

FLORIDA RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

JULY 2026

FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION



Florida Recreational Trails Program

Trails Advisory Committee

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) was established pursuant to 23 U.S. Code § 206 and is tasked with providing and maintaining recreational trails. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT), is designated as the state agency responsible for administering apportionments made to the State under this section.

Pursuant to 23 U.S. Code § 206 (c)(2), each state must establish a state recreational trail advisory committee that represents both motorized and nonmotorized recreational trail users, which shall meet not less often than once per federal fiscal year. This committee, known as the Trails Advisory Committee (TAC), is established by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council and appointed pursuant to Section 260.0142(5), F.S., for the purpose of developing the RTP Priority List.

Among its duties, the TAC serves to advise DEP staff on matters regarding use of RTP grant funds in the state, including annual application review, assistance with the interpretation of federal RTP regulation, review of application procedures, nomination of state trail projects for national trail awards, and assistance in regional and state trail planning efforts and other trail policy issues.



Motorized Representation

Ted S. Everett



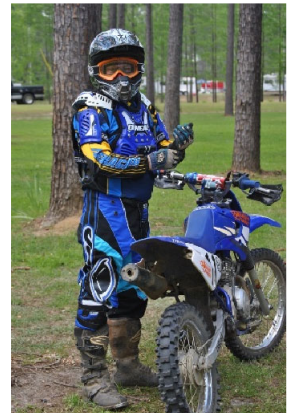
Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Motorcycling*

Ted S. Everett is a longtime Florida resident, entrepreneur and advocate for motorized recreational trail opportunities. With more than 25 years of experience in off-road motorcycling and trail-based recreation, he brings valuable firsthand knowledge of trail design, development, management and user needs.

Mr. Everett previously owned and operated an off-road recreation park featuring approximately 30 miles of trails and two motocross tracks, where he gained extensive experience building, maintaining and managing trail systems for motorized users. His background provides practical insight into trail accessibility, safety considerations and the unique requirements of various off-road recreational activities.

In addition to his involvement in motorized recreation, Mr. Everett owns and operates a 2,400-acre tree farm in Northwest Florida, giving him a strong appreciation for Florida's natural resources and outdoor landscapes. His professional and civic leadership experience includes serving as a Board Member of the Northwest Florida Water Management District, a Board Member of the Florida Forestry Association and a member of the Northwest Florida Community Hospital Board. He also previously served as Chairman of Opportunity Florida, a regional economic development organization.



Mr. Everett believes that well-planned recreational trail systems can expand outdoor recreation opportunities while promoting safe and enjoyable experiences for all users. He brings a practical perspective on trail development, maintenance and motorized recreation to the TAC and is committed to supporting projects that enhance public access to quality recreational trails throughout the state.



Benjamin “Rocky” Gavins



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Motorcycling/All-Terrain Vehicle/Utility Terrain Vehicle*

A lifelong Floridian, Benjamin “Rocky” Gavins was born and raised in Tallahassee before relocating to Monticello, Florida, with his wife, Sandra, to her hometown to continue a longstanding family tradition. Together, they operate their business from the same location where

Sandra's father served the community for more than 30 years.

Rocky earned his bachelor's degree from Florida State University launching a successful career in entrepreneurship, construction, accounting and small business consulting.

A dedicated advocate for motorized outdoor recreation, Rocky has been actively involved in Florida's off-road community for many years. He began riding dirt bikes with his son, Ben, when Ben was just nine years old, and together they have traveled throughout the southeastern United States participating in recreational riding and competitive racing events. Their shared passion for off-road recreation eventually led them to establish North Florida Offroad Specialties, a business specializing exclusively in the service and repair of off-road motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and side-by-side vehicles.



As an active participant in Florida's motorized recreation community, Rocky enjoys exploring the state's National Forests and designated off-road riding areas while promoting responsible stewardship of public lands. His experience as a business owner, financial professional and



longtime off-road enthusiast provides valuable insight into the recreational needs of Florida's motorized trail users. He is committed to supporting the continued development, maintenance and responsible management of recreational trail opportunities across the state through his service on the Recreational Trails Program Trails Advisory Committee.

Motorized and Non-Motorized Representation

Jeremiah (J.T.)Thompson



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Blueways*

Jeremiah Thompson is a fourth-generation Floridian with a strong background in land conservation, natural resource stewardship and public land management. He earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Geography from Florida State University, where he was a member of the Seminole football program.

Jeremiah has extensive experience working on land conservation initiatives throughout Florida. As a Senior Acquisition Agent with DEP's Division of State Lands, he negotiated and facilitated numerous land acquisition and conservation easement projects that helped protect thousands of acres of environmentally significant lands for public benefit. His work provided valuable support for Florida's conservation, recreation and natural resource management goals by helping preserve lands that contribute to wildlife habitat, water resource protection and outdoor recreation opportunities.

In addition to his professional experience, Jeremiah remains actively involved in organizations that support Florida's natural resources and outdoor recreation. He is a member of the Apalachicola Riverkeeper, Florida Paddling Trails Association, Florida Forestry Association and the Florida Springs Institute, reflecting his commitment to conservation, public access and stewardship of Florida's unique landscapes and waterways.

As a member of the TAC, Jeremiah brings expertise in land acquisition, conservation planning, public lands management and resource protection. His experience working with conservation partners and understanding of Florida's natural and recreational resources provides valuable insight into projects that enhance trail access, connectivity and outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the state.

Non-Motorized Representation

Nancy Stephens



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Equestrian*

Nancy Stephens is a lifelong equestrian and committed advocate for Florida's trail systems, bringing decades of hands-on experience in trail planning, accessibility and multi-use trail compatibility. Her work reflects a deep understanding of the unique needs of equestrian users and a strong collaborative spirit developed through years of partnering with federal, state, regional and local agencies. Nancy has worked closely with land managers, planners and resource professionals to expand safe, sustainable and enjoyable recreational trail opportunities across diverse landscapes.

She currently serves as Chair of the Back Country Horsemen of Florida and President of the North Florida Back Country Horsemen, where she leads statewide efforts focused on responsible trail use, volunteerism and equestrian access. A passionate trail rider, Nancy has explored and evaluated equestrian trails in many regions of the United States, giving her a broad perspective on effective trail design, maintenance standards and the importance of user-group cooperation. Her field experience includes active participation in trail stewardship projects in Florida's forests, state parks, water management district lands and greenways.

Nancy's long-standing commitment to volunteer service includes contributions to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, the Wyoming National Recreation Trail and numerous trail systems throughout North Florida. She brings practical expertise in trail sustainability, an understanding of on-the-ground resource challenges and a strong dedication to preserving and improving public access. Her leadership and perspective strengthen efforts to ensure that Florida's trail network remains safe, functional and meaningful for current and future generations of outdoor enthusiasts.

Mike Stephens



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Non-Motorized Trail User*

Michael A. "Mike" Stephens is a Florida native and lifelong resident of Lake County. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Stetson University and has spent nearly 40 years in Florida's financial services industry. Mike currently serves as Senior Vice President and Senior Credit Policy Executive for United Southern Bank, where he has assisted commercial banking clients for more than two decades.

A passionate cycling and trails advocate, Mike has been promoting trail access and connectivity since his youth. Following decades of competitive and recreational mountain biking, gravel biking and trail riding, he helped establish the Lake 100 Trails Committee and the Friends of Lake County Trails in 2019, serving as chairman and championing the development of regional multi-use trail systems throughout Lake County.

Mike's dedication to trails and outdoor recreation has earned numerous recognitions, including the Florida Bicycle Association's Trails Promoter of the Year Award, the Lake County Special Judges Community Service Award, the Lake 100 Member of the Year Award and the Lake 100 President's Award for Leadership and Dedication to Trails. He has also served on the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee, as well as the Lake County Parks and Trails Advisory Board.

A longtime community volunteer, Mike is a member of the Umatilla Kiwanis Club and has served as an officer and board member for several local business and civic organizations. He is a lifetime member of the Ocala Mountain Bike Association and has volunteered with both the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails and the U.S. Forest Service in support of trail maintenance and stewardship efforts.

Appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis to the Florida Greenways and Trails Council in 2022, Mike currently serves as Chair of the Council and Treasurer of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation.

Mike and his wife, Carla, have been married for more than 35 years and enjoy spending time outdoors with their two daughters. Together, they enjoy cycling, camping, fishing, boating and exploring the Southeast.

Stephanie Wardein



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Private Landowner*

Stephanie Wardein is an accomplished chief executive and visionary senior leader with over two decades of experience driving systemic change, strategic stewardship and collaborative impact across the healthcare, non-profit and public service sectors. She currently serves as Executive Director of Lancewood Institute, leading overarching operations, regional partnerships and institutional strategy, guiding the activation of complex asset-backed models, compliance firewalls and insurance-leveraged endowment infrastructure.

Appointed by the Governor to the Florida Greenways and Trails Council, Wardein serves as Vice Chair, advocating for the expansion, connectivity and preservation of Florida's statewide network of greenways, trails and conserved lands.

Prior to leading Lancewood, Wardein served as President and CEO of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southwest Florida, where she led organizational transformation and crisis response. Previously, she served for over a decade as System Director of Community Affairs at Lee Health, directing community benefit strategy, public health outreach and multi-sector initiatives across Southwest Florida.

A prominent voice in corporate governance and statewide policy, Wardein serves on the Lee Association for Remarkable Citizens Board of Directors and was a founding member of the Florida Chamber Foundation Prosperity Advisory Board. Following Hurricane Ian, she served on the Lee County Long-Term Recovery Group Governing Board and the Resilient Lee Planning and Capacity Branch. Her leadership on regional initiatives has earned national distinction, including the American Hospital Association's NOVA Award, the America's Essential Hospitals Gage Award and the Governor's Sterling Award from the Florida Sterling Council.

Stephanie was recognized as one of Southwest Florida's "40 Under 40" by Gulfshore Business Magazine and was named the American Heart Association's 2022 Woman of Impact. She holds a master's degree in Theological Studies from Madonna University and is Lean Six Sigma Advanced Yellow Belt certified through the Florida Sterling Council. When she is not serving her community, she enjoys spending time with her six children.

Robert Steele



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Water Management*

Robert Steele serves as the Senior Asset Management Administrator for the Northwest Florida Water Management District and brings more than 20 years of experience in natural resource management, public lands administration and outdoor recreation. Throughout his career, he has worked with state and local agencies to enhance public access to natural areas while promoting responsible stewardship of Florida's natural resources.

Prior to joining the Northwest Florida Water Management District in 2024, Robert held leadership and management roles with the City of Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs Department, DEP's Florida State Parks and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. His work has focused on fostering partnerships among land management agencies, conservation organizations and recreation user groups to advance land management objectives, develop sustainable trail systems and connections and expand opportunities for nature-based recreation.

As a member of the TAC, Robert brings extensive experience in public lands management, trail development, recreation planning and collaborative conservation efforts. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Conservation Management from Upper Iowa University and is committed to ensuring Florida's trails and outdoor recreation resources remain accessible and sustainable for future generations.

Tara McMue



Appointed: 2026

Primary Interest: *Planning Council*

Tara McCue, AICP serves as Executive Director of the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, where she leads regional planning initiatives across eight counties and 78 municipalities in east central Florida. With more than 20 years of experience in community planning, stakeholder engagement and regional collaboration, Tara brings extensive expertise in developing partnerships and implementing projects that enhance Florida's communities, natural resources and recreational opportunities.

Tara has worked with local governments, state agencies, nonprofit organizations and private-sector partners to advance initiatives focused on sustainability, resilience, transportation, land use planning and quality of life. A significant portion of her work has centered on trail planning, development, promotion and connectivity throughout Florida.

Tara has contributed to numerous statewide trail initiatives, including trail economic impact studies, the Coast-to-Coast Trail Implementation and Marketing Toolkit and planning efforts for the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop Trail, helping advance trail connectivity and outdoor recreation opportunities across Florida.

As a member of the TAC, Tara contributes extensive experience in trail planning, regional coordination, public engagement and strategic project development. Her ability to bring together diverse stakeholders and guide complex, multi-jurisdictional initiatives provides valuable insight in evaluating projects that support Florida's trail systems and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Tara holds a bachelor's degree in Marine Biology from the University of North Carolina Wilmington and a master's degree in Environmental Resource Management from the Florida Institute of Technology. She is an AICP-certified planner and serves on the Executive Committee of the Florida Regional Councils Association, the Honorary Board of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation and the Board of Directors for Stetson University's Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience.



Graham Markarian, Community Program Manager

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