

FLORIDA

GREENWAYS & TRAILS

SYSTEM PLAN | 2024-2028

Outdoor Recreation Creates Healthy Communities

Studies demonstrate that, in addition to economic prosperity, outdoor recreation delivers personal and social benefits on which healthy, happy communities thrive.



Rocky Bayou State Park

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Executive Summary

An important function of the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) is to facilitate communication, cooperation and coordination among all governmental entities, landowners, recreational user groups and other non-governmental organizations involved in greenways and trails planning, development, management and maintenance. This is a substantial undertaking and requires OGT staff to establish strong relationships with planners, land managers and other stakeholders at all levels, both public and private.

Outdoor recreation is a major driver of tourism in Florida. Because of its climate, diversity of natural landscapes, and award-winning state parks and trails, Florida offers a tremendous selection of recreational experiences for residents and visitors. Connecting these individual opportunities into a larger recreation and conservation system is essential to maximizing the value of individually planned and managed public lands. The Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS) is the needed foundation for connecting and providing access to recreation opportunities ranging from extensive state networks, national forests and community parks.

This plan outlines the vision for the FGTS both on land and water. It defines the role of the system in advancing Florida's economy, tourism, health, transportation choices, recreation, conservation and quality of life. This is the third update to the FGTS plan since Connecting Florida's Communities laid the groundwork in 1998 to implement the many greenways and trails programs and projects that exist today. To view the previous plans and other FGTS Plan documents, visit floridadep.gov.

OGT also has the responsibility of updating the comprehensive, multipurpose outdoor recreation plan with the assistance of other public recreation land managers. The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is the state's official document regarding outdoor recreation planning and serves as a guide for all public outdoor recreation in Florida, including urban

and rural neighborhoods, cities and small towns. The SCORP serves as an extensive statewide and regional appraisal of the outdoor recreation needs of Florida and assists by providing guidance for the development of a wide-ranging, balanced statewide outdoor recreation system. OGT, through an extensive public input process, updates the SCORP every five years. Because the FGTS Plan substantially contributes to the identification and implementation of outdoor recreation, it serves as an essential state-level companion to the SCORP. This FGTS five-year plan builds on past accomplishments and provides a comprehensive approach to establish partnerships, engage stakeholders and implement, fund and promote the system.

Section 375.021(1), Florida Statutes

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Department), Division of Recreation and Parks (Division) is required to:

- Develop a statewide comprehensive multipurpose outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) in partnership with other public recreation land managers.
- Update the SCORP every 5 years.

Section 258.004(3), F.S.

- Study and appraise the recreation needs of the state.
- Assemble and disseminate information pertaining to recreation.

Chapter 260, F.S.

The Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) is the bureau within the Division that fulfills the Florida Greenways and Trails Act. To accomplish this, OGT:

- Leads, plans and facilitates the development of an interconnected Florida Greenways and trails System (FGTS).
- Coordinates with partners to compile local trails data from cities, counties and other land managing entities into one inclusive system.
- Depicts the trails data on a statewide map to identify where connections can be made across jurisdictional boundaries.



Lake Louisa State Park

“Adults who took 8,000 or more steps a day had a reduced risk of death over the following decade than those who only walked 4,000 steps a day.”

National Institute of Health

The goals of the 2019-2023 Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan included:

- Delineation of regional systems.
- Strategic investment in resources to advance system completion.
- Promotion of the Florida Greenways and Trails System to residents and visitors.
- Establishment of partnerships and engage stakeholders.

Accomplishments

The 2019-2023 FGTS Plan established a solid basis for significant progress in implementing and expanding the Florida Greenways and Trails System. The goals of that plan were as follows:

The plan provided a methodology to identify and delineate distinct regional trails, recommended priorities for developing the system and establish partnerships to promote and coordinate the FGTS.

By leveraging these achievements, this plan establishes a path forward to significantly advance the FGTS. With the system now delineated and regional corridors identified, this plan will focus on how to implement and develop the system.

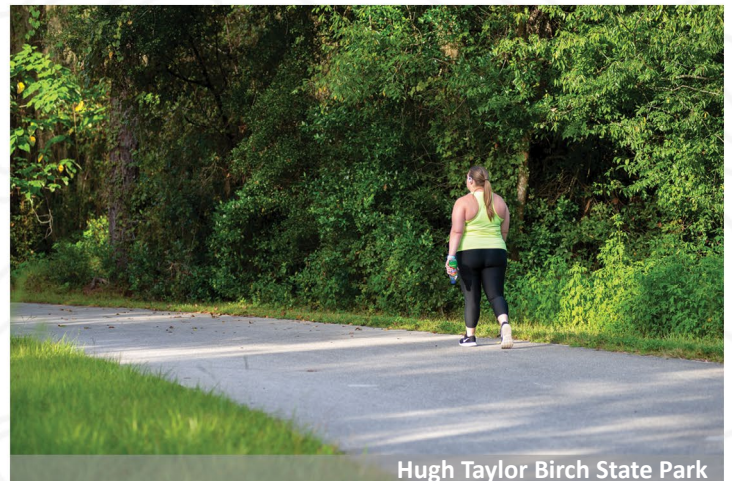


Alford Greenway

Delineate regional systems	13 distinct regional trails identified
Strategic investment in resources to advance system completion	Shared use non-motorized trail funds allocated for design & construction
Promote the Florida Greenways and Trails System	Designated 18 Trail Towns within FGTS - Created StoryMaps for Trail Towns & Regional Trails - Established monthly campaign & webinar series - Developed educational materials for target audience
Establish partnerships and engage stakeholders	- Established new partnerships - Attended local, state, national conferences and events engaging 77 stakeholders

What are Greenways and Trails?

Greenways serve as essential corridors through protected open space, supporting the preservation and vitality of native ecosystems. These ecological greenways enhance our human surroundings, while providing thriving habitats and enabling wildlife movement across different locations. Some greenways include trails while others do not.



Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

“We found that all types of recreational activities that get people moving are associated with greater longevity, so, the most important thing an inactive older adult can do to improve their health is find an activity that they enjoy and can stick with.”

Dr. Eleanor Watts



Camp Helen State Park

Department of Health

For every \$1 spent on walking trails, approximately \$3 is saved in medical expenses (American Heart Association, 2016). Investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure and programming could significantly lower long-term individual and public health care costs by reducing stress and obesity rates, improving physical fitness and strengthening social bonds with family and friends (Outdoor Recreation Economy 2017, Outdoor Industry Association).

Trails, both paved and unpaved, join populated areas together by linking landscapes such as parks, water features, open space, cultural features and historic sites. Loop trails begin and end at the same location and follow a single trail or multiple trails to form a loop. Individual trail segments, typically locally managed, provide an experience where users can start and end at the same location by following a single trail or multiple trails to an end point and then return along the same route. Long distance or regional trails begin and end in different locations. These trails connect the individual local trail segments together to provide a multiday experience. By connecting these local projects together into larger systems, the FGTS has the potential to be a fundamental component of Florida's overall economic development strategy.

Non-motorized trails and waterways provide places for paddlers, bicyclists, pedestrians, hikers, horseback riders and others to recreate and experience the many natural and cultural attractions of our state. Establishing a connected system of greenways and trails for Florida is an important way to join aspects of both the natural and human environments.

Regional trails are long distance or loop trail systems that cross multiple jurisdictions. They comprise shorter individual or local trail segments that are linked together to form a more unique, expansive system. A regional trail can provide a multiday experience for the more ambitious trail users. Although some individuals may never travel an entire regional trail, many will enjoy the local sections and connecting trails.

Prioritizing the System

Opportunities

Land Trail Opportunity corridors within the Florida Greenways and Trails System are planning corridors that represent existing, proposed or conceptual non-motorized multi-use trails. These corridors represent a feasible land-based trail network that crosses, or have the potential to cross, jurisdictional boundaries.

The Land Trail Opportunity Map is a synthesis of trail planning efforts conducted by cities, counties, transportation planning organizations, non-profits and other agencies throughout Florida. This map does not include all existing, proposed and conceptual trails in Florida, but focuses on trails that can form a comprehensive connected system when complete. To be recognized as a Land Trail Opportunity, the corridor must meet the following criteria to the greatest extent possible:

- Crosses or has the potential to cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- Documented endorsement of local or regional government.
- Leads to or connects to a destination which provides natural scenic qualities and diverse experiences.
- Provides access to conservation lands, historic, recreational or cultural sites.
- Supports the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Paddling Trail Opportunity corridors represent the vision for a comprehensive water-based trail system. To be recognized as a Paddling Trail Opportunity, the corridor must meet the following criteria to the greatest extent possible:

- Recognized as an existing or potential tourism destination due to scenic qualities and diverse experiences.
- Spans at least three miles.
- Navigable during most months in an average year.
- Benefits from increased visitation without harm to the natural environment.

Priorities

The Greenways and Trails System Priority corridors are the focused vision for trails in the state. The Priority corridors consist of selected Opportunity corridors that have been collectively prioritized by multiple cities, counties and managing entities. The corridors on the maps

“Our communities increasingly are looking for a wider range of transportation choices.”

Florida Transportation Plan, 2015



Savanas Preserve State Park

“Two-thirds of Americans would like more transportation options so they have the freedom to choose how to get to their destinations.”

Transportation for America, 2010



Ponce De Leon State Park

are represented as approximately five miles wide to allow for flexibility in the proposed trail alignments as they are refined. To be recognized as a Priority corridor, it must meet these criteria to the greatest extent possible:

- Includes long-distance trails or provides connections between long-distance trails and/or long loops to join multiple counties and population centers.
- Demonstrates broad regional and community support, including those entities willing to commit to trail management and long-term maintenance.
- Builds on past and programmed state and federal investments in trails, particularly when matched by funding from local and private sources.
- Provides public safety by offering non-motorized use that is separated from highways.
- Supports and further establishes national, state or regional trail projects, plans and initiatives.
- Enhances connections to parks, trails and greenways.
- Provides access to and supports the Florida Wildlife Corridor.
- Enhances access to nature-based tourism and economic development by connecting natural, recreational, cultural and historic sites.

OGT has worked with partners and stakeholders to identify and delineate 13 distinct regional trails within the Priority corridor.

The FGTS Opportunity and Priority maps are maintained online along with the data resources through FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com.

Benefits of Greenways and Trails

Economic Development and Tourism

Any trail, no matter the length, can be an economic asset to a community. A study by Headwaters Economics, entitled *Measuring Trail Benefits: Business Impacts*, states that “Trails can generate business impacts and create new jobs by attracting visitors, especially overnight visitors.” The study also shows that communities with connections to trails begin to transform themselves into destinations for trail users and they also become desired locations where people also want to live and work. Regional trails attract visitors from outside the local area who travel specifically to use a trail. The benefits from multiuse regional trails can have a direct impact on local business. The economic benefit from trails is highest when a trail is connected to local businesses that cater to trail user needs. This can be a link through trail spurs that connect directly to the business district, or through wayfinding signs at trailheads or shuttles between a community and the trailhead. Because lodging is usually the biggest expenditure of an overnight trip, a trail’s economic impact increases when it draws more overnight users.

In 2017, the Trail Town program was established to encourage and create trail hubs. Like Gateway Communities for hikers on the Florida National Trail or Blueway Communities for paddlers, the goal of the Trail Town program is to inspire cities and communities to fully capitalize on the economic opportunities afforded to them by trails and trail tourism. Successful Trail Towns embrace the culture and benefits of trails, bringing enhanced prosperity and vitality into their communities. The first Trail Town, Dunedin, was designated in 2018.

A Trail Town in Florida is a community located along, or in proximity to, one or more long-distance, nonmotorized recreational trails. Whether on a paved or unpaved multiuse trail, paddling, equestrian or hiking trail, recreational



Dunedin, Florida

Trail Town Designation



The first Trail Town to be designated was Dunedin. Located along Florida's west coast, Dunedin has long been a mecca for non-motorized paved trail users. Bicyclists, joggers, in-line skaters and those enjoying a leisurely stroll can access the town by way of the Pinellas Trail, which runs through downtown on an abandoned CSX railroad corridor. The multi-use paved trail loop stretches from St. Petersburg to Tarpon Springs. Town officials credit the trail for a sharp rise in the business occupancy rate, from 30% to 100%. Bike shops, cafes, motels and other businesses cater to trail users.

users can leave the main path to utilize the services and enjoy the unique character of the community.

The town provides a safe place where both residents and trail users can walk, bike, paddle, etc., find goods and services and easily access both the trail and the community. A Trail Town may have outdoor equipment shops, restaurants, a grocery store, local shops and lodging. Service providers often include guide services and gear stores. It has wide sidewalks, bike racks, benches, water and restrooms at convenient locations.

A Trail Town's economy prospers because of trail users, and its community thrives because of engaged citizens. A trail offers the community a safe and scenic means of traveling to work, parks, recreation and shopping areas without getting into a car. The trail can equally be a tourist attraction and a community asset. When you walk or bike through a successful Trail Town you see a multitude of thriving businesses. The downtown is utilized by recreational users, visitors and local citizens alike who are checking out local businesses and enjoying the nearby attractions.

Basic characteristics of a successful Trail Town include:

- Incentives to attract trail users off the trail to explore the town.
- Clear and safe connections between the town and trail.
- Wayfinding and readily available information about the town.
- Businesses that offer goods and services to meet the needs of trail users.
- Festivals and events are held that draw people to the trail who may not normally be trail users.
- Safe connections to work, schools, parks and shopping.
- Relationships with adjacent communities that promote the regional trail as a tourist destination.

Local businesses, especially those that accommodate the needs of the trail users, regularly feel the economic impacts of these destination trails. Direct connections between the commercial centers and the regional trails can be accomplished by trail spurs or, indirectly, by wayfinding signage or shuttles from nearby trailheads. To encourage businesses to help promote the Trail Town, they are asked to sign a "Trail Town Pledge." This helps to quantify the local support and also identifies how they will support the initiative, such as providing bike racks, restroom access, discounts on purchases or trail information. Businesses that sign the pledge are provided a Trail Town sticker they can place in their window to identify themselves as Trail Town ambassadors.

Improved Health

The FGTS offers numerous opportunities to support active lifestyles and enhance overall health by providing greater access to outdoor recreation and alternative transportation options. By creating a well-designed and maintained network of trails and greenways that connect communities, the advantages of activities like walking, biking, horseback riding and paddling are clearly recognized, encompassing not only physical health benefits but also providing the opportunity to connect with nature and foster community ties.

To stay informed of how outdoor recreation affects health trends in Florida, and to help further our mutual goals, OGT staff works with the Florida Department of Health and participates on standing committees for the update to the Florida State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP). The priority area of Social and Economic Conditions Impacting Health under SHIP Goal SEC 3 aims to "Support communities to promote healthy, interconnected and safe environments." Objective SEC 3.2 directly addresses this issue by "increasing the number of trail towns in the state from 11 to 15 by 2027." Each of Florida's 67 counties creates a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) from the goals and objectives outlined in the SHIP. In this way, communities can better understand how to best utilize statewide resources to develop trails locally.

“Greenways improve water quality by creating a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and road runoff.”

Chuck Flink, Greenways, Inc.



Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park

The Florida Department of Health also administers the Healthiest Weight initiative. This is a public-private collaboration to help Florida's children and adults make choices about healthy eating and active living. Strategy One of the Healthiest Weight initiative aims to "Increase opportunities for physical activity." The FGTS supports achieving this by providing safe spaces for physical activity in the form of protected and interconnected trails.

The FGTS also provides a return on investment by helping to reduce the public health costs of diseases and physical ailments stemming from inactivity and obesity, which, in turn, increases the ability of Floridians to live healthy lives.

Transportation Choices

Trails and greenways are increasingly important in transportation planning and development. Because of Florida's large population and year-round tourism economy, it is important to provide a practical, accessible and safe means for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel through and between communities.

While greenways and trails have long been known for their recreational benefits, they are an increasingly critical component of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within multimodal transportation systems. Trails can play an important role in transportation for residents. As cities look for ways to reduce traffic congestion, multiuse paths are often part of the conversation. Trails, separated from traffic, are safer and more inclusive than sidewalks. They are wider and create more space for benches, shade, lighting and other structures that promote walkability.

Greenways often serve as a central spine that connects to residential areas and business districts via spur trails. They often lead to additional enhancements like bike lanes, pedestrian crossings, road diets and other components of Complete Streets. Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, operating and maintaining streets that enables safe access for all people who need to use them, including pedestrians, bicyclists,

motorists and transit riders. Greenways also connect with greener transportation choices including transit stops, scooter/bike share stations and micromobility hubs, places where people can connect to multiple modes of transportation to make their trip safe, convenient and reliable.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is an executive agency with the responsibility for coordinating the planning and development of a safe, viable and balanced statewide transportation system. Updated in 2021, Florida's Pedestrian and Bicycle Strategic Safety Plan (PBSP) serves as the implementation element of Florida's Strategic Highway Safety Plan. To address the need for a greater focus on a safe walking and bicycling infrastructure, FDOT formed the Florida Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Coalition. This coalition is comprised of a diverse group of federal, state, local and public partners and stakeholders charged with implementing the goals within the PBSP. This group's goal is to improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility and safety by facilitating partnerships and information-sharing that supports bicycle and pedestrian policy development and implementation. By incorporating separated multiuse trails into communities, the potential for crashes between vehicles and vulnerable users is significantly reduced. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is an active participant in this coalition and continuously seeks opportunities to provide input to FDOT on issues related to bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Conservation - Florida Wildlife Corridor

There are numerous environmental benefits provided by trails and greenways that help to protect the critical functions performed by natural environments. Because of their linear nature, trails and greenways not only provide areas for recreation, but also function as corridors for plants and wildlife. Vegetated greenways, as well as paved and unpaved trails with buffers, can assist in varying degrees to protect our natural resources. Linear corridors provide uninterrupted habitat and can contain a high diversity of plant and animal species that inhabit the edges of the corridor.

“Outdoor recreation activities thrive in Florida because of the year-round climate and available opportunities and in 2016 accounted for \$58.6 billion spent on trips, equipment and other items.”

Outdoor Industries Association, 2017



St. Marks Trail

The Florida Department of Transportation Advances Trails to Meet Transportation Needs

Because of Florida's large population and year-round tourism economy, it is vital to provide a viable and accessible means for bicyclists and pedestrians to safely travel through and between communities. While trails have been long known for their recreational benefits, they are now an increasingly critical component of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within multimodal transportation systems. Two-thirds of Americans would like more transportation options so they have the freedom to choose how to get to their destinations (Transportation for America, 2010). The Florida Transportation Plan, published in December 2015, includes a new statewide goal for More Transportation Choices. It is available at www.floridatransportationplan.com.

To address the need for a greater focus on walking and bicycling infrastructure, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) formed the Florida Bicycle and Pedestrian Partnership Council (FBPPC). The Council's mission is to promote the livability, health and economic benefits of bicycle and pedestrian activity and provide input to FDOT on issues affecting Florida's bicycle and pedestrian transportation needs.

When properly maintained, native habitat on the edges of trails can also suppress the occurrence of invasive plant species.

Often, greenways protect and link fragmented conservation lands and provide opportunities for protecting plant and animal species. When conservation lands become detached, these corridors can function as a conduit or migration route for species to move. This is often critical in preventing inbreeding that can limit genetic diversity. The more diverse the population, the better chance there is for survival. Without this diversity, local extinction can occur. Greenways in open sunny areas can support naturally occurring wildflowers on their edges, which provide habitat highways for crop and forest pollinators, especially in rural and agricultural areas.

Additionally, trails and greenways contribute to wetland preservation and the improvement of air and water quality in several ways. Recreational trail corridors provide enjoyable and safe alternatives to motorized vehicles, reducing the burning of fossil fuels. Ecological greenways and natural landscapes offer protection to large areas of plants that create oxygen and filter air pollutants. They also improve water quality by creating natural buffer zones that protect streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and road runoff.

As local governments develop innovative ways to address flooding, there are emerging patterns of utilizing green infrastructure (vegetation, soils and natural processes) and open space to complement other water mitigation efforts that may help lower flood risks naturally and increase their resilience. These green infrastructure projects offer opportunities for greenway and trail connections and can further migratory wildlife paths. Partnerships with local governments and agencies that are considering green infrastructure as part of comprehensive and land-use plans offer new opportunities to create connections within the statewide system.

The FGTS can also provide opportunities for environmental education. For example, trails

can be used as educational tools by providing interpretive signage to inform recreational users about water quality issues or species sustainability. In a similar way, a greenway can serve as a hands-on outdoor classroom for people to experience natural settings, fostering environmental awareness.

Goal 1: Implement Regional Systems

Why Regional Trails?

Long distance trails provide an alternative means of transportation and help to preserve local character and Florida's natural environment. By attracting visitors for multiple days, these trails promote tourism and economic development. They also provide access to outdoor recreation, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices.

A single local trail can require significant effort to complete, but successfully establishing and connecting several local trails into a regional trail system involves a network of stakeholders, including advocates and decision makers, who are truly committed to a project. Combining multiple trail projects to achieve a long-distance regional trail system requires advanced coordination and a determined effort. Once complete, regional trails provide multiple uses including biking, hiking, equestrian and paddling. These systems also link natural communities including natural areas, parks, beaches, rivers and springs.

Assistance and Resources

OGT has regional planners who provide technical assistance, planning expertise and coordination of resources to help implement the FGTS.

Regional planners work with metropolitan/ transportation planning organizations, multiple counties, cities and citizen support organizations to establish a leadership team for each regional trail. The leadership teams are composed of representatives from that area. The desired outcome is to collectively assist in making recommendations to county commissions, tourism development boards, economic development



Miami Beach, East Coast Greenway Alliance

The East Coast Greenway (ECG) is a developing trail system, spanning nearly 3,000 miles extending from Canada to Key West, Florida, linking all the major cities of America's Eastern Seaboard. It is the nation's most ambitious long-distance urban trail project. At 600 miles, Florida is the longest state segment on the national East Coast Greenway route. With over 200 miles of route already off road, complete and designated, the ECG is actively working with local communities, national and state agencies and private organizations to connect existing trails with planned shared-use paths. North to south, the ECG enters the state from Georgia at Fernandina Beach then continues through 13 coastal counties to Key West, the United States' southernmost mainland point. The ECG travels close to the coast, connecting communities and small towns, major cities including Jacksonville and Miami, America's earliest historic sites as well as vast coastal nature preserves and an extensive number of Florida State Parks. The ECG also includes the Florida Overseas Heritage Highway Trail which hops from island to island through the Florida Keys for 100 miles to Key West, providing some of the most recognized iconic vistas and sunsets along the national ECG route.

The ECG provides Florida residents and visitors of all abilities and ages a consistent high quality, safe and motor vehicle free trail experience wherever the ECG logo is encountered. The entire ECG in Florida is within the FGTS Land Trails Opportunity Map and the FGTS Priority Trails Map. For more information, visit <https://www.greenway.org/states/florida>.

commissions, chambers of commerce and others to focus resources toward the establishment of the desired regional trail.

To assist regional trail leadership teams, OGT maintains current technical assistance information on its website. These resources support all FGTS projects and include design guidelines for paved and unpaved trails, economic and health benefits, grant opportunities and much more. To advance the technical assistance program, educational materials are regularly being developed, updated and shared at facilitated regional summits. These resources are designed to target specific audiences such as rural communities, private developers or health care providers.

Designation

The Designation Program was established by Chapter 260, F.S., to identify and promote greenway and trail projects within the Greenways and Trails System. This program raises public awareness of the conservation and recreation benefits of trails and greenways and encourages voluntary partnerships in conservation, development and management of system components. To date, nearly 1.5 million acres of public and private lands are designated including state trails, state parks, national forest lands and trails, local greenways and trails, blueways and other areas.

Trail Town Designation

To be designated as a Trail Town in Florida, communities contact the Office of Greenways and Trails. Communities can perform a self-assessment using guidelines provided by OGT. The self-assessment addresses trails, accessibility, community/business participation, amenities, safety and trail information/wayfinding.

Upon receipt of the self-assessment, an OGT regional coordinator will schedule a tour of the community independently, as well as with the applicant, to ensure the characteristics of a successful Trail Town exist. Once there is consensus from staff and it is determined that the community is ready for designation, the Florida Greenways and

Trails Council will officially recognize the Trail Town at its next scheduled meeting.

To be designated, lands or waterways must:

- **Protect and/or enhance natural, recreational, cultural or historic resources; and**
- **Provide linear open space or a hub or a site; or**
- **Promote connectivity between or among conservation lands, communities, parks, other recreational facilities, cultural sites or historic sites.**

Goal 2: Allocate Strategic Investments and Resources to Accelerate the Completion of the System

Funding Resources

A successful trail project requires sufficient funding for acquisition, development, management, maintenance and marketing. OGT works with public and private partners to help identify and strategically focus funding to close gaps within the system.

OGT coordinates with agencies and other grant programs that support public recreation access. To assist with acquiring strategic priority projects within the Greenways and Trails System, the Division of State Lands developed the Strategic Managed Areas Lands List (SMALL) Florida Forever project which was subsequently approved by the Acquisition and Restoration Council. This project consists of parcels identified by OGT and other land-management agencies including the Division of Recreation and Parks, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Florida Forest Service. The parcels will serve to close gaps in the Priority System or create a more manageable boundary for the agencies.



Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, Santos Trail

“Greenways and trails were the number one outdoor recreation facility respondents would like to see built in their Florida communities.”

2021 Florida SCORP Survey

DEP-administered funding programs include:

- Florida Forever
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program
- Recreational Trails Program
- Florida Communities Trust

One of the many benefits of establishing leadership teams for each regional trail is to gain a unified commitment to use local funding sources by encouraging city, county and regional governmental support for projects. Partners and stakeholders should also work with private developers to encourage them to incorporate trail projects that close gaps into their development plans. Leadership team members can also encourage the inclusion of trail and greenway projects in any planned unit development, development of regional impact, sector plan, etc.

Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail Program

Furthering the state's commitment to improving mobility, the Florida Legislature passed measures in 2014 and 2015 to fund the development of multiuse trails. Specifically, section 339.81, F.S., established the Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail program. Administered by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the SUN Trail program provides funding for the development of the Florida Greenways and Trails System priority paved trail corridors for bicyclists and pedestrians. Today, the SUN Trail network includes a combination of existing, planned, and conceptual multiuse trails; it represents the paved component of the Florida Greenways and Trails System's Land Trails Priority Network. Implementing these projects increases the reliability and safety of Florida's transportation system.

In 2023, Senate Bill 106, entitled Florida Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network, was introduced

in the Florida legislature, and was subsequently approved and became law on July 1, 2023. Highlights of the legislation include:

- Prioritizes the development of "regionally significant trails." These trails span multiple counties, contribute to economic and ecotourism development, showcase the state's wildlife areas and natural resources, and serve as important connections between trails across the state.
- Enhances the planning, coordination and marketing efforts for the state's bicycle and pedestrian trail system and the Wildlife Corridor.
- Trails developed within the Wildlife Corridor must make maximum use of previously disturbed lands, such as abandoned roads, railroads, canal corridors and drainage berms. They should also comply with applicable land use regulations.
- FDOT is required to erect uniform signage to identify trails within the SUN Trail Network. FDOT must also submit periodic reports on the status of the network.
- "Trail Town" communities are recognized and specific entities will be directed to promote the use of trails as economic assets, including trail-based tourism.
- A member from the Board of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation will be added to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Greenways and Trails Council.
- The Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation (VISIT Florida) Board of Directors will include a member representing nature-based tourism.

Additionally, the bill increases recurring funding for the SUN Trail Program from \$25 million to \$50 million. It also provides a non-recurring appropriation of \$200 million for planning, designing and constructing of the SUN Trail Network. The bill ensures that the currently planned projects in the FDOT 5-Year Work Program for the SUN Trail



Biscayne Everglades Greenway

The Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail program provides funding for the development of a statewide system of paved multiuse trails (SUN Trail network) for bicyclists and pedestrians. The SUN Trail network is the paved component of the Florida Greenways and Trails System Priority Land Trail Network. For additional information visit FloridaSunTrail.com.

Network will not be disrupted. However, the new funds are specifically allocated to add new projects or expedite work on existing projects.

FDOT will continue to advance the establishment of the FGTS by programming the recurring \$50 million allocation to close gaps and complete trails within the priority system. Local sponsors or agencies must secure funding for trailheads, restrooms and other amenities.

Not all trails in Florida are identified as a priority in the FGTS, therefore they are not eligible for SUN Trail funding. FDOT administers other funding sources, from both federal and state allocations, for improving bicycle and pedestrian safety, nonmotorized system connectivity, developing supporting trail facilities and improving the environment. For trail projects seeking other funds from FDOT, early coordination with local Transportation Planning Organizations, Regional Planning Councils and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) can be helpful. To be eligible for these funding sources, Chapter 339.175 (8), F.S., requires prioritization by the MPO or board of county commissioners. The primary items to be considered by each MPO when developing a list of project priorities are preserving the existing transportation infrastructure; enhancing Florida's economic competitiveness; and improving travel choices to ensure mobility.

Goal 3: Promote and Market the Florida Greenways and Trails System to Residents and Visitors

Communicate and Educate

To effectively advance the Greenways and Trails System, clear communication is essential among its stakeholders. Two main user groups exist: current users who already appreciate trails and potential users who may be unaware of the opportunities. Stakeholders can be divided into formal groups such as regional planning organizations and local governments, and informal groups like recreational user associations

and foundations. A marketing and communications strategy will be implemented in concert with the DEP communications office, drawing on successful approaches used in established greenways and trail systems. The goal is to create a unified message that increases awareness and engagement among users and stakeholders. This strategy will include developing tools to promote trail and greenway usage, encouraging current users to become formal partners and conducting outreach to local governments and potential users through presentations and summits. Continued collaboration with existing partners will also be crucial, with tailored tools and materials being developed and shared.

With the approval of Senate Bill 106, the Florida Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network legislation, the Board of Directors for the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation gained an additional seat which will represent the nature-based tourism industry. This seat will be appointed by Enterprise Florida, the Division of Tourism Marketing. In addition, the legislation directs Enterprise Florida to add several components to its 4-year marketing plan. These initiatives include:

- Promotion of nature-based tourism, including, but not limited to, promotion of the Florida Greenways and Trails System as described under section 260.014, F.S.
- Promotion of the Florida Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network as described under section 339.81, F.S.
- Coordination of efforts with OGT to promote and assist local communities, including, but not limited to, communities designated as Trail Towns by the Office of Greenways and Trails, to maximize use of nearby trails as economic assets, including specific promotion of trail-based tourism.
- Promotion of heritage tourism.

Enterprise Florida contracts with VISIT Florida, the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, a direct-support organization established in section 288.1226, F.S., to execute tourism promotion and



Windley Key State Park

“Bicycling significantly reduces transportation emissions while also reducing traffic congestion and the need for petroleum.”

Bay Area Bike to Work Day, 2018

marketing services for Florida. This also includes the activities prescribed by the 4-year marketing plan. VISIT Florida, in cooperation with DEP's Office of Communications and OGT, has already begun developing the marketing campaign that will speak to potential visitors to the state as well as to residents. Florida is well known for its beaches and tourist attractions. This campaign will introduce people to the unexpected recreational opportunities in Florida, such as trails and greenways.

Branding is an important aspect of successfully promoting the FGTS. Having a meaningful, consistent, identifiable brand will help to establish an interconnected system of Greenways and Trails for Florida. A brand style guide will be developed to provide consistent instructions to those who communicate, now and in the future, the purpose and key values of the Greenways and Trails System.

Goal 4: Establish Partnerships and Engage Stakeholders

Align Complementary Plans and Programs

Partnerships are key to establishing and managing a well-planned FGTS. Benefits of partnerships include:

- Improved outcomes.
- Enhanced understanding of multiagency activities.
- Consensus-building.
- Increased coverage and resources.
- Cohesive approaches.
- Supportive exchange of ideas.
- Improved services.
- Raised awareness.
- Mutual trust.

Multiple agencies and organizational partners at different levels collaborate to establish,

manage and promote the system. Guidelines for safe and accessible trails are promoted while respecting partners' individual missions. Continued coordination with key entities is crucial, and joint workshops and events will be hosted.

Volunteers are also critical partners who contribute to trail establishment and maintenance. OGT supports volunteer efforts and encourages the formation of local "friends organizations." Non-profit organizations play a vital role in advocating for trails, applying for grants, working across stakeholder boundaries and promoting trail events for support, management and economic growth.

Summary/Conclusion

The completion of this FGTS Plan was made possible through the commitment of many stakeholders and valuable partnerships among multiple organizations.

The progress on the regional trails within the statewide system to date showcases this commitment and provides a solid foundation for implementing the actions identified in this plan through the Florida Greenways and Trails program. The intent of this plan is to provide guidance and encouragement and effectively work together to reach mutual goals. The work that lies ahead will depend on the assistance and dedication of our many partners.

The completion of the FGTS can only be accomplished with participation and involvement from stakeholders at many levels. The strategies and action steps identified in this plan will require everyone who worked to develop them to participate in implementing them. In addition, there is a need to engage others to establish new partnerships. The FGTS stands to be an international attraction, providing a safe and unforgettable trail experience for residents and all visitors to the state. Florida is positioned at the forefront of an exciting period that will result in economic growth, improved health and wellness, more alternative transportation methods, increased outdoor recreation opportunities, more



Collier- Seminole State Trail

“Trails and greenways help improve air and water quality. For example, communities with trails provide enjoyable and safe options for transportation.”

Rails to Trails Conservancy, Benefits of Trails and Greenways

livable communities and increased conservation efforts. All of these contribute to an improved quality of life.

Next Steps

Much work lies ahead. The identified strategies, goals and action steps provide guidelines to developing a successful greenways and trails system in Florida. To continue the momentum and generate interest in the FGTS, an aggressive approach will be needed to implement the action steps identified. The goals include establishing partnerships and regional alliances for implementation, identifying and securing funding opportunities for development and management, providing technical assistance and marketing the system. The many actions that follow will help

contribute to the success of Florida's Greenways and Trails program. While many Greenways and Trails have already been established throughout the state, this Plan identifies and lays the groundwork for a connected system of regional trails statewide.

Understandably, the time frames will rely on many considerations that will be determined through discussion and consensus building among all stakeholders and partners. The Plan will serve as a guide for these decisions, but the details will be determined as the actions are undertaken. The regional concept this Plan proposes will remain the same, but to take advantage of opportunities that will emerge as all partners work together, the action plan will be fluid.



Silver Springs State Park



Silver Springs State Park

Public lands and waters are the outdoor industry's basic infrastructure, and without them the industry cannot survive. Preserving access is imperative to enhancing the industry's economic and social impact. Access ensures every American's ability to get outside where jobs, health and communities grow.

Outdoor Recreation Economy, 2017