



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



PUBLIC MEETING: April 13, 2023
TIME: 9:00 am
LOCATION: DEP Carr Building: 3800 Commonwealth Blvd. Tallahassee, FL

FGTC Members in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- *Mike Stephens – Trail User Appointed by Governor*
- *Sarrah Glassner - Greenway User Appointed by Governor*
- *Stephanie Wardein – Private Landowner Appointed by the Governor*
- *Kate Miller – Delegate for Scott Stryker, Greenway User Appointed by the Governor*
- *Chelsea Noble – Delegate for Traci Deen, Greenway User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Faron Boggs – Trail user Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Jason Lauritsen – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Wesley Stalnaker – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Chris Rietow – Apalachee Regional Planning Council*
- *Shawn Thomas – U.S. Forest Service*
- *Parks Small – FDEP, Division of Recreation & Parks*
- *Jim Couillard – Marion County Parks & Recreation Director*
- *Jerrie Lindsey – FWC, Office of Recreational Services Director*
- *Vincent Birdsong – DOS, Florida Master Site File Supervisor*
- *Robin Birdsong – DOT, SUN Trail Manager*
- *Edwin McCook – Suwannee River Water Management District*
- *Brooks White – Florida Forest Service*

OGT Staff in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- *Samantha Browne – Bureau Chief*
- *Britney Moore – Assistant Bureau Chief*
- *Anna Hopkins – Outdoor Recreation Specialist/Staff to Council*
- *Katie White – Regional Coordinator*
- *Justin Baldwin – Regional Coordinator*
- *Allison Beaty – Regional Coordinator*
- *Doug Alderson – Outdoor Recreation Specialist*

Welcome

Welcome remarks were given by Chuck Hatcher, Director of the FDEP Division of Recreation and Parks. Chuck gave an overview of the Division's recent accomplishments and upcoming and

recently passed legislation relating to parks and recreation. Legislation of special mention included a bill that gives Floridians first access to State Park campsite reservations, and the recently passed bill that instituted changes to the priorities and make up of the FGTC and Trail Town program. Chuck shared that he had served on the Council in the past as a local government representative before coming to DEP.

Approve Agenda – Led by Jim Couillard

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Sarah Glassner*

SECOND: *Chris Rietow*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE MEETING AGENDA

Approve the December 2022 Meeting Summary – Led by Jim Couillard

FGTC REMARKS: *Mike Stephens noted one correction: in the Council Updates section of the December meeting notes, he was referencing the Wekiva Trail, not the Seminole Trail.*

MOTION: *Chip Birdsong*

SECOND: *Jerrie Lindsey*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE MEETING SUMMARY WITH MODIFICATIONS

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Office of Greenways and Trails Update – Samantha Browne

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) draft has been completed and is currently undergoing review and approval from multiple other departments. The Outdoor Florida Webinar Series will continue at least through the end of 2023, with the next webinar scheduled for May 10th covering funding sources for trail projects. Since December, OGT staff have attended five events and spoken with over 750 people about recreation and trails. The next event OGT is attending is LakeFest in DeFuniak Springs on May 20th. There are several events coming up this spring and summer that can be found on the OGT website under the Community Trails Calendar tab. Doug Alderson shared trail count data that has been collected so far in 2023 from trail within the FGTS. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is coordinating a logo contest for the Gulf Coast Trail that will begin in June and end in October. DEP is partnering by helping to spread the word to contacts and on social media.

Updates in Region 1 included the beginning of regional trail alliances for the Capital City to Sea Trail, US 90 Trail and the Great Northwest Coast Connector. Region 2 Updates included overview of Allison Beaty's involvement with the Northeast Florida Regional Council Ecotourism and Trail Steering Committee, Pasco County Greenways, Trails, and Blueways Plan Working Group, trail

workshops through the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, and Bicycle/Pedestrian Safety Coalition Meetings. She also noted that FDOT is currently working on trail inventory for DOT Region 2. Region 3 updates included work on the Gulf Coast Trail in Southwest Florida, the City of Venice's interest in becoming a Trail Town, and Katie White's experience at the SORP workshop in Asheville, NC.

Samantha Browne introduced SB106. Among other things, the bill would add a position to the council that specifically represents the Florida Wildlife Corridor (appointed by the Governor) and more directly link the Florida Greenways and Trails System priority trails network with SUN trail funding. The council will have more responsibilities as far as recommending trail funding priorities to DOT, and DOT will receive more funding to complete trail projects. The bill also gives OGT specific authorization to carry out the Trail Town program within communities across Florida and encourages development of the FGTS into the Florida Wildlife Corridor where feasible.

Following the OGT update, HuiWui Shen with FDOT gave an overview of SB 106 which recently passed both the Florida House and Senate. DOT is currently reviewing and understanding the intent of the new legislation and working with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO)/Transportation Planning Organizations (TPO)/Land Managers/Local Partners on the process and criteria to fulfill FDOT's responsibilities of the legislation. They are working on updating their SUN trail process to focus on trails of regional significance, trail towns, and the Florida Wildlife Corridor. They are identifying ways to collect all the data needed to fulfill the new reporting requirements. There are discussions about adding new trail counters in strategic locations to more accurately record what kind of trail users are on SUN trails. For the additional \$25 million received in the first year, ready and eligible projects will be priority. DOT is working on setting up the first year of work projects to get as close to the new \$50 million total as possible. They are exploring the most efficient ways to select which projects to focus on in future years with the annual \$25 million increase. DOT can serve as the facilitator between locals and the council to make sure the correct priorities are identified. DOT is committed to using the one time increase of \$200 million to get set on the road to success.

Trail & Recreation Placemaking in Tallahassee – Betsy Couch (KCCI)

Betsy discussed Knight Creative Communities' mission to enhance a sense of place and improve quality of life for residents through creative community projects. KCCI has completed 34 projects over 15 years in Tallahassee working with over 200 community catalysts (volunteers). She highlighted several recent projects including Discovery at Cascades, the TLH letters, Art of the Box, Crosswalks to Classrooms, Fully Booked, and the Bicycle Park. The Fully Booked project was conceived to elevate the trails in Tallahassee while also addressing low literacy rates in the city. At each Fully Booked location, there is a multi-lingual story displayed along the trail that is changed out a few times a year. At the main location (Eastside Branch Library/Pedrick Pond trail) there is also a hammock garden and book benches. Betsy explained how communities with a strong sense of place are able to grow more sustainably long term.

Tallahassee Area Trails Update – Autumn Calder & Michael Alfano (Blueprint)

Autumn and Michael presented about the "Trailahassee" identity, highlights along the Capital Cascades Trail, and priorities/opportunities for trail projects around the city. The 2019

Community Trail Report found that Tallahassee had over 700 miles of unpaved trails and 34.8 miles of shared use paths. Before and after photos were shown of the Franklin Blvd. segment of the Capital Cascades Trail, highlighting infrastructure improvements to control flooding. Cascades Park also features creative stormwater solutions that double as recreation areas. The development of Cascades Park has led to further investment in the area by private businesses (hotels, apartments, etc.). The bridge connecting Cascades to the rest of the trail has seen over 1,000,000 crossings since 2016 and features solar cells to offset carbon. Other highlights along the trail include the Anita Favors Plaza, the FAMU Way playground, the green roof restroom, and the skateable art park. Priorities and opportunities discussed included the Welaunee Greenway, a Northeast Connector currently under design, a proposed 5.9 mile University Greenway, and improvements from Midtown to Bannerman.

Private Landowner Designation – Aterro Recreational Park – Allison Beaty

Aterro Master Association applied for designation of the Jeremy's Hill Trail System at Aterro Recreational Park to be included in the FGTS through OGT's designation program. The area is managed by SORBA Jax and the Aterro Master Association. The park is 100+ acres and offers trails for mountain biking, running, walking, and general recreation. While not directly located on a regional trail, the park does connect via sidewalks to other trails in the area.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Jim Couillard*

SECOND: *Stephanie Wardein*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE DESIGNATION

Map Updates – Region 1 – Justin Baldwin

Updates were presented for Escambia County, Santa Rosa County, Walton County, Bay County, Jackson County, Gadsden County, and Leon County.

Map Updates – Region 2 – Allison Beaty

Updates were presented for Alachua County, Nassau County, Duval County, Clay County, Flagler County, Volusia County, Citrus County, Brevard County, Seminole County, Orange County, Lake County, and Pasco County. It was noted that 32 support letters were received for a connection from Micanopy to the Gainesville-Hawthorn State Trail, 60 support letters were received for the Wekiva Trail, and 40 support letters were received for the River-to-Hills Trail. Counties without changes included Hamilton, Suwannee, Lafayette, Dixie, Columbia, Baker, union, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, Putnam, Marion, St. Johns, Hernando, and Sumter.

Map Updates – Region 3 – Katie White

Updates were presented for Osceola County, Polk County, Indian River County, St. Lucie County, Martin County, Pinellas County, Hillsborough County, Manatee County, Sarasota County, Charlotte County, Palm Beach County, Broward County, Dade County, and Collier County.

Counties without changes included Lee, Hendry, Monroe, Glades, Highlands, Hardee, Desoto, and Okeechobee.

Map Updates – Council Comment

General comments amongst the council included that the lines on the maps need to be clearly indicated as corridors and not specific trails. The current markings can be easily misinterpreted by the public resulting in confusion about trails being placed in conservation areas. It was reiterated that the approval of the maps is a very early first phase action, and all the trail corridors indicated may not end up as feasible projects. The council requested to review the interactive GIS map after the council meeting before the vote on Day 2. [A link to the updated maps was emailed out as requested following the Day 1 meeting].

Jerrie Lindsey: Landowners and managers should be engaged when a trail is moved within the system. She would like this to be a further topic of discussion at future meetings. Raised concerns about intensification of recreation within conservation areas, citing a proposed trail corridor within the Tenoroc WMA. Upon closer inspection it was found that the corridor encompassed the edge of the WMA even though it appeared to run through the middle. This further highlighted the need to make corridor vs trail clear on the public maps. Asked what the threshold should be for determining when a trail is finished enough to promote another trail to DOT as a priority for SUN Trail funding.

Jason Lauritsen: It would be helpful to know if a trail in the plan is paved or unpaved. Would like more resources to better understand the local perspective on trail changes within the system. It is difficult to grasp how the proposed changes will actually look on the ground when reviewing so much information at once. Noted that the new bill states that the FGTS may be developed in the Florida Wildlife Corridor “only where feasible”. Pointed out a section of trail in the Palm Beach area that connected two sections of wildlife corridor. Without the trail there, filling that gap would be impossible. Also questioned how funding would be dispersed within the system.

Jim Couillard: Asked about the criteria for a trail being promoted from opportunity to priority. Answered by regional coordinators that the entity asking for the promotion must show things like stakeholder support and regional connectivity. Noted that there will likely be a lot of new changes at the next update due to the recent legislation, and the Council will largely be relying on DOT and DEP to know which updates should be approved.

Mike Stephens: Asked if the Florida Wildlife Corridor would be reflected in the new FGTS maps. Samantha Browne responded yes. Also asked if the Council will be recognizing a 3rd and 4th priority regional trail for SUN trail funding, considering the new bill. Samantha Browne answered that OGT will wait for direction from FDOT on when another trail recommendation is needed.

Shawn Thomas: With the new SUN trail funding, it will be important to focus on nearby paralleling trails to see what can be combined.

Robin Birdsong: Would like to know how many miles were added to the network with this update. Answer by Jess Richards (GIS Specialist) following meeting: 446.19 miles of new opportunity trails and 527.28 miles of new priority trails (including promoted opportunity trails).

Stephanie Wardein: There is a lot of information presented in the map updates, how can the council be more involved in the process in the future before the day of the vote? Also noted it would be helpful to have more information on trail status during the update process.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Following the Blueprint presentation, comments were made expressing a need for more equestrian resources at recreation areas and equestrian trails within Tallahassee. One equestrian user expressed concern that new trails being built were diminishing the availability of equestrian recreation spaces. It was also noted that horses were not allowed on the Lafayette Heritage Trail.

During the map updates discussion Gallus Quigley provided context on some of the changes in Lake County (Region 2.) Laks Gurram (Charlotte County MPO) provided background on future trails near the Babcock Ranch WMA.

ADJOURN:

MOTION: *Wesley Stalnaker*

SECOND: *Mike Stephens*



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



PUBLIC MEETING: April 14, 2023
TIME: 9:00 am
LOCATION: DEP Carr Building: 3800 Commonwealth Blvd. Tallahassee, FL

FGTC Members in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- *Mike Stephens – Trail User Appointed by Governor*
- *Stephanie Wardein – Private Landowner Appointed by the Governor*
- *Kate Miller – Delegate for Scott Stryker, Greenway User Appointed by the Governor*
- *Chelsea Noble – Delegate for Traci Deen, Greenway User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Faron Boggs – Trail user Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Jason Lauritsen – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Wesley Stalnaker – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Chris Rietow – Apalachee Regional Planning Council*
- *Parks Small – FDEP, Division of Recreation & Parks*
- *Jim Couillard – Marion County Parks & Recreation Director*
- *Katherine Burke – Delegate for Jerrie Lindsey, FWC*
- *Vincent Birdsong – DOS, Florida Master Site File Supervisor*
- *Robin Birdsong – DOT, SUN Trail Manager*
- *Edwin McCook – Suwannee River Water Management District*
- *Brooks White – Florida Forest Service*

OGT Staff in Attendance for Council Meeting:

- *Samantha Browne – Bureau Chief*
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- *Katie White – Regional Coordinator*
- *Justin Baldwin – Regional Coordinator*
- *Allison Beaty – Regional Coordinator*
- *Doug Alderson – Outdoor Recreation Specialist*

Approve Agenda

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Wesley Stalnaker*

SECOND: *Chip Birdsong*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE MEETING AGENDA

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Map Updates Follow-Up Discussion & Vote – Council Members

FGTC REMARKS: *Edwin McCook suggests that the council approve the maps with the caveat that a disclaimer will be added to the bottom clarifying that markings are corridors and not trails.*

MOTION: *Edwin McCook*

SECOND: *Jason Lauritsen*

Note: Robin Birdsong abstained from vote and Stephanie Wardein was not present for vote.

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS (modifications- disclaimer as described above).

Coast to Coast Alliance Meeting Recap – Allison Beaty

The Coast-to-Coast Alliance meeting took place on February 14th at Wekiwa Springs State Park. There were 47 attendees in total representing agencies such as FDOT, the County & City, Bike/Walk Central Florida, TDCs, Visit Florida, FTA, FBA, the Greenways and Trails Foundation, Kimley-Horn, Metro Plan, SCTPO, and trail users. Topics at the meeting covered strategic planning and maintenance of the trail, safety, promotion, signage, and funding, Counties along the trail also provided updates. The draft Story Map was again presented to the Council for feedback.

Tallahassee to St. Marks State Trail & Geo Parks Update – Lance Kelly

Lance discussed his role in managing the Tallahassee to St. Marks Trail along with other parks in the GeoParks group: St. Marks River Preserve State Park, Natural Bridge Battlefield Historic State Park, and Econfina River State Park. He discussed some of the wildlife found at the parks including black bears at St. Marks River Preserve, and gave a shout out to the Equestrian groups who perform trail maintenance at Econfina River. The Tallahassee to St. Marks State Trail is maintained by multiple agencies including the City of Tallahassee, Leon County, the State, Wakulla County, and the City of St. Marks. Based on data from one trailhead, 212,000 people use the trail each year. He is planning on organizing an event on the trail to celebrate the first day of Greenways and Trails Month on October 1st.

Trail Town Designation – Brooksville – David Howard

David provided an overview of Brooksville's trail amenities and events.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Mike Stephens*

SECOND: *Stephanie Wardein*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) Endorse Trail Town Designation

Trail Town Designation – Mount Dora – Misty Sommers

Misty provided an overview of Mount Dora’s trail amenities and the future trail projects that will connect Mount Dora to other trail networks (Wekiva Trail and Innovation Trail).

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Chip Birdsong*

SECOND: *Wesley Stalaker*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) Endorse Trail Town Designation

Trail Town Designation –Capital Cascades Corridor– Justin Baldwin, Michael Alfano, Artie White

Justin provided an overview of the trail amenities along the Capital Cascades Corridor and surrounding area. Michael Alfano from Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency and Artie White from the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department added details and context on the trail features. Samantha Browne clarified that this designation is for the Capital Cascades Corridor only, similar to the past Trail Town designation that was given to Depot Park (within Gainesville) at a prior meeting.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Stephanie Wardein*

SECOND: *Mike Stephens*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) Endorse Trail Town Designation

Trail Town Designation – Milton – Justin Baldwin, Heather Lindsey, Tim Milstead

Justin provided an overview of Milton’s trail town amenities followed by additional information from Milton Mayor Heather Lindsey and Milton Planning Director Tim Milstead.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Robin Birdsong*

SECOND: *Stephanie Wardein*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) Endorse Trail Town Designation

Trail Town Application & Webpage Updates – Allison Beaty & Justin Baldwin

The Trail Town self-questionnaire will be redesigned, and questions will be added to encourage complete, detailed answers. A business pledge will be included for local businesses to sign on verifying that they are trail friendly. Baseline information about businesses occupancy rates and property values will be collected. OGT is looking into ways to incorporate QR codes linked to story maps into Trail Towns. More guidance will be given as to what a “good” application looks like and how to structure the PowerPoint presentation for the council. The Trail Town webpage is being redesigned to be more visually attractive with better organized information.

Election of new Chair and Vice Chair

Election was led by Samantha Browne. Mike Stephens nominated Jim Couillard as Chair. Jim accepted.

FGTC REMARKS: Motion to close Chair nominations.

MOTION: *Edwin McCook*

SECOND: *Mike Stephens*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) Elect Jim Couillard as Council Chair

Jim Couillard nominated Mike Stephens as Vice Chair. Mike accepted.

FGTC REMARKS: Motion to close Vice Chair nominations.

MOTION: *Edwin McCook*

SECOND: *Wesley Stalaker*

FGTC RECOMMENDATION:

(X) Elect Mike Stephens as Council Vice Chair

Public Comment:

Following the presentation by Lance Kelly regarding the Tallahassee to St. Marks Trail/Geo Parks, an equestrian user in the audience shared information about early trail building and maintenance projects performed by the equestrian community at St. Marks River Preserve State Park.

Council Updates & Comments:

Faron Boggs: Hiking the Grand Canyon rim to rim with family in June.

Robin Birdsong: Since the last meeting in December, 20.5 miles of new SUN trail projects have been constructed. 64 miles total have been constructed since the start of SUN trail funding. Construction of trail is not immediate due to various steps that must be taken beforehand such as P, D & E and feasibility studies. SB 106 will require more reporting around the construction of priority trails. This will be a challenge if the network continues to grow at a fast rate. The DOT Transportation Alternatives grant cycles is now open for District 5.

Katherine Burke: Florida Wild Quest is coming up between April 28th and May 7th. All the WMAs are participating this year. This is a great program to get people out in nature.

Stephanie Wardein: Southwest Florida is still rebuilding, there are eight strategic branches for long term recovery. Upcoming trail studies in Lee County will include stormwater management tactics. All hospitals and health systems in the state must create Community Health Assessments and work with community partners. Good opportunity for collaboration. There is also the Statewide Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

Chelsea Noble: Conservation Florida is excited to be a part of the council and promote use of the outdoors.

Edwin McCook: the SRWMD has recently acquired more properties, some of which add to the Florida National Scenic Trail. 2,000 acres are currently being restored near the Steinhatchee River, which increases the wildlife corridor in the area. He is working with White Springs to help them reach designation as a Trail Town.

Kate Miller: The Friends of Estero are working on new trail developments.

Chip Birdsong: The Florida historic preservation tax credit has not yet passed. It would allow for income-producing historic properties to get tax breaks for restoration work. It would also allow Main Street communities to get corporate tax breaks.

Mike Stephens: The Wekiva and River to Hills trails will allow trail users to go from Lake County all the way to Titusville on trail. Money is being invested in developing Lake Apopka trails.

Jason Lauritsen: The latest exploration through the Wildlife Corridor finished in February. It featured three veterans traveling completely on public greenways and blue ways and focused on health and wellness. Some of them were former park staff and provide a great perspective on enjoying the outdoors. The Foundation is in talks of putting up more signage around the corridor and drawing attention to ecosystems and conservation. They are putting together a new resources page that will have photos and videos available for partners to use. If anyone would like to host a local screening of a corridor film, reach out.

Brooks White: the Forest Service is making updates and improvements to the Trail Walker program. They are also pursuing new kiosk styles that will be more weather resistant.

Parks Small: The Florida Preference bill gives Florida residents a one-month head start to make campground reservations at State Parks. Facilities at T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park are close to coming back online after Hurricane Michael damage in 2018. The campground cabins have been refurbished and are planned to reopen sometime this summer.

Chris Rietow: The Florida Regional Council Association has been monitoring SB 106. The Association may be in position to help with some planning aspects. The Apalachee Regional

Council has partnered with COCA (Council on Culture and Arts) to create a bike trail called Cycle the Arts which features over 300 art pieces throughout Tallahassee. Each route is about one hour long. Cycle the Arts received a national award, but they would like to improve the marketing and promotion of it. He will be hiking 30 miles on the Appalachian Trail with family this summer.

Next Meeting Location & Date

Next meeting will be in July or August tentatively located in Mount Dora. Poll will be sent out to Council members to determine exact date.

Adjourn:

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: *Chris Rietow*

SECOND: *Edwin McCook*