

BUILDING A NORTHEAST GREENWAY SYSTEM

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Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is the largest and most widely respected trails organization in America, and the only national group devoted to preserving railroad corridors by converting unused and neglected rail lines to multi-use trails. Before RTC was founded, more than one-half of the nation's 300,000-mile railroad network lay unused or abandoned and there were fewer than 200 known rail-trails across the country.

Today, America has nearly 1,200 open rail-trails spanning more than 12,500 miles, and approximately 17,000 miles of potential rail-trails in various stages of development. To keep up with the demand for trails in communities across the country, RTC established field offices in California, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Massachusetts. By partnering with citizen groups, public agencies, railroads and others organizations, RTC's national and field offices have catalyzed the building of rail-trails in all 50 states.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) helps communities make their rail-trail visions a reality. But trail building can be an arduous process, often taking years from inception to ribbon cutting, and encountering barriers along the way. Here are some of the ways RTC excels in community outreach:

- **PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.** Support community trail-building efforts and fulfill goal to increase the nation's rail-trail inventory to 15,000 miles by providing technical assistance (fielding more than 30 technical assistance calls and e-mails each month) and in-depth, project-specific support such as trail acquisition, design and maintenance issues.
- **PROMOTING TRAILS AND GREENWAYS.** Organize rallies, testify at public meetings and speak at events.
- **PROTECTING RAIL-TRAILS IN COURT AND IN LEGISLATURE.** Defend the important federal funding program that supports community trails and advocate for trail-friendly policies at the national, state and local level. Assist in court cases with national results for trail development.
- **CREATING TOOLS FOR ADVOCATES.** Provide the tools needed by advocates to make the case for trails, such as studies, fact sheets, talking points and research on issues such as brownfields liability.

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

RTC's New England field office works diligently every day to help communities build trails. Accomplishments over the past year include:

- Organizing TrailLink 2003: Designing for the Future, RTC's International Trails and Greenways Conference in Providence, R.I., attended by more than 350 advocates, government officials, trail builders and designers, and health officials.
- Initiating new local trail organizations in communities such as Ware, Concord and Leominster, Mass.

- Playing an instrumental role in creating the Rail-Trail/Bicycle/Pedestrian Caucus in the Massachusetts State House, and the Governor's Task Force on Trails and Greenways to help break down government barriers to trail building.
- Working with a diverse coalition to develop and launch Healthy Maine Walks, a statewide program that promotes physical activity by encouraging communities to designate walking paths.

CURRENT PROJECTS FOR RTC'S NEW ENGLAND OFFICE

- **Protect Transportation Enhancements (TE)** — Created by Congress in 1991, TE is the largest federal program that funds local transportation-related projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, rail-trails, and scenic and historic preservation. In 2002, New England states received \$34.4 million in TE funds for these important projects. Despite its wide popularity the TE program came under attack in the U.S. House of Representatives in summer 2003 and future threats are anticipated. RTC is working at the national and state level to protect Transportation Enhancements. The New England field office will continue to generate support for the program through community awareness efforts and by enlisting the support of advocates and politicians who believe in transportation options and livable communities.
- **Concord River Greenway** — RTC's New England office is partnering with the Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust to develop an urban greenway in the City of Lowell. This will be accomplished through neighborhood-based organizing, outreach and planning for the development of a multiuse pedestrian/bicycle path. The project's ultimate goal is to transform the Concord River from what has historically been seen as a boundary between neighborhoods into a shared natural resource that unites these communities and connects them to broader regional resources accessible from their own front door.
- **Massachusetts Central Rail-Trail** — RTC's New England office is partnering with communities along this 103-mile rail corridor to create Massachusetts' longest rail-trail that will eventually connect the Boston suburbs to Northampton and serve as the spine of a larger trails and greenways network in the state. As part of this, we are assisting the town of Ware in the development of their 3.3-mile section of the rail-trail that will provide a non-motorized connection to the town of Hardwick, create a public recreation area, increase opportunities for physical activity and boost economic development in the area. For this project, RTC will spearhead the creation of a local advocacy organization, increase public outreach and help town officials with trail development issues and help town officials with trail development issues.
- **Three Community Trail** — RTC's New England office helped jumpstart coordination between Salisbury, Amesbury and Newburyport, Mass., to create a larger network of connected on-road and off-road bicycling facilities. The current focus of our work is on Salisbury; providing technical assistance to boost advocacy efforts, create a fundraising plan and develop a trail system vision for the community.
- **Regional Tool Box** — At RTC's international conference in June 2003, discussions between RTC, government officials and trail advocates made clear that tools such as instructional brochures and videos, fact sheets, funding sources, state and regional contacts and other resources are needed to help bridge the gap when trail projects cross political jurisdictions. In response, RTC is creating a New England "tool box," which can be replicated in other regions, to aid organizations and individuals trying to connect trails across state, regional or international borders.
- **Rail-Trail Conversion Resource Guide** — RTC's New England office and the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to develop a federal resource guide and state policy and program proposals around brownfields liability issues that effect the conversion of MBTA-owned corridors into community trails. This project will remove a major barrier to trail development in Massachusetts and serve as an example for other states.