for Recreational Trails (CRT) is a federation of national and regional trail-related organizations. Its members work together to build awareness and understanding of the Recreational Trails Program, which returns federal gasoline taxes paid by off-highway recreationists to the states for trail development and maintenance. CRT was formed in 1992 following the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) to ensure that the National Recreational Trails Fund (now known as the Recreational Trails Program or RTP) established by that legislation received adequate funding. During the six years of ISTEA, CRT worked to ensure that program was continued and strengthened as part of the ISTEA reauthorization process. Following the 1998 passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the 2005 approval of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), both of which significantly increased RTP program funding, CRT's efforts have been focused on supporting its continued, effective implementation and its extension and enhancement through the next round of transportation legislation.

National Members

All-Terrain Vehicle Association
American Council of Snowmobile Associations
American Hiking Society
American Horse Council
American Motorcyclist Association
American Recreation Coalition
American Trails
Americans for Responsible Recreational Access
Back Country Horsemen of America
Bikes Belong
BlueRibbon Coalition
The Corps Network
Equine Land Conservation Resource
International Association of Snowmobile Administrators
International Mountain Bicycling Association
International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association
Motorcycle Industry Council

National Association of Recreation Resource Planners
National Association of State Park Directors
National Association of State Trail Administrators
National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council
National Recreation and Park Association
Partnership for the National Trails System
Professional Trail Builders Association
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association
SnowSports Industries America
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America
Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
Student Conservation Association
Tread Lightly!
United Four Wheel Drive Associations