



Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) December 2025 Council Meeting Minutes

PUBLIC MEETING: December 17th, 2025
TIME: 9:00 AM
LOCATION: Florida Sheriff's Association Training Center
2617 Mahan Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32308

FGTC Members in Attendance:

Robin Birdsong – Florida Department of Transportation
Robert Steele – Water Management District, Northwest Florida
Vincent “Chip” Birdsong – Florida Department of State
Stephanie Wardein – Governor-Appointed Private Landowner
Jim Couillard – Local Government, Marion County Parks & Recreation
Scott Stryker – Governor-appointed Greenway User
Tim Giesecke -- Division of Recreation & Parks-Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Dale Allen – Senate-Appointed Greenway User
Rachel Penrod – Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
Shawn Thomas – United States Forest Service
Morgan Wilbanks – Governor-Appointed Greenway User
Chris Rietow -- FRCA
Brooks White – Florida Forest Service
Ned Baier¹ – Volkert Inc., Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation

Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Staff in Attendance:

Samantha (Sam) Browne, Bureau Chief
Britney Mulholland, Assistant Chief
Delaney Goins, Regional Coordinator, Staff to Council
John Groves, Regional Coordinator
Cassidy Haney, Regional Coordinator

Other FDEP Staff in Attendance:

Sean Happel, Gubernatorial Fellow
Rachel Earlywine, Office of General Counsel

Members of the Public and Presenters in Attendance:

Katasha Gruver, FDOT
Tanya Branton, FDOT
John Beamish, FDOT
Vernon Compton, Bluffline Trail Representative
Samantha Adams, FWC

Announcements:

Council Introductions

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Call to Order – 9:01 AM

Approve Agenda Change – 9:02 AM

Motion was created to change order of agenda items- Chris Rietow’s Living Shoreline presentation and Cassidy Haney’s Trail Town Alliance presentation were swapped.

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Ned Baier

SECOND: Morgan Wilbanks

FGTC RECOMMENDATION: APPROVED

FDOT Environmental Activities and Connectivity for Land of the Wildlife Corridor Act – 9:05 AM

Katasha Gruver of FDOT presented on the inner workings of the transportation project development process as well as how wildlife connectivity is integrated from planning and design phase through the construction phase. Florida now has nearly 200 wildlife crossings, including the landmark wildlife overpass at I-4 and SR 33 and the state’s longest wildlife crossing at Wekiva Parkway. In her presentation, Gruver highlighted multiple crucial tools which are housed on an interactive website created by FDOT. These tools keep track of wildlife hotspots, habitats, and potential crossings. The website also serves as a public, statewide repository of past wildlife crossings. A key element of FDOT connectivity projects is the design guidance provided by the FDOT Design Manual and Florida Greenbook. FDOT has been prioritizing innovation and outreach via their Roadside Animal Detection System (RADS) using thermal imaging and radar technology. They have also implemented youth-focused programs, one of which is the Superhero Safety Squad- led by Ranger the Panther; This program utilizes infrastructure and early education to make the roads safe for people and wildlife.

Living Shoreline Update – 9:40 AM

Chris Rietow, the Executive Director of the Apalachee Regional Planning Council, gave updates on the Franklin County Living Shoreline restoration project- a major \$15 million undertaking that covers 6 miles of coastline along US 98. The objective for the Living Shoreline project is to

build oyster reefs and marshes to improve resilience, reduce erosion, and restore critical habitat. By doing so, it will support economic recovery for oyster fishers and local communities, as well as improve and fortify the evacuation route for US 98. Progress is about halfway complete, with construction restarting in January. Completion of this project is required by December 31st, 2026. Stakeholder engagement is of high importance for the success of this project. With that in mind, positive stakeholder engagement was expressed when a hurricane passed through, and the Living Shoreline endeavor proved its resilience.

Unpaved Trail Guidelines – 10:15 AM

Sam Browne of OGT led a conversation updating the council on Unpaved Trail Guidelines. The content has been finalized and is now in the layout and design phase. The graphics will align with the agency's five-year plan look and feel. Council members requested to review the draft. Staff hope to present the final document for approval at the next council meeting.

Trail Town Alliance Updates – 10:24 AM

Cassidy Haney of OGT presented updates on the Trail Town program. She spearheaded the Trail Town Alliance, which invites representatives from each current and prospective trail town to collaborate, share triumphs, explore new avenues to resolve challenges, and establish a peer network across the state. The first meeting was held on October 15th with around 20 participants from 12 trail towns. During the first meeting, conversation included attributes of successful trail towns, key similarities and differences between trail towns, and points for opportunity and growth. The next meeting will be on January 13th at 10:00 AM EST. The council was pleased with the constructive momentum of this endeavor and was vocal with their support. They recommended a few measures to strengthen the Trail Town program, including re-engaging communities on what a Trail Town designation means, as well as gathering data to provide metrics on trail town participation and future involvement.

Public Comment – 10:44 AM

A comment was made by Vernon Compton of Milton, Florida regarding the TRAIL-GO program- he expressed his interest in the program and voiced his desire for the program to be funded in the future. He discussed continual agency cooperation between the acquisition and management phases- for instance, the acquisition of the Wolfe Creek Forest. Additionally, he discussed trail priority realignments. Next, the council moved to write a letter from Mike Stephens to the DEP Secretary's office in support of the TRAIL-GO program. The council moved on to provide individual updates and to decide on future meeting dates and locations.

MEETING ADJOURN – 11:29 AM

Dale Allen moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Jim Couillard.