
Florida Greenways and Trails 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 the system.



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 Land Owner
- (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

VACANT

Appointed by the Governor - Trail User



Mike Stephens (Council Vice 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 34 years. Mr. Stephens is currently a Senior Vice President of Commercial Banking and a Senior Lender for United Southern Bank, a local Community Bank, and has been with them for the past 18 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. In this role he advocated for regional paved multi-purpose trails within Lake County. He was awarded the Florida Bicycle Association's Trails Promoter of the Year Award in 2020, the Lake 100 President's Award in 2020 for Leadership and Dedication to Trails in Lake County, and the Eustis Area Chamber of Commerce's 2020 Community Service Award for Leadership advocating for Lake County Trails. Mike has also previously served on the Lake Sumter MPO Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee and 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 Kiwanis and serving as an Officer and Board member of several local business and community organizations, including as 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 has been married to his wife Carla for 30 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



Scott Stryker
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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 Land Owner



Stephanie Wardein

System Director, Community Affairs

Lee Health

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Stephanie Wardein is the System Director of Community Affairs at Lee Health in Southwest Florida where she is responsible for all community relations activities, community health strategies, outreach, education, and collaboration with other community organizations to develop working solutions to address local health-related needs. Her responsibilities also include developing and expanding relationships with community leaders and supporting Lee Health's ongoing community benefit activities and reporting.

Wardein has been with Lee Health since 2012, serving in various roles on community projects including Community Health Visioning 2017, now known as Healthy Lee, to improve the health status of Lee County residents. The collaborative community leader effort guides research and outreach efforts for community health. Many of the projects have received top tier recognition including the NOVA Award from American Hospital Association, the Gage Award from America's Essential Hospitals, the Community Benefit Award from Florida Hospital Association, and the first Unite Award from our local United Way and Southwest Florida Community Foundation. Results in Lee County include a 29% reduction in deaths from both heart disease and from stroke, 15% reduction in adult obesity, 34% reduction in childhood obesity, 22% increase in those who meet physical activity recommendations.

Wardein is the current Chair of Tobacco Free Florida – Lee County; Chair of the American Heart Association Chairman's Board of Directors; member of the LARC (Lee Association for Remarkable Citizens) Board of Directors; member of the SWFL Economic Development Advisory Committee; Co-Chair, Lee County Action Team with SWFL FutureMakers; member of the Ave Maria University School of Nursing Advisory Committee, 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 earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts – Theology from Franciscan University and 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.

Wardein is passionate about equitable health care and collaborating for impact. She is committed to fostering the Lee Health mission of being a trusted partner, empowering healthier lives through care and compassion. When she is not at work, Wardein enjoys spending time with her husband and six children, ages 14, 12, 11, 8, 3 & 2.

Appointed by the Governor - Greenway User

VACANT

Appointed by the Governor - Florida Wildlife Corridor

VACANT

Appointed by the President of the Senate - Trail User

VACANT

Appointed by President of the Senate - Greenway User



Jason Lauritsen

Executive Director, Florida Wildlife Corridor Coalition
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Jason Lauritsen implements the vision and mission of the organization to connect, protect and restore essential conservation habitat statewide. Jason's expertise includes environmental conservation and restoration, land management science, wetland protection, and Wood Stork recovery in the Western Everglades. He is an experienced speaker, educator, and writer who has authored numerous papers, publications, and presentations throughout his more than 20-year career in conservation and natural resources management.

Lauritsen has served on the Estero Bay Agency for Bay Management, SWFL Watershed Council, Wood Stork Monitoring and Recovery Group and the Lee County Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource Advisory Committee. At the crossroads of science and policy, Jason developed tools and refined regulatory approaches to improve impact assessment and mitigation for wetlands and listed species for State and Federal agencies. He has provided consultation to agencies and private land owners on preserve design and configuration to maximize local and landscape level benefits to wildlife. In 2016, he served as a delegate to China on a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) exchange program to share expertise in wetland restoration and mitigation.

Lauritsen has a Master's in Science Education from the University of Iowa and a Bachelor's in Animal Ecology from Iowa State University. He worked as a rainforest guide in Ecuador in 1992. In 2001, he joined Audubon at the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary as the Natural Resources Manager and prescribed burn boss. Continuing his career with Audubon, he became the Big Cypress Ecosystem Science Coordinator in 2005 before being promoted to Assistant Sanctuary Director in 2007 and Sanctuary Director in 2012 where he led the crown jewel of Audubon's Sanctuary network until December of 2018.

Lauritsen is committed to landscape level conservation and long planning horizons to achieve sustainability. He advocates the pursuit of a deep science-based understanding of our complex and often fragile ecosystem that undergirds the quality of life for both people and wildlife. If future generations are to enjoy the beauty and diversity of a healthy natural world, Jason believes it will require broad stakeholder support and partnerships that are central to effective land stewardship.

Appointed by President of the Senate - Greenway User



Wesley Stalaker

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Wesley Stalaker was appointed to the Florida Greenways and Trails Council in 2021 and is ecstatic to be a member of the group. As a Florida Native, Wesley developed a passion for the outdoors early on, enjoying activities that the state has to offer such as hunting, fishing, kayaking, and swimming in the breathtaking springs.

Upon attending Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Wesley began to take advantage of the several trails and nature parks that Alachua County has to offer. His experiences in Alachua County piqued his interest in a new activity he hadn't considered previously and enhanced his appreciation for the state's nature and wildlife. Now, he is constantly trying to explore new parks and trails across the state of Florida.

Appointed by the Speaker of the House - Trail User



James Buchanan

District 74 Representative, Florida House of Representatives

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Biography coming soon.

Appointed by the Speaker of the House - Trail User



Cyndi Stevenson

District 18 Representative, Florida House of Representatives

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Cyndi is a CPA and lifelong Floridian who has called Northeast Florida home for over 30 years. She lives in St. Johns County where she and her husband Henry raised their two sons. She served as a County Commissioner there from 2004 to 2015. As a State Representative, she has worked tirelessly to serve St. Johns County. Cyndi brings a passion for public service in her role as our voice in Tallahassee, where she has voted to increase school funding, cut taxes and blocked the expansion of runaway, entitlement spending.

Cyndi understands we need world-class schools and a well-trained workforce. She knows we must be wise stewards of our natural resources and protect the elderly and our most vulnerable citizens. She has worked to get government out of the way so Florida's economy and small businesses can flourish and she has always maintained a strong commitment to public safety.

She is dedicated to making sure Florida continues to be a place where people can live the American dream of getting a good education, the opportunity to build a career or start a business and raise a family. She is committed to protecting Florida's precious water resources and natural beauty for the health and enjoyment of future generations. She works to fight fraud, wasteful spending and to ensure that there are opportunities for all people

Cyndi and Henry enjoy reading and kayaking, but their lifelong passion is bicycle touring. She served on the St. Johns County Bike/Ped Transportation committee, and rode the inaugural River-to-Sea loop. As a Commissioner and State Representative she has been a leader in planning, funding and developing trails throughout St. Johns County and Northeast Florida.

Appointed by the Speaker of the House - Greenway User



Traci Deen

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A 6th generation Floridian born in Homestead, Florida, Traci is passionate about protecting Florida's wild and working lands for the generations of Floridians to come. She is the CEO of Conservation Florida, overseeing statewide land conservation efforts. Her work includes fostering strategic partnerships, engaging the community and community leaders, and facilitating large-scale land transactions.

She currently serves as the President of the Alliance of Florida Land Trusts, and as the Florida Representative on the Board of Directors of the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation. Traci is an environmental lawyer and an active member in the legal community. She has been appointed twice to the Florida Bar's Governmental and Public Policy Advocacy Committee by the Florida Bar President and has served as Legislative Director for the Florida Association for Women Lawyers. She is currently serving a third term as a Board Member for the Central Florida Association for Women Lawyers.

In the community, Traci is an active volunteer. She has served as the Chair of the Junior Leagues of Florida State Public Affairs Committee, representing over 11,000 women. Traci enjoys a good book, horseback riding, exploring trails, and spending time with her husband and daughter.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

VACANT

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Jerrie Lindsey

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Jerrie Lindsey is the Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Office of Recreation Services where she is responsible for developing wildlife viewing-related recreation opportunities on Florida's wildlife management area system and facilitating wildlife-viewing tourism on public lands statewide. During her career, Ms. Lindsey has worked in environmental education and recreation programs for the Legislature, Florida Department of Natural Resources, and the Florida Recreation and Park Association.

Her professional interests focus on developing recreational learning experiences that lead participants to take positive actions for fish and wildlife habitat. She is an avid paddler and enjoys hiking and birding.

Florida Department of Transportation



Robin Birdsong

Statewide Coordinator, Shared Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail Program
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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 and Consumer Services



Brooks White

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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



Vincent "Chip" Birdsong

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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.

Suwannee River Water Management District



Edwin McCook

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Edwin McCook became involved in trail development and ecotourism in the late 80's, serving as the Executive Vice President for the Suwannee County Chamber of Commerce. Edwin was a founding member of The Original Florida, now known as Natural North Florida. The group partnered with Suwannee River Water Management District to build off-road bicycle trails on District lands in White Springs. During that time, the Chamber proposed the Suwannee River Greenway at Branford, which was built in the mid-90's.

Edwin joined the Suwannee River Water Management District in 2000, where he was a shared employee with the Office of Greenways and Trails as a Regional Trails Planner serving counties in the District. He was involved in planning the Woodpecker Trail at Big Shoals Public Lands, Four Freedoms Trail in Madison, and Ichetucknee to O'Leno Trail in Columbia County. He is most proud of being a part of the team that created and built the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail on the Suwannee River.

In 2002, he became the Public Use Coordinator for District lands and now serves as Senior Land Management Specialist. He continues to manage all recreational activities and public use of District lands.

Edwin's work and hobbies overlap as an outdoor enthusiast, enjoying bicycling, camping, hiking, and paddling. In addition, he is a professional conservation photographer and a long-term member of Suwannee Bicycle Association, Florida Trail Association, and Branford Camera Club.

Federal Land Management Agency



Shawn Thomas

(USDA) U.S. Forest Service
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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



Chris Rietow

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Chris Rietow has served as the Executive Director of the ARPC since October of 2013. The ARPC's nine-county region includes Jackson, Calhoun, Gulf, Gadsden, Liberty, Franklin, Leon, Wakulla, and Jefferson along with 27 municipalities.

Chris has lived in Tallahassee since 1992. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology (1997) and a Master of Science in Planning from Florida State University (2000). He began at the ARPC as an economic development/growth management planner before transitioning to emergency management planning. He currently serves on the Board of the Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency (CRTPA) and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

When away from work, Chris enjoys camping, mountain biking, kayak fishing, hiking, and spending time with his wife and two daughters.

Local Government



Jim Couillard (Council Chair)

Director, Marion County Parks and Recreation

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Jim Couillard serves as Director of the Marion County Parks and Recreation Department and is the county's landscape architect overseeing the management of 50 unique parks and trailheads. Marion County covers 1,652 square miles, with 36% of the county classified as Conservation (380,621 acres). It is home of the Cross Florida Greenway, state forests, water management lands, and the largest portion of the Ocala National Forest.

Jim has a robust vision for outdoor recreation with a goal of making Marion County the ecotourism hub of the southeast through partnerships with federal, state, and local land managing agencies and the private sector. Jim works closely with FDEP and FDOT in a joint effort to close gaps and find ideal alignments for shared-use trails in Marion County as part of the state-wide paved trail vision. Jim's experience with these agencies and his park design expertise will be beneficial to the Greenways and Trails Council. When he is not working, Jim enjoys spending time with his family, long distance backpacking, camping, fishing, and watching his son play baseball.