



## Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) August 2023 Council Meeting - Day 1 Minutes



**PUBLIC MEETING:** August 22, 2023  
**TIME:** 9:00 am  
**LOCATION:** Mount Dora Chamber of Commerce, 341 Alexander St. Mount Dora, 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*
- *Traci Deen – Greenway User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Representative Cyndi Stevenson – Trail User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Representative James Buchanan – Trail User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Jason Lauritsen – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Wesley Stalnaker – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Tara McCue – Delegate for Chris Rietow, Apalachee Regional Planning Council*
- *Shawn Thomas – U.S. Forest Service (USFS)*
- *Parks Small – FL Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)*
- *Jim Couillard – Marion County Parks & Recreation Director*
- *Jerrie Lindsey – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)*
- *Vincent Birdsong – FL Department of State (FDOS)*
- *Robin Birdsong – FL Department of Transportation (FDOT)*
- *Edwin McCook – Suwannee River Water Management District*
- *Brooks White – FL Forest Service (FFS)*

### **OGT Staff in Attendance for Council Meeting:**

- *Samantha Browne – Bureau Chief*
- *Britney Moore – Assistant Bureau Chief*
- *Anna Hopkins – Outdoor Recreation Specialist/Staff to Council*

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### **Welcome**

Welcome remarks were given by Crissy Stile, Mayor of Mount Dora. Highlights included various renovations and refreshes at area parks, a new ADA accessible kayak and canoe launch, the new mountain bike flow trail and pump track that was built with support from the Ocala Mountain Bike Association (OMBA), new recreation facilities at Gilbert Park, and an update on the expansion of the Wekiva trail. The city is no longer pursuing purchase of the railway to expand the trail but is looking at other options. Following the speech, Chair Jim Couillard presented Mayor Stile with the Mount Dora Trail Town sign.

### **Approve Agenda**

**FGTC REMARKS:** N/A

**MOTION:** *Jerrie Lindsey*

**SECOND:** *Stephanie Wardein*

**FGTC RECOMMENDATION:**

APPROVE MEETING AGENDA

### **Approve the April 2023 Meeting Summary**

**FGTC REMARKS:** N/A

**MOTION:** *Wesley Stalnakar*

**SECOND:** *Mike Stephens*

**FGTC RECOMMENDATION:**

APPROVE MEETING SUMMARY

### **FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:**

#### **Office of Greenways and Trails Update – Anna Hopkins & Samantha Browne**

*Signups are now live on the OGT website for the Outdoor Florida webinar series from September -December. OGT staff have been preparing new Trail Town materials that will make the application process easier for interested parties. The new online application will be live in the next few days on the OGT website. OGT staff have reached over 1,000 members of the public through eight different outreach events since the last meeting. Anyone may submit an outdoor recreation or trail focused event to be included on the OGT Community Trail Calendar by contacting the Office. A new section of SUN Trail is expected to open the first week of September in Lynn Haven, north of Panama City. This segment is part of the Priority Network of the Florida Greenways and Trails System.*

#### **Orange County Trails Update – Cedric Moffet (Orange County Parks and Rec)**

*Cedric gave an overview of the existing trails in Orange County including the West Orange Trail, Wekiva Trail, Lake Apopka Loop Trail, Clarcona Ocoee Connector, Cady Way Trail, Pine Hills Trail, and Shingle Creek trail. The second half of the presentation focused on new trails and additions to existing trails including Phase 4B of the West Orange/Wekiva Trail, Phase 4 of the West Orange Trail, construction of the Lake Apopka Connector Trail, a 3.36-mile critical addition to the Coast-to-Coast Trail, Phase 2 of the Pine Hills Trail, and construction of segments of the Shingle Creek Trail and Little Econ Trail. The Little Econ project will include construction of a pedestrian bridge in 2026.*

#### **St. Johns County Trail Update – St. Johns County Commissioner Henry Dean**

*Commissioner Dean asked the Council to consider an out of cycle addition to the priority Greenways and Trails System, promoting the conceptual Orangedale to Mickler Trail from its current state as an opportunity trail. The trail was first conceptualized in 2006 and has since been supported by an array of public and private sector partners. The proposed trail would also connect two other trails that are already in the priority network. Population growth in the County has led to the future construction of four new regional parks and studies of residents showed that walking and biking paths were the most requested amenity. It is hoped that the trail will serve more than a recreation purpose but also connect schools, homes, shopping, etc. and serve as a transportation corridor.*

**FGTC REMARKS:** *Representative Cyndi Stevenson abstained from the vote.*

**MOTION:** *Stephanie Wardein*

**SECOND:** *Traci Deen*

**FGTC RECOMMENDATION:**

APPROVE UPGRADE TO A PRIORITY TRAIL

### **Planning with Wildlife Corridors in Mind – Jason Lauritsen (Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation)**

*Jason provided information on the background and mission of the Corridor. There are currently 10 million acres preserved and 8 million that are unprotected. Connected habitats are more resilient and offer more protection from local extinction of species. Wildlife sightings increase tourism and support the economy. Communities should consider how they can facilitate connections in bottleneck and hotspot areas where state land acquisition isn't possible. In urban areas, wildlife corridors may look different, and trails/greenways can serve as wildlife crossings. It is important to find win-wins between communities and the ecosystem. When it comes to conservation properties, many landowners do not want public access. Edges of conservation property can serve as opportunities for corridor connections.*

### **Trail Town Designation: Sopchoppy – Samantha Browne (OGT) & Liz Carter (Friends of Sopchoppy River)**

*Samantha Browne gave an overview presentation of Sopchoppy's trail amenities and connections with a follow up from Liz Carter (Friends of Sopchoppy). The city sits on the Capital City to the Sea regional trail and provides access to the Florida National Scenic Trail and a newly built fitness trail in Depot Park. The nearby GF&A Trail provides a unique biking opportunity through the Apalachicola National Forest. Both the Sopchoppy and Ochlockonee Rivers are designated paddling trails and accessible from Sopchoppy. When the city had initially applied for designation, OGT staff noted a lack of signage within city limits. Since then, the Friends of Sopchoppy created a large permanent map display at the Depot Museum that they hope to spread throughout the city. Sopchoppy organizes several nature and wildlife-based community events emphasizing the city's interest in the outdoors. More than 20 locations for lodging have been identified between Airbnbs, VRBO, campgrounds, and motels. The Trail Town designation is supported by the City of Sopchoppy and Wakulla County, with Friends of the Sopchoppy River, Discover Sopchoppy and the Big Bend Scenic Byway Committee also supporting.*

**FGTC REMARKS:** *N/A*

**MOTION:** *Stephanie Wardein*

**SECOND:** *Jerrie Lindsey*

**FGTC RECOMMENDATION:**

ENDORSE TRAIL TOWN DESIGNATION

### **Bike/Walk Central Florida (BWCF) Presentation – Emily Hanna (BWCF)**

*Emily Hannah, Executive Director of Bike/Walk Central Florida, presented about the organization's Best Foot Forward (BFF) program focusing on pedestrian safety. Bike/Walk Central Florida is a nonprofit dedicated to educating and advocating to make communities more walkable, bikeable, and rollable with an emphasis on equity. She highlighted how communities are often designed for cars instead of people and exclude vulnerable populations. One focus of Best Foot Forward is to change the culture of drivers vs. walkers*

*on the road. One simple measurable goal: to get more drivers to yield and stop for pedestrians in marked crosswalks, as Florida law requires. BFF uses a multi-prong approach that combines education within the community, low-cost engineering changes at crosswalks, and high-visibility enforcement to encourage behavior change. Best Foot Forward started as a coalition in Orange County and then grew to include Osceola and Seminole. Now, the program works with over a dozen stakeholders. After outlining the specific strategies associated with the three E's, Emily shared data comparisons showing an increase in driver yield rates in areas where BFF was implemented.*

**Council work session on Florida Greenways and Trails System plan**

*Members walked around the room and added their feedback and recommendations to posters that listed the main goals of the 2024-2028 FGTS Plan.*

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

*No public comment.*

**ADJOURN:**

**MOTION:** *Brooks White*

**SECOND:** *Jerrie Lindsey*



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



**PUBLIC MEETING:** August 23, 2023  
**TIME:** 9:00 am  
**LOCATION:** Mount Dora Chamber of Commerce, 341 Alexander St. Mount Dora, 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*
- *Traci Deen – Greenway User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Representative Cyndi Stevenson – Trail User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Representative James Buchanan – Trail User Appointed by the Speaker*
- *Jason Lauritsen – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Wesley Stalnaker – Greenway User Appointed by President of Senate*
- *Tara McCue – Delegate for Chris Rietow, Apalachee Regional Planning Council*
- *Shawn Thomas – USFS*
- *Parks Small – FDEP*
- *Jim Couillard – Marion County Parks & Recreation Director*
- *Jerrie Lindsey – FWC*
- *Vincent Birdsong – FDOS*
- *Robin Birdsong – FDOT*
- *Edwin McCook – Suwannee River Water Management District*
- *Brooks White – FFS*

### **OGT Staff in Attendance for Council Meeting:**

- *Samantha Browne – Bureau Chief*
- *Britney Moore – Assistant Bureau Chief*
- *Anna Hopkins – Outdoor Recreation Specialist/Staff to Council*

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### **Approve Agenda**

**FGTC REMARKS:** *N/A*

**MOTION:** *Wesley Stalnaker*

**SECOND:** *Mike Stephens*

**FGTC RECOMMENDATION:**

APPROVE MEETING AGENDA

### **FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:**

### **East Central Regional Planning Council (ECRPC) Update – Tara McCue (ECRPC)**

*ERPC is conducting an economic impact analysis for trails in the area that will be funded by FDOT. They have just completed Phase I which was the literature review to find applicable approaches for the study. They plan to work with many stakeholders to complete the analysis by the summer of 2024. The findings from the study may be able to help with the reporting requirements imposed on FDOT in SB106.*

### **Marion County Trail Update – Ken Odom (Marion County Board of County Commissioners), Bob Balmes (Ocala-Marion Transportation Planning Organization)**

*Ken gave an overview of the Cross Florida Greenway's (CFG) history and main trailheads. The CFG contains over 100 miles of trails, 14 of which are paved miles. Cycling groups were the first to volunteer to maintain the trail and continue to be involved today. Today, there are mile markers and GPS checkpoints along the trail which helps first responders in the case of accidents on the trail. Ken also previewed some upcoming trail projects in Dunnellon, Bellview, and Ocala.*

*Bob discussed what the Marion County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) is currently working on. They have completed a 10 year bicycle master plan that includes shared use plans, sidewalk projects, and multi-modal transportation. They also have a regional trails facility plan that focuses on N/S/E/W connectivity to surrounding counties. The Silver Springs Bike Lane project is on hold while issues with landowners are sorted out. Members of the Ocala Mountain Bike Association are medically trained in basic first aid and volunteer their skills on the trails. They do mock rescue scenarios with local emergency services. Mickey Thomason, Park Manager of the CFG, provided some updates on the greenway and shared about the wildlife crossings that have happened at the land bridge and other areas.*

### **FDOT & SUN (Shared-Use Nonmotorized) Trail Updates – Chris Edmonston (FDOT)**

*Chris recapped the main points of SB 106 that related to SUN Trail projects. These included prioritizing connections to the Florida Wildlife Corridor using previously disturbed areas, creating uniform signage, an increase in annual funding from 25 million to 50 million, and new reporting requirements. FDOT is making changes to accommodate all the new requirements. They will be increasing trail counters from 12 to 25 with over 100 new trail counter locations identified for installation over the next three years. QR code surveys are being piloted along trails in 15 locations to determine if that will be a feasible way to collect required data. The SUN Trail work program is approved by the legislature and then signed by the governor, so there will not be changes to the current work program that has already been approved. More maps indicating gaps in SUN Trail projects will be added to the FDOT website. FDOT is opening applications for new projects from September 2023 through mid-December. These will be for the 2029-2030 cycle. FDOT will be looking for new areas to incorporate trails into the wildlife corridor on a case-by-case basis making sure to minimize impacts to wildlife habitat. At the next Council meeting the members will be asked to review the six regional trails that were originally determined to be the funding priorities.*

### **Public Comment**

*Wenonah Venter with the Manatee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) attended the meeting and shared during the public comment period the MPO's support for the Florida Gulf Coast Trail. They expect it to be a vital transportation resource for the area*

which continues to grow in population. The MPO plans to be a partner and intermediary for trails in the gulf coast area.

### **Council Updates & Comments:**

Robin Birdsong: By the end of the calendar year several new SUN trail segments will be completed and opened. Some are re-pavement projects, and some are new construction projects. This includes a new section of the Palatka to Lake Butler Trail.

Jerrie Lindsey: A survey is being completed of e-bike users in Wildlife Management Areas to assess attitudes amongst the users of conservation lands. Results will be shared with the council when available. New sites have been added to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail. There has been new research in the last two years about the mental health benefits of birding and it would be great to consider how this data can be included into trail projects. She also mentioned she would like to see more representation from the equestrian community on the council.

Stephanie Wardein: A deal in Estero to connect Collier to Lee Counties is close to being finalized. This was the first collaborative effort between the MPOs and started around 10 years ago. Funding has been explored for trail construction and boots are on the ground ready to get started with PD&E. The Friends of the Bonita Estero Rail Trail (BERT) grassroots organization has seen immense public support with over 3,000 members. Healthy Lee received a grant last fall to expand beyond county lines. The recent Community Health Needs Assessment in Lee County included information on the impact of trails on health.

Traci Deen: She is happy to join the council. No updates.

Edwin McCook: No updates.

Kate Miller: No updates.

Chip Birdsong: There is a new position with DOS to focus on the maintenance and identification of abandoned/neglected African American cemeteries. There are also millions of grant dollars available for neglected cemeteries. More information can be found on the DOS website.

Mike Stephens: Two million dollars has been given to the West Orange to Wekiva Trail. A two-million-dollar appropriation was received a few years ago to complete Lake Apopka projects. PD&E is underway for the North Lake Trail. Work is being done on the North Hancock Trail, an expansion of the Lake Apopka Loop. The Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation recently updated their website and is in the process of updating their strategic plan.

Jason Lauritsen: The Wildlife Corridor Summit is coming up September 26th-28th in Orlando. Anyone who would like to attend can email Jason for an invitation. Many trail topics will be included and there will be some fieldtrips at the beginning of the conference. The new Florida Wildlife Corridor film will be premiered at the event.

Brooks White: An existing trail is being added to the State Forest Trailwalker program. New funding is being used to expand a park in Polk County, expand RV campsites, and other projects.

Parks Small: He has enjoyed his time on the council and has started his new position as the Division Fire Coordinator in DEP's Bureau of Natural and Cultural Resources.

Tara McCue: The ECFRPC's Leadership Summit at Kennedy Space Center will include panels on innovation, transportation and resilience, and more. The conference will feature federal speakers from the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) along with others and include fireside chats on biodiversity. The dates for the conference are October 10th-11th. Volusia county partnered with the Alachua Conservation Trust to submit an application for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant.

Representative Cyndi Stevenson: No updates.

Wesley Stalaker: The Villages have a successful trail system and multi-modal travel plan.

Shawn Thomas: USFS is working on celebratory projects and events for the 40th anniversary of the Florida National Scenic Trail congressional designation. A new structure has been completed within the Withlacoochee state forest in partnership with the Florida Forest Service. The Florida Trail Association has a new trail mobility project called FTAccess which allows disabled hikers to enjoy the trail with the use of a trail wheelchair. The Partnership for the National Trails System is holding a workshop in Orlando November 7th-9th. The Florida Trail Association is a hosting partner and one of 11 National Scenic Trails nationwide.

Jim Couillard: Thank you to the OGT staff for facilitating the meeting.

Representative James Buchanan: No updates.

### **Next Meeting Location & Date**

Next meeting will be in either Tallahassee or Venice in December of 2023. A poll will be sent to council members to decide location and date.

### **Adjourn:**

**MOTION:** Stephanie Wardein

**SECOND:** Traci Deen