PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

8/21/2015

VIOLET CROWN TRAIL OPENS, RALLYING COMMUNITY TO TAKE ACTION

Last week, the first piece of the Violet Crown Trail, a six-mile segment of new and restored trail running from Zilker Park to Sunset Valley, officially opened to the public. The project has been in the works since 1999 under the leadership of Hill Country Conservancy in cooperation with private and public partners in multiple municipalities.

The first segment is just the beginning of what will one day be the longest trail system of its kind in Central Texas. Once complete, the Violet Crown Trail will stretch 30 miles from a gateway trailhead in Zilker Park into publicly-owned Water Quality Protection Lands in Hays County, which the trail will grant public access to for the first time.

On Friday, August 14, community members, elected officials, and stakeholders gathered to participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for this first segment at the 290 Trailhead. Mayor Rose Cardona of Sunset Valley, District 8 Council Member Ellen Troxclair, and George Cofer, Executive Director of Hill Country Conservancy, spoke at the event. Following the presentation, guests were encouraged to join the ancient ceremonial tradition of *cairn* building, by each stacking a rock at the trailhead.

REI's "Every Trail Connects" campaign also launched on August 14. Through the campaign, REI committed to investing a total of $500,000 in ten trails nationwide, including the Violet Crown Trail. The public was able to decide how the funding should be distributed by voting online. Violet Crown Trail volunteers took to all three Austin-area REI locations and Zilker Park to promote the campaign and ask the public to vote.

The campaign received an overwhelming response nationwide, with 100,000 votes cast in just 37 hours. The Violet Crown Trail placed third in the race, receiving 14,843 votes and raising $74,215 before REI's funding limit was reached. The maximum amount any trail could raise was $75,000, and a generous Violet Crown Trail donor quickly stepped in with the additional $785 needed to reach this goal. Inspired by the public's enthusiastic response to the campaign, REI announced today that they will be investing an additional $10,000 in each of the campaign's 10 trails.

Hill Country Conservancy and REI will continue to partner together to raise awareness and funding for the Violet Crown Trail. This Saturday, August 22, the REI Outdoor School is leading "Get to Know the Violet Crown Trail" instructor-led tours of the trail for runners, cyclists, and hikers at the 290 Trailhead. Information and registration is available on the REI website. As well, Hill Country Conservancy and REI will partner together again on September 26 to host a volunteer cleanup project on the trail for National Public Lands Day.

REI is just one of many private partners who have shown their support for the Violet Crown Trail over the last year. In 2014, Hill Country Conservancy quietly embarked upon a $13,125,000 capital campaign. To date, $9 million has been raised towards that goal. As the capital campaign enters its public phase, there are many ways to get involved, including trail memberships and corporate sponsorships. Additional information can be found at hillcountryconservancy.org.

The opening of the first six-mile segment of the trail marks a milestone for the Violet Crown Trail's partners. Stretching along the Barton Creek Greenbelt and Gaines Creek, this segment includes new trail mileage and existing trails, which have been restored and improved through HCC's partnership with American YouthWork's Texas Conservation Corps. HCC is already planning for the future of the trail by establishing a $1.7 million stewardship fund, and the organization is working actively with the Austin Ridge Riders to ensure the Barton Springs Greenbelt is well maintained. The second seven-mile segment of the trail is scheduled for completion by the end of 2016.

Violet Crown Trail Partners:

Austin Parks Foundation, Austin Ridge Riders, City of Austin, City of Sunset Valley, Hill Country Conservancy, Save Barton Creek Association, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, The Real Estate Council of Austin, Texas Conservation Corps, Texas Parks & Wildlife, Texas Department of Transportation, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

See photos attached by Jonathan Garza.

Visit http://hillcountryconservancy.org/about/in-the-news/press-releases/ for additional photos.

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Sunset Valley Mayor Rose Cardona, Hill Country Conservancy Executive Director George Cofer, and District 8 Council Member Ellen Troxclair cut the ribbon at the Violet Crown Trail 290 Trailhead

Violet Crown Trail Project Manager Butch Smith, American YouthWorks CEO Parc Smith, HCC Executive Director George Cofer

District 8 Council Member Ellen Troxclair speaks to guests at VCT Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Violet Crown Trail Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Members of Texas Conservation Corps pose at the Violet Crown Trail 290 Trailhead.