



Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) December 2023 Council Meeting Day 1 Minutes



PUBLIC MEETING: December 6, 2023
TIME: 9:00 am
LOCATION: FDEP Carr Building: 3800 Commonwealth Blvd. Tallahassee, FL

FGTC Members in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- Mike Stephens – Governor Appointed Trail User
- Jason Lauritsen – Senate President Appointed Greenway User
- Wesley Stalnaker – Senate President Appointed Greenway User
- Lindsay Cosby – Delegate for Rep. James Buchanan – Speaker Appointed Trail User
- Shorty Robbins – Delegate for Rep. Cyndi Stevenson – Speaker Appointed Trail User
- Kipp Frohlich – Delegate for Traci Deen – Speaker Appointed Greenway User
- Danielle Terrell – FL Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)
- Katherine Burke – Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
- Robin Birdsong – Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
- Brooks White – Florida Forest Service
- Chip Birdsong – Florida Department of State
- Edwin McCook- Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD)
- Derrick Washington – Delegate for Shawn Thomas – US Department of Agriculture
- Chris Rietow – Apalachee Regional Planning Council
- Jim Couillard – Marion County Parks and Recreation

OGT Staff in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- Samantha Browne, Bureau Chief
- Britney Moore, Assistant Bureau Chief
- Katie White, Regional Coordinator
- Justin Baldwin, Regional Coordinator
- Anna Hopkins, Regional Coordinator
- Doug Alderson, Outdoor Recreation Specialist

Welcome – Chuck Hatcher, FDEP Division of Recreation & Parks Director

Chuck Hatcher welcomed the council members to the meeting and introduced Danielle Terrell, a new council member and Assistant Director with the Division of Recreation and Parks for the Central Office.

Approve Agenda

A motion was made to switch the FL SB 106 (2023 version) discussion and the Bylaws discussion on the agenda to ensure that legal counsel would be present.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Mike Stephens

SECOND: Chip Birdsong

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE MEETING AGENDA WITH MODIFICATIONS

Approve the August 2023 Meeting Summary

FGTC REMARKS: Shorty Robbins noted a spelling correction to Commissioner Henry Dean's name.

MOTION: Wesley Stalnaker

SECOND: Mike Stephens

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE MEETING SUMMARY WITH MODIFICATIONS

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Office of Greenways and Trails Update – Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Staff

The Trust for Public Land revealed the winning design in the Florida Gulf Coast Trail logo contest in November after the public voting period ended. OGT graphic designer Kari Baasch has created an outdoor recreation themed tabletop calendar that the office will be passing out at outreach events. The calendars will be available early next year. Regional Coordinator Justin Baldwin organized the first Capital City-to-the-Sea Trail (CC2ST) alliance meeting at the end of November. This was the first meeting since the CC2ST Master Plan was adopted by the Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency back in 2014. The meeting highlighted many opportunities for collaboration between trail stakeholders. Doug Alderson shared trail count statistics with the council that have been submitted by partners over the last several months. He also highlighted the new paddling trail story maps available through OGT and a potential addition to the St. Marys River Paddling Trail which would extend from the portion of the river that is already a designated paddling trail. OGT has begun the planning process for the 2027-2031 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Regional Coordinator Katie White shared a survey which is intended to identify what kind of information partners would like to see in the upcoming SCORP.

Collier to Polk Regional Trail Presentation – Anne McLaughlin (Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization)

Anne presented on behalf of the Collier MPO, Heartland Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), Polk TPO, and FDOT about the project goals, potential benefits, and master plan for a new proposed priority trail corridor, the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. Some of the trail corridors within the alignment are already Priority trails within the Florida Greenways and Trails System

(FGTS), some are Opportunity trails, and some are not currently identified in the system. The trail would connect small towns and leverage existing infrastructure to maximize ecotourism benefits to the area. When conceptualizing the trail, FDOT referenced other regional trails including the Great Allegheny Trail. Senate Bill 106 expanded the opportunities for the FGTS to connect with the Florida Wildlife Corridor and to expand funding for SUN trails. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail aligns with the definition of regionally significant trails as outlined in SB106. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail will add 170 miles of trail and link seven counties. A 42-mile additional corridor connecting to the south end of the proposed trail would form a connection from Immokalee to Everglades City. This additional corridor along SR 29 would pass along various environmental areas including Big Cypress National Preserve and Fakahatchee Strand State Park. Council approval of all the proposed FGTS map changes within the study area would set the stage for planning and implementing the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. FDOT is currently coordinating a masterplan for the trail and beginning stakeholder outreach and analysis. The masterplan is scheduled for completion by July 2024. Collier MPO, Heartland TPO, and Polk TPO have all passed resolutions supporting the trail.

Council Discussion:

Jason Lauritsen: What has outreach to the tribes in the area looked like? Kat Chinault (KC)- FDOT has reached out to the Office of Environmental Management to coordinate communication with tribal leadership. Has there been any assessment of fencing, culverts, etc. that would relate to wildlife permeability along the trail? KC- the master planning process is in the beginning stages of stakeholder engagement. The future project development and environment (PD&E) study would likely include analysis of those types of opportunities.

Samantha Browne brought up that there may be small changes to the alignment of the trail on the north end near the Tenoroc Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Kathy Burke stated that as the alignment is refined, FWC would prefer the trail to stay on the edge of WMAs instead of going through them.

Jason Lauritsen pointed out that there may be more public interest surrounding the SR 29 corridor addition due to the conservation areas in that region. Anne clarified that the trail is intended to be fully within the right-of-way of the road. Kipp Frohlich pointed out that there have always been high Florida panther mortality rates on SR 29 and the trail may provide opportunities to resolve some of those conflicts utilizing underpasses or fencing.

Public Comment:

Trish Pfeiffer, Commissioner with the City of Bartow and Vice Chair of Polk TPO, voiced support for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. They hope to eventually connect their local Fort Fraser trail to the regional trail. She highlighted the value of story maps at the state, county, and city level. Bartow has applied to become a Trail Town and looks forward to coming back to the Council in the future.

A letter from Scott Stryker, a Florida Greenways and Trails Council member who was not present at the meeting, was read by Council Chair Jim Couillard. The letter voiced support for the Council to add the entirety of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail to the FGTS Priority Network.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Mike Stephens

SECOND: Kathy Burke

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE addition of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail, including the SR 29 Corridor, into the FGTS Priority Trail Network with the understanding that the alignment may shift slightly on the north end.

Deering Park Project Presentation – Ernie Cox (Family Lands Remembered)

There are millions of acres of conservation land in the area of Volusia County where the Deering Park project is. The segment of trail being proposed to the Council falls almost entirely within the 5-mile buffer of nearby Opportunity and Priority trails. The Deering Park segment would connect to a part of the East Central Regional Trail that was recently resurfaced by FDOT on SR 442. Ernie also shared information about other projects within the Deering Park site including plans for a water treatment wetlands facility and a housing development. The proposed trail would connect to the wetlands as well as wooded areas. The property on both sides of the proposed trail is protected conservation land. Family Lands Remembered plans to work closely with the County, City, Oak Hill, and the TPO to expedite construction on the project with the goal of a ribbon cutting in a few years.

Council Discussion:

Mike Stephens asked for clarification that the proposed trail would in fact connect to the existing East Coast Regional Greenway. Ernie Cox (EC) confirmed that it would.

Samantha Browne clarified that the Deering Park trail already falls mostly within the existing five-mile buffer of the East Central Regional Rail Trail, so the council would be voting to shift that buffer to include the Deering Park trail within the priority corridor. Robin Birdsong expressed concern that shifting the buffer would move currently funded projects out of the FGTS. Samantha clarified that OGT would work with FDOT to ensure all projects stay within the system.

Jason Lauritsen (JL)- Where is the Deering Park project at in the permitting process? EC- Development activities will begin at the end of Q1 of 2024. JL- Will there be opportunities to weave into the messaging of the housing development the value of trails and trail towns? EC- Yes, the project will be a sustainable community and 75% of the land will never be developed. Trails and wildlife corridors will be promoted along with the development.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Mike Stephens

SECOND: Danielle Terrell

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE addition of the Deering Park Trail into the FGTS Priority Trail Network with the understanding that no currently funded FDOT projects will fall out of the existing Priority trail network.

FGTS Plan Vote

Council Discussion: Mike Stephens asked how the goals and objectives in the plan are tracked overtime. Samantha Browne answered that OGT staff will provide yearly updates at council meetings on progress made via a one-pager that highlights what was accomplished from the plan and priorities in the coming year.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Chris Rietow

SECOND: Wesley Stalnaker

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE with understanding that small grammatical edits may be made by the FDEP Secretary's Office

White Springs Trail Town Presentation- Anna Hopkins (OGT), Sharon Shea/Julie Williams (White Springs Historic Preservation Society)

OGT Regional Coordinator Anna Hopkins presented White Springs for Trail Town designation endorsement to the Council. White Springs is in Hamilton County and situated along the Florida national Scenic Trail as well as the Suwannee River Wilderness Paddling Trail. There are additional local trails and two state parks within the town. The main local support groups for the designation are the Suwannee Bicycle Association and the White Springs Historic Preservation Society. Eleven letters of support were submitted by various groups and 29 local businesses signed the Trail Town pledge.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Edwin McCook

SECOND: Mike Stephens

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) ENDORSE designation

FDEP Land & Recreation Grant Opportunities – Linda Reeves (FDEP Land & Recreation Grants Section)

The Land and Recreation Grants Section is housed within the Division of State Lands and includes several grant programs: Florida Communities Trust, Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts, Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the Recreational Trails Program. Linda Reeves highlighted the eligibility requirements and application process for all of the above programs and included examples of funded projects from around the

state. Each program has a different application cycle. Interested parties can sign up for alerts from the Florida Administrative Register regarding application cycles, webinars, and public meetings by visiting their website and subscribing to notifications.

FL SB 106 (2023 version) Discussion

Mike Stephens opened a discussion amongst the council about the meaning of “regionally significant trails” as stated in SB106. The council discussed whether regionally significant trails are the same as the existing regional trails as identified in the FGTS Priority Network. Toni Sturtevant, FDEP Attorney, noted that the new legislation does not offer a definition of regional trail that differs from what OGT already uses. It was agreed that the existing regional trails within the FGTS would be reranked at the March 2024 Council meeting. Jenna Bowman and Robin Birdsong with FDOT explained how a rerank of the regional trails would affect how SUN Trail funding is distributed. It was agreed that the reranking would need to use clear, objective criteria that match the language in SB106. Jason Lauritsen also brought up the need for a definition of “critical linkage” as used in SB106. Toni noted that any definitions the Council agrees upon, while useful and needed to get everyone on the same page, are not the same as terms defined by rule.

The discussion also included conservation easements and public access (or lack thereof). Some language in SB106 highlights connecting conservation property to the FGTS, but many conservation properties do not allow for public access.

Bylaws Review & Update Discussion

The following changes were proposed to the bylaws. A vote will take place during the first meeting of 2024 to adopt or reject these amendments.

Article IV - Membership

- Add a new governor-appointed seat as directed in SB 106 for a board member of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation
- Update the title of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services seat to read “Director of the Florida Forest Service” instead of “Director of the Division of Forestry”
- Remove the requirement for Council members to submit memorandums in advance of any voting items they plan to abstain from voting on. It will suffice to verbally state during the meeting that they are abstaining from a vote.
- Remove the statement that alternates shall not replace the attendance requirement of appointed Council members.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jack Kostrzewa, Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency- The council should be cautious when reranking trails for SUN Trail funding priority since it is a big undertaking with a lot of stakeholders. Deciding on what qualifies as a regionally significant trail would be a positive thing to do to help with the process and get everyone on the same page. There will be a lot of expensive projects seeking SUN trail funding and the cost of transportation projects is increasing.

ADJOURN:

MOTION: Chris Rietow

SECOND: Mike Stephens



Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) December 2023 Council Meeting Day 2 Minutes



PUBLIC MEETING: December 7, 2023
TIME: 9:00 am
LOCATION: FDEP Carr Building: 3800 Commonwealth Blvd. Tallahassee, FL

FGTC Members in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- Mike Stephens – Governor Appointed Trail User
- Jason Lauritsen – Senate President Appointed Greenway User
- Lindsay Cosby – Delegate for Rep. James Buchanan – Speaker Appointed Trail User
- Shorty Robbins – Delegate for Rep. Cyndi Stevenson – Speaker Appointed Trail User
- Kipp Frohlich – Delegate for Traci Deen – Speaker Appointed Greenway User
- Danielle Terrell – FL Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)
- Katherine Burke – Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
- Robin Birdsong – Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
- Brooks White – Florida Forest Service
- Chip Birdsong – Florida Department of State
- Edwin McCook- Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD)
- Derrick Washington – Delegate for Shawn Thomas – US Department of Agriculture
- Chris Rietow – Apalachee Regional Planning Council
- Jim Couillard – Marion County Parks and Recreation

OGT Staff in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- Samantha Browne, Bureau Chief
- Britney Moore, Assistant Bureau Chief
- Katie White, Regional Coordinator
- Justin Baldwin, Regional Coordinator
- Anna Hopkins, Regional Coordinator
- Doug Alderson, Outdoor Recreation Specialist

Approve Agenda

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Robin Birdsong

SECOND: Edwin McCook

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE meeting agenda

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Communications Update – Brett Laiken (Visit Florida)

Brett provided an update on the promotional materials that Visit Florida has produced to promote trails as required by SB106. The Visit Florida Team has created media assets for both in-state and out-of state viewing which include social media banners, story ads, regular format ads, short videos, and more. One series within the campaign shows views an ad for “3 Trails Within 3 Hours” of major cities depending on where the viewer is watching from. The council viewed three video clips that were produced to promote Florida trails including one Trail Town feature for the City of Brooksville. Visit Florida plans to produce a total of nine Trail Town videos in the future.

Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail Overview – Lauren Ali (FWC)

Lauren provided an overview of the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (GFBWT) which is a project of the FWC that encompasses over 500 sites across the state. Many sites on the GFBWT are located near or along trails that are included in the FGTS. Florida has the third most wildlife viewers among all 50 states which are a mix of both visitors and residents. The GFBWT is a trusted resource amongst wildlife enthusiasts and the prestigious designation of a site benefits local economies and incentives conservation. The GFBWT connects visitors with site partners through their website, trail guides, checklists, festivals, workshops, conservation outreach, and a newsletter. Future plans for the GFBWT include targeting beginner wildlife viewers, modernizing the website and trip planning services, evaluating existing sites, and building partnerships.

Florida Trail Update – Philip Marley (USFS)

Philip provided an overview of the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) and recent developments for the 40th anniversary of the trail. The FNST is over 1,500 miles long with 171 campsites and 162 trailheads. About 380,000 visitors use the trail each year. There are 103 land management units along the trail, with some of the land managing partners including State Parks, FWC, State Forests, Water Management Districts, and county properties. 2023 was the 40th anniversary of the FNST and several projects were completed including the construction of new bridges at Bull Creek WMA and within Withlacoochee State Forest. 2024 initiatives include even more bridge builds, optimal routing of the trail, a land acquisition plan, standardized kiosks, and continuation of the Gateway Community and Next Generation Coalition programs.

Tallahassee Mountain Bike Association Update – Doug Bell (TMBA)

Doug provided an overview and update on TMBA’s work in Tallahassee. The group consists of 240 members and a volunteer board. All TMBA’s funding comes from member dues and small donations. TMBA is a local chapter of the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) and Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA) who engage in general advocacy and offer liability protection. TMBA has been working with Maclay Gardens State Park to get some new mountain biking trails into the next State Park management plan and they have also been

working to get Tallahassee on IMBA's list of great places to ride which are ranked with a medal system. The County has included in their trails master plan an outline of the steps needed to reach the IMBA designation. TMBA engages with their volunteers by holding work events concurrent with group rides. They have done a few things to encourage young cyclists to get involved including organizing women-only rides where mothers will come out and ride with their daughters. TMBA also donates money to interscholastic riders at the middle and high school level so they can purchase bikes for the team and bring young riders into the community. In the near future, TMBA hopes to work with Apalachicola National Forest managers to include more biking trails in the master plan.

Public Comment:

Jack Kostrzewa, Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency (CRTPA)- CRTPA works with TMBA and the Florida Trail Association on many projects. It is difficult to plan and build urban trails every though they are very important. The CRTPA is exploring possibilities for more urban trails in Tallahassee for not only cyclists but also pedestrians.

Council Updates & Comments:

Danielle Terrell: Unit management plans will now be updated every 10 years for Florida State Parks and will be district-wide instead of park-specific. The switch began with District 2 and is almost complete after 19 months. Addressing more than one park per plan is a more efficient way to keep the information updated. The process involves regional advisory groups and public meetings. The next district unit management plan will be for District 4 starting in January 2024. As of December 13th, 21,000 discounted State Park Annual Passes have been sold under the Great Outdoors Initiative, compared to only 5,000 during the same time period last year.

Edwin McCook: The SRWMD is continuing to address storm damage from hurricane Idalia. The SRWMD is excited to be working with a local chapter of Backcountry Horsemen to build and maintain new equestrian trails on district property. They are also exploring more opportunities to promote birding on district land.

Jason Lauritsen: The Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation held a productive solutions lab at their September conference. In the future they plan to make the lab longer and want to pilot a half or full day solutions lab in Polk County where there are many corridor gaps. Many new collaborative groups came out of the conference as well, including a working group for trails chaired by Samantha Browne. Save the date for Feb. 12th which is Florida Wildlife Corridor Day at the Capitol. More information will be available on social media as the event is planned.

Chip Birdsong: As mentioned at the last meeting, the Department of State has new funding for cemetery projects and have hired a new staff member to oversee the program. The focus will be on identifying, reporting, and maintaining cemeteries that have been abandoned and neglected.

Robin Birdsong: The current SUN Trail call for projects will close at 2pm on December 20th. These projects will be for the fiscal year 2030. There is currently over \$140 million worth of projects in

the current five-year work plan. The one-time infusion of funds from SB 106 will be programmed to the tentative work program. Being on the network is only one criterion amongst several for eligibility for funding.

Chris Rietow: The Apalachee Regional Planning Council is working with the FDOT office in District 3 to create a rural transportation plan for five counties in the region. They are also using the project as an opportunity to identify trails.

Jim Couillard: Last year in Marion County an appropriations request was approved to extend the Dunnellon trail. The design is 90% complete and will be going to bid next. They also have a new feasibility study coming out to explore crossings over SR 200 where two trails currently dead end. There is an opportunity for the “Canon Gap” in Marion County to be addressed with plans for a new solar farm. The solar market may affect the timing of trail construction.

Mike Stephens: The River to Hills Trail in Lake County segment 3A is in the design phase, about 80% finished and construction will start next year. Segment 3B is still in the PD&E/NEPA process but is scheduled to finish next month. A PD&E study for the Black Bear Scenic Byway was submitted for SUN trail funding to FDOT. A segment of the gap in the Lake Apopka Loop Trail within Lake County will be going out to bid soon. The project is going well.

Brooks White: Updates continue to the Trailwalker and Trailtrotter programs. New brochures are being designed and new trails are being added or promoted within the program. QR codes will be used to keep users up to date on trail status. The Florida Forest Service is holding weekly raffles for free camping reservations and passes through the beginning of January.

Kathy Burke: There is a new 12,000 acre WMA named Telogia Creek in Liberty County. The management and advisory meeting is coming up in early January. FWC hopes to provide paddling opportunities and extensive equestrian trails on the property. A book was recently published titled “Ultimate Paddling Adventures: 100 Epic Experiences” and it features paddling experiences worldwide including 26 in North America and one in Florida, the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail.

Kipp Frohlich: Conservation Florida has officially partnered with the Cattlemen’s Association of Florida due to their shared interest in preserving working lands. They both will be advocating this legislative season for funding for Florida Forever, rural family lands, protection plan funding, and more. The 3rd annual Wild Florida reception will be on December 12th at the Capitol building. Last year, the Protect our Paradise docuseries premiered at the event. The docuseries is now streaming at discoverfloridachannel.com. This year, Conservation Florida has closed on 7,000 acres of conservation land across the state and hope to get another 3,000 acres protected by the end of the year.

Lindsay Cosby: Rep. Buchanan looks forward to attending the next meeting. He just chaired the Agriculture, Conservation, and Resiliency subcommittee for the Florida House.

Derrick Washington: The USDA Forest Service is working on revising the forest plan for Ocala National Forest, Apalachicola National Forest, and Osceola National Forest soon. The plan was last updated back in 1999.

Shorty Robbins: Rep. Stevenson sends her apologies for not being able to attend. Their office is gearing up for the next legislative session.

Next Meeting Location & Date

Four meeting dates were proposed for 2024. Dates will be posted to the OGT website once confirmed.

Adjourn:

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Mike Stephens

SECOND: Danielle Terrell