



Montana Trails, Recreation and Park Association
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The Honorable Gregg Gianforte
U.S. House of Representatives
1222 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2020

Dear Mr. Gianforte,

On behalf of the Montana Trails, Recreation and Parks Association, we write to express support for the **Investing in a New Vision for the Environment and Surface Transportation in America (INVEST in America) Act**. This act, in part, will provide direct competitive grants to governments to build safe and connected shared use paths and will provide grants to states, local communities and trail associations to build and maintain recreational trails and shared use paths.

The Act will provide funding nationally for active transportation networks providing walking and biking infrastructure so that people can safely travel between home and the places they want to go within their communities such as jobs, schools, parks, shopping and transit. It will enhance public health and economic well-being of rural and urban communities and help in connecting backcountry and front country environments.

Nearly half of all trips Americans take are within a 20-minute bicycle ride and more than 20 percent of all trips are within a 20-minute walk. Shifting some of these short trips from driving to walking and bicycling can effectively reduce pollution and traffic congestion, while increasing physical activity levels.

The Act would ensure that the remarkable successes of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) will continue and provide safe, enjoyable trails and access to the Great Outdoors for Montanans. Funding for this program comes from the federal gas tax paid for gas used in off-highway vehicles including OHVs, UTVs, snowmobiles and other off-highway motorized trail technologies. RTP ensures funds for development and maintenance of all types of trails including non-motorized, motorized and diversified use.

Currently \$84 million has been appropriated nationally for this program. Montana's annual share is approximately \$1.5 million. Local communities, government agencies and trail organizations request \$3 million annually. In addition many choose to not apply because of the competition for the small amount available. A report published in 2018, *Montana Trails In Crisis*, says that in the period 2014-2018, 128 application for RTP funds could not be funded resulting in a lost value of \$13.8 million in trail projects.

Montana has proven that RTP dollars can be put to great use for improving trail infrastructure. From 1993 to 2018, over \$23 million has been granted to Montana through RTP. Those funds have been a critical alternative funding source for federal land manager's trail programs during a time of declining agency budgets. Moreover, these RTP funds have also enabled dozens of organizations that run



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volunteer programs to get thousands of citizens out onto their public lands, volunteering, giving their time and sweat to improve motorized and non-motorized trails all across the state. Fifty percent of trail maintenance that occurs on Region 1 of the US Forest Service is accomplished with volunteer labor. RTP dollars are not a hand-out. They require a minimum of a 20% match and have an enormous return on investment.

We anticipate that the current amount appropriated for RTP is much less than the actual amount paid for the federal gas tax for gas used in OHVs. The Act requests an increase in RTP funding and comprehensive studies to accurately assess fuels used in OHVs!

The passage of the Act will give people access to affordable, safe and healthy activities. Current federal programs are essential to provide resources for trails and shared use paths, but completing Montana's active transportation and recreation system will take far too many decades without supplemental federal investment focused on seeding a federal/state/local partnership to connect existing facilities.

Please support the **Invest In America Act**. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Whitaker".

Michael Whitaker

President of Montana Trails, Recreation, and Parks Association