

Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan

Regional Partnerships create the Statewide System

Executive Summary

The Office of Greenways and Trails (Greenways and Trails) is a bureau within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Department), Division of Recreation and Parks (Division) and is tasked with fulfilling Chapter 260, Florida Statutes, the Florida Greenways and Trails Act. To accomplish this, Greenways and Trails has been given the responsibility of leading, planning and facilitating the development of an interconnected Florida Greenways and Trails System. This takes a coordinated effort with state and local partners to compile local trails data from cities, counties and other land managing entities into one inclusive system. Depicting the trails data on a statewide map helps to identify where connections can be made across jurisdictional boundaries.

Another important function of Greenways and Trails 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 significant undertaking and requires Greenways and Trails staff to establish strong relationships with planners, land managers and other stakeholders at all levels, both public and private.

To implement the Florida Greenways and Trails System, the Department recognizes that community trails and State Parks complement and help complete the system. Greenways and Trails' role is to identify new opportunities to connect the Greenways and Trails System to the Florida State Park System and incorporate findings into the individual unit management plans. By doing so we are establishing and encouraging connections between the Greenways and Trails System, State Parks, local parks and communities.

This plan outlines the vision for the state's Greenways and Trails System 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 second update to the Florida Greenways and Trails System 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 Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan documents, visit FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com.

This plan's strategies, goals, objectives and actions provide a comprehensive approach to establish partnerships and engage stakeholders and to delineate, fund and promote the system.

Accomplishments

In 2012, Greenways and Trails completed the first update to the original 1998 plan. The updated [2013-2017 FGTS Plan](#) established a *new vision* for the Florida Greenways and Trails System. The

goals set forth in the plan provided a comprehensive approach to identify, prioritize, establish, promote and coordinate the FGTS.

The goals of the 2013-2017 Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan included:

- Identifying and prioritizing trails and greenways to facilitate completion of the system
- Directing resources and programs to establish and connect the system
- Promoting and communicating information about greenways and trails to advance the system
- Linking and supporting complementary programs, planning and partnership efforts to coordinate the system.

The Office of Greenways and Trails began with the original Land Trails Opportunity maps, which included a different map for each of the 4 distinct user groups - hiking, bicycling, horseback riding and multi-use. These were combined into one overall multi-use map making it easier to visualize the connections and to understand the goals and priorities of each county. The Land Trails Opportunity Map now serves as the state companion to community greenways and trails and bicycle and pedestrian master plans, and encompasses a combination of paved and unpaved, multiple and single use trails.

Greenways and Trails' staff established clear criteria to help identify priority land trail corridors within the Greenways and Trails System, as opposed to priority segments, which were typically individual local trails. This allowed for the identification of potential long-distance trail corridors and helped to clearly identify connectivity across jurisdictional boundaries. The multi-county approach encourages regional planning, allowing projects to be funded and completed more quickly.

To help delineate the unacquired and undeveloped segments within the Priority Trails Map, Greenways and Trails developed a Priority Trails Gap Map that now serves as the guide for directing resources to complete the state's highest priority trail projects.

To assist with consistency of the Greenways and Trails System as it is developed, the Greenways and Trails' staff worked with the Florida Greenways and Trails Council to compile updated unpaved trail standards and guidelines as a resource for communities, agencies and organizations establishing the Florida Greenways and Trails System. The Department of Transportation provides the standards and guidelines for the paved trail component of the System.

The Office of Greenways and Trails participated in the development of the recently established Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail program administered by the Department of Transportation. To be eligible for the SUN Trail program, a project must be identified as a component of the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System. Funded SUN Trail projects include two regional trail systems, identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council, known as the Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail and the St Johns River-to-Sea Loop Trail. Other individual trails throughout the state have also been programmed for funding.

The Florida Greenways and Trails Designation Program helps to identify and promote trails and greenways within the Greenways and Trails System. Recently, to assist with recognizing eligible projects, new signage and branding standards were developed. Since January 2013, 59 projects

totaling over 225,000 acres and 756 trail miles have been designated into the statewide Greenways and Trails System including state trails, state parks, national forest lands and trails, locally managed greenways and trails, blueways and many other areas.

Communication of information to advance the Greenways and Trails System has increased over the past five years. The Greenways and Trails quarterly online *Connections* newsletter highlights major trail happenings around the state such as groundbreaking ceremonies, trail openings and other special events taking place on trails within the Greenways and Trails System. Circulation for *Connections* has risen from just over 2,000 in 2012 to more than 45,000, a nearly 20-fold increase, underscoring the growing interest in trails and greenways.

Each November, Florida Paddlesports Month celebrates more than 4,000 miles of designated paddling trails throughout the state. This program was established by Greenways and Trails and adopted by the Department and the Florida Paddling Trails Association. Events such as these are shared on Greenways and Trails' website and by sending e-mails to more than 1,200 contacts. Regional Planning staff also engage with stakeholders and planners directly to promote the Greenways and Trails System, whether it is through one-on-one meetings or presentations at local, regional, state or multi-state summits.

To bring awareness to the significant economic benefit of trails, Greenways and Trails developed an economic infographic showing the latest figures from studies and surveys relating to trails in Florida. This trail economic infographic is distributed at trail events and can also be downloaded from the website.

To link and support complementary programs, Greenways and Trails identified mutual goals and objectives of our partnering agencies so that resources could be consolidated and joint meetings and events could be co-hosted to reach common goals. In addition, Greenways and Trails analyzed the existing and planned trails data within individual master plans and identified local projects that when connected could create long distance regional trails. By tying these efforts together into a comprehensive statewide vision, regional partnerships can be established to support joint projects.

Building on these past accomplishments, this plan provides a foundation from which to substantively advance the Florida Greenways and Trails System. Among this plan's highlights are:

- Delineating distinct long distance regional trail corridors within the Priority Greenways and Trails System.
- Providing strategies to plan, fund, develop and market Florida's Priority Regional Greenways and Trails to advance Florida's economy, tourism, health, transportation choices, recreation, conservation and quality of life.
- Establishing partnerships between public and private sectors to provide leadership regarding the acquisition, development, designation, management and long-term maintenance of Greenways and Trails projects that fulfill the FGTS plan and vision.
- Communicate and market the benefits of Greenways and Trails to Florida residents and visitors.

What are Greenways and Trails?

Greenways are natural corridors of protected open space that are vital to the maintenance of functional and healthy native ecosystems. These ecological greenways support our human environments and allow wildlife to thrive and travel from place to place. Some greenways include trails while others do not.

Greenways and recreational trails, both paved or unpaved, join populated areas together by linking landscapes such as parks, water features, open space, cultural features and historic sites. 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 many aspects of both the natural and human environments. To accomplish this, Greenways and Trails' strategy is to identify and delineate long distance regional trails within the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System and facilitate multi-jurisdictional partnerships to support, develop and manage these systems.

Benefits of Greenways and Trails

Economic Development and Tourism

The Florida Greenways and Trails System supports the Florida Five-Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development (www.floridajobs.org/FL5yrPlan). Particularly, it advances the plan's *Quality of Life & Quality Places* and *Infrastructure & Growth Leadership* strategies. These goals include the creation of "vibrant, safe and healthy communities that attract workers, businesses, residents and visitors." and the development of "multimodal, interconnected trade and transportation systems to support a prosperous and globally competitive economy."

Any trail, long or short, is an economic asset to a community. They provide free recreation for people of all ages and fitness levels, and offer opportunities to study nature or local history. By connecting these local projects together into a larger system, the FGTS has the potential to be a fundamental component of Florida's overall economic development strategy. Long distance or destination trails not only attract nearby residents, but also visitors from outside the local community. These visitors travel specifically to use the trail and are seeking a multi-day experience. Studies show that the longer a trail is, the farther people will travel to visit it, the longer they will stay, and the more money they will spend. A day-user will spend four times the amount of a local user, and is likely to make a return trip to the area. An overnight visitor will spend twice the amount of a day-user. Local businesses, especially those that cater to the needs of the trail users, commonly feel the economic impacts of these destination trails. Service providers often include restaurants, grocery or convenience stores, campgrounds and hotels, guide services and gear stores. Direct connections between the commercial centers and the destination trails can be accomplished by trail spurs or indirectly by wayfinding signage or shuttles from nearby trailheads.

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 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.

Improved Health

The Greenways and Trails System supports the Florida State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) with emphasis on advancing the Healthy Weight initiative, and Goal HW2 to "Improve access to and participation in physical activity opportunities across the lifespan to increase healthy weight." This 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.

The Florida Greenways and Trails System 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 achieve that. The physical and mental health benefits of walking, bicycling, horseback riding and paddling, including the experience of connecting with nature and community, are well documented. While many of the active lifestyle related benefits of a connected recreational trail system are not easy to quantify – such as improved mental health, educational development, connection to nature and a sense of place – an increasing amount of research associates trails and greenways to increased physical activity, decreased healthcare costs and improved air quality. (Benefits of Greenways: Pennsylvania -Pa Greenways Partnership Commission - 2002) (The Environmental Benefits of Bicycling and Walking – FHWA 1993)

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 and accessible means for bicyclists and pedestrians to safely travel through and between communities. While trails have long been known for their recreational benefits, they are now an increasingly critical component of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within multimodal transportation systems.

To address the need for a greater focus on walking and bicycling infrastructure, the Department of Transportation formed the [Florida Bicycle and Pedestrian Partnership Council](#). This council'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. The Department of Environmental Protection is an active participant on this council and continuously seeks opportunities to provide input to the Department of Transportation on issues related to bicycle and pedestrian projects.

Outdoor Recreation

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. Linking 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 is the needed foundation for connecting and providing access to recreation hubs ranging from sizeable state and national forests to small community parks.

The Florida Legislature gave the responsibility to the Department of Environmental Protection 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. The Department's Office of Park Planning, through an extensive public input process, updates the SCORP every 5 years.

Because the Greenways and Trails Plan substantially contributes to these recreational activities, it serves as an essential state-level companion to the SCORP.

Conservation

There are numerous environmental benefits provided by trails and greenways that help to protect the critical functions performed by our 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 species of plants and animals that inhabit the edges of the corridor.

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.

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 the automobile, which reduces 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 a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and road runoff.

The Florida Greenways and Trails System 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 of all ages to experience natural settings, fostering environmental awareness.

Goal 1: Delineate Regional Systems

Evaluate and Prioritize

The Greenways and Trails System acts to integrate natural and human environments, both paved and unpaved. Trails and greenways 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 roadways, with the exception of walkable and bikeable downtown main streets.

Opportunities

Land Trail Opportunities within the Florida Greenways and Trails System are corridors that represent existing, planned and conceptual non-motorized multi-use trails. These corridors form a land-based trail network that cross, or have the potential to cross, jurisdictional boundaries. The corridors on maps are represented as approximately one mile-wide to allow for flexibility in the proposed trail locations as they are refined.

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 that can form a comprehensive connected system when complete.

Moving forward, Greenways and Trails will further refine the Land Trail Opportunity map to identify “Ready” Land Trail Opportunities. To be recognized as “Ready”, the corridor must meet the following 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 Florida Ecological Greenways Network

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 the scenic qualities and diverse experiences
- Spans at least three miles in length
- Navigable during most months in an average year

- Benefits from increased visitation without harm to the natural environment

Moving forward, the Office of Greenways and Trails will evaluate and identify paddling corridors with the potential to be a long-distance destination paddling trail, similar to the [Suwannee River Wilderness State Trail](#). This paddling trail, established through a public/private partnership, provides an incredible journey and memorable experience. Launching just above White Springs, you can paddle more than 170 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. Numerous take-out points and overnight campsites along with dedicated river camps make it possible to enjoy either a leisurely weekend on the water or a more ambitious trip.

Priorities

The Greenways and Trails System Priority corridors are the *focused* vision for trails in the state and rank higher for implementation than the Opportunity corridors. Priority corridors are comprised of a subset of the Land Trail and Paddling Trail Opportunity maps. To be recognized as a Priority corridor, it must meet these criteria to the greatest extent possible:

- Supports and further establishes national, state or regional trail projects, plans and initiatives
- Builds on past and programmed state and federal investments in trails, particularly when matched by funding from local and private sources
- 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, especially those entities willing to commit to trail management and long-term maintenance
- Enhances access to nature-based tourism and economic development by connecting natural, recreational, cultural and historic sites
- Enhances connections to state parks and trails and greenways
- Coincides with and support the FEGN priorities
- Provides public safety by offering non-motorized use that is separated from highways

Moving forward, Greenways and Trails will work with partners and stakeholders to identify and delineate distinct 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 more unique expansive system. A regional trail can provide 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, Greenways and Trails has had the opportunity to share and gain knowledge from others. The national trail movement is exciting and interest is growing. Neighboring states, Georgia and Alabama, have expressed interest in identifying opportunities for connecting into Florida’s expansive trail system. Other opportunities for connections 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. The Office of Greenways and Trails will pursue each of these interstate trail connections.

The Florida Greenways and Trails System Opportunity and Priority maps are maintained online along with the data resources through FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com.

Establish and Connect

The Office of Greenways and Trails is taking a regional approach to implement the statewide system. Regional trails are identified and delineated from within the Priority Corridors. They are multi-county projects and can be either linear or loop trail systems. Because they span long-distances, sometimes over 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, 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 can provide multiple uses including biking, hiking, equestrian and paddling. These systems also link natural communities including natural areas, parks, beaches, rivers and springs.

To implement the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System, the Department recognizes that community trail spurs and State Parks complement and help complete the system. Greenways and Trails' role is to identify new opportunities to connect the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System to the Florida State Park System and incorporate these findings into the individual unit management plans. By doing so we are establishing and encouraging connections between the Florida Greenways and Trails System, State Parks, local parks and communities.

Assistance and Resources

Greenways and Trails regional planners provide technical assistance, planning expertise, and coordination of resources to establish the Greenways and Trails System.

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 teams are comprised of representatives from that region. The desired outcome is that collectively, they will endorse the regional trail project. The group 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, Greenways and Trails maintains current technical assistance information on its website, FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com. These resources support all Florida Greenways and Trails System projects and include design guidelines for paved and unpaved trails, economic and health benefits, grant opportunities and much more. To further the technical assistance program, educational materials will be developed and shared at facilitated regional summits. These new resources will be designed to target specific audiences such as rural communities, private developers or health providers. Greenways and Trails will also develop a series of tools and templates tailored specifically for partners and stakeholders to utilize.

Designation

The Designation Program was established Ch 260, Florida Statutes, 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. 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.

A newly established Trail Town program was developed to encourage and establish trail hubs. Similar to Gateway Communities for hikers on the Florida 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, such as Dunedin, have embraced the culture and benefits of trails, bringing enhanced prosperity and vitality into their communities.

A successful 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 including bike shops, restaurants, hotels and inns. The downtown is utilized by recreational users, visitors and local citizens alike checking out local businesses and enjoying the nearby natural landscapes.

Goal 2: Strategic Investment of Resources to Advance System Completion

Funding

A successful trail project requires sufficient funding for acquisition, development, management, maintenance and marketing. The Office of Greenways and Trails works with public and private partners to help identify and strategically focus funding to close gaps within the system. To further assist in identifying and estimating funding needs, case examples of project costs and links to successfully funded projects will be compiled and provided on FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com.

One of the many benefits of establishing a regional leadership teams is to gain a unified commitment to use local funding sources by encouraging local and regional governmental support for projects. Partners and stakeholders can also engage private developers to encourage them to incorporate trail projects that close gaps in the Greenways and Trails System, into their development plans. Leadership teams can also encourage the inclusion of trail and greenway projects in any planned unit developments, developments of regional impact, sector plans, etc.

Furthering the state's commitment to improving mobility, the Florida Legislature passed measures in 2014 and 2015 to fund the development of multi-use trails. Specifically, Section 339.81, Florida Statutes, established the [Shared-Use Nonmotorized \(SUN\) Trail program](#). Administered by the Department of Transportation, the SUN Trail program provides funding for the development of a statewide system of paved multi-use trails for bicyclists and pedestrians. The SUN Trail network is the paved component of the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System. Through a two-tier funding structure, the Department of Transportation will advance the establishment of the trail system by programming the recurring \$25 million allocation to close gaps and complete trails within the Greenways and Trails Priority System. Local sponsors or agencies must secure funding for trailheads, restrooms and other amenities.

In addition to SUN Trail funding, the Department of Transportation administers multiple funding sources that can be used to implement trails. These additional [funding sources](#) are available for implementing trails, amenities and trailheads.

The Office of Greenways and Trails will continue to coordinate with agencies 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. Another form of assistance includes reviewing acquisition proposals for Florida Forever and providing geographic data analysis to support acquisitions that help complete priority projects.

Acquisition

The Florida Greenways and Trails Acquisition Program, which historically received 1.5% of the Florida Forever funds each year, has not been funded since 2010. Currently, the Office of Greenways and Trails works with the Division of State Lands to identify other funding programs that support the acquisition of greenway or trail projects.

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 the Office of Greenways and Trails and other land managing 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.

In addition, Greenways and Trails 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, a recreational easement to construct a paved trail on a 40-mile stretch of a future utility corridor was recently negotiated. 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.

Development

A new effort Greenways and Trails 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 Opportunity and Priority Corridors with local and state parks. Mapping is underway to identify these potential connections. Regional planners will work with the Florida Recreational Trails Council, non-profits, cities, counties, regional, state and federal governments to help direct resources and secure funding to develop these new trail connections.

Another initiative is to coordinate with the Department's Office of Park Planning to incorporate connections from State Park System to the Greenways and Trails System into individual Unit Management Plans. Additionally, connections to locally managed parks and trails will also be shared with recreational and transportation planning entities. Maps and content will be provided to help with integrating the information into local and regional plans.

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

Communicate and Educate

A key component in advancing the Greenways and Trails System is to ensure that its purpose, benefits and values are effectively communicated to the many public and private stakeholders involved the success of the system.

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

The Florida Greenways and Trails System has various stakeholders that can be divided into two groups, formal and informal. Formal stakeholders include regional planning organizations, county governments, municipalities, business organizations, and local and regional tourism promoters. Informal partners include recreational user groups, individual businesses, foundations, coalitions, etc.

Greenways and Trails will develop an integrated marketing and communications strategy that addresses these two target audiences – users and stakeholders. Initially, a base inventory of the current marketing and communication efforts from established state, national and international

greenways and trail systems will be created. This inventory will identify the most effective practices and messages to promote greenways and trails among users (current and potential) and stakeholders (formal and informal).

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

Branding is an important aspect of successfully promoting the Florida Greenways and Trails System. 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 that will 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

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

- Lead to improved outcomes through a range of joint services, advice and support being readily available and easily accessible
- Benefit the understanding of multi-agency activities, enabling them to focus on their core role
- Help to build consensus, strengthen partnership voices, break down professional silos and broaden focused perspectives
- Help to enhance the scale of coverage when shared budgets, joint projects and events are put into action
- Establish a cohesive approach when multi-agency programs share responsibilities to address local needs
- Promote a supportive exchange of ideas between staff
- Increase the fit between the services offered and those desired by users and partners
- Improve understanding and raises awareness of issues
- Increase the level of trust between partners knowing each can and will deliver results

The establishment, management and promotion of the Greenways and Trails System is conducted by many agency and organizational partners from the local to the federal level. Though these entities may manage different segments of the Greenways and Trails System, they often have very distinct missions. For example, the Greenways and Trails System extends 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. Continued coordination with key federal, state, local governments, Metropolitan Planning Organizations and other entities with the capacity to complete the Greenways and Trails System is extremely important. In coordination with these partners, common goals will be identified and joint workshops and events will be hosted to further establish, maintain, operate and market the Greenways and Trails System.

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

Summary/Conclusion

The completion of this Florida Greenways and Trails System Action Plan results from the commitment of many stakeholders and valuable partnerships among multiple organizations. The progress on the statewide system that has been accomplished to date provides a solid foundation for implementing these actions through the Florida Greenways and Trails program. The intent of this plan is to help provide guidance and to encourage many to work together effectively to reach mutual goals. The work that lies ahead will rely heavily on the hard work and support of our many partners.

The completion of the Florida Greenways and Trails System can only be accomplished with participation and involvement from stakeholders at many levels. Success will require that everyone who worked to develop these strategies participate in implementing them and engage others to establish new partnerships. The Florida Greenways and Trails System 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 available alternative transportation methods, increased outdoor recreation opportunities, more livable communities and increased conservation efforts which all contribute to an improved quality of life.

Next Steps

With the completion of this plan, much work lies ahead. The identified strategies, goals and action steps provide a guide to success. Many actions will be implemented within the next year to continue the momentum and generate more interest. The goals include establishing partnerships and regional alliances for implementation, identifying and securing funding opportunities for development and management, providing technical assistance and outreach 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. The table below proposes targets to be met over the next five years. They are organized by the goals described in the Plan.

The timeframes for each action step are only suggestions. Understandably, they 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.

Strategies, Goals, Objectives and Action Steps

Strategy: Coordinate with federal, state and local entities to develop cross-jurisdictional partnerships and regional alliances to increase viability of investment in the development and management of the FGTS			
Goal 1: Delineate Regional Systems			
Objective 1.1: Identify and prioritize opportunities for partnerships, efficiencies, and implementation system-wide			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
1.1.1 Identify and delineate distinct regional trails within the FGTS Priority Corridor	✓		
1.1.2 Work with the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation and Florida Greenways and Trails Council members to establish and facilitate alliances and leadership teams for each regional trail	✓		
1.1.3 Coordinate with local partners to assess the gaps within the FGTS Priority corridor and develop a status map	✓		
1.1.4 Support and assist rural counties to identify potential corridors and establish working groups	✓		
1.1.5 Identify routes connecting state and local parks and other publicly managed lands to the FGTS Opportunity and Priority Corridors		✓	
1.1.6 Engage local communities and identify regional significance of any existing State Parks		✓	
1.1.7 Implement the Parks and Community Trails program by closing gaps between State Parks and the FGTS		✓	
1.1.8 Identify Land Opportunity Corridors that may be ready to receive funding for development and assist with identifying resources	✓		
Objective 1.2: Identify and engage regional stakeholders to delineate, evaluate, and advance the system			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
1.2.1 Coordinate joint meetings with partners to encourage cross-jurisdictional trail projects	✓		
1.2.2 Develop a Coalition Plan and Strategy for each regional alliance established		✓	

1.2.3 Delineate distinct regional trails within the FGTS Priority Corridor and identify beginning and end points for each	✓		
1.2.4 Conduct a Statewide Review of Regional Trail Completion in preparation for next Five-Year System Plan			✓
Objective 1.3: Recognize the needs of diverse user groups			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
1.3.1 Using the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), identify groups that have been traditionally underrepresented as visitors to Florida’s Greenways and Trails system, establish working groups to understand recreation trends and develop plans for inclusion in the FGTS		✓	
1.3.2 Identify demographics (age, race, education, etc.) within the stakeholder groups to encourage more diverse involvement		✓	
1.3.3 Expand the presence of greenways and trails in rural and urban Florida through education and innovative partnerships to drive economic impact to these areas		✓	
1.3.4 Reach out to under-served groups and regions to understand the barriers, needs, and preferences of all current and potential user groups		✓	
1.3.5 Work with partners and stakeholders who have developed programs for under-served populations and include successful strategies when implementing the FGTS		✓	
1.3.6 Communicate effective solutions to unmet needs through the division’s website, newsletter, social media and other available methods		✓	
1.3.7 Support and assist counties of greatest need to identify potential corridors		✓	
Objective 1.4: Establish and encourage connections between the FGTS, State Parks, local parks and communities by implementing the Parks and Community Trails Program			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
1.4.1 Identify new opportunities to connect the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System to the Florida State Park System and incorporate findings into the individual unit management plans	✓		

1.4.2 Increase connectivity statewide by identifying State Parks that may be appropriate for providing connectivity across local jurisdictions	✓		
1.4.3 Work with local and regional partners to develop initial trail master plans or integrate trails into existing plans		✓	
1.4.4 Encourage local and regional partners to include PACT projects on Metropolitan Planning Organization or appropriate priority lists		✓	
Objective 1.5: Improve the user experience and economic development without compromising resources			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
1.5.1 Coordinate with partners and stakeholders to identify and inventory significant natural and cultural resources within the FGTS		✓	
1.5.2 Coordinate efforts by identifying common goals to develop appropriate interpretive plans for natural and cultural resources within the FGTS			✓
1.5.3 Coordinate with partners and stakeholders to identify and develop best management practices for trail design to minimize impacts to wildlife		✓	
1.5.4 Provide outreach and education about the importance of natural and cultural resources by highlighting successful historic, cultural, and environmental preservation/conservation projects near or in proximity the FGTS		✓	
1.5.5 Encourage relationships with educational institutions to offer mutually beneficial citizen/student research and interpretive opportunities			✓
1.5.6 Highlight agency efforts and communicate local and regional conservation-related efforts by sharing successful natural and cultural resource protection stories within the FGTS through the website, newsletters, social media, interpretive programs and other available methods			✓
Goal 2: Strategic investment in resources to advance system completion			
Objective 2.1 Identify funding sources for acquisition, design, construction and management of the FGTS			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5

2.1.1 Coordinate with DOT to implement the Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail program	✓		
2.1.2 Coordinate with local, state and federal agencies to identify and secure available funding sources appropriate for greenways and trails	✓		
2.1.3 Establish public and private partnerships to identify funding needs for trail management, maintenance and facilities development	✓		
2.1.4 Identify, engage and assist local, state and federal partners to develop specific agreements to fund and manage trail segments	✓		
2.1.5 Work with other parts of division to direct grants to specific trail development and management needs		✓	
2.1.6 Work with the Florida Greenways and Trails Council to recommend regional trail funding priorities to DOT, as requested	✓		
2.1.7 Provide education to local and regional partners about funding opportunities		✓	
2.1.8 Encourage local governments to identify local sources of funding for trail development and management and include these items in their budget requests		✓	
2.1.9 Encourage recreational grant programs to provide additional points to projects identified in the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System	✓		
Strategy: Engage federal, state and local stakeholders to facilitate statewide and local promotion of trails and trail segments within the Florida Greenways and Trails System			
Goal 3: Promote and market the Florida Greenways and Trails System to residents and visitors			
Objective 3.1: Recognize and encourage excellence through the Trail Town Program			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
3.1.1 Recognize hard work and commitment by identifying and designating Trails Towns	✓		
3.1.2 Coordinate with appropriate entity to monitor and document the economic impact of a successful Trail Town	✓		

3.1.3 Provide education and guidance to local communities to assist with understanding the basic characteristics of a successful Trail Town	✓		
3.1.4 Provide education to Visit Florida, tourist development councils, chambers of commerce, etc. to assist them with understanding the benefits of being a successful Trail Town		✓	
3.1.5 Provide signage and decals to local communities to assist with identifying participating “trail friendly” businesses		✓	
3.1.6 Communicate actions and programs that contribute to being a successful Trail Town through the website, social media, outreach events and any other available methods		✓	
Objective 3.2: Develop and implement an integrated marketing and communications plan and strategy to enhance communication with stakeholders			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
3.2.1 Work with the division’s Bureau of Operational Services to identify target audiences and increase outreach to partners and stakeholders		✓	
3.2.2 Develop educational tools relating to the benefits of trails with regards to conservation, health, recreation, economic growth, alternative transportation, historic preservation, etc.		✓	
3.2.3 Develop educational tools for working groups based on lessons learned to help establish successful regional trails		✓	
3.2.4 Encourage partnership engagement for trail development by facilitating educational programs, workshops, webinars and summits to share strategies and provide targeted information to partners		✓	
3.2.5 Develop a FGTS brand style guide		✓	
3.2.6 Identify and engage stakeholders to encourage participation in multi-day events celebrating regional trail projects		✓	
3.2.7 Publish a quarterly newsletter and utilize the website to celebrate local accomplishments and events		✓	

3.2.8 Work with DEP communications team to promote greenways and trails on social media, targeted campaigns, etc.		✓	
Objective 3.3: Connect events on greenways and trails to people and communities			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
3.3.1 Promote programs and events and encourage participation by inviting elected officials, surrounding community partners, stakeholders, and media to participate in greenways and trails events and volunteer opportunities		✓	
3.3.2 Coordinate with recreational user groups to develop maps and multi-day itineraries for hiking, paddling, equestrian and bicycle trails.		✓	
3.3.3 Work with Tourist Development Councils and Visitor and Convention Bureaus to coordinate local and regional events on greenways and trails.		✓	
3.3.4 Continuously update and maintain statewide greenways and trails events calendar and share events on the website		✓	
Objective 3.4: Promote the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority System to advance Florida's economy, tourism, health, transportation, recreation, conservation and quality of life			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
3.4.1 Communicate the value of connecting recreational resources with multi-use trails by developing a summary of economic, health, and alternative transportation benefits locally and regionally	✓		
3.4.2 Engage local businesses and communicate the economic value of regional trails to local businesses and encourage them to provide goods and services that appeal to visiting trail users		✓	
3.4.3 Improve health outcomes for Floridians by partnering with state and local organizations to support and promote health and wellness education programs and activities		✓	
3.4.4 Advance the Florida State Health Improvement Plan, in coordination with the Department of Health, by increasing access to and awareness of the FGTS		✓	
3.4.5 Coordinate with local health agencies and organizations to encourage implementation of the FGTS as a strategy to improve community health	✓		

3.4.6 Organize a statewide summit in partnership with the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation, Florida Greenways and Trails Council and Visit Florida to educate local Tourist Development Councils		✓	
3.4.7 Partner with entities from other states to facilitate interstate trail connections	✓		
Goal 4: Establish Partnerships and Engage Stakeholders			
Objective 4.1: Engage stakeholders and partners, both public and private to advance the system			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
4.1.1 Identify common goals with local, state and federal partners and establish partnership agreements to accomplish these goals		✓	
4.1.2 Host workshops and events in coordination with local, state and federal partners		✓	
4.1.3 Work with Department of Transportation, Metropolitan/Transportation Planning Organizations and others to develop guidelines for facilities, signage and amenity development on multi-use trails	✓		
4.1.4 Enlist Visit Florida and other partners to promote trail use		✓	
4.1.5 Increase outreach and identify resources for regional trails by establishing partnerships with local advocacy groups, organizations, and other entities		✓	
4.1.6 Work with partners and stakeholders to Identify greenways and trails projects to implement jointly	✓		
4.1.7 Increase recognition of partner and stakeholder efforts at events and through media	✓		
Objective 4.2: Collaborate with partners and stakeholders to encourage the development of a local identity and sense of place			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
4.2.1 Encourage communities, local businesses, and other local partners to identify community attractions, landscapes, events, businesses, etc. that contribute to a unique sense of place		✓	
4.2.2 Establish partnerships with local advocacy groups, businesses and organizations to encourage enhancement of		✓	

visitor experiences by featuring local cultural and historic resources			
4.2.3 Assist with development of promotional materials highlighting greenways and trails and the surrounding recreational, cultural and historical resources		✓	
Objective 4.3: Engage youth to build an understanding of the importance and value of a connected regional trail system			
Actions	Immediate	Yrs 1-2	Yrs 3-5
4.3.1 Collaborate with local schools and youth-serving organizations to provide opportunities to develop interactive, interpretive and education programs that communicate and encourage the importance of active transportation and greenways and trails	✓		
4.3.2 Participate with partners and stakeholders to promote and cultivate educational programs and youth volunteer opportunities that support greenways and trails		✓	
4.3.3 Engage youth in producing a "benefits of trails" marketing messages in support of the FGTS for the division (e.g., creating blogs, testimonials, etc. for the internet and social media)		✓	

Public Outreach and Input

Florida Greenways and Trails Council members list

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Leadership and Staff

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