



Sunflower Foundation

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## American Trails honors Sunflower Foundation for its work in trails

### National nonprofit names Kansas philanthropy Trails for Health award recipient for 2025

TOPEKA, Kan. – Sunflower Foundation recently was honored by **American Trails**, a national nonprofit trails organization, for its years of leadership in improving access to trails across Kansas and promoting the physical, mental and community health benefits that they can provide.

American Trails has named the foundation as its Trails for Health award winner for 2025. Dr. Elizabeth Burger, senior vice president of programs and strategy for the foundation, accepted the award on April 15, during the International Trails Summit in Madison, Wis. The event is co-sponsored by American Trails and the **Professional Trail Builder's Association**.

The award was one of several handed out to organizations from across the country, recognizing excellence and innovation in the development and stewardship of trails and greenways and reinforcing the importance of accessible, sustainable, and community-driven trail networks.

The foundation, a statewide health philanthropy with a mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the health of all Kansans, has a deep-rooted history in trails and understands that being active and connecting with nature are important to both



*Dr. Elizabeth Burger, senior vice president of programs and strategy for Sunflower Foundation, accepted the Trails for Health award on behalf of the foundation on April 15 at the International Trails Summit in Madison, Wis. American Trails recognized the foundation for its work in improving access to trails across Kansas.*

physical and mental health. What started 20 years ago as an innovative idea to combat obesity has grown into a funding priority and a commitment for the foundation to ensure that all Kansans have access to public trails and green space.

Since 2005, Sunflower's trails program has been partnering with communities, schools and nonprofits, providing grant funding to develop recreational trails, support established trail systems and provide technical assistance to trail projects, stakeholders and advocates. The foundation has supported more than 200 trail projects in more than 80 Kansas counties through community-based, trail-builder grants, as well as grants to support trail planning, promotion, education and evaluation.

“It’s such an honor for Sunflower Foundation to receive this award, really on behalf of the countless trail champions in our state who have the vision to create public places where people from all backgrounds can be active outdoors, connecting with nature and each other,” Burger said. “This acknowledgement puts Kansas on the map as a place where we recognize the power of trails to improve physical and mental health of individuals and the economic and civic health of communities. The foundation wants to thank the trail lovers of the Sunflower State for making this award possible.”

For most of the past 13 years, prior to becoming senior vice president, Burger has spearheaded the foundation’s work in trails. Through her leadership, the foundation became a trail technical assistance leader and convener in Kansas, offering peer learning and networking via trail summits, webinars, and workshops.

Other Sunflower Trails initiatives have included:

- supporting the Kansas Trails Council in development of the Trail-in-a-Box, a portable trailer filled with all the tools needed to build a natural surface trail that can be loaned out for trail-building projects;
- establishing Trail Appreciation Day at the Kansas State Capitol, an event that brings together trail enthusiasts from across the state and provides opportunities for them to meet with state lawmakers;
- providing seed money to help develop the first statewide trail organization, Kansas Trails, Inc.

In announcing the award, American Trails stated that, “For over a decade, Elizabeth Burger’s leadership in the Sunflower Foundation’s Trails Program has transformed Kansas into a burgeoning trail destination. By uniting towns, stakeholders, and trail champions, the foundation has broadened access to trails and promoted active living across the state, laying the groundwork for healthier communities and stronger trail networks.”

The foundation has learned that the benefits of trails go well beyond health and wellness.

“Access to public trails is one of our most impactful strategies for reaching communities across Kansas and making real, meaningful change,” said Kelli Mark, who has taken the reins of the Sunflower Trails program as the foundation’s director of Healthy Communities. “Trails are more than just concrete or dirt; they can represent the real lifeblood of a community, connecting people, promoting healthy lifestyles, preserving heritage and culture, increasing tourism and stimulating local economies.”

Looking ahead to the future of Sunflower Trails, the foundation remains committed to

working with trail champions across Kansas.

“We are leaning on all the trail champions across the state to help us chart our course. They are the individuals who have boots on the ground, shovels in the dirt, and know best what trails investments will have the biggest impact,” Mark said. “I invite any trail champion who would like to share their thoughts with me to reach out. I’d love to chat!”

## ABOUT SUNFLOWER FOUNDATION

Sunflower Foundation was established in 2000 as a statewide health philanthropy with a mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the health of all Kansans. The foundation believes that a thriving, sustainable nonprofit sector contributes to healthy communities, and we are committed to investing in mission-aligned nonprofits through grants, education, advocacy, collaborative learning, and capacity building. To learn more, visit [www.SunflowerFoundation.org](http://www.SunflowerFoundation.org).



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