

Background

Florida's Vision: A Statewide System of Greenways and Trails

Florida's statewide greenways and trails initiative grew out of two decades of innovative, state-directed land acquisition and resource management programs and many community-based and region-wide resource conservation and recreational planning projects. Now recognized as a leader in America's greenways movement, Florida's program is the result of the combined efforts of numerous individuals from community citizen groups, nonprofit organizations, the scientific community, private businesses and local, state and federal governmental units. Together, these individuals are working to create the Florida Greenways and Trails System that will benefit Florida's native ecosystems and its people, both for today and the future.

Excerpt from "The History of Greenways and Trails in Florida" in Connecting Florida's Communities with Greenways and Trails: The Five Year Implementation Plan for the Florida Greenways and Trails System

The Statewide Plan

Connecting Florida's Communities with Greenways and Trails: The Five Year Implementation Plan for the Florida Greenways and Trails System (the Plan) was developed through the work and consensus of a broad range of groups and stakeholders. The foundation for its development consists of various legislative actions and efforts that occurred throughout the more than 20 years prior to its adoption. Among those important steps was the legislative establishment of the Recreational Trails System Act in 1979. Nearly a decade later, 1000 Friends of Florida and the Conservation Fund began the visionary work of creating a connected Florida. In subsequent years, the Florida Greenways Commission was established making the bold recommendation that Florida create a system to link natural areas and open spaces, conserve native landscapes and ecosystems and offer recreational opportunities across the state. This "green infrastructure" would connect residents and visitors to the state's natural heritage, enhance their sense of place, and enrich their quality of life. Above all, it would be an integral step toward creating a more sustainable Florida.

In 1995, the Florida Greenways Coordinating Council was created to continue the pioneering work of the Greenways Commission. That same year, the Department of Environmental Protection was directed to take the lead in the state's greenways efforts. Working in coordination with the Florida Recreational Trails Council, these groups spent the next three years developing the Plan, identifying existing and potential pieces of the statewide system and developing specific strategies for making it a reality.

The Plan was completed in September of 1998 and was legislatively adopted in 1999. During the five year implementation period, which drew to a close in 2004, many programs, initiatives and efforts were put in place, laying the foundation for the statewide system of greenways and trails. These include the following:

- The original Trail Network Opportunity Maps were updated and prioritized through a web-based system and now encompass over 6000 miles of trail corridor opportunities.
- The Florida Ecological Greenways Network was prioritized and ten Critical Linkages were delineated, which guides protection of the most significant components within the Ecological Network.
- The Florida Greenways and Trails Acquisition Program was established. Through revisions to Chapter 62S-1, FAC, eligibility for the funding under the program is now tied to the Trail Network Opportunity Maps.
- The Florida Greenways and Trails Designation Program was established. Designations since inception include the Cross Florida Greenway, many state parks, lands within the National Forests, and even private property owned by Plum Creek Timber for a segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail.
- Planning and technical assistance to communities was formalized through establishment of regional coordinators who serve as liaisons regarding greenways and trails issues throughout Florida.
- An ambitious marketing and outreach campaign was launched resulting in the development of several promotional pieces including public service announcements, short form videos, brochures and print advertisements.
- The Online Florida Greenways and Trails guide was launched to provide trail information to residents and visitors in a user-friendly format.
- October was formally established as Florida Greenways and Trails Month.

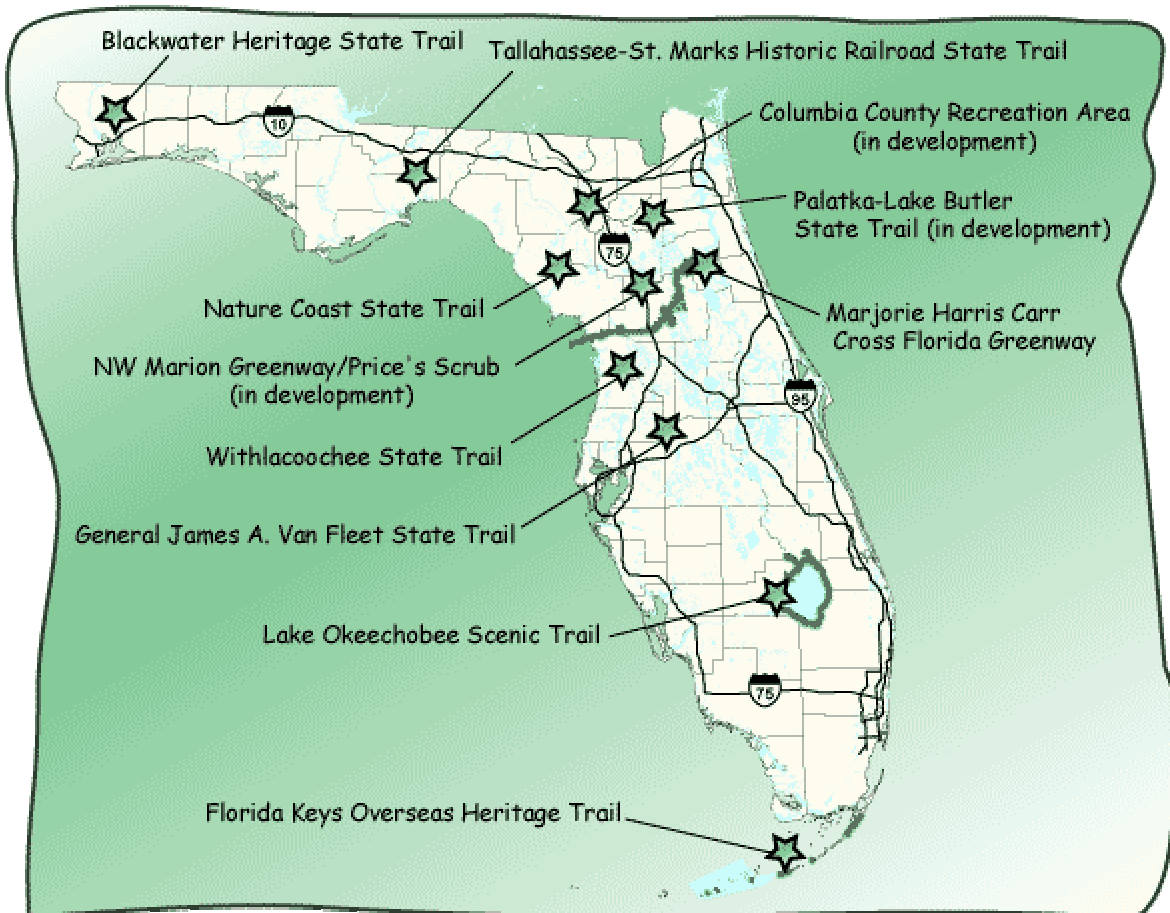
The Office of Greenways & Trails Today

The Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT), within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), serves as a clearinghouse for the rapidly growing greenways and trails system in Florida. Many of the achievements made during the plan implementation period are now an integral part of the Office of Greenways and Trails. The programs and services provided by OGT include:

Management of State Greenways and Trails - OGT manages eight state trails, the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, and other lands. See map below.

Planning and Technical Assistance - OGT's Regional Coordinators provide planning and technical assistance to citizens, local governments, developers, private landowners and state and federal agencies regarding the acquisition, establishment and management of greenways and trails projects. Assistance is provided by regional staff assigned along geographic lines. OGT regions and coordinator contact information can be found at http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/community/refguide/pdf/region_map.pdf.

Lands Managed by the Office of Greenways and Trails



Funding to Purchase Land for Trails - OGT administers a land acquisition program under the Florida Forever Act. The annual distribution is \$4.5 million. The program offers funding for recreational trails as defined by the Trail Network Opportunity Maps. Negotiations for purchase and closing activities are handled by the FDEP Division of State Lands.

➔ For more detailed information regarding the OGT acquisition program, see *Section 2, Funding Resources*.

Funding to Develop Trails and Trail Facilities - Through the Recreational Trails Program, we provide grants for the development of recreational trail projects for motorized and non-motorized uses. We receive approximately \$1.6 million annually from the Federal Highway Administration. States must use 30% of their funds for motorized trail uses, 30% for non-motorized trail uses, and 40% for diverse (i.e. two or more types of trail activities, motorized and/or non-motorized) trail uses.

➔ For more detailed information regarding the Recreational Trails Program, see *Section 2, Funding Resources*.

Designation of Lands and Waterways - OGT administers a program for designating public and private lands and waterways as part of the Statewide System of Greenways and Trails. The process, which is voluntary on the part of public and private landowners, helps to identify and establish the growing statewide system.

➔ For more detailed information regarding the Designation Program, see *Section 4, Designation*.

Public Information and Outreach - OGT provides information to educate and inform Florida's residents and visitors about and promote the benefits of greenways and trails. This is accomplished through events, promotional materials, the *Connections* newsletter, press releases and the OGT web site, <http://www.FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com>.

The activities of OGT are governed by Chapter 260, Florida Statutes, and its implementing rule, Chapter 62S-1, Florida Administrative Code.