

# DRAFT 2018-2022 FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS SYSTEM PLAN

## Introduction

The Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS) Plan provides a comprehensive approach to identify, prioritize, connect, promote and coordinate the implementation of a statewide system of connected greenways and trails. This plan is the vision for the FGTS both on land and water, with the intent of improving the health and welfare of the public.

Creating a statewide system of greenways and trails for Florida is an important way to integrate aspects of the natural and human environments. Greenways and trails join communities together by linking features such as parks, open space, historic sites and residential areas. Non-motorized trails and waterways provide places for paddlers, bicyclists, hikers, horseback riders and others to recreate and experience the many natural and cultural wonders of our state. Greenways are natural landscape linkages that are vital to the maintenance of functional and healthy native ecosystems. Ecological greenways support our human environments and allow wildlife to thrive and travel from place to place.

## Authorization

In 1995, the Florida Legislature passed the Florida Greenways and Trails Act in Chapter 260, Florida Statute (F.S.). This legislation established the FGTS, the “Florida Greenways and Trails Program,” and the Florida Greenways and Trails Council (Council) as an advisory group to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The greenways and trails program within DEP, Division of Recreation and Parks, is known as the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT). OGT is tasked with fulfilling the legislation. To accomplish this, the role of the office includes:

- Lead the planning of an interconnected statewide greenways and trails system
- Cultivate development of the statewide greenways and trails system
- Increase education about, nurture support for, and promote the use of greenways and trails among the public
- Promote communication, cooperation and coordination among all government entities, landowners, user groups and other non-governmental organizations involved in greenways and trail planning, development, management and maintenance

The legislation established OGT and the Council, which resulted in the original 1998 FGTS Plan titled, “Connecting Florida’s Communities.” In 2012, the updated 2013-2017 FGTS Plan established a “new vision.” To view the original plan and other FGTS documents, visit [FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com).

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## Accomplishments

Florida has long been a leader in greenways and trails planning and implementation. The state was recognized in 2008 as the first-ever Best Trails State in America for its outstanding statewide system of trails. The Sunshine State's successful greenways and trails program is exemplified by the more than 20 rails-to-trails projects. These include the [Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail](#), one of the top rated rail-trails in the nation, and the 106-mile [Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail](#) stretching from Key Largo to Key West, a remnant of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Flagler Railroad. Additionally, the 110-mile [Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway](#) (CFG), crossing central Florida from the Gulf of Mexico to the St. Johns River, occupies much of the land formerly known as the Cross Florida Barge Canal. A series of historic events transformed this corridor from one of the nation's largest uncompleted public works project to a world class greenway. The CFG is also home to America's first land bridge, providing safe passage for pedestrians and wildlife over Interstate 75.

OGT coordinates the 1,515-mile [Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail](#), offering paddlers detailed guides and maps. To accommodate hikers, the USDA Forest Service in Florida manages the 1,300-mile congressionally designated [Florida National Scenic Trail](#) which stretches from the Big Cypress National Preserve in south Florida to Ft. Pickens in the Gulf Islands National Seashore near Pensacola. OGT supports the Forest Service in Florida to promote, plan, develop and protect the FNST. Florida also has 43 federally recognized [National Recreation Trails](#). This program recognizes model land and water trails of local and regional significance. In response to the high demand for trails among Florida visitors and residents, [VISITFLORIDA.com](#) features trails as traveler destinations. VISIT FLORIDA is the state's official travel planning and marketing organization.

Furthering the state's commitment to improving mobility, the Florida Legislature passed measures in 2014 and 2015, specifically, Section 339.81, F.S., creating the [Shared-Use Nonmotorized \(SUN\) Trail program](#). This program was established within the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) to fund the paved component of the FGTS Priority Land Corridors to create the SUN Trail network for bicyclists and pedestrians. Through a two-tier funding structure, DOT administers the recurring \$25 million allocation. The first tier is for funding Regional Trail Systems identified by the Council. The first two regional trails recommended for funding include the 250-mile plus [Coast to Coast Trail](#) (C2C), which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean near Titusville to the Gulf of Mexico in St. Petersburg and the five county, 270-mile [St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop](#) (SJR2C). The second tier is used to fund Individual Trail segments within the FGTS Priority Land Corridors that close gaps and completes trail systems. Approximately one third of the funding will be allocated in each category over the period of the DOT Five-Year Work Program.

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## The View Forward: Taking a Regional Approach

1. Evaluate and Prioritize
2. Establish and Connect
3. Communicate and Educate
4. Align Complementary Plans and Programs

### Evaluate and Prioritize

The FGTS acts to integrate natural and human environments. Greenways and trails tie communities together by linking features such as parks, open spaces, historic sites and residential areas. Non-motorized trails and waterways provide places for paddlers, bicyclists, hikers, walkers, horseback riders and others to experience the many natural and cultural wonders of our state. Ideally these routes will be separate from the street, except, perhaps, the walkable and bikeable downtown main streets.

Greenways, natural landscape linkages, are vital to maintaining functional and healthy natural ecosystems. Ecological greenways support our human environments and allow native wildlife to thrive and travel from place to place.

#### Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN)

This map, created, maintained and updated by the University of Florida's Center for Landscape Conservation Planning, identifies landscape linkages and wildlife corridors necessary to connect large natural areas into a statewide ecological greenways system. The map depicts six levels of priority corridors and linkages. The six FEGN priorities, along with the map, help to identify and define a comprehensive ecological greenways vision for the FGTS.

#### Opportunities

Land Trail Opportunities of the FGTS are corridors which represent existing, planned and conceptual non-motorized multi-use trails. These corridors form a land-based trail network of regional and state importance. The FGTS corridors on maps are represented as approximately one mile-wide to allow for flexibility in the proposed corridor locations.

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 of state and regional significance to form a comprehensive connected system.

#### Actions

- Identify the most "Ready" Land Opportunity Corridors
- Identify the state's most important long-distance regional trails from the FGTS Priority Corridors
- Support and assist counties of greatest need to identify potential trail corridors

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Moving forward, OGT will further refine the Land Trail Opportunity map to identify Ready Land Trail Opportunities. To be recognized as a Ready Opportunity Corridor the trail must meet these criteria to the greatest extent possible:

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

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

- Be an existing or potential tourism destination due to the scenic qualities and diverse experiences
- Span at least three miles in length
- Be navigable during most months in an average year
- Benefit from increased visitation without harm to the natural environment

Moving forward, OGT will evaluate and identify paddling corridors with the potential to be a long-distance paddling trail like the [Suwannee River Wilderness State Trail](#). This trail provides an incredible journey. Launching above White Springs, you can paddle more than 200 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. There are numerous take-out points and overnight camp sites available with dedicated river camps make it possible to enjoy either a leisurely weekend on the water or a more ambitious trip for the more adventurous.

## **Priorities**

The FGTS Priority Corridors are the focused vision for trails in the state and rank higher for implementation than the Opportunity Trail Corridors. Priority Trail Corridors are selected from the Land Trail Opportunity map and Paddling Trail Opportunity map, and must also support conservation of the FEGN's six levels of priorities. To be recognized as a FGTS Priority Corridor, it must meet these criteria to the greatest extent possible:

- Support and further establish national, state or regional trail projects, plans and initiatives
- Build on past and programmed state and federal investments in trails, particularly when matched by funding from local and private sources
- Include long-distance trails or provide connects between long-distance trails and/or long loops to connect multiple counties and population centers

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- Demonstrate broad regional and community support, especially those willing to commit to trail management and maintenance
- Enhance access to nature-based tourism and economic development by connecting natural, recreational, cultural and historic sites
- Enhance connections to state parks and trails and greenways
- Coincide with the FEGN priorities
- Provide public safety by offering non-motorized use that is separated from highways

Moving forward, OGT will work with stakeholders to identify and delineate regional trails within the Priority network. Regional trails are long distance or loop trail systems that cross multiple jurisdictions. They are comprised of shorter individual or local trail segments that are linked together to form a unique more expansive system. A regional trail provides a multi-day 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.

As a leader in the trail movement, Florida is frequently asked by other states to share “lessons learned.” Participating in national summits and conferences with other states, OGT has had the opportunity to share and gain knowledge from others. The national trail movement is exciting and interest is growing. Georgia and Alabama have expressed interest in identifying opportunities and connecting into Florida’s trail system. Other opportunities include the East Coast Greenway which spans from Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida; the Bartram Trail, an eight-state National Recreation Trail; and the Old Spanish Trail linking St. Augustine, Florida to San Diego, California. OGT will pursue each of these interstate trail connections.

The Florida Greenways and Trails System maps are maintained online along with the data resources through [FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com).

### **Establish and Connect**

To implement the FGTS, OGT is taking a regional approach. Regional trails are identified from the FGTS Priority Corridors as multi-county, long-distance or loop trails. Because they span long-distances, sometimes more than 200 miles, these regional trails can provide users with diverse multiple day experiences.

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 encourage economic development. Another benefit is that they provide access to outdoor recreation, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices.

A local trail can require significant effort to complete. 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

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determined effort. Once complete, regional trails can provide multiple uses including biking, hiking, equestrian and paddling. These systems also link natural communities including natural areas, parks, beaches, rivers and springs.

In Florida, OGT is legislatively designated in Chapter 260, F.S., to plan and implement the state's network of greenways and trails. OGT is leading and coordinating the planning process, which includes providing:

## Assistance and Resources

OGT's regional planners provide technical assistance, planning expertise, and coordination of resources to establish the FGTS.

Once a regional trail is identified, the appropriate regional planner will work with multiple counties, cities and metropolitan/transportation planning organizations to establish a leadership team. The leadership team is comprised of representatives from that region. The desired outcome is that the team collectively endorse the regional trail project. The team will also assist in making recommendations to county commissions, tourism development boards, economic development commissions, chambers of commerce and others to focus resources towards the establishment of that regional trail.

To assist regional trail leadership teams, OGT maintains current technical assistance information on its website, [FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com). These resources support all FGTS projects and include design guidelines for paved and unpaved trails, economic and health benefits, and grant opportunities. To further the technical assistance program, OGT will develop educational materials and facilitate regional summits. These new resources will be designed to target specific audiences such as rural communities, private developers or health providers. OGT will also develop a series of tools and templates tailored specifically for partners and stakeholders to utilize.

## Funding

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 further the FGTS Priority Corridors and to close gaps within the system. To further assist in identifying and estimating funding needs, OGT will compile and provide on its website, [FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com), case examples of project costs and links to successfully funded projects.

### Actions

- Work with the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation to establish leadership teams for each FGTS regional trail
- Coordinate with DOT to implement the SUN (Shared Use Non-motorized) Trail funding program
- Work with the Florida Greenways and Trails Council to recommend regional trail priorities to DOT, as requested
- Implement the Florida Trail Town and PACT programs
- Establish interstate trail and greenway connections

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One of the many benefits of establishing a regional leadership team is gaining a unified commitment to utilize local funding sources by encouraging local and regional governmental support for projects. Stakeholders can also engage private developers and encourage them to incorporate trails and greenways that complete FGTS Priority Corridor gaps into their development plans. Opportunities can also be advanced and encouraged to be included in any developments of regional impact, planned unit developments, sector plans etc.

Since 2014, the DOT has administered the SUN Trail funding program. DOT receives \$25 million annually from the redistribution of new vehicle tag revenues to fund the paved or hard surface components of the FGTS priorities. At the request of DOT, the Council, an advisory body to OGT, recommended funding to complete the top two regional trails, the Coast to Coast and St. Johns River-to-Sea Trails. The remaining funds are distributed to individual trail projects through a competitive process at the DOT district level. The SUN Trail program funds the design and construction of the paved shared use trails. Local sponsors or agencies must secure funding for trailheads, restrooms and other amenities.

OGT will continue to coordinate with agency acquisition programs and other grant programs that support public recreation access. These funding programs include Florida Forever, Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, Recreational Trails Program, and Florida Communities Trust. OGT will continue to review acquisition proposals for Florida Forever and provide GIS analysis to support acquisitions that help complete FGTS priorities. OGT will work with the Florida Greenways and Trails Council to recommend the next regional trail for SUN Trail funding, as requested.

## **Acquisition**

OGT administers the Florida Greenways and Trails Acquisition Program, and works with the Division of State Lands to identify other funding programs that support the acquisition of greenway or trail projects. In addition, OGT helps to identify alternatives to full-fee acquisitions. These alternatives include management agreements, conservation easements, partnerships with private landowners, and locating trails within transportation and other linear corridors. For example, the DEP recently negotiated an easement from Duke Energy to construct a paved trail on a 40-mile stretch of a future utility corridor. When complete, this regional trail will connect the 32-mile Nature Coast State Trail in Dixie, Levy and Gilchrist counties to the 110-mile Cross Florida Greenway in central Florida providing users with an opportunity for a multi-day and diverse recreational experience.

## **Designation**

The Florida Greenways and Trails Designation Program was established to identify and promote trails and greenways within the FGTS. The Designation Program raises public awareness of the conservation and recreation benefits of the FGTS. To date, nearly 1.3 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 many other areas.

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To further the concept of establishing trail hubs, OGT will implement the Florida Trail Town program with the goal of encouraging cities and communities to fully capitalize on the economic opportunities afforded to them by trails and trail tourism. Successful towns in Florida, such as Dunedin, Winter Garden, Titusville and Palatka have each embraced the culture and benefits of trails, bringing enhanced prosperity and vitality into their communities.

A successful trail town's economy thrives because of trail users, and its community thrives because of engaged citizens. The 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 is equally a tourist attraction and a community asset. When you walk or bike through a successful Florida Trail Town you see a multitude of thriving businesses including bike shops, restaurants, hotels and inns. The downtown is utilized by recreational users and local citizens alike perusing local businesses and enjoying the nearby natural landscapes.

### **Development**

A new effort OGT is undertaking is the Parks and Community Trails (PACT) program. PACT is a proposed technical assistance program to help rural and small communities build new trails linking the FGTS Opportunity and Priority Corridors with local and state parks. Mapping is underway to identify these potential connections. OGT will work with non-profits, cities, counties, regional, state and federal governments to direct resources and secure funding to develop these new trail connections.

OGT will work with the DEP's Office of Park Planning to include FGTS Opportunity and Priority Corridor connections to individual state parks and local communities into the park's Unit Management Plans. Additionally, OGT will coordinate these connections with recreational and transportation planning entities, provide maps, and assist in providing content to incorporate into local and regional plans.

### **Communicate and Educate**

A key component in advancing the FGTS is to ensure that its purpose, benefits and values are effectively communicated to the many public and private stakeholders involved.

For purposes of communication, greenway and trail users can be divided into two groups - current and potential users. Current users already value greenways and trails and potential users are those who may use greenways and trails but are currently unaware of the opportunities.

The FGTS has various partners divided into two groups, formal and informal. Formal partners include regional planning organizations, county governments, municipalities, business organizations, and local and regional tourism promoters. Informal partners include user groups, individual businesses, foundations, coalitions, etc. DEP will develop an integrated marketing and communications strategy that addresses these two target audiences, users and partners.



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We will begin by creating a base inventory of the current marketing and communication efforts from established state, national and international greenways and trail systems. The inventory will identify the most effective practices and messages to promote greenways and trails among users (current and potential) and partners (formal and informal).

Based on the outcomes of the research, DEP can develop and deliver a unified message for Florida. DEP will create marketing and education strategies for Florida's greenways and trails that increase awareness and engagement among the two target audiences, users and partners. During this phase, tools will be developed for managers to use in promoting continued and new greenways and trails usage, and to encourage current users to become formal partners. Additional strategies may include targeted presentations and regional summits to inform potential users and informal partners of the existence and values of greenways and trails and outreach to local governments and their Convention and Visitors Bureaus or Tourist Development Councils. Continuing to actively work with existing partners through individually tailored tools and templates will be crucial.

- | Actions  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and implement an integrated marketing and communication plan</li><li>• Identify target audiences</li><li>• Develop tools to educate target audiences for working groups and partners</li><li>• Facilitate workshops, webinars and summits to share strategies</li><li>• Develop a FGTS brand style guide</li></ul> |

Branding is an important aspect of successfully promoting the FGTS. Having a meaningful, consistent, identifiable brand will help to establish an interconnected greenways and trails system for Florida. DEP will develop a brand style guide for the FGTS. The style guide will provide consistent instructions to those who communicate now and in the future, the purpose and key values of the FGTS.

## Align Complementary Plans and Programs

Through collaborative partnerships with agencies and organizations that offer complementary programs, we can establish a well-planned, designed and managed FGTS. There are many benefits of partnerships:

- Leads to improved outcomes through a range of joint services, advice and support being readily available and easily accessible
- Benefits the understanding of multi-agency activities, enabling them to focus on their core role
- Helps to build consensus, strengthen partnership voices, break down professional silos and broaden focused perspectives

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- Helps to enhance the scale of coverage when pooled budgets, joint projects and events are put into action
- Establishes a cohesive approach when multi-agency programs share responsibilities to address local needs
- Promotes a supportive exchange of ideas between staff
- Increases the fit between the services offered and those desired by users and partners
- Improves understanding and raises awareness of issues
- Increases the level of trust between partners knowing each can and will deliver results

The establishment, management and promotion of the FGTS are conducted by many agency and organizational partners from the local to federal level. Though these entities may manage different segments of the FGTS, they often have very distinct missions. For example, the FGTS runs through areas as varied as remote wilderness in expansive national forests to abandoned rail corridors in highly urban communities. The managers of such places have markedly different purposes and goals. It is important to promote guidelines for safe, accessible trails and greenways while balancing the needs of individual partners to further their own missions. DEP will continue to coordinate with key federal, state, local governments and other entities with the capacity to complete the FGTS. With its partners, DEP will identify common goals and host workshops and events to further establish, maintain, operate and market the FGTS.

Additionally, volunteers are critical partners in establishing and maintaining the FGTS. Many volunteers and their organizations have made tremendous contributions advancing and providing stewardship of the FGTS. Successful trail managers coordinate with, support, and recognize the efforts of volunteers from user groups such as hikers, mountain bikers, paddlers and equestrians who donate many hours to help establish and maintain the trails. DEP will further strengthen these types of partnerships by developing and providing information about how to start a local “friend organization” to assist trail managers with trail maintenance and promotion.

<b>Actions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strengthen ongoing relationships with government and non-government organizations through partnership agreements</li><li>• Promote and support strategic plans of agency partners by identifying common goals</li><li>• Actively work to fulfill partnership projects</li><li>• Host workshops and events in partnership with state or local partners to further common goals</li></ul>

## **Economic Development and Tourism**

Trails and greenways are increasingly an economic engine for communities and the state. As an example, for more than 20 years, Bike Florida, Inc. has created economic opportunities for small towns, rural areas and cities by attracting participants from around the world to experience Florida’s natural and historical beauty while engaging in the health-promoting activity of bicycling. Each year, the organization hosts a Spring Tour to promote bicycle safety

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and create bicycle touring awareness. These tours host up to 650 cyclists every year, contracting with many local businesses throughout Florida. The route changes every year to highlight different areas of the state. In 2017, the Gullah Geechee Spring Tour took place in St. Johns, Putnam, and Duval counties. The event hosted 631 people and had a total tour economic impact exceeding \$880,000. Since 2011, the Spring Tours have had a total economic impact of nearly \$4.3 million (source: Bike Florida's 2017 Gullah Geechee Spring Tour Economic Impact Report).

Individual trails can be an important component of a community's economic development strategy. By connecting trails together into larger systems, the FGTS has the potential to be a vital component of the state's economic development strategy. Through its communications and marketing component, DEP will further trail-based economic development and tourism by developing promotional information and conducting targeted outreach to specific communities located on or near a regional trail system.

### **Health**

The FGTS provides many opportunities to support active lifestyles and improve overall health by increasing access to outdoor recreation and alternative transportation. A well designed and managed system of trails and greenways, connecting to and through communities, is an essential way to do that. The physical and mental health benefits of walking, bicycling, horseback riding and paddling, including the experience of nature and community, are well documented. According to the Journal of Aging Health, 2008, "Getting outside on a daily basis may help seniors stay healthy and live longer."

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. In 2016, a study by the American Heart Association found that for every \$1 spent on walking trails approximately \$3 is saved in medical expenses.

### **Transportation**

Trails and greenways are increasingly important in transportation planning and development. 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 (FTP), published in December 2015, includes a new statewide goal for More Transportation Choices. The FTP is available at [floridatransportationplan.com](http://floridatransportationplan.com).

To address the need for a greater focus on walking and bicycling infrastructure, DOT formed the Florida Bicycle and Pedestrian Partnership Council. The mission of the Council is to promote the livability, health and economic benefits of bicycle and pedestrian activity and provide input to

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DOT on issues affecting Florida's bicycle and pedestrian transportation needs. DEP is an active participant on this council and continuously seeks opportunities to provide input to DOT on issues related to bicycle and pedestrian projects. For more information, visit [DOT.gov/planning/policy/bikeped/](http://DOT.gov/planning/policy/bikeped/).

## Recreation

Florida offers an incredible array of recreational experiences for residents and visitors, thanks in part to its inviting climate, spectacular scenery, and award-winning parks and trails. Integrating these opportunities into a larger recreation and conservation framework is essential to maximize the value of individually planned and managed public lands. The FGTS supplies that needed framework by connecting and fostering access to recreation hubs ranging from vast state and national forests to small community parks.

The Florida Legislature gave the responsibility to DEP to develop and execute a 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. DEP's Office of Park Planning, through an extensive public input process, updates the SCORP every 5 years. The 2018 SCORP helps coordinate Florida's outdoor recreation planning efforts and guides the development of a diverse, balanced system of lands, programs, facilities and opportunities. Goals for this 5-year plan include the promotion of: active and healthy lifestyles in the outdoors; trails, trail connectivity, and the safety of trail users; and the economic benefits of outdoor recreation and ecotourism in Florida. Because the FGTS plan contributes substantially to these activities, it serves as an essential state-level companion to SCORP.

## Conservation

Florida's economy is tied to its natural and man-made attractions. Nearly 71 million visitors are drawn to Florida each year from across the United States and abroad. They come to enjoy Florida's resources, including clear waters, world-class beaches, coral reefs, parks, rivers and lakes. Wildlife-related recreation activities thrive in Florida because of the available number of fishing, hunting and wildlife-watching opportunities and in 2006 accounted for \$8.1 billion spent on trips, equipment and other items. More than four million people visited Florida's public lands to participate in wildlife-watching activities (source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

The Ecological Greenways component of the FGTS is critical to protecting wildlife by conserving natural systems and establishing habitat connectivity. Just as trails require tremendous coordination because of their linear nature and the jurisdictions they cross, ecological greenways also need a collective effort to effectively plan and coordinate. A protected Ecological Greenways system is integral to providing for a comprehensive conservation network.

Leading an effort to define a statewide conservation network of wildlife and natural areas is the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Cooperative Conservation Blueprint (CCB). A leading purpose of the CCB is to:

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*Create a compelling natural systems vision of what Florida could look like if steps are taken to conserve the critical environmental resources and working agricultural lands that the state's wildlife depend upon and that provide ecosystem services and quality of life for the benefit of all Floridians. (FWC 2010)*

The FWC also works with a wide range of partners to develop and update the State Wildlife Action Plan. The Action Plan is a strategic vision of the integrated conservation efforts needed to sustain the broad range of wildlife in Florida. Support for these efforts is provided through State Wildlife Grants.

The Center for Landscape Conservation Planning, within the University of Florida, is responsible for the establishment of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN). The goal of the FEGN is to identify and prioritize a functionally connected statewide network of public and private conservation lands. The FEGN guides the FGTS efforts to help conserve and maintain ecological greenway connectivity and to protect, connect and conserve Florida's native wildlife and natural systems. DEP will continue to use the FEGN and encourage its partners to adopt it as a part of their greenways and trails master plans and comprehensive plan policies.