Florida Greenways and Trail Council

The Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) was established pursuant to 260.0142, Florida Statutes. Among its duties, the Council serves to advise the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on greenway and trail related issues, promote intergovernmental cooperation and private partnerships for developing the greenways and trails system, recommend priorities for critical links in the system, and provide funding recommendations for developing and managing thesystem.

Office of Greenways and Trails Contacts

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Florida Greenways and Trails Council- 260.0142 F.S.

Appointed by the Governor:

- (2) Trail Users
- (2) Greenway Users
- (1) Private Landowner
- (1) Florida Wildlife Corridor Representative

Appointed by President of the Senate:

- (1) Trail User
- (2) Greenway Users

Appointed by Speaker of the House:

- (2) Trail Users
- (1) Greenway User

The 9 Remaining Council Members Include:

- FL Dept. of Environmental Protection
- FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- FL Dept. of Transportation
- FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- FL Dept. of State
- Water Management District
- Federal Land Management Agency
- Regional Planning Council
- Local Government

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Appointed by the Governor – Trail User

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Karl is a lifelong Floridian that has been a resident of Tallahassee since 2000. Karl enjoys being outdoors via running and walking in Tallahassee and around the state when traveling. Karl previously served as a Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Cabinet Affairs for Governor Rick Scott. He also previously served as the Assistant Director of State Lands and as the Cabinet Affairs Director for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection where he developed a passion for the many outdoor recreational opportunities provided by the state.

Appointed by the Governor – Trail User

Mike Stephens – Council Chair
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Michael A. (Mike) Stephens is a Florida native and lifetime resident of Lake County. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Stetson University and has worked in the financial services industry in Florida for over 37 years. Mr. Stephens is currently the Senior Credit Policy Executive and Senior Vice President of United Southern Bank, a local Community Bank, and has been with them for the past 21 years helping clients with all their Commercial Banking needs.

Mike has been an unofficial bike trail advocate since elementary school, riding his bike to school daily in the 70's. After enjoying several decades of competitive and recreational mountain biking, gravel biking, and trail riding, he helped form and became Chairman of the Lake 100 Trails Committee and The Friends of Lake County Trails in 2019 - advocating for regional paved multi-purpose trails within Lake County. He was awarded the Lake County special judges Community Service Award in 2022, the Florida Bicycle Association's Trails Promoter of the Year Award in 2020, the Lake 100 Member of the Year award in 2023 and the Lake 100 President's Award in 2020 for Leadership and Dedication to Trails in Lake County. Mike has also previously served on the Lake Sumter MPO Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee and the Citizens Advisory Committee, as well as the Lake County Parks and Trails Advisory Board.

Mike has a long history of volunteering in his community, including being a 30+ year member of Umatilla Kiwanis and serving as an Officer and Board member of several local business and community organizations. He is a lifetime member of the Ocala Mountain Bike Association -- volunteering for the Office of Greenways and Trails on the Cross Florida Greenway and the US Forest Service on the Ocala National Forest. He was appointed by Governor DeSantis to serve on the Florida Greenways and Trails Council in 2022 and is currently the Chair of the Council. He is also on the Board of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation where he serves as the Treasurer.

Mike has been married to his wife Carla for 33 years and they have two beautiful daughters that also enjoy cycling and mountain biking together. In addition to cycling around the Southeast, Mike and his family also enjoy camping, fishing, boating, and road trips.

Appointed by the Governor – Greenway User

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Scott was born in New Jersey and came to Florida in 2002 for college at Florida Gulf Coast University where he studied Philosophy and Legal Studies. Currently a resident of Southwest Florida, Scott enjoys walking, jogging, and biking around the area both for exercise and pleasure. Whether biking to the local ice-cream shop or gearing up for races, Scott enjoys all things biking and looks forward to expanding multimodal infrastructure across the state.

Appointed by the Governor – Private Landowner

Stephanie Wardein
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As the new President and CEO of Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) Southwest Florida, Stephanie brings over 20 years of experience in community engagement, leadership, and program development. Her proven track record and deep passion for improving the lives of children and families position her as a perfect fit to carry forward and expand the mission of RMHC Southwest Florida. Stephanie's extensive involvement in the community, serving in state and local board leadership positions, including the Patient & Family Advisory Council for Golisano Children's Hospital of SWFL, LARC, and the Franklin Park Community Partnership School, underscores her commitment to community well-being.

Wardein is immediate past chair of the American Heart Association Chairman's Board of Directors; immediate past chair of Tobacco Free Florida in Lee County; received gubernatorial appointment to the Florida Greenways and Trails Council; serves on the Florida Chamber Foundation Prosperity Advisory Board, the LARC (Lee Association for Remarkable Citizens) Board of Directors, and following the impacts of Hurricane Ian in the fall of 2022 serves on the Lee County Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG) Governing Board, appointed member by the Board of County Commission to the ResilientLee Planning & Capacity Branch; Past Co-Chair, Lee County Action Team with SWFL FutureMakers; Ave Maria University School of Nursing Advisory Board member, parent member of the School Advisory Committee at Babcock Neighborhood School; and an active community volunteer.

In 2018, she was named one of Southwest Florida's "40 under 40" by Gulfshore Business magazine. She holds a master's degree in theological studies from the Institute for Pastoral Theology at Madonna University and earned Lean Six Sigma Advanced Yellow Belt Certification from the Florida Sterling Council. Most recently, Wardein was named 2022 Woman of Impact by the American Heart Association and co-chaired the 2024 Go Red for Women Luncheon with tremendous success.

Wardein is passionate about equitable access to health care, wellness, and collaborating for community impact. She is committed to fostering partnerships, empowering healthier lives through care and compassion. When she is not out serving her community, Wardein enjoys spending time with her husband and six children, ages 17, 15, 13, 10, 6, and 5.

Appointed by the Governor – Greenway User

Morgan Wilbanks
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Morgan is a native Texan and an alumnus of Texas Tech University where he earned a B.S. in Construction Engineering (1989). Morgan has been a resident of Fleming Island, Florida in Clay County since 1999, where he and his wife of 33 years, Janet, raised their son and daughter.

Morgan is Vice President of Operations for the Commercial Division at Stellar Group, Inc. headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Clay Florida Economic Development Corporation and Young Life Clay County. Morgan formerly served multiple terms on the Board of Directors of Associated Builders & Contractors First Coast Chapter. He is also a member of Grace Anglican Church, Fleming Island.

Morgan enjoys numerous hobbies and most involves the outdoors, such as fishing, hiking, backpacking, camping, kayaking, road biking, mountain biking, relaxing at the beach and traveling.

Appointed by the Governor – Florida Wildlife Corridor

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Paul "P.J." Marinelli was born in Tampa and grew up in Naples. At an early age he found himself enthralled in the outdoors whether playing in the woods behind his house or spending time with his family enjoying the area's beautiful beaches. PJ went on to spend time camping and exploring natural South Florida and taking weekend dive trips to the Keys.

In an effort to help preserve the wild Florida that he loves he joined the board of Audubon of the Western Everglades (formerly Collier County Audubon) serving as President of the chapter for several years. He also spent many years as a volunteer guide on behalf of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary leading tours "off the boardwalk" to get visitors into the swamps of Southwest Florida.

PJ is the Founder and President of RiverGlades Family Offices, a boutique wealth management firm catering to the needs of affluent families. He received an undergraduate degree from Duke University majoring in economics. He became a Chartered Financial Analyst® (CFA®) Charter holder in 2007. He has in the past and continues to serve in leadership positions on various boards and committees for charitable, civic and environmental organizations including the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation, FGCU's Lutgert School of Business Dean's Advisory Board, and the Naples Salvation Army Advisory Board.

Having spent his working career both in Florida and the New York City area, he was happy to return to Naples in 2008 where he now lives with his wife and three sons.

Appointed by President of the Senate – Trail User

Lisa Vickers
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Lisa Vickers was born in Indiana and has been a resident of Florida since 1979. She retired from public service where she served in various positions in Florida government. Lisa enjoys myriad outdoor activities including hiking, paddling, mountain biking, adventure racing and trail running. She is passionate about the availability of outdoor recreational spaces for everyone of all abilities to enjoy.

Appointed by President of the Senate – Greenway User

Oscar Anderson
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Oscar Anderson is a proud third-generation Floridian who grew up among the sandhills and orange groves of Central Florida. His grandfather, a citrus grower, instilled in him an early appreciation for Florida's working lands and the importance of preserving them for future generations.

With a career spanning more than two decades, Oscar has built a reputation as a trusted advisor and advocate at the intersection of government, business, and community. He has served at the highest levels of government in both the legislative and executive branches across local, state, and federal arenas. Early in his career, Oscar was chief lobbyist for Orange County Chairman Mel Martinez, later joining Martinez in Washington, D.C. as Deputy Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Returning to Florida in 2003, Oscar became Chief of Staff and Assistant Secretary at the Department of Community Affairs, where he played a pivotal role in passing the landmark Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act and spearheaded the first major overhaul of the state's growth management laws in two decades.

Since then, Oscar has represented hundreds of businesses and organizations as a partner at The Southern Group, specializing in state and local government budgets and appropriations, affordable housing, environmental protection, and land use policy. In 2021, he was instrumental in the passage of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act, a historic conservation effort to safeguard the state's natural landscapes. Today, he remains deeply engaged in securing resources to preserve *Wild Florida* for the benefit of his children, grandchildren, and generations to come.

Oscar lives in Orlando with his wife, Carin, and their three children.

Appointed by President of the Senate – Greenway User

Dale Allen
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Dale is the former President of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation and continues helping FGTF as an honorary Board member. Dale resides in Tallahassee, Florida.

Appointed by Speaker of the House – Trail User

Representative James Buchanan
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James Buchanan was born in Michigan and has resided in Florida for over three decades. A Cardinal Mooney graduate, he went on to play for Bobby Bowden on a full ride scholarship where he obtained his bachelor's degree in Finance and Entrepreneurship from Florida State University in 2004. He then went on to complete his MBA at the University of South Florida in 2009.

James has been a real estate agent since 2006, as well as a real estate broker and small business owner in Sarasota County since 2009. James has been a member of the Florida House of Representatives since 2018. He most recently served as Chairman of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Resiliency Subcommittee in the House as well as Vice-Chair of Ways and Means.

Additionally, he has sat on the Health & Human Services and State Affairs Committees, as well as the Agriculture & Natural Resources Infrastructure Strategies, State Affairs Committee, and Agriculture & Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee.

James is an avid outdoorsman and enjoys cycling, fishing, and sport shooting. He resides in Sarasota County with his wife, Lea, and their three children, Lexington, Caroline, and Jesse.

Appointed by Speaker of the House – Trail User

Vacant

Appointed by Speaker of the House – Greenway User

Vacant

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

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Tim Giesecke is an Assistant Director within the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) where he oversees the Bureau of Operational Services, Bureau of Natural and Cultural Resources and the Office of Greenways and Trails. He previously served as the Bureau Chief of Operational Services within DRP. Prior to his employment with the Florida Park Service, Tim proudly served for 25 years with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in various leadership positions within the Criminal Justice Information Services Division, the Professionalism Division, and the Office of Inspector General.

Tim is an alumnus of Florida State University where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology (1996). He loves the outdoors and enjoys fishing with his kids and riding his mountain bike on many of the beautiful bike trails that Tallahassee has to offer.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Rachel Penrod is the Director of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission's Public Access Services Office. Rachel has been with FWC since 2020, serving first as the Conservation Stewardship and Interpretation Leader before moving into her current position in 2023. Rachel has more than 20 years of experience in natural resource interpretation, education, outreach, volunteer and grant management, and conservation programming. She has previously held conservation and community engagement roles at Walt Disney Parks & Resorts, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. In her free time, Rachel enjoys visiting Central Florida's natural and themed attractions, spending time with her children and pets, and working on her native plant garden.

Florida Department of Transportation

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Robin joined the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) team in August 2015 as the Trail Program Manager for the Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail Program. In this capacity, she works with stakeholders to implement the SUN Trail Program and further FDOT's mission. SUN Trail projects will improve the intermodal connectors by closing gaps in the statewide paved trail system to increase the reliability of Florida's transportation system.

Previously, Robin worked for 11 years as a Regional Trail Coordinator with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Office of Greenways and Trails. For approximately a year, she worked as Florida's Recreational Trails Program Coordinator in DEP's Office of Operations. Prior to joining the FDEP she worked with the Florida Department of State. She has extensive experience in team collaboration and advocacy. She moved to Tallahassee from Virginia to attend Florida State University. In her spare time, Robin enjoys exploring cultural and historical sites, bicycling, hiking, and relaxing at the beach with her husband.

Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

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Brooks White graduated from Western Carolina University with a degree in Natural Resource Conservation Management with a concentration in Forestry. She moved down to Jefferson County from North Carolina in 2019 for the County Forester position, and then worked as the Educational Forester for Bear Creek. She started her current position with the Florida Forest Service in December of 2022. Some of her hobbies include Art, Camping, Hunting, and Gaming.

Florida Department of State

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Vincent "Chip" Birdsong manages the Florida Master Site File, Florida's official inventory of historical and cultural resources. Located within the Division of Historical Resources, the Site File maintains records on archaeological sites, historic buildings, historical districts, historic cemeteries, and a variety of other resources. He has a background in archaeology and received a B.S. in Anthropology from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.
Mr. Birdsong has been involved in historic preservation and archaeology for more than 30 years, working in cultural resource management in the private sector and for the National Park Service Southeast Archaeological Center prior to joining the Site File team in 1997.

Born in Virginia, Mr. Birdsong has a deep family history in Florida and has been a Tallahassee resident since 1994. He enjoys hiking, biking, camping, and relaxing on Florida's beautiful beaches, blueways, trails, and forests.

NW Florida Water Management District

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Robert Steele is a multigenerational Floridian from Auburndale, Florida. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Conservation Management from Upper Iowa University where he played football and coordinated the outdoor pursuits department. Prior to joining the team at the Northwest Florida Water Management District in 2024 as the Sr. Asset Management Administrator, Robert spent over two decades working in state and municipal park systems combining his passion for natural resource management and program development for the City of Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs Department, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Florida State Parks) and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (State Parks Bureau).

With a drive and belief that we can all accomplish more working together for the good of our natural resources, throughout his career Robert has focused on collaborative efforts with many land management agencies, conservation organizations and interest groups to identify and accomplish land management objectives, develop interest and provide access to nature-based experiences and recreation, develop sustainable trails and trail connections, and interpreting the importance of land stewardship and ecosystems management.

Robert and his family live in Tallahassee and enjoy spending their free time camping and exploring rivers, springs, and the Florida Panhandle coastline.

United States Department of Agriculture

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Shawn Thomas manages the congressionally designated Florida National Scenic Trail which spans 1,300 miles from Big Cypress National Preserve in the Everglades to Gulf Islands National Seashore in Pensacola. Shawn has a degree in Natural Resource Management from Ohio State University and served 3 ½ years as a Protected Areas Resource Specialist in the U.S. Peace Corps.

Prior to joining the National Forests in Florida, Shawn was a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Air Force, managing a Fish and Wildlife Program in Central Florida. An avid hiker and outdoor enthusiast, he enjoys spending his free time exploring Florida's natural areas with his wife, daughter, and son.

Regional Planning Council

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Tara McCue, AICP, is the Executive Director at the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, a council of governments covering eight counties and 78 cities in east central Florida. As Executive Director, and under the direction of the RPC Board, Tara is responsible for the administration and operation of the programs and team of the RPC, including a growing multimillion dollar budget.

Tara began her career at the ECFRPC in 2003 and has worked for over two decades to bring together stakeholders and experts from across the region to implement projects, policies, and programs to make east central Florida a healthy, sustainable, thriving, and resilient region for future generations. Over the past 20 years, she has facilitated multiple projects and programs in the realms of community planning and policy development, resilience and sustainability, health in the built environment, and others. She has facilitated numerous partnerships and projects to advance trail development and marketing over the years including economics of trails studies across the state and in partnership with OGT, FDOT, and other RPCs, development of the Coast to Coast Implementation and Marketing Toolkit and branding in collaboration with Tampa Bay RPC and Alta Planning, and a strategic plan for the SJR2C in partnership with the Alliance and Northeast Florida Regional Council.

Tara has a Bachelor's in Marine Biology from UNC-Wilmington and a Master's in Environmental Resource Management from the Florida Institute of Technology. She serves on the Florida Regional Councils Association Executive Committee, is a member of the Honorary Board of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation, and serves on Stetson's Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience Board of Directors. Tara is also an American Planning Association certified planner and has two published white papers.

Local Government

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Andy graduated from Catawba College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Administration and from Florida State University with a Master of Science degree in Recreation and Leisure Services Administration. Andy is a Certified Parks and Recreation Executive, holds a certification as a Design-Build Institute of America Professional, and is a Certified Public Manager. His career and dedication to public service began over 30 years ago as a lifeguard. Andy has worked as a GIS mapper, grants writer, city and county planner, parks planner, recreation superintendent, and currently serves as the Parks Planning & Strategic Initiatives Manager with the City of Winter Haven.
One of Andy's first jobs as a planner with Polk County, 23 years ago, was to lead the Polk Unified Greenways Systems Project. In this role, Andy helped coordinate a countywide system of trails. He has been with the City of Winter Haven for nearly 22 years. During that time, he has helped plan, lead, and implement master planning efforts; develop an interconnected trail system of over 16 miles; and advance projects including complete streets, athletic complexes, park improvements, nature parks, recreation centers, and aquatic facilities. Andy's passion for these projects goes beyond the physical improvements—he values gathering community input and working collaboratively across teams to deliver iconic, long-lasting community spaces that help shape future generations.
Andy's personal passions closely align with his work. He is an avid triathlete, cyclist, and runner, and he spends many hours on the trails and in the parks he has helped plan and build. In 2022, he and a friend completed the Coast-to-Coast System from Cocoa Beach to Pinellas County in 48 hours. Andy occasionally sneaks away from Winter Haven to Clermont for hill repeats at Sugarloaf Mountain or to Tampa to bike or run along the Courtney Campbell Trail. He is most proud to live, work, and play in Winter Haven with his wife and daughter, often planning their weekends around hikes, bike rides, and enjoying the outdoors.