

Florida Greenways & Trails System Plan 2013-2017

The Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS)

It "is declared to be the public policy of this state and the purpose of [the Florida Greenways and Trails Act] to provide the means and procedures for establishing and expanding a statewide system of greenways and trails ... which shall be designated as the Florida Greenways and Trails System." 260.012(1), Florida Statutes

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A New Vision

This plan outlines the new vision for the Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS). It defines the role of the FGTS in advancing Florida's economy, tourism, health, transportation, recreation, conservation and quality of life. This is the first update to the FGTS Plan since Connecting Florida's Communities laid the groundwork in 1998 to implement the many greenways and trails programs and projects that exist today. To view the original plan and other FGTS documents, visit

FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com.

Florida has been a leader in greenways and trails. The state was recognized in 2008 as the first-ever Best Trails State in America for its work in facilitating an outstanding statewide system of trails. That system includes thousands of miles of paved, unpaved and water trails to accommodate hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and paddlers.

Included among these trails are more than 20 rail trails, such as the Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail, one of the top rated trails in the nation, and the developing East Central Regional Rail Trail, the longest single rail trail ever acquired by the state of Florida. The FGTS also includes ambitious greenways and trails projects such as the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail and the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, home to America's first greenway land bridge.

In response to high demand for these trails among Florida visitors and residents, the Sunshine State

now features trails as traveler destinations on VISITFLORIDA.com, the most visited state destination marketing website in the country. The demand for trails often stems from the desire of residents and visitors to experience Florida's beautiful natural environment. Preservation of that environment comes in part from Florida's leadership in the research, planning and implementation of conservation networks for the long term preservation of wildlife habitats and ecosystems. Florida was the first state in America to establish a comprehensive statewide plan for ecological greenways and this serves as a critical component of the FGTS plan.

Building on these and many other accomplishments, this plan provides a new foundation from which to substantively advance the FGTS. Among the plan's highlights are:

The establishment of clear priorities for

coordinating, directing and focusing resources.

A new framework for systematically “closing gaps” and connecting priority corridors within the FGTS to establish a fully connected and integrated statewide trail network.

Clear linkages between this plan and complementary state planning efforts that the FGTS helps to advance:

Economic Development – Florida Five Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development.

Tourism – VISIT FLORIDA Marketing Plan.

Health – Florida State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

Transportation – Florida Transportation Plan (FTP)

2060.

Recreation – Florida Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

Conservation – Cooperative Conservation Blueprint & Wildlife Action Plan.

The plan's goals, strategies and objectives provide a comprehensive approach to identify, prioritize, establish, connect, promote and coordinate the FGTS.

Why the Florida Greenways and Trails System?

While trails and greenways provide a wide range of benefits, some of their most compelling values are economic. The following statistics demonstrate some of the reasons to invest in trails and

greenways:

Three Central Florida trails were estimated to support \$42 million of economic impact and 516 jobs in 2010 (East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, 2010).

Trails are the number one community amenity sought by prospective homeowners (National Association of Homebuilders, 2008).

Homes adjacent to rail trails sell faster and closer to list price than other homes (Della Penna, 2005).

Every \$1 million spent on the construction of multi-use trails yields 9.6 jobs (University of Massachusetts, 2011).

The repeated annual economic impact of cyclists has been estimated to be nine times the one-time

cost to build bicycle facilities (North Carolina DOT, 2004).

Nearly 75 percent of all Florida visitors participate in nature-based activities during their visit (VISIT FLORIDA, 2012).

Identification and Prioritization of the FGTS

The FGTS is made up of existing, planned and conceptual trails and ecological greenways that form a connected, integrated statewide network. The FGTS serves as a green infrastructure plan for Florida, tying together the greenways and trails plans and planning activities of communities,

agencies and non-profit organizations throughout Florida.

GOAL 1: Identify and prioritize trails and greenways to facilitate completion of the FGTS.

1. The Vision The Opportunity Maps contain the comprehensive vision for the FGTS.

Land Trails Opportunity Map – Represents the existing, planned and conceptual non-motorized trails that form a land-based trail network of state and regional importance. This map is a synthesis of trail planning efforts being conducted by cities, counties, transportation planning organizations and other agencies and non-profits throughout Florida. This map does not include all existing, proposed and conceptual trails in Florida, but focuses on

linear trails of state and regional significance to form a comprehensive connected system. The Land Trails Opportunity Map is the state companion to community greenways and trails and bicycle and pedestrian master plans, and encompasses a combination of multiple and single-use trails to accommodate uses such as: walking, hiking, bicycling, mountain biking, horseback riding, skating and wildlife viewing.

Paddling Trails Opportunity Map – Represents the vision for a comprehensive water-based trails system. This map includes waterways that are designated as part of the FGTS or are appropriate for future designation. Because water trails are not consistently captured in local and regional planning efforts like land trails typically are, it is important to establish basic criteria for inclusion. Therefore, to be included in the Paddling Trails Opportunity Map, a waterway shall:

Represent an existing or potential destination trail that reaches beyond the local area due to its scenic qualities and diversity of experiences.

Be at least three miles in length, preferably longer.

Be navigable during the majority of months in an average year.

Ecological Greenways Opportunity Map –

Represents the areas necessary to protect a statewide network of conservation land and connecting wildlife corridors designed to maintain large landscape-scale ecological functions. The Ecological Greenways Opportunity Map consists of various data combined to identify the network of landscape linkages and corridors necessary to functionally connect large conservation land areas into a statewide ecological greenways system. A

direct outcome of this map is the publicly promoted Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Strategy 1.1: Develop and maintain Opportunity Maps to identify and define an accurate, current and comprehensive statewide vision for the Florida Greenways and Trails System.

Objective 1.1.1: The Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) will maintain the Land Trails Opportunity Map as Florida's non-motorized land-based trails [vision and conduct a review and update of this map] no less than every three years in coordination with partners.

Objective 1.1.2: OGT will maintain the Paddling Trails Opportunity Map as Florida's water trails [vision and conduct a review and update of this map] no less than every three years in coordination with partners.

Objective 1.1.3: OGT will maintain the Ecological Greenways Opportunity Map as Florida's comprehensive ecological greenways [vision and conduct a review and update of this map] no less than every five years in coordination with partners to include the University of Florida and the Florida Ecological Greenway Technical Advisory Group.

East Coast Greenway

The East Coast Greenway (ECG) is a developing trail system, spanning nearly 3,000 miles as it winds its way from Canada to Key West, FL, linking all the major cities of America's Eastern Seaboard. It is the nation's most ambitious long-distance urban trail project. By connecting existing and planned shared-use trails, a continuous, traffic-free route is being formed to serve self-powered users of all abilities and ages.

Florida boasts the longest portion of the ECG with the most miles of completed trail. North to south, the ECG enters the state at Fernandina Beach then continues 584 miles to Key West, the United States' southernmost mainland point. The ECG travels largely along the coast, through seaside villages, America's earliest historic sites, through vast nature preserves and major cities that include Jacksonville and Miami. The project also includes the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail which hops from island to island for 106 miles. The Florida segment includes the most bridges of any ECG state, with much of the route on a wide side path that runs along Highway A1A. The entire ECG in Florida is within the FGTS Land Trails Opportunity Map and the FGTS Priority Trails Map. For more information about the Florida East Coast Greenway, visit greenway.org/fl.aspx.

2. The Priorities The Priority Trails Map and Critical Linkage Map are the focused priorities within the vision established in the FGTS Opportunity Maps.

The Priority Trails Map encompasses the most important corridors and connections within the FGTS Land Trails Opportunity Map and Paddling Trails Opportunity Map. The corridors and connections within the Priority Trails Map will, to the greatest extent possible:

- 1) Support and further national, state or regional trail projects, plans and initiatives that encompass multiple counties.
- 2) Include existing and planned long-distance trails and trail loops that serve as destinations to support nature-based tourism and economic development.

3) Include the State Trails, the Cross Florida Greenway and other major connecting trails of greatest length (five miles or longer).

4) Connect major population centers to provide access to the FGTS by the greatest number of Floridians.

5) Build on past and programmed state and federal investment in trails, particularly when matched by funding from local and private sources.

6) Coincide with transportation, utility and canal corridors that facilitate major connections.

7) Coincide with the Florida Ecological Greenways Network.

8) Connect natural, recreational, cultural and

historical sites that provide a range of experiences.

9) Provide a safe, accessible and high quality experience for users.

Critical Linkages are the most important components within the Ecological Greenways Opportunity Map for completing a statewide ecological network of conservation lands, including the most critical large intact landscapes and best connection opportunities.

Strategy 1.2: Maintain the Priority Trails Map and Critical Linkages Map to delineate FGTS priorities.

Objective 1.2.1: OGT will maintain the Priority Trails Map and conduct a review and update of the map in coordination with each Opportunity Map update.

Objective 1.2.2: OGT will maintain the Critical Linkages Map and conduct a review and update of the map in coordination with each Opportunity Map update.

3. The Gaps The Priority Trails Gap Map delineates the unacquired and undeveloped segments within the Priority Trails Map. These gaps serve as the guide for directing resources to complete the state's highest priority trail projects.

The Strategic Protection Areas Map delineates the gaps, or unprotected components, within the Ecological Greenways Critical Linkages.

Strategy 1.3: Evaluate and determine gaps within the Priority Trails Map to identify where to best target resources and funding.

Objective 1.3.1: OGT will, by December 2013,

analyze the Priority Trails Map in coordination with partners, to identify all gaps.

Objective 1.3.2: OGT will, by December 2013, prioritize the Priority Trails gaps, in coordination with partners, to determine the relative importance of each gap.

Objective 1.3.3: OGT will, in coordination with the University of Florida and the Ecological Greenways Technical Advisory Group, identify Strategic Protection Areas by 2015.

Objective 1.3.4: OGT will maintain the Priority Trails Gap Map and conduct a review and update in coordination with each Priority Trails Map update.

4. The Maps The FGTS maps consist of the following:

Level 1 - The Vision: Land Trails, Paddling Trails and Ecological Greenways Opportunity maps

Level 2 - The Priorities: Priority Trails Map and Critical Linkage Map

Level 3 - The Gaps: Priority Trails Gap Map and Strategic Protection Area Map

Strategy 1.4: Facilitate statewide planning by making FGTS maps and supporting data accessible to all.

Objective 1.4.1: OGT will provide all FGTS maps through FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com and other means, as appropriate.

Objective 1.4.2: OGT will maintain, in coordination with communities, agencies and non-profit organizations, the Existing Trails data layer and

make it available through

FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com.

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Beginning at Big Lagoon State Park near Pensacola, extending around the Florida peninsula and Keys, and ending at Fort Clinch State Park near the Georgia border, the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail (CT) is a 1,515-mile sea kayaking trail coordinated by OGT. The trail includes every Florida coastal habitat type, from barrier island dune systems to salt marsh and mangroves. Numerous historical sites and points of interest are accessible by kayak along with colorful fishing communities and urban centers. The trail is utilized by thousands of Florida residents and visitors who paddle for a few hours, days, weeks or months. Some paddle the entire

trail, while others pursue completion of the trail in segments over several years, similar to how hikers often tackle the Appalachian Trail.

The CT is specifically recognized in the Florida Greenways and Trails Act (Chapter 260, F.S.), and the entire route is included on the FGTS Priority Trails Map. It is the only paddling trail delineated in its own class on the FGTS Maps. Its success relies heavily on the involvement and cooperation of numerous government agencies at the federal, state, regional and local levels, along with private outfitters, businesses, paddling clubs and individual volunteers. The nonprofit Florida Paddling Trails Association was organized in 2007 to act as volunteer stewards of the CT and other Florida paddling trails. For more information about the CT, visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/paddling/saltwater.htm>.

Establishing and Connecting the FGTS

Establishing and connecting the FGTS relies on the collective effort of many programs and partners. A single trail project alone can require significant effort to complete. Combining multiple trail projects into an integrated statewide system requires advanced coordination and a concerted effort to achieve the greater whole.

GOAL 2: Direct resources and programs to establish and connect the FGTS.

1. Assistance and Resources It is critical to

provide the technical and planning assistance and resources needed to establish and connect the FGTS. Individual projects and plans require accurate information and guidance to get off the ground. This is important for the consistency and success of projects.

Strategy 2.1: Coordinate and provide technical and planning assistance and resources to facilitate establishment of the FGTS.

Objective 2.1.1: OGT will provide greenways and trails assistance and resources to communities, organizations and individuals, with emphasis on assisting projects and plans that advance and complete FGTS priorities.

Objective 2.1.2: OGT will maintain current technical assistance information and resources on FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com to support all

FGTS projects and plans.

Objective 2.1.3: OGT will coordinate with the Florida Greenways and Trails Council to compile updated paved and unpaved trail standards and guidelines as a resource for communities, agencies and organizations establishing the FGTS.

Objective 2.1.4: OGT will administer the electronic Florida Greenways and Trails Community Network (webinars, e-communications, web pages), in partnership with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and other organizations, to provide training, share best practices and showcase cutting-edge projects.

2. Funding No issue is more critical to the success of greenways and trails projects than having adequate funds for acquisition, development, management and promotion. It is important to identify and direct available funding sources to

advance FGTS opportunities and complete priorities. Further, with increasingly strained public budgets, it is critical to identify private sources of funding.

Strategy 2.2: Coordinate and direct funding to facilitate implementation of the FGTS vision with emphasis on priorities.

Objective 2.2.1: Encourage local, state and federal programs that provide funding for greenways and trails to advance the FGTS with emphasis on completing priorities.

Objective 2.2.2: Identify and maintain, on FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com, a database of funding sources that facilitate the acquisition, development, management and promotion of the FGTS.

Objective 2.2.3: OGT will compile and provide, on FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com, case examples of project costs, including the sources of funding for those projects, to assist in the identification and estimation of funding needs and sources.

Objective 2.2.4: OGT will pursue public/private partnerships to take advantage of public and private sources of funding and in-kind contributions to support implementation of the FGTS.

3. Acquisition It is important to advance and align acquisition efforts that support completion of FGTS priorities. Beyond fee simple acquisition, it is now critical more than ever to encourage less than fee options and partner with linear infrastructure and other private landowners that can assist with completion of the FGTS.

Strategy 2.3: Acquire properties that facilitate closing the gaps and completing corridors in the FGTS, with emphasis on priorities.

Objective 2.3.1: By December 2013, OGT will coordinate and complete the revision of Chapter 62S-1, F.A.C., to focus the Greenways and Trails Acquisition Program to closing gaps and completing corridors on the FGTS Priority Trails Map.

Objective 2.3.2: Ensure that state conservation and recreation land acquisition programs, such as Florida Forever, consider FGTS priorities during project analysis and selection.

Objective 2.3.3: Encourage all public conservation and recreation land acquisition programs to consider FGTS priorities and opportunities during project analysis and selection.

Objective 2.3.4: Encourage the use of transportation and other linear infrastructure rights of way that coincide with FGTS priorities and opportunities to include trails.

Objective 2.3.5: Promote public access in less than fee acquisitions that have the potential to close gaps and complete connections within the FGTS Priority Trails Map.

Objective 2.3.6: Encourage less than fee or conservation easements for working landscapes that coincide with FGTS Critical Linkages.

4. Development It is important to encourage trail development efforts from local to federal level to advance the FGTS and complete priorities.

Strategy 2.4: Coordinate and direct trail

development programs to facilitate implementation of the FGTS vision with emphasis on priorities.

Objective 2.4.1: Encourage programs that support development of trails, such as Transportation Alternatives, to emphasize FGTS priorities to close gaps.

Objective 2.4.2: Encourage communities, agencies and organizations that develop trails to advance completion of the FGTS by directing funding and resources to priorities and gaps.

Objective 2.4.3: Encourage private developers to incorporate and establish trails and greenways that fulfill FGTS priorities and opportunities in developments of regional impact, planned unit developments, sector plans and other development plans.

5. Designation The Florida Greenways and Trails Designation Program was established to identify and promote trails and greenways within the FGTS. To date, nearly 1 million acres have been designated in the statewide system including state trails, state parks, national forest lands and trails, locally managed greenways and trails, blueways and many other areas.

Strategy 2.5: Designate projects to consistently identify, advance and promote the FGTS.

Objective 2.5.1: Encourage communities and public land managers to pursue designation of trails and greenways that are within the FGTS vision, emphasizing those on the Priority Trails Map and Critical Linkage Map.

Objective 2.5.2: Pursue private landowner designations that facilitate the FGTS vision,

emphasizing connections and corridors on the Priority Trails Map and Critical Linkages Map.

Objective 2.5.3: Update and establish a new signage and branding standard for FGTS designated trails and greenways no later than December 2013.

Promoting and Providing Information about the FGTS

A key component to advancing the FGTS is ensuring that its purpose, benefits and value are effectively communicated to Floridians, visitors and target partners that use the system, play a role in its establishment, benefit from its presence and

affect its future.

GOAL 3: Promote and communicate information about greenways and trails to advance the FGTS.

1. Reaching the Public Promoting greenways and trails as opportunities for recreation, transportation and health, and providing information about where these opportunities can be accessed is critical to bringing the FGTS to people's everyday lives. It is also important to provide information about the purpose and benefits of the FGTS so that Floridians understand why the Sunshine State is making the investment to coordinate, establish and expand this comprehensive system.

Strategy 3.1: Communicate the purpose and

benefits of greenways and trails to advance public support for the FGTS.

Objective 3.1.1: Promote the economic, health, transportation and environmental benefits of greenways and trails through newsletters, news releases, presentations, webinars and other appropriate communication channels.

Objective 3.1.2: Compile, by July 2013, and maintain, on FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com, a current, comprehensive benefits document that can be used by communities, citizens and organizations to promote the value of the FGTS.

Objective 3.1.3: Partner with agencies and organizations to conduct economic impact evaluations for Florida-based projects to improve knowledge of the value of greenways and trails.

Objective 3.1.4: Work with trail managers to provide current information about existing greenways and trails opportunities through information portals such as

VISITFLORIDA.com/Trails,

FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com,

FloridaStateParks.org and TrailLink.com.

Objective 3.1.5: Work with media, tourism organizations and others to promote existing greenways and trails opportunities through articles, partner publications, news releases, events and Florida Greenways and Trails Month.

2. Reaching Target Partners It is not only important to communicate the general purpose, benefits and value of the FGTS to the public at large, but also to target partners. Target partners include communities that have the potential to more fully participate in the FGTS. Some partners

have the potential to help implement the FGTS, such as linear corridor owners who can provide right of way for a trail, while others derive direct economic benefit, such as trailside businesses.

Developers can help to both implement the FGTS while also benefitting from the system. By providing a regional trail connection, for example, a developer can reduce the need for public funding while simultaneously accruing the benefits of increased property values that are associated with homeowner access to trails and greenways.

Target partners also include emerging supporters of the FGTS. Corporations and private foundations with compatible and related missions (e.g. health care, outdoor suppliers, environment) have the capability of providing funding support to promote and implement the overall system. It is important that communication strategies address outreach to target partners because they are so vital to making

the FGTS a reality. Trails and greenways, because of their linear nature, are partnership projects.

Strategy 3.2: Communicate the purpose and benefits of greenways and trails to target partners to advance their understanding of and participation in the FGTS.

Objective 3.2.1: As part of a public/private partnership campaign, conduct targeted outreach to developers, linear corridor owners, small businesses, corporations, foundations and other potential private sector partners.

Objective 3.2.2: Conduct coordinated outreach to communities that have potential for increased participation in the FGTS, with emphasis on economically challenged areas that would benefit from trails and greenways.

Objective 3.2.3: Conduct outreach to elected officials and organizations that affect policy and funding decision-making related to the FGTS.

Coordinating the FGTS

Advancing the Florida Greenways and Trails System vision and priorities requires the coordination of allied programs, planning efforts and partnerships from the community to federal level.

GOAL 4: Link and support complementary programs, planning and partnership efforts to coordinate the FGTS.

1. Economic Development and Tourism Trails

and greenways are increasingly an economic engine for communities and Florida. To fully comprehend the dynamic established in a small downtown centered on a trail, one only need visit the City of Dunedin along the Pinellas Trail. The presence of this trail is noted for having driven downtown business occupancy rates from 35 percent to nearly 100 percent. Just as individual trails can be an integral component of a community's economic development strategy, the FGTS, by combining trails together into larger systems, has great potential as a component of the state's economic development strategy.

The FGTS supports at least eight of the 29 strategies that make up the Florida Five Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development (www.floridajobs.org/FL5yrPlan). The FGTS particularly advances the plan's Quality of Life & Quality Places and Infrastructure & Growth

Leadership strategies. Notable among these is the creation of “vibrant, safe and healthy communities that attract workers, businesses, residents and visitors.” It is important to establish the FGTS to support the economic development efforts of Florida and its communities.

The economic impact of trails is not only fueled by residents, but Florida visitors as well. In the wake of the high visitor demand for bicycling and outdoor experiences, VISIT FLORIDA partnered with OGT and others to launch VISITFLORIDA.com/Trails in 2010. This site brings together descriptions and maps of trails from around Florida with information about lodging, camping, restaurants, outfitters and other travel related services. Trails are now featured traveler destinations alongside beaches, resorts, golf courses and themed attractions. It is critical to maintain and build on this portal to enhance the

value of FGTS destination trails to Florida tourism.

Strategy 4.1: Coordinate the FGTS to advance Florida's economic development and tourism.

Objective 4.1.1: Advance the Florida Five Year Strategic Plan for Economic Development by coordinating implementation of the FGTS with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and local and regional economic development organizations.

Objective 4.1.2: Advance VISIT FLORIDA's Marketing Plan by expanding and supporting [VISITFLORIDA.com/Trails](https://www.visitflorida.com/trails) and related initiatives that promote destination trails within the FGTS. FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com

2. Health The FGTS provides tremendous opportunity to improve the health of Floridians by

providing outdoor recreation and alternative transportation that support active lifestyles. A critical factor in improving community health is through increased access to opportunities for physical activity. A well planned, designed and managed system of trails and greenways, connecting to and through cities, and towns is an important means to do that. The physical and mental health benefits of walking, bicycling, horseback riding and paddling, including the experience of nature and community, are well documented. The FGTS provides a return on investment by helping to reduce the public health costs of diseases and physical ailments stemming from inactivity and obesity and increasing the ability of Floridians to live healthy lives.

The FGTS supports the Florida State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) with particular emphasis on advancing the Community Redevelopment and

Partnerships Strategic Issue Area, and Goal CR2 to “build and revitalize communities so people can live healthy lives.” The objectives below are in support of the SHIP, and in specific fulfillment of SHIP Objective CR1.1.4, to incorporate health related objectives as part of this plan.

Strategy 4.2: Coordinate the FGTS as a means to strengthen Florida’s health by providing greater access to active outdoor recreation and human-powered transportation opportunities.

Objective 4.2.1: Advance the Florida State Health Improvement Plan, in coordination with the Florida Department of Health, by increasing access to and awareness of the FGTS.

Objective 4.2.2: Coordinate with local health agencies and organizations to encourage implementation of the FGTS as a strategy to

improve community health.

Trends in Trails and Health

More than one third of American adults are obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2012). If current trends continue, nearly half will be obese by 2020 (New England Journal of Medicine, 2009). Even more alarming is the rapid increase in obesity among America's youth.

Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the last 30 years (CDC, 2012), raising the possibility of reduced average life expectancy for our youngest generations. Added to this is the growing concern over the increasing deficit of time that America's children spend outdoors, and particularly in nature. Because of these factors, creating and enhancing access to places where Americans can be physically active outdoors is a critical public health strategy. Trails can be an important and effective

part of this strategy. As a result, the CDC has developed a complete action guide called “Facilitating Development of a Community Trail and Promoting its Use to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults.”

Because of the important connection between trails and health, there is a growing trend in the American healthcare industry to actively support trail development. A groundbreaking project in this regard is the Medical Mile along the Arkansas River Trail. Heart Clinic Arkansas, the state’s largest cardiology clinic, joined forces with the National Park Service, the City of Little Rock, the Arkansas Department of Health and others to develop a segment of trail that includes health related displays and wellness messages in what has been called the nation's first outdoor linear health museum. In South Carolina, the Greenville Hospital System provided \$1 million of funding to support

and has its name tied to the 17.5-mile Greenville Hospital System Swamp Rabbit Trail. In Florida, Capital Health Plan, a nonprofit health maintenance organization, has donated \$662,000 to develop the 2.3-mile Fitness Trail within the Capital Cascades Park in Tallahassee. As this plan is implemented and the FGTS is further developed, it will be important to further engage the healthcare industry through creative partnerships, such as these.

3. Transportation Trails and greenways have become increasingly important in transportation planning and development. One of the most obvious Florida examples of this integration is the Suncoast Trail which was developed in tandem with the limited access Suncoast Parkway. Other trails are being retrofitted into existing transportation rights of way such as the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail and the Palatka-to-

St. Augustine State Trail. On a broader scale, trails are a significant component of local and regional bicycle and pedestrian plans, which in turn support state transportation planning.

The 2060 Florida Transportation Plan (2060 FTP) defines Florida's future transportation vision and identifies goals, objectives and strategies to guide transportation decisions for the next 50 years. Among its long range goals are to "Make transportation decisions to support and enhance livable communities" and "Improve mobility and connectivity for people and freight." The FGTS supports these goals by providing safe, clean transportation opportunities and by connecting to and becoming an integral part of multimodal transportation systems. The 2060 FTP mutually supports the FGTS by providing for coordination of "transportation investments with other public and private decisions to foster livable communities."

Another important long term goal of the 2060 FTP is to “Make transportation decisions to promote environmental stewardship.” Critically, this supports the FGTS by minimizing the impact of transportation infrastructure on ecological greenways that connect conservation hubs and serve as wildlife corridors.

Strategy 4.3: Strengthen the linkage between the planning and development of trails and transportation to mutually advance priorities of the FGTS plan and transportation plans at state, regional and local levels.

Objective 4.3.1: Advance the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan and the Future Corridors Initiative by coordinating the FGTS with the Florida Department of Transportation to provide multimodal transportation that is safe and

accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Advancing Trails to Meet Transportation Needs

Because of Florida's large population and year round tourism economy, it is vital to provide a viable and accessible means for bicyclists and pedestrians to safely travel through and between communities. While trails have been long known for their recreational benefits, they are now an increasingly critical component of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within multimodal transportation systems. When asked how they would allocate transportation spending, Americans indicated that they would increase the amount directed toward bicycling and walking infrastructure by about 15 times existing levels (Transportation for America, 2007). Two-thirds of Americans would like more transportation options

so they have the freedom to choose how to get to their destinations (Transportation for America, 2010).

To address the need for a greater focus on walking and bicycling infrastructure, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) formed the Florida Bicycle and Pedestrian Partnership Council (FBPPC). The Council's mission is to promote the livability, health and economic benefits of bicycle and pedestrian activity and provide guidance to FDOT on policy matters and issues affecting Florida's bicycle and pedestrian transportation needs. Because of the importance of trails in meeting these needs, the FBPPC included review of the FGTS plan as one of its primary focus areas in 2012. The Council provided valuable input and strongly endorsed this plan for its role in advancing multi modal transportation planning. For more information about the FBPPC and bicycle and

pedestrian issues, visit

<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/policy/bikeped/>.

Objective 4.3.2: Support the implementation of transportation alternatives, including safe routes to schools, through coordination of FGTS priorities with the Florida Department of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Objective 4.3.3: Support the implementation of scenic highways and byways that coincide with the FGTS in coordination with the Florida Department of Transportation, the Florida Scenic Highways Advisory Committee and Scenic Highway Corridor Management Entities.

Objective 4.3.4: Coordinate the FGTS to support the recommendations of the Florida Bicycle and Pedestrian Partnership Council.

Objective 4.3.5: Coordinate with the Florida Department of Transportation, MPOs and other appropriate agencies to minimize transportation impacts on ecological greenway connectivity.

4. Recreation With its temperate climate and subtropical beauty, Florida offers an incredible array of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. To maximize the value of individually planned and managed public lands that provide outdoor recreation, it is critical to integrate them into a larger recreation and conservation framework. The FGTS provides that framework as it connects and provides access to hubs that offer recreational opportunities, ranging from expansive national forests to small community parks.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) serves as the centerpiece of Florida's

outdoor recreation planning efforts. Among SCORP's intended goals are to increase public access to and coordinate connections between recreational opportunities. Since the FGTS plan plays an instrumental role in both of these regards, it serves as an integral state-level companion to SCORP.

Strategy 4.4: Coordinate the FGTS to enhance public access to and provide connections between Florida's diverse recreational opportunities.

Objective 4.4.1: Advance the SCORP by coordinating the FGTS plan to connect and increase access to public recreational opportunities.

Objective 4.4.2: Promote the FGTS plan and SCORP as companion efforts for state level outdoor recreation planning.

Objective 4.4.3: Coordinate with the Florida Outdoor Recreation Coalition, the Florida Recreation and Parks Association and other related non-profits regarding recreational efforts and initiatives that advance and are supported by the FGTS.

5. Conservation The Ecological Greenway's component of the FGTS is critical to protecting wildlife, conserving natural systems and establishing connectivity between natural areas. Just as trails require tremendous coordination because of their linear nature and the jurisdictions they cross, so too ecological greenways necessitate a collective effort to adequately plan and coordinate. A protected Ecological Greenways system is integral to providing for a comprehensive conservation network.

Leading the effort to define a statewide conservation network of wildlife and natural areas are Florida's Cooperative Conservation Blueprint (CCB) and State Wildlife Action Plan. A leading purpose of the CCB is to:

Create a compelling natural systems vision of what Florida could look like if steps are taken to conserve the critical environmental resources and working agricultural lands that the state's wildlife depend upon and that provide ecosystem services and quality of life for the benefit of all Floridians.
(FWC 2010)

The FGTS is important to advancing and implementing the CCB's natural systems vision for Florida. The CCB builds on the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project (CLIP) which incorporates the FGTS Ecological Greenways. The update of FGTS Ecological Greenways data is now

funded through a State Wildlife Grant to help implement the State Wildlife Action Plan.

Strategy 4.5: Coordinate the FGTS to protect, connect and conserve Florida's wildlife and natural systems.

Objective 4.5.1: Advance Florida's Cooperative Conservation Blueprint by coordinating implementation of FGTS Ecological Greenways with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and other partners to protect wildlife and conserve natural systems.

Objective 4.5.2: Support implementation of the Florida State Wildlife Action Plan through coordination of data updates to and establishment of FGTS Ecological Greenways.

The Florida Wildlife Corridor

The Florida Wildlife Corridor is a collaborative vision to connect natural lands, waters, working farms, forests and ranches from the Everglades to Georgia, protecting a functional ecological corridor for the health of people, wildlife and watersheds. The Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) provides the scientific foundation for the Florida Wildlife Corridor, and encompasses several identified Critical Linkages. The FEGN, the conservation component of today's Florida Greenways and Trails System, was an outcome of early efforts to focus on the importance of protecting wildlife corridors and a network of conservation lands spearheaded by Larry Harris and Reed Noss at the University of Florida in the 1980s. The Florida Wildlife Corridor aims to build on this work to advance support for ecological greenways and wildlife corridors through an education and awareness campaign that

demonstrates the dynamic and critical connection between landscapes and watersheds. Goals of the Florida Wildlife Corridor include:

Protecting and restoring habitat and migration corridors essential for the survival of Florida's diverse wildlife, including wide-ranging panthers, black bears and other native species.

Restoring water flow to the Everglades and sustaining water supply to both south and north Florida in the Everglades and St. Johns River watersheds.

Sustaining the food production, economies and cultural legacies of working ranches, forests and farms within the corridor.

Bolstering local economies through increased opportunities such as hunting, fishing,

birdwatching and other forms of eco-tourism.

For more information about this important initiative, visit floridawildlifecorridor.org.

6. Community and Regional Planning Local government and regional plans are critical tools for establishing connected systems of greenways and trails. Many of Florida's communities and all of the state's regional planning councils have incorporated greenways and trails strategies and policies in their plans. Several communities have also developed specific greenways and trails master plans. Much of the success of projects in the state are a result of the seeds that are planted at the local and regional planning level.

From local to state level, the FGTS plan can tie together local and regional greenways and trails plans, encourage them where they don't exist and

support them where they exist. The FGTS plan ties these efforts together into a comprehensive statewide vision. There is great opportunity to advance greenways and trails by more fully linking local and regional plans to the FGTS.

Strategy 4.6: Strengthen the linkages among greenways and trails planning activities at all levels to support and advance the FGTS.

Objective 4.6.1: Work with local governments, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning organizations and the Department of Economic Opportunity to encourage adoption of greenways and trails master plans and comprehensive plan policies that recognize, support and advance the FGTS.

Objective 4.6.2: Maintain and provide, on FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com, examples of local

greenways and trails master plans and comprehensive plan policies that serve as models for Florida communities.

Objective 4.6.3: Pursue new opportunities for integrating the FGTS in planning efforts at all levels.

7. Partnerships The establishment, management and promotion of the FGTS are conducted by many agency and organizational partners from the local to federal level. Though these entities may all manage sections of the FGTS, they often have very distinct missions. For example, the FGTS runs through areas as varied as remote wilderness in expansive national forests to abandoned rail corridors in highly urban communities. The managers of such places have markedly different purposes and goals. It is important to promote guidelines for safe, accessible trails and greenways

that are balanced with the need of individual partners to protect and further their own missions.

The Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) is a major component of the FGTS that serves as a model for balancing these issues. A coalition of agencies, led by the United States Forest Service, the Florida Trail Association and the Office of Greenways and Trails, partnered to develop the 2012 FNST 5-Year Strategic Plan. That document includes goals and strategies that are instructive to promoting coordinated management among diverse partners. The plan's partnerships goal is for each of the FNST land managers to "proactively contribute to Trail development, maintenance and promotion of their segment as part of a larger whole." This is likewise a worthy approach for the FGTS.

Volunteers are another critical partner in establishing and maintaining the FGTS. Many

volunteers and volunteer organizations have supported tremendous progress in the advancement and stewardship of FGTS trails. The Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway (CFG), a major corridor in the FGTS, is emblematic of the contribution and cooperation of volunteer user groups. Hikers, mountain bikers, paddlers and equestrians work side by side to establish and maintain trails in support of the CFG's overall recreational mission. It is important to coordinate with volunteers like these, support their work and recognize their effort.

Strategy 4.7: Coordinate and assist partnerships that advance and promote safe, accessible, well managed greenways and trails and the FGTS as a whole.

Objective 4.7.1: By December 31, 2013, develop, through the Florida Greenways and Trails Council,

Guiding Principles for consistent establishment, management and promotion of the FGTS by partners.

Objective 4.7.2: Implement Guiding Principles in coordination with partners to support consistent development, management and promotion of the FGTS, including assistance with access to funding, guidance and equipment for maintenance.

Objective 4.7.3: Encourage partners to support efforts to close gaps and complete FGTS priorities, to fund the development and management of greenways and trails, and to restore and manage public lands and waters to implement the FGTS.

Objective 4.7.4: Encourage agencies and organizations that develop and manage components of the FGTS to incorporate reference to the FGTS in management and operational plans.

Objective 4.7.5: Promote the Florida National Scenic Trail 5-Year Strategic Plan as a representative model for coordinating FGTS project partnerships.

Objective 4.7.6: Coordinate with volunteer organizations to support and recognize volunteers, and increase volunteer capacity, for FGTS development and maintenance.

Florida National Scenic Trail

Florida is home to one of 11 congressionally designated national scenic trails. The Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) is a non-motorized, recreation trail that meanders approximately 1,000 miles across some of the most beautiful landscapes in the country. Along the way, it highlights the diverse scenic, natural, historic and cultural

character of the Florida countryside. No other national scenic trail traverses a subtropical landscape. The U.S. Forest Service is the designated administrator of the FNST. The sections that are completed owe their existence to many years of dedicated work by the volunteers of the Florida Trail Association, and the many local, state, federal and private land managers along the FNST who develop, maintain and protect this treasure for Florida residents and visitors.

The FNST is recognized in the Florida Greenways and Trails Act (Chapter 260, F.S.) as Florida's official statewide non-motorized trail. It is the only land trail delineated in its own class on the FGTS Maps. The entire planning corridor for the FNST is within the FGTS Land Trails Opportunity Map and the prioritized single route identified by the U.S. Forest Service through its public process is included on the FGTS Priority Trails Map. For more

information about the FNST, visit

www.fs.usda.gov/fnst.

Public Outreach and Input

The public outreach and input process for this plan was extensive, including participation by two councils, several agencies and organizations, and nearly 500 Floridians who participated through attendance at public open houses and provided comments online. The 2012 open houses, meetings and briefings included the following:

Public Open Houses

Tallahassee, Florida Dept. of Transportation

Headquarters, Sept. 12

Panama City Beach, Panama City Beach Senior Center, Sept. 13

Palatka, Ravine Gardens State Park, Sept. 18

Sanford, Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens, Sept. 22

Sarasota, Sarasota County Public Works, Sept. 25

Boca Raton, Boca Raton Community Center, Oct. 4

Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) Meetings

FGTC Full Council, March 1

FGTC Plan and Map Committees, April 11

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FGTC Plan and Map Committees, May 22

FGTC Full Council, June 20

FGTC Plan and Map Committees, Aug. 15

FGTC Full Council, Oct. 24

FGTC Full Council, Dec. 12

Florida Bicycle and Pedestrian Partnership Council (FBPPC) Meetings

FBPPC Meeting, April 24

FBPPC Meeting, Sept. 12

FBPPC Meeting, Nov. 29

Partner Agency Briefings

Florida Department of Transportation, Jan. 24

Florida Forest Service, Feb. 1

United States Forest Service, Feb. 2

Florida Department of State, Feb. 2

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,
Feb. 6

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Feb.
7

Florida Regional Councils Association, Feb. 10

Florida Department of Health, Feb. 22

Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization
Advisory Council, April 26

2012 Florida Greenways and Trails Council Members

Carol Bert, Northwest Florida Water Management
District

Robert Bendus, Florida Department of State

Keith Bettcher, Florida Forest Service, Department
of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Jeff Caster, Florida Department of Transportation

Greg Chelius, Trust for Public Land

Deborah Crowder, Trail User

Robert English, Polk County Board of County

Commissioners

Greg Gologowski, Harmony Development Company

Chuck Goodheart, City of Tallahassee

Albert Gregory, Florida Department of
Environmental Protection

Deno Hicks, Southern Strategy Group

Bruce Johnson, Stantec, Inc.

Susan Kennedy, Jupiter Farms Environmental
Council and Loxahatchee River Coalition

Jerrie Lindsey, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation
Commission

Susan Matthews, U.S. Forest Service

Matthew Morris, Environmental Science Teacher

Gayle Oberst, Mayor of Panama City Beach

Mark Penfield, Greener Lands Development, Inc.

Kathryn Starkey, Starkey Land Company

Patricia Steed, Central Florida Regional Planning
Council

Kent Wimmer, Florida Trail Association

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Leadership and Staff

Jon Steverson, Secretary

Gary Clark, Deputy Secretary, Land and
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Donald V. Forgione, Director

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Office of Greenways and Trails

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Liz Sparks, Paddling Trails Coordinator

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About the Office of Greenways and Trails

The Office of Greenways and Trails serves as the

central entity providing lead planning and coordination to establish and expand the FGTS. In its role to implement the FGTS Plan, OGT works in partnership with communities, agencies and organizations to complete segments and close gaps in the FGTS regardless of which entity will ultimately acquire, develop and manage a given project. In support of the FGTS Plan, OGT's functions and responsibilities include:

Evaluate and prioritize greenways and trails corridors in the FGTS.

Provide statewide coordination of the FGTS through planning and community assistance.

Facilitate and provide support to FGTS priority and opportunity projects.

Serve as staff to the Florida Greenways and Trails

Council.

Administer the Florida Greenways and Trails Acquisition Program.

Administer the Florida Greenways and Trails Designation Program.

Administer the federal Recreational Trails Program.

Publicize and promote greenways and trails and the FGTS.

The Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation, Inc.

The Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation, Inc. exists to support the mission and programs of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) as it

continues toward establishing a statewide system of greenways and trails for recreation, conservation and alternative transportation. The Foundation is Florida's chief advocacy organization for non-motorized trails and supports the greater use of trails for recreation, for fitness and health, for reducing carbon emissions, for attracting leisure travelers, for building community, for beautification, and for a larger role in evolving multi-modal transportation policy.

Funding to print this plan was provided by the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation, Inc.

Printed 3/2013