



Closing the Gaps – Background, Goals and Progress

Background. From the time the Alliance was formed in 1991 it has been our stated aim to substantially complete (80% off-road) the Greenway by the year 2010. In summer of 2004, having completed our Inaugural Event on the National Mall (June 2003) and our first end to end cycle tour (Fall 2004) we asked ourselves how we were faring with getting trail on the ground, and how realistic our long-standing goal of 80% by 2010 was. Our Board of Trustees decided to undertake a detailed assessment of progress, with best-case projections of where we might be in 2010, revisions to goals and an assessment of our organizational capacity to deliver on a revised set of goals.

Developing our “Close the Gaps” Campaign

In October 2004 we established a **2010 Strategic Committee** to steer this strategic planning process. Its objectives were:

- To develop a feasible five-year plan to substantially complete and sign the spine route of the ECG by 2010.
- To assess organizational capacity to carry out the above responsibilities over the coming five years.
- To construct a five-year development strategy to ensure that the ECGA (including state committees) has the requisite resources to meet its challenges during this period.

The 2010 Strategic Committee consisted of 12 members drawn from ECGA board of trustees, advisory board and staff as well as from other organizations. Members included David Startzell, Executive Director, Appalachian Trail Conference, Keith Laughlin, President, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Meg Maguire, past President, Scenic America, Linda McKenna Boxx, Executive Director, Allegheny Trail Alliance, Jeff Olson, formerly director of the Millennium Trails Program, and Chuck Sloan, Trust for the Appalachian Trail Lands; and several ECGA Directors: Chuck Flink, Board Chair, Mark Fenton, Vice Chair, Elizabeth Brody, NJ Trustee, David Dionne, MD Trustee, Tony Barrett, Maine Trustee; and ECGA Executive Director, Karen Votava.

We applied for and received a Surdna Foundation organizational capacity grant of \$15,000 in October of 2004 to underwrite the expenses of bringing this group together for meetings and phone calls and for other expenses related to this strategic exercise.

In the winter of 2004- 5 staff worked with our state committees to do a segment by segment (284) assessment of status on the Greenway. Simultaneously, the Strategic Committee, ably led by Chuck Flink and Mark Fenton, met several times by teleconference and in person including a weekend meeting at the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy office in Washington, DC in February 2005. From these working sessions emerged a new set of goals and recommendations for increasing our capacity to deliver on these goals.

These recommendations were presented to the ECGA Board of Directors at their May 1, 2005 meeting and were adopted as a five-year “Close the Gaps” Campaign to step up progress on the Greenway. The details of the Campaign are presented in the enclosed Executive Summary.

“Close the Gaps” Campaign Goals for 2010:

- Complete a continuous (on and off-road) route Maine to Florida. Complete cue sheets for entire route and mark 50%.
- Move on-road sections off-road to achieve an 80% off-road route where 80% of the people live
- Reroute or identify public transportation options through unsafe sections
- Upgrade on-road bike-ped accommodations as needed
- Complete one continuous, unbroken stretch of off-road trail at least 100 miles long for safe travel by people of all abilities
- Develop a user map for 25% of entire route
- Undertake routing studies for all “gap” areas to define off-road routing and move them into development

Progress on implementation

- A. **5-year trail development plans.** In the spring of 2005 staff began working with state volunteers to craft detailed plans for advancing every one of the almost 300 segments that make up the Greenway. Draft plans were completed for every state by Fall 2005 and await vetting by state agency and advocates.
- B. **Year 2006 Blueprints for Action.** These will help to coordinate the advocacy efforts of everyone working within each state by setting out a unified set of annual objectives. Thus far, we have completed Blueprints for New Hampshire, Connecticut and Maryland, and expect to complete Massachusetts and New Jersey before the end of 2005. These also have gone through a vetting by key state advocates and agency personnel so that they represent a consensus.
- C. **Increasing staff capacity to deliver on these plans.** Our goal is to add four regional staff focussed on trail development within their regions. We have already added a staff person for New England (Eric Weis) and expect to add the balance during 2006. We also hired a person to serve as Trail Program Coordinator (John Piazza.)
- D. **Creating Trails Council** to engage advocates and partners in trail building and to put a tight focus on trail progress toward 2010 goals for completing ECG and to resolve routing and trail policy matters. The Trail Council met for the first time November 5th in New Haven. For its membership we have drawn on many people who had served as chairs of their state committees and on our Board of Trustees, but included others who had had a less direct role in the ECGA organization but are critical to trail progress.
- E. **Building Board of Trustees as a smaller but higher-powered entity focussed on funding the effort, governance and strategic direction.** The new board was elected in November and is eleven strong with three new members: Kate Kraft, formerly of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Gene Conti, former executive with the US Department of Transportation, and Peter Dague, a CPA from Ohio who is also a strong supporter of trails and cycling. Most of the nine members

who left the former board joined the Trail Council. The new board will assume its mandate to help build our funding base when it meets for the first time in March. In 2006 it will also adopt an ECGA personnel manual and hopes to tackle an ECGA financial policy and procedures manual.

- F. **Developing strategic partnerships to leverage added resources to help advance the Greenway.** The proposed professional design squad providing *pro bono* assistance with project scoping and costing has yet to be established but we anticipate that happening early in 2006. A Trail Corps to engage local volunteers to assist with trail-related tasks may be set up to assist with the field data gathering associated with the production of our first series of multi-day user maps being developed in partnership with the Adventure Cycling Association. We aim to complete maps for the NYC to DC section of our route in 2006.
- G. **Funding the “Close the Gaps” Campaign.** To increase staffing and provide support to our state volunteers we need to double our operating budget, raising an additional \$400,000 per year over the next five years. We have been successful in securing over \$94,000 in donor grants toward the Campaign—we anticipate exceeding our goal for 2005 of \$100,000. (In 2006 we aim to double our major donor goal to \$200,000.) A crucial part of the development strategy was realized when the Surdna Foundation granted us a 3-year \$300,000 grant is helping to leverage the other funding.

Prepared by Karen Votava, Executive Director, December 2005