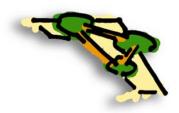# 2004 Update and Prioritization of Florida's Trail Network

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The 2004 Trail Network Prioritization Maps are the result of a yearlong effort to update a series of maps that delineate the vision for Florida's Trails Network. The Trail Network Prioritization Maps not only represent the statewide vision for a connected system of trails, they also determine eligibility for funding to purchase land under Florida's greenways and trails acquisition program. A trail corridor can only be eligible to compete for the state's acquisition dollars if it is part of the Trail Network identified on the prioritization maps.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways & Trails (OGT) collaborated with the University of Florida GeoPlan Center (UF) to update these maps with input from non-profit organizations, user groups and agencies across the entire state. The University of Florida developed a web-based system that allowed for input from individuals and organizations throughout Florida. The focus of the online system was to update the multi-use and paddling trail network corridors. The hiking trail network map adopted the planning corridor for the congressionally designated Florida National Scenic Trail.

Background

The Trail Network data being updated was originally developed as a companion to Florida's statewide greenways and trails plan in 1998, entitled Connecting Florida's Communities with Greenways and Trails: The Five Year Implementation Plan for the Florida Greenways and Trails System (DEP and FGCC 1998). The Implementation Plan was accompanied by a map series showing potential recreational trails derived from Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data and public comments. The Trail Networks shown on those maps were Hiking Trail Opportunities, Off-Road Bicycling Trail Opportunities, Equestrian Trail Opportunities, Multi-Use Trail Opportunities, and Paddling Trail Opportunities.

Given the rapid growth in local and regional planning of greenways and trails since the adoption of the *Implementation Plan*, it was important to update the data so it would reflect the tremendous progress being made throughout Florida in greenways and trails visioning. The 2004 map series was reduced to Multi-Use, Hiking and Paddling, with Off Road Biking and Equestrian being subsumed under the Multi-Use Trail Network. The trail opportunities were mapped with lines, but each line was assumed to represent a corridor four kilometers in width, measuring two kilometers on either side of the mapped line. This width allows for the inevitable variability that can occur during trail corridor planning.

Phase One: Trails Planning Organizations

The online system that was developed by UF to conduct the data update allowed trail planners, trail user groups and others involved with planning and visioning to submit updates from their desktop computer. Trails organizations and agencies were provided password access during the first phase of the update. Representatives from these entities could visit the website and zoom in from a statewide map of Florida to the local area of interest. They could then submit specific additions or changes by using their mouse to "draw" trail corridors on their computer screen, using aerial photos or other data layers as their guide. In addition to submitting geographic information, representatives also filled out a form with specific information such as the organization they represent, whether the corridor is part of a specific local plan, and other information about the corridor itself. Because the additional information was provided through an online form, all information submitted was consistent.

Phase Two: Public Comment Period

After comments were received from representatives of trail agencies and organizations, a draft update was prepared based upon those comments for review by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC). Once reviewed and approved by the FGTC to move forward, the draft update was made available to the public via the online system. During that time, virtually anyone could submit comments regarding the draft update. Three public workshops were also held throughout the state to provide an opportunity for citizens to discuss questions or comments face to face with OGT.

Phase Three: Prioritization of All Segments

After public comment, the final opportunity corridors were submitted to the FGTC for review and approval. Once approved, all of the trail corridor segments were prioritized through a process that included both subjective input as well as quantitative criteria. The methodology used for prioritization was the same as that originally developed to prioritize the trails in 2001, which utilized GIS analysis and expert opinion. A set of Statewide and Regional Experts provided rankings for the multi-use and paddling trail prioritizations. "Expert Opinion" was needed in two categories of the analysis: regional significance and continuity. The experts were asked to rank the segments as high, medium or low in each of the two categories.

Multi-Use Trail Network Prioritization

In order to measure REGIONAL IMPORTANCE, priority was given to corridor segments:

- that have the potential to contribute to ecological connectivity and to protect and enhance biological diversity and significant natural resources,
- that connect with local trails and/or existing and proposed trails
- that are compatible with adjacent land uses.

In order to measure QUALITY, priority was given to corridor segments:
- that optimize the quality of the non-motorized user's experience and minimize conflicts.
- that connect or have the potential to connect to trailheads, access sites, recreation sites, campsites, suitable cultural/historic sites, schools, neighborhoods, places of work, civic buildings, theme parks and sites of special interests, e.g., stream springs, sinkholes or hilltops.

In order to measure MANAGEABILITY, priority was given to corridor segments:
- that are manageable for multiple uses.

In order to measure CONTRIBUTION TO CONTINUITY, priority was given to corridor segments:
- that will link Florida's major urban areas to one another and to major natural resource destinations.

Paddling Trail Network Prioritization

In order to measure REGIONAL IMPORTANCE, priority was given to corridor segments:
- that support paddling in regions with high levels of paddling demand.
- whose development has the potential to contribute to ecological connectivity and to protect and enhance biological diversity and significant natural resources.
- that are compatible with adjacent land uses.

In order to measure QUALITY, priority was given to corridor segments:
- that optimize the quality of the paddler's experience and minimize conflicts with motorized users.
- that connect or have the potential to connect to trailheads, access sites, recreation sites, campsites, suitable cultural/historic sites, schools, neighborhoods, places of work, civic buildings, theme parks and sites of special interests, e.g., stream springs, sinkholes or hilltops.
- with the potential for cultural, historic and ecological interpretation.
- that are scenic and diverse.

In order to measure MANAGEABILITY, priority was given to corridor segments:
- that are manageable for paddling.

Hiking Trail Network Prioritization

The Hiking Trail Network Prioritization Map is based on the route identified in the USDA Forest Service's study, Preferred Routing For The Florida National Scenic Trail, as updated in 2003. The route of the Trail runs north to south beginning in two locations in west Florida (at the Gulf Islands National Seashore and at the Alabama state line - Blackwater State Forest) and ending in the Big Cypress National Preserve in South Florida.
The route included on the map includes the pathway and essential associated lands required for proper functioning of the trail. Low, medium and high priorities are based on the need for trail acquisition as defined below. For readability, some generalization is included in the segments. That is, in some cases the entire length will not require acquisition.

Low Priority – Land acquisition should not be needed. There is existing trail on protected/public land, or there is public land where trail can be located, or acquisition is not appropriate.

Medium Priority – Land acquisition is needed. Acquisition of land for the corridor of the trail or for public land on which the trail can be located, is underway. There may or may not be existing trail on the ground. There may be some trail on public land for which acquisition is not needed.

High Priority – Land acquisition is needed. Acquisition of land for the corridor of the trail or other public land is not underway. There may be some trail on public land for which acquisition is not needed.

Summary
In less than twelve months, the trail network opportunity corridor data for the entire state was updated. Receiving comments through the online system significantly reduced the cost and time associated with the tremendous number of meetings that would have otherwise been needed, not to mention the large number of hours that would have been required to compile information from marked-up paper maps. Another significant benefit during the process was that changes submitted online were viewable almost immediately by others submitting comments. This helped to avoid duplication of comments. The next update of the Trail Network is anticipated in 2009.

For further information about Florida's trails data update and to view the results of the work, visit http://ogt.geoplan.ufl.edu.