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**Millennium Trails Round Table
May 19, 1999**

Millennium Trails Round table (5/19/99)

First Lady's speech

Well, I would like to start by thanking all of you. The kind of collaborative effort that this represents is exactly the sort of partnership that we need to further and deepen and expand in so many respects, right now in our country we need to prepare for the future. The trail movement has a distinguished ancestry with some of the major efforts, particularly the Appalachian Trail at the beginning of this century. But it really took off about 30 years ago. I think you could say that the people began to appreciate how important it was to provide more space and more recreational opportunities in the outdoors for Americans, many of whom were losing touch with what it meant to be outside. In the last 30 years and under the leadership of organizations like Rails-to-Trails, we've seen the reclaiming of a lot of our precious landscape and an opening of that landscape to people in all walks of life and, literally, every region of the country. What I'm delighted about is how we've used this Millennium Trails initiative as a way to bring trails advocates together, and to give all of us an opportunity to really do something significant and really bring other people into the trails movement by the use of the millennial turning point, if you will. I've seen a remarkable outpouring of support from people all over the country, and it is an issue that cuts across every demographic, ideological, ethnic, political geographic line you can imagine, bringing people, as Americans who love the outdoors, together. We have a great team working on Millennium Trails and I just wanted to identify a few others in addition the ones who have already been introduced. Ellen Lovell heads the White House Millennium Council for the President and she's here. Ellen why don't you raise your hand {Ellen: hello everybody}. Ellen has worked tirelessly on a range of these initiatives and in bringing together agencies of the Federal government, the state and local governments along with private sector and not for profit partners. She works with Stephanie Madden, who has been a key figure in helping to create this cooperative venture among the Department of Transportation, Rails-to-Trails and other kinds of interesting groups. I'm also very pleased that Assistant Secretary Conti could be here representing Secretary Slater. I want to say a special thanks to Secretary Slater and to my husband and to others because when the great big transportation bill was going through there were a lot of traditional and very important calls on that bill. You know better routes in and out of major cities trying to get around gridlock that locks up some of our major cities on and on. But there was always awareness about how we needed to put transportation back into more of a human scale and the trails initiative was right on there along with a lot of the other infrastructure needs that people were advocating for and that's what's enabled us to have a much more multi-faceted transportation policy now. Yes, we do have to take care of our roads. We have to repair them, we have to maintain them, we have to build new ones where they're needed, we have to take care of our bridges. We have to do what is necessary,, but we also have to recognize that we've got to reconnect people to movement and to give them more of a chance to choose different ways of getting back and forth to work or just spending a Saturday afternoon with their children. I also want to thank Larry Landrey who kindly arranged the reception that we're going to be able to go upstairs to enjoy and Rosemary Cribben and Mark Wolf-Armstrong from Rails-to-Trails will be able to answer additional questions about the Celebration Committee and our hopes for that really taking on yet a new

dimension with more and more people bringing their commitment, their resources and their energy to it. I hope that this part of the country, which is such an identifying symbol for what America means will play a major role in the Celebration Committee, and I know some of you really have been on the front lines of bringing that about already. I do think that this initiative is of course important to those who are already committed to the outdoors or already understand what it means to ones life to be able to come to the Grand Canyon and walk or maybe just go to the other side of town and walk. But I think it's especially important today as we think about the fast paced quality of our lives and how difficult it is to spend time with one another, particularly time in families with children. We just have to do a lot of rethinking about how we structure our time and what we do together, and this trails initiative will certainly benefit those of us who are already converted to the idea that we need more trails. But it will also, ideally, draw more Americans outdoors. I noticed that the Baltimore- Annapolis Trail, which is a great trail, goes through urban areas and suburban rural areas and it has become a thoroughfare. People are on it all the time. When I went there to celebrate it and to kick-off the Millennium Trails initiative I talked with so many people who said things like " We spend a lot more time outdoors now because of the trail." Or "I don't have to worry about my children so much because there are always people I know on the trail who are looking out for them" or "As a family, we help plant flowers along the trail now". It's reconnecting people and it's also rebuilding a sense of community. So I want to thank you for being, many of you pioneers in the effort and others for bringing such great support to it. And I truly believe it is one of the really important ways that we're going to transform how people think about themselves, and how they think about and cherish our country. So for that I am very, very grateful. Thank you very much.