

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

- The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) was established by a provision of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and reauthorized in 1998 as part of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).
- The legislation applies the “user-pay/user-benefit” philosophy of the Highway Trust Fund to return monies to the states for maintenance and construction of trails, thus benefitting those who pay the federal motorfuel tax for nonhighway recreation uses. A Congressionally mandated study, conducted by Oak Ridge National Laboratory for the Federal Highway Administration, supported an estimate of \$167 million annually in Highway Trust Fund receipts attributable to nonhighway recreational activities. A subsequent review has found that the estimate could be as high as **\$286 million annually**.
- Eligible projects include: maintenance and restoration of existing recreational trails; development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages for recreational trails; purchase and lease of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment; construction of new recreational trails (with some specific requirements when federal land is involved); and acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property for recreational trails or trail corridors. State administrative and educational program costs are capped at 7% and 5% respectively. States are encouraged to give priority consideration to environmental-mitigation projects.
- Under ISTEA, a total of \$37.5 million was made available for the program. Under TEA-21, \$270 million in funding was available over six years. Up to 1½% can be used by the Department of Transportation to cover administrative costs. The remainder is apportioned to the states as follows: 50% divided equally among eligible states; 50% divided among eligible states in amounts proportionate to the degree of 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 recreational trail use within a recreational trail corridor, trailside or trailhead.
- The Recreational Trails Program has had a dramatic and positive impact on the quality of life in America. It has produced improvements through more than 6,650 projects nationwide and through catalyzing communication and cooperation among diverse trail enthusiasts, government officials at the federal, state and local levels, and national organization in the conservation, recreation, and transportation fields.
- The presence of trails in a community encourages increased physical activity. As a result, trails should be an essential element in the nation’s public-health campaign to reduce inactivity and obesity. Legislation reauthorizing America’s surface transportation program must continue to recognize the importance of trails to personal and community well-being.
- TEA-LU (H.R. 3), the 109th Congress reauthorization bill in the House, provides \$503 million for the Recreational Trails Program over six years. Senate bill in the 108th Congress, provides \$360 million over the same period. While this would return less than 50% of the gasoline taxes generated by nonhighway recreation over the six years of the legislation, the Coalition for Recreational Trails supports the RTP funding provisions in the House bill as far more equitable than provisions in the Administration’s proposal and legislation passed in the Senate in the 108th Congress.

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