



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CHATTANOOGA TO BE NAMED FIRST TRAIL TOWN
OF GREAT EASTERN TRAIL**

Chattanooga, Tennessee – April 8, 2013 - Chattanooga will be named as the first official trail town of the Great Eastern Trail at a ceremony to be held at the Tennessee Riverpark's Amnicola Marsh pavilion on **Sunday, April 28, 2013, at 12:00 noon EDT**. Representatives of the City of Chattanooga, including then Mayor Andy Berke, Hamilton County, and the Great Eastern Trail Association will participate. The public is invited to attend.

The Great Eastern Trail (GET) is a new long-distance hiking trail comparable in many ways to the Appalachian Trail (AT). Its "trail town" designation is essentially the same as the AT's "trail community" and can be expected to provide similar economic benefits. The GET has been created by linking together regional trail systems. It extends nearly 1,800 miles between Alabama's Flagg Mountain and the North Country National Scenic Trail just south of New York's Finger Lakes. About 72% of the GET is open to hiking. More information about the GET and the Great Eastern Trail Association is available at www.greateastertrail.net.

Tom Johnson, president of the Great Eastern Trail Association, states. **"The Great Eastern Trail passing directly through Chattanooga makes Chattanooga the largest city in the country by far to host a major long-distance trail."**

Until recently, the Chattanooga area was one of the few remaining major gaps existing between the regional trail systems that are components of the GET. That gap has now been closed through the efforts of a joint Great Eastern Trail Association (GETA) / Cumberland Trail Conference (CTC) committee chaired initially by Jim Schroeder of Murfreesboro, TN, and currently by Warren Devine of Oak Ridge, TN. Over the last couple of years, the GETA/CTC Chattanooga Committee has worked diligently in partnership with local, state and federal partners and interested citizens to identify and establish a trail connection between the Georgia Pinhoti Trail at the Tennessee-Georgia state line and the Cumberland Trail on Walden's Ridge. The Cumberland Trail will serve as the GET's path northward to the Tennessee-Kentucky line.

The committee's efforts have resulted in the identification of a preferred route for the Chattanooga area connector trail between the Georgia Pinhoti Trail and the Cumberland Trail:

- existing National Park Service and Lookout Mountain Conservancy trails on Lookout Mountain,
- the Guild Trailhead,
- the Riverwalk (existing and planned segments) through downtown Chattanooga and up to the C. B. Robinson Bridge,
- the provision of access for pedestrians and bicyclists across the C. B. Robinson Bridge (the City is contracting for a study, funded by a grant from TDOT, of the available options),
- the planned Riverwalk segment between the C. B. Robinson Bridge and Chickamauga Dam on the north side of the river, and a connecting trail from the Dam to the North Chickamauga Creek Greenway trail, and
- the North Chickamauga Creek Greenway trail (existing and planned segments) from its Lake Resort Drive trailhead near Chickamauga Dam to the Cumberland Trail's trailhead within the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Natural Area located off Montlake Road in the Soddy-Daisy area.

The Lookout Mountain trails and the Cumberland Trail have already been designated as part of the GET.

To allow hikers to continue their journey on the GET through Chattanooga while work on completing the area's greenway trail systems that constitute the preferred route for the GET continues, an interim route for the GET that uses road walks to bypass the yet-to-be-completed segments of the Riverwalk and the North Chickamauga Creek Greenway trail has been established.

In the eyes of the trail community, the GET, albeit not yet in its envisioned final form of a trail within a continuous natural corridor, is an established fact in the Chattanooga area.

Joanna Swanson and Bart Houck whose trail names are "Someday" and "Hillbilly Bart," are currently engaged in an effort to become the first persons to thru-hike the GET. Their hike through the Chattanooga area took place in early February 2013. They will interrupt their thru-hike to return to Chattanooga for this event and will present a **program on thru-hiking the GET** at Outdoor Chattanooga, 200 River Street, at **4:00 p.m. EDT on Sunday, April 28, 2013.** The public is invited to attend. Their progress on the thru-hike can be followed on the website www.gethiking.net.

On Sunday, April 28, 2013, in addition to the "Trail Town" ceremony and the "Thru-Hike" program, there will be two guided walks along the Riverwalk. The walks will depart from the Tennessee Riverpark's Amnicola Marsh pavilion at 1:00 p.m. immediately following the "Trail Town" ceremony and the public is invited to participate.

Also, on Saturday, April 27, 2013, there will be three opportunities for the public to participate that morning in guided hikes and walks along existing and planned segments of the GET's route.

For the hikes and walks, it is recommended that participants wear shoes suitable for hiking and bring bottled water.

A complete schedule of the public activities, including the hikes, "Trail Town" ceremony and "Thru-Hike" program, that are part of the "Great Eastern Trail – Chattanooga Weekend" event accompanies this press release. A condensed version of the schedule can be viewed online at the Outdoor Chattanooga website: www.outdoorchattanooga.com and for questions about the schedule, the public may call the Outdoor Chattanooga office at 423-643-6888.

Tom Johnson states, "On behalf of the Great Eastern Trail Association, I would like to recognize the Cumberland Trail Conference and the Tennessee Trails Association for their vision and efforts in establishing the Cumberland Trail which serves as the GET's primary route across Tennessee and acknowledge the important role that citizens have played in building and maintaining the trail. The State of Tennessee and Tennessee State Parks are also to be commended for embracing that vision and making the Cumberland Trail an even more wonderful experience by expanding the trail corridor to include lands of high conservation value along the route, thereby creating the Cumberland Trail State Park. Also, I would like to express special appreciation to our other key partners involved in the work in the Chattanooga area to close the GET's gap here; several of those key partners include Chattanooga Parks and Recreation, Hamilton County Parks and Recreation, the Georgia Pinhoti Trail Association, and the Lyndhurst Foundation. We thank all the persons who have served and currently serve as members of the GETA/CTC Chattanooga Committee. We look forward to continuing the partnership and to the completion of the Chattanooga area's greenway trail system and the future realization of the full measure of the beautiful route envisioned for the GET here."

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