Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation P.O. Box 4142 Tallahassee, FL. 32315

I would like to encourage the Florida Greenways & Trails Council, when they meet on March 31st, to select the "Heart of Florida Loop" as a priority as part of the SUNTrail System. As you know, the Heart of Florida Loop is nearly 70% complete – more than any other regional system. That this trail is so close to completion demonstrates the regional commitment to work collaboratively – and satisfies several of the criteria for selection.

Other SUNTrail criteria which are met by the Heart of Florida Loop include:

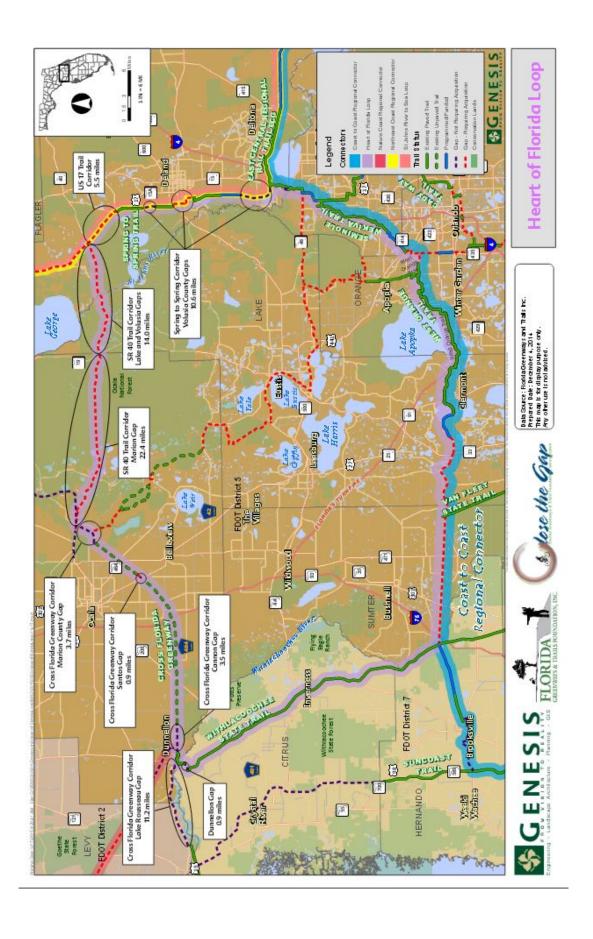
- The trail system encompasses multiple counties within the FGTS priority system refer to attached map.
- The trail system serves as a destination AND serves destinations too numerous to list but I live in Orlando and Ocala is a destination for me as well as the trail being a destination in and of itself. Filling the gap across the Ocala National Forest will really open that area to new user groups.
- The trail system supports economic development and tourism small businesses all along the trail
 are supported by trail users, and the trail itself attracts visitors from across the USA as well as other
 countries. I speak from personal experience about the people I have met when using the existing
 trail segments.
- The trail system is an off-highway facility enhancing safety for non-motorized uses by the public some parts may parallel roadways but some, the parts I like best, are out in the woods.
- There is prior AND future public/private investment commitment for the trail system. this is demonstrated by the near completion status of the Loop.
- There are committed operations and maintenance entities speaking from the perspective of cycling, there are numerous organizations with untold numbers of volunteers who commit time to the trail, including bike patrols and workdays.
- The trail system connects to and facilitates use of multimodal transportation opportunities it is certainly accessible from many roadways via trailheads, but also from the SunRail commuter train in central Florida, for pedestrians via walkways that access trailheads, and for cyclists who can access via connecting trails (such as Cady Way).
- The readiness status of the trail system is available with definable trail segment and project phasing

 this goes without saying due to the current status of trail completion.

In closing, I would just like to reiterate my encouragement for the Council to select the Heart of Florida Loop as a priority. I appreciate your time in reading my letter and for your consideration of my request.

Thank You!

Sincerely, Carol J Sweeney





March 29, 2016 PP 2016-03

Mr. Brian Smith, Chairman Florida Greenways and Trails Council Office of Greenways and Trails 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 795 Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

RE: Support for the Heart of Florida Loop Trail

Dear Chairman Smith,

The Heart of Florida Loop Trail spans roughly 215 miles and involves the collaboration of eight counties throughout Central Florida. The planning area of the River to Sea Transportation Planning Organization (R2CTPO) is home to approximately 39 miles of the Loop. Over the years, interested stakeholders have continued to work together in the planning and development of this regional trail. To that end, the River to Sea TPO joined with the Ocala-Marion TPO last year to prioritize a request for the completion of a Project Development and Environmental (PD&E) study for the Black Bear Scenic Trail that will span between Volusia and Marion Counties running through the Ocala National Forrest. The PD&E study is currently funded for \$1.1 million in FY 2020/21.

The R2CTPO and other supporters have worked earnestly to advance the Heart of Florida Loop Trail and approximately 70% of trail is either complete or has funding programmed. In addition, the R2CTPO completed a Regional Trails Corridor Assessment (RTCA) in 2015 to ensure we were strategically pursuing the establishment of trails. While much progress has been made, there is still more to do and the RTCA has provided us with a clear understanding of how to move forward. Prioritization and funding support from the Office of Greenways and Trails through the SUN Trail program would help supplement the existing activities and advance the completion of trail segments. Please see the following brief overview of how this project addresses the criteria being considered by the Council.

- 1. There is documentation of a regional alliance that demonstrates broad and persistent community support for the regional trail system; ongoing coordination and regional cooperation reflect solid support for this regional trail network. The project has a commitment from the River to Sea TPO and many of the municipalities within our planning area and segments of this trail are also included on the Central Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Alliance (CFMPOA) regional trails priority list.
- 2. The trail system encompasses multiple counties within the FGTS priority system; the Heart of Florida Loop Trail spans eight counties including Citrus, Hernando, Marion, Orange, Seminole, Lake, Sumter and Volusia. All eight counties are designated Priority Land Trails of the FGTS Plan.
- **3.** The trail system serves as a destination and serves destinations; origins and destinations served by this trail system are numerous. There are environmental assets including Silver Springs State Park, the Oklawaha Prairie, the Withlacoochie State Forrest and the Ocala National Forrest. The loop also serves a variety of beautiful small towns providing an "old" Florida experience often missed in today's environment. The southern portion of the Heart of Florida Loop Trail is also known as the Coast to Coast Connector Trail.
- **4.** The trail system supports economic development and tourism; the Heart of Florida Loop Trail serves many tourism destinations including nature based activities as well as historic and manmade attractions. These attractions are all well supported with hotel and restaurant venues to serve trail users.
- 5. It is demonstrated that the trail system is an off-highway facility enhancing safety for non-motorized uses by the public; each of the partner counties are committed to providing off-highway trails as a part of the development of the Heart of Florida Loop Trail. In the River to Sea TPO planning area, the Regional Trails Corridor Assessment (RTCA) was completed to ensure there is a clear path for developing and supporting these efforts.
- 6. It is demonstrated that there is prior and/or future public/private investment or commitment for the trail system; both partner counties have shown a strong commitment to building and maintaining quality trail projects. Utilizing local, state and federal funds, local governments have shown a consistent financial commitment towards constructing and maintaining multi-use trails.
- **7.** There are committed operations and maintenance entities; as described in the previous response, Volusia County has shown a strong commitment to building and maintaining quality trail projects.
- 8. The trail system connects to and facilitates use of multimodal transportation opportunities; the Heart of Florida Loop Trail provides connections to a number of multi-



modal options including local transit service and SunRail (the Central Florida passenger rail service). This provides opportunities for trail riders to access the loop from throughout the Central Florida area and provides mobility options after a long day of riding.

- 9. The readiness status of the trail system is available with definable trail segments and project phasing; as mentioned, the RTCA has provided a comprehensive assessment of the existing trail segments as well as the gaps throughout the R2CTPO planning area. The RTCA documents trails currently under development and is intended to ensure a strategic approach towards completing the entire SunTrail network within our planning area. In addition, "Close the Gaps" assessments and local area masterplans have laid the foundation for completing this project.
- 10. The trail system is able to be substantially complete or fully programmed within 5 years.

 151 miles of the Heart of Florida Loop Trail have been developed. With the assurance of additional financial resources, local governments within our planning area would be ready to advance the projects needed to complete this regional trail network.

I appreciate the efforts of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation in advancing high quality trails throughout the State of Florida. I look forward to working as partners in this effort.

Sincerely,

Pat Patterson, Volusia County Council Member

Chairman, River to Sea TPO

W. Dale Allen, Executive Director, Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation
 Mr. Brian Ruscher, Regional Land Trails Coordinator, Office of Greenways and Trails
 Lois Bollenback, Executive Director, River to Sea TPO
 Tim Baylie, Director, Volusia County Parks, Recreation & Culture
 Gerald Brinton, County Engineer, Volusia County Engineering & Construction
 Gene Ferguson, TPO Liaison, FDOT, District 5



From: Cory Ehrlund
To: Ruscher, Brian
Subject: Heart of Florida loop

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 10:28:38 AM

Hello, my name is Cory Ehrlund, I am 31 years of age and a father of a 4 year old boy and 6 year old girl. I am a auto mechanic at Parkers Tire and Auto in Ocala, Fl. I've been spending the last year riding with my kids on the greenway trails, I love the the cycling environment and think it's a great place to bring kids. Please support the Heart of Florida loop for our future and the great sport of cycling. Thanks!

Cory



East Central Florida Regional Planning Council

309 Cranes Roost Blvd. Suite 2000, Altamonte Springs, FL 32701 Phone 407.262.7772 • Fax 407.262.7788 • www.ecfrpc.org

Hugh W. Harling, Jr. P.E. Executive Director

March 25, 2016

Mr. Brian Ruscher Regional Land Trails Coordinator Offices of Greenways and Trails Florida Department of Environmental Protection 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 795 Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Subject:

Letter of Support for the "Heart of Florida Loop"

Dear Mr. Ruscher:

The purpose of this letter is to support the prioritization of the Heart of Florida Loop by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council for Sun Trail funding. The Heart of Florida Loop is a major initiative to Close the Gaps in Central Florida and is the culmination of the longstanding effort of various agencies and partners to create a central Florida Loop. It is also evident that the Loop hits all the criteria necessary for priority ranking by the Council for Sun Trail funding, as demonstrated through this letter.

This Loop will connect trails and destinations in the east central Florida region by linking the Withlacoochee State Trail, The West Orange Trail, The Lake County Trail, The Seminole/Wekiva Trail, The Shingle Creek Regional Trail, and The East Central Regional Rail Trail, some of which are included in the Coast to Coast Connector, this Loop builds upon current priorities of the State. These trails, as well as the Loop, have had and continue to have, enormous local and regional support, especially through the efforts of the TPOs/MPOs and the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation.

The Heart of Florida Loop is an opportunity to create a connected and continuous trail loop through the State's heartland and connect smaller communities with the major cities of Orlando, Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Jacksonville, providing great opportunities for ecotourism and economic development. The Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation estimates, based upon the ECFRPC Orange County Trail Study, that the loop trail could generate over \$200 million of annual revenue for business in the counties and cities along the Greenway.

Mr. Brian Rusher March 25, 2016 Page Two

The East Central Florida Regional Planning Council considers bicycle and pedestrian transportation to be of significant importance to the region by providing recreation, transportation, economic and community development opportunities which is a vital component to the Heart of Florida Loop. Therefore, the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council strongly recommends that the Florida Greenways and Trails Council include the Heart of Florida Loop in its priority list for Sun Trail funding.

Executive Director

From: RMBlaney@cox.net
To: Ruscher, Brian

Subject: Heart of Florida Cycling Loop

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 8:45:19 PM

Dear Mr. Ruscher,

I am contacting you in support of the Heart of Florida Cycling Loop. We just wrapped up our annual event and it was larger than ever. We experienced outstanding attendance from the Central Florida area and I fielded calls from all over the state, southeastern US, and Canada from visitors here to ride.

Completing the Loop would be an incredible economic impact in a healthy way! I'd love to see Florida go in this direction.

Thank you,

Renee Blaney
Director, Santos Fat Tire Festival
Ocala Mountain Bike Assoc.
March 11-13, 2016
www.SantosFatTire.com
(352) 804-7204



Hernando/Citrus MPO

20 N. Main Street, Room 262 Brooksville, FL 34601 352-754-4057 Fax: 352-754-4420 www.HernandoCitrusMPO.us

March 28, 2016

Florida Greenways and Trails Council Office of Greenways and Trails Florida Department of Environmental Protection 3800 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 795 Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Dear Council Members,

As the Executive Director of the Hernando/Citrus MPO, I support the Heart of Florida Loop and recommend that the Florida Greenways and Trails Council assign high priority to this trail.

The Heart of Florida Loop would extend through eight counties in central Florida and travel through mostly rural areas of the state. It will include sections of the Coast-to-Coast Connector (C2C) trail; the Nature Coast to Peace River Greenway and the St. John's River to Sea Loop. Once all segments are completed, it will be part of a network that would extend through most of rural central Florida.

Also noteworthy, the Heart of Florida Loop encompasses the Cross-Florida Greenway, the Withlacoochee State Trail and the West Orange Trail.

I welcome the opportunity to work alongside all the governmental and advocacy partners in this regional effort to invest in Florida's eco-tourism, economic development, bicycle and pedestrian safety, and sustainability.

Sincerely,

Dennis Dix

Hernando/Citrus MPO

From: Quigley, Gallus
To: Ruscher, Brian
Subject: HOF Loop Trail System

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 9:54:19 AM

Brian

Lake County

Black Bear Scenic Trail SR 40 is part of Trails Master Plan (2008) Access to St. Johns River, Lake County has 3 ramps located off this trail

Access to Ocala NF and its trail system

Future connection to Umatilla and North Lake Trail

Runs along Black Bear Scenic Byway

South Lake Trail is part of Coast to Coast and HOF Loop Trail and high priority for completion.

Many trails in Lake County's Trails Master Plan will be accessible from top and bottom sections of this trail crossing through Lake County allowing connections to North Lake Trail, South Lake Trail, Wekiva Trail, Tav-Lee Trail, Van Fleet, and Neighborhood Lakes Trail. Some of these are moving forward, some are completed in whole or in part, others are still just line on map in our 2008 Master Plan.

Will have economic impacts on City of Astor and Umatilla which will benefit both for the northern portion.

Economic impacts will help Mascott, Groveland, Clermont, and Minnoela in south.

County will maintain any sections that are not picked up by local incorporated cities.

All these areas are high use for bicyclists and South Lake Trail is very high use and growing. 8000-10000 trips per month.

This continues Lake County's slogan of Real Florida, Real Close for bringing people into the county to enjoy passive recreation and eco-tourism based activities.

Let me know if you need more or a different format.

Gallus C. Quigley Jr.
Recreation Coordinator--Trails
Lake County Parks & Trails Division
1300 Fosgate Rd.
Minneola, FL 34715

Cell: 352-516-8512 eMail: gquigley@lakecountyfl.gov

Main Office: 352-253-4950
Main Office Fax: 352-742-3870

www.lakecountyfl.gov/parks

www.facebook.com/LakeCountyFLParks

LAKE~SUMTER METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

RESOLUTION 2016 - 4

RESOLUTION OF THE LAKE~SUMTER METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION REQUESTING THAT THE FLORIDA GREENWAYS & TRAILS COUNCIL ESTABLISH THE HEART OF FLORIDA LOOP TRAIL AS THE NEXT STATE PROJECT ELIGIBLE FOR SUNTRAIL FUNDING

WHEREAS, the Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has been designated by the Governor of the State of Florida as the body responsible for the urban transportation planning process for the Lake-Sumter Urban Areas; and

WHEREAS, Florida Statutes 339.175; 23 U.S.C. 134; and 49 U.S.C. 5303 requires that urbanized areas, as a condition of the receipt of federal capital or operating assistance, have a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process that results in plans and programs consistent with the comprehensively planned development of the urbanized area; and

WHEREAS, the Lake~Sumter MPO has been an integral partner in developing and implementing the SUNTrail network, within which the concept of the Heart of Florida Loop Trail is included in the Office of Greenways & Trails Priority Land Trails Map; and

WHEREAS, the Lake~Sumter MPO is a strong proponent of the provision of bicycle and pedestrian facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Heart of Florida Loop Trail has been publicly vetted and has a regional alliance in support of the trail system, including the Central Florida MPO Alliance; and

WHEREAS, the Heart of Florida Loop Trail route benefits multiple counties within the Florida Greenways and Trails Priority Land Trails System, including the counties of Sumter, Lake, Orange Seminole, Volusia, Marion, Citrus and Hernando; and

WHEREAS, a completed Heart of Florida Loop Trail will serve as a nationwide destination and will benefit eco-tourism efforts in multiple counties and communities; and

WHEREAS, the Heart of Florida Loop Trail will provide safe and scenic enhancements that will increase public usage and access to the State's and the region's natural, historic, cultural and recreational resources; and

WHEREAS, the completion of the Heart of Florida Loop Trail builds on prior federal, state and local investments; and

WHEREAS, the Heart of Florida Loop Trail has committed regional and local entities prepared to operate and maintain the facility; and

WHEREAS, the Heart of Florida Loop Trail connects to the nearly complete Central Florida Coast to Coast Trail to the regional River to Sea Loop Trail; and

WHEREAS, the various needed segments of the Heart of Florida Trail are ready to fund as all trail segments are defined and have been evaluated for project phasing and cost; and

WHEREAS, the Heart of Florida Loop Trail is the only SUNTrail funding eligible facility within the State of Florida with the ability to be fully programmed for construction within a five-year period.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization hereby requests the Florida Greenways & Trails Council establish the Heart of Florida Loop Trail, as shown in Exhibit A to this resolution, as the next SUNTrail funding-eligible project for the State of Florida.

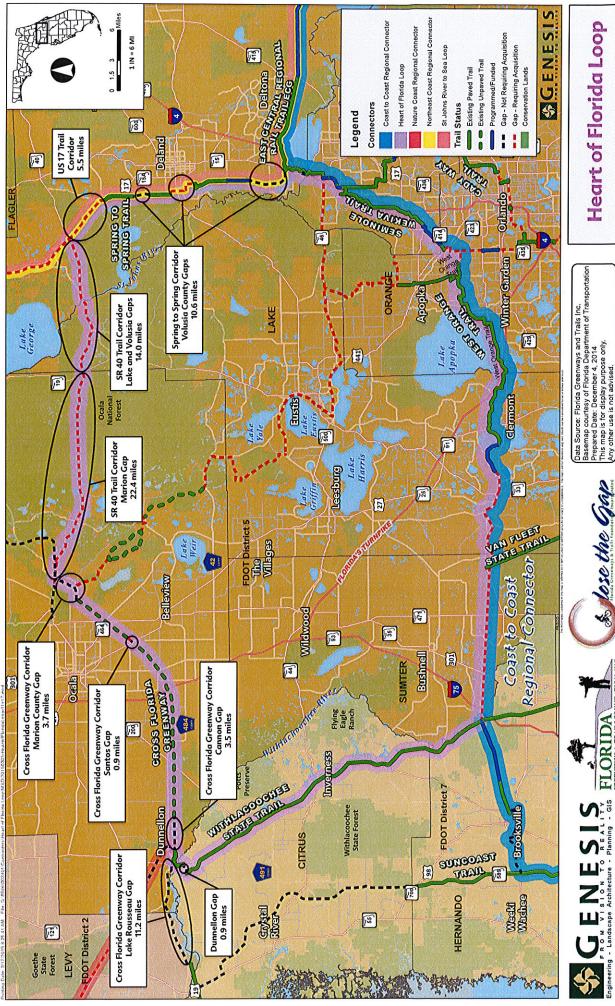
PASSED AND ADOPTED this 24 day of February, 2016.

Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization

Leslie Campione, Chairman

Approved as to form and legality:

Ei Heutige for Melanie Marsh, MPO Attorney



Heart of Florida Loop

Data Source: Florida Greenways and Trails Inc.
Basemap courtesy of Florida Department of Transportation
Preparad Date: December 4, 2014
This map is for display purpose only.
Any other use is not advised. Lose the Gap

FLORIDA FRANCES GREENWAYS & TRAILS FOUNDATION, INC.

Ruscher, Brian

From: Sciullo, Madeline G < madelinesciullo@ufl.edu>

Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 11:48 AM

To: Ruscher, Brian

Subject: Support of Heart of Florida Loop Trail

Hello Brian,

I understand you are the Government Operations Consultant for my area. I am a PhD student at the University of Florida and ride The Florida Greenway Trails very often. I know and love these trails very well. Therefore I believe this Heart of Florida Loop project as the state priority to complete this important trail as a part of the SUN Trail network. As I am sure you know, the Heart of Florida is nearly 70% complete already and more than any other regional system. Below is the criteria that will be used to prioritize regional systems for funding and we meet all of them.

SUN Trail priority regional paved multi-use trail systems will meet the majority of the following criteria:

- -There is documentation of a regional alliance that demonstrates broad and persistent community support for the regional trail system.
- -The trail system encompasses multiple counties within the FGTS priority system.
- -The trail system serves as a destination and serves destinations.
- -The trail system supports economic development and tourism.
- -It is demonstrated that the trail system is an off-highway facility enhancing safety for non-motorized uses by the public.
- -It is demonstrated that there is a prior and/or future public/private investment or commitment for the trail systems.
- -There are committed operations and maintenance entities.
- -The trail system connects to and facilitates use of multimodal transportation opportunities
- -The readiness status of the trail systems is available with definable trail segments and project phasing
- -The trail system is able to be substantially complete or fully programmed within 5 years.

The Heart of Florida Loop trail meets and exceeds the criteria and is the only trail system with a chance to be fully rammed within 5 years.

Thank you for your time, Madeline Sciullo FIT 2014 B.S. Graduate in Electrical Engineering UF 2018 PhD Student in Electrical Engineering From: MIKE STEPHENS
To: Ruscher, Brian

Subject: Support Heart of Florida Loop Trail

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 10:24:53 AM

Mr. Ruscher,

I'm a member of the Lake Sumter MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee, as well as a cyclist and someone who uses multiple trail projects throughout the State, and I'd like to add my support to the Heart of Florida Loop Trail.

I believe the Heart of Florida Loop Trail meets all the selection criteria used to prioritize regional trail systems and is a fairly simple and cost effective expansion of the Coast to Coast trail. In addition, I also believe that the Heart of Florida Loop Trail will bring desperately needed Economic Development to numerous Cities along the route throughout Central Florida.

Please place the Heart of Florida Loop Trail as the next significant trail to be funded after the Florida Coast to Coast Trail.

Thanks,

Michael A. Stephens

Senior Vice President NMLS 514775 United Southern Bank 2701 S. Bay St. Eustis FL 32726 352-483-5899

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County Council

JASON P. DAVIS COUNTY CHAIR

March 21,2016

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JOSHUA J. WAGNER DISTRICT 2

DEBORAH DENYS
DISTRICT 3

DOUG DANIELS

FRED LOWRY, JR. DISTRICT 5

JAMES T. DINNEEN
COUNTY MANAGER

Mr. Brian Ruscher Regional Land Trails Coordinator Office of Greenways and Trails Florida Department of Environmental Protection 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 795 Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Dear Mr. Ruscher:

Volusia County's trail network is crucial to our eco-tourism efforts and beloved by our residents. That's why the Volusia County Council is asking the Florida Greenways and Trails Council to designate the St. Johns River to Sea Loop and the Heart of Florida Loop as state priority trails.

This designation is critical as it will allow state SUN Trail money to be used to complete both trail systems and link them to trail networks in neighboring counties.

The Volusia County Council has seen firsthand the passionate public support that our trails receive, and we have heard our residents ask for more to be developed.

Trails provide good jobs – in fact, more jobs per dollar than roads since they are more labor-intensive. The visitors to Volusia's trail system help our economy by staying in local hotels, eating at area restaurants and shopping at our stores.

Trails also provide our citizens with affordable transportation opportunities and improved health.

Mr. Brian Ruscher Page 2 March 21, 2016

Integrated public trails and intermodal pathways in Volusia County and Florida are truly a win-win for everyone. The Volusia County Council urges the Greenways and Trails Council to designate the St. Johns River to Sea Loop and the Heart of Florida Loop as state priority trails.

If you need additional information, please feel free to contact any Volusia County Council member. Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

COUNTY COUNCIL
VOLUSIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

JASON P. DAVIS, County Chair

PAT PATTERSON, District 1, Vice Chair

JOSHUA J. WAGNER, District 2

DOUG DANIELS, District 4

JOYGE M. CUSACK, At-Large

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DR. FRED LOWRY, District 5