



# CONNECTIONS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

## LOST Jewel The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail

by Leslie Palmer, Public Information Specialist

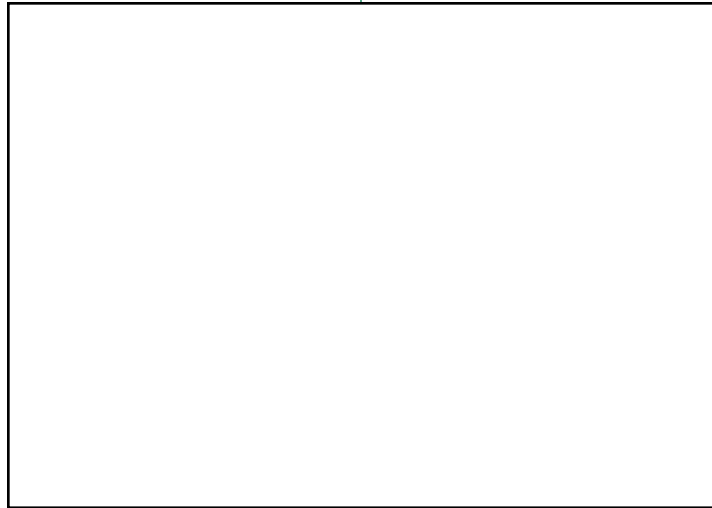
LOOK ON ANY Florida map and you will find what is LOST — the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail. The lake, aptly named by the Seminoles (Okeechobee means “big water”), lies within five counties and is

The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail rims the Herbert Hoover Dike, a 115 mile structure built to contain the lake. A major hurricane hit south South Florida in 1926, and again in 1928. Both storms

Lake Okeechobee as a threat to the natural beauty of the Everglades, it is from the top of these same structures that trail users can enjoy and appreciate the diverse ecosystems in the region.

When completed, the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail will be a 115 mile multi-use recreational trail running along the top of the dike. The dike’s elevation (35 feet) provides dramatic views of the lake’s natural lands, wildlife, varied water control systems, historic communities, and working landscapes of citrus groves and sugar cane fields. The trail encircling Lake Okeechobee is a segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST), one of only

see LOST JEWEL, page 2



Above: Lake Okeechobee

the second largest freshwater lake in the United States. Noted for its bountiful fishing, abundance of wildlife and importance to the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee will soon be known as the site of one of the finest multi-use trails in the nation, the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST).

caused Lake Okeechobee to overrun its banks and flood thousands of acres. Due to the tremendous loss of life and massive property damage, cries for control of lake waters resulted in the construction of channels, dams, control gates and a levee. Although some characterize the flood-control systems that contain

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 Our NEW logo!

## FROM THE DIRECTOR...

*Dear Friends of OGT,*

*As you probably noticed, the look of Connections has changed. With the statewide system of greenways and trails well on its way to becoming a reality, we felt it was time for a new look. Along with this change comes the development of a greenways and trails logo (front page, upper left corner) which we hope will become synonymous with greenways and trails throughout the state. Thanks to the support this initiative has received from DEP Secretary David Struhs and Deputy Secretary Bob Ballard, OGT has begun the process of making connections all over the state. From the Blackwater Heritage Trail in Pensacola to the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway in Central Florida to the Overseas Heritage Trail in the Keys to the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail in our cover story, more and more people are getting involved in developing greenways and trails in their communities. At OGT, we will continue providing assistance at every level to ensure local greenways and trail efforts succeed.*

*Please let us know if we can help!*

*Sincerely,  
Debbie Parrish  
Director, Office of Greenways and*

*Trails*

skaters, paddlers, campers, fishermen, and the physically challenged as well as by bikers and hikers.

The LOST project has enjoyed unprecedented community support. The Greater Lake Okeechobee Tourism Association and the Florida's Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative were both created to develop advertising campaigns and package tours showcasing the area. Various communities surrounding the lake will provide trailheads, facilities with potable water, picnic, parking, and restrooms. Located adjacent to Dupuis Reserve State Forest, the Corbett Wildlife Management Area, Brighton Indian Reservation and numerous local greenways, the

trail's multiple access points and close proximity to traditional tourist destinations make the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail a logical destination for those looking to incorporate outdoor recreational and educational activities into their vacations.

While completion of the trail's development is still a year or so away, the LOST is still a rare find and available for use by hikers and bikers today. For more information, contact the Office of Greenways and Trails, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2600 Blair Stone Road MS 795, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-2400, 850-488-3701 or e-mail [Samantha.Brown@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Samantha.Brown@dep.state.fl.us).

### LOST JEWEL , from page 1

eight National Trails in the United States. The FNST will eventually extend more than 1,300 miles across Florida, from Gulf Islands National Seashore in northwestern Florida to Big Cypress National Preserve in south Florida. The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail will also be an integral component in Florida's statewide system of greenways and trails.

Although a jewel long used by hikers and mountain bikers throughout southeast Florida, it wasn't until 1995 that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) established a Citizens/Technical Advisory Committee to work with an Interagency Project Oversight Committee in developing a conceptual Master

Plan (Plan) for the trail, completed in June 1998. In addition to the FDOT's Districts One and Four, the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection have all provided input into the Plan. City and county governments have pledged their support and the Florida Trail Association, long a proponent of the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail development, has been an invaluable resource. The Plan provides for paving where appropriate, trailhead development, interpretive/visitors centers, boardwalks and campsites. Presently the trail is primarily shell rock, in some places overgrown with grass. Ultimately, the trail will prove accommodations for equestrians,

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# Preservation 2000

By Samantha Browne, Planner III

THE FLORIDA Preservation 2000 program is in its final year, and the Department of Environmental Protection is working diligently with project sponsors to obligate the remaining greenways and trails acquisition funds prior to June 30, 2000, the end of the state fiscal year.

Over the past 10 years, many projects were acquired and have become successful greenways and trails. The West Orange Trail, Cross Seminole Trail, Nature Coast Greenway, Silver Run Connector, Gainesville to Hawthorne and the Miccosukee Canopy Road Greenway are just a few of the noteworthy greenway and trail projects added to our statewide system. These projects provide enjoyment to Florida residents and draw many visitors to our state each year.

The Florida Forever Act –signed into law by Governor Bush on June 8, 1999 –will continue the country's largest and most successful public land acquisition programs. While the Legislature lauded the impressive achievements of P-2000, the members clearly indicated a new direction and focus for the successor program by including (in the

Florida Forever Act) several new requirements for all land acquisition programs. Although all of the new goals and benchmarks have not yet been determined for other acquisition programs, those required of the Florida Greenways and Trails program are clearly outlined in our governing statute (Chapter 260).

To address the new program's requirements, the Office of Greenways and Trails is currently finalizing administrative rules to guide the selection of acquisition projects. Rule development workshops were held in Tallahassee and Orlando, and the Department received helpful input from those who attended. We hope the changes we have made in this program will

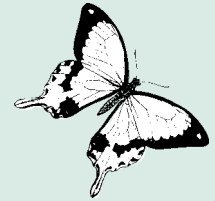
be seen as positive improvements. If all goes well, the rule should be adopted on November 1, 1999.

Upon adoption, the rules and forms (such as the "Application for Acquisition of Land") will be available from the following website: <http://www.dep.state.fl.gwt/rule>. If you would like to receive the application package by mail, you can contact our new toll-free number at 1-877-822-5208.

Look for an announcement of the next application cycle in an upcoming issue of Connections. The Department encourages you to apply for acquisition funding under the new Florida Forever program.



## Fall 1999

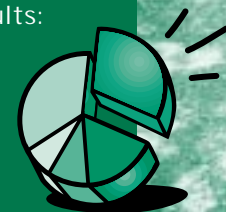


The Office of Greenways and Trails surveyed Florida residents to find out what they know about greenways and trails. Nearly 75% of those surveyed were unfamiliar with the term "greenways and trails" even though the most popular recreational activities selected by survey respondents—biking, canoeing, and hiking—are ideally suited to greenway and trail use.

Of the 25% who currently use greenways and trails, 44% have used one within a month; an additional 52% have used a greenway or trail within a year.

When given a brief definition, "Greenways and Trails are open spaces designated for public recreation or

ecological value," almost half of those surveyed said they would include a greenway or trail in vacation plans. 70% would be willing to drive up to fifty miles to use a greenway or trail, with some potential users willing to travel up to 200 miles. The majority of Florida residents believe that greenways and trails are safe to use and are an economic boost to a community. An overwhelming number (96%) of Florida residents say they would use a greenway or trail if one were in their community. Conclusion based on survey results: "If you build it, they will come."



## New Greenways and Trails Web Site

This Fall, the Office of Greenways and Trails will launch its new web site in coordination with the Save Florida initiative. Under the banner of Connecting Florida's Communities, the new site will provide expanded recreational opportunity information, frequently requested publications, community resource information for acquiring, developing and managing greenways and trails, and much more. For the most recent information on the status of the new site, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt).

# New Designation Process Begins

By Suzanne P. Walker, Planning Manager

BE THE FIRST in your area to be designated as part of the Florida Greenways and Trails System! When the OGT rules are finalized this Fall, the process for designating lands and waterways as part of the statewide system will be up and running.

To be eligible for designation, private lands and waterways must:

- protect or enhance natural, recreational, cultural or historical resources
- and must either
  - 1) provide linear open space or a hub or a site, or
  - 2) promote connectivity between or among conservation lands, communities, parks, other recreational facilities, cultural sites, or historic sites

The application form outlines what materials will need to be submitted with your request for designation, but the most important requirement to keep in mind is that you will need the landowner's consent.

Public conservation or recreation lands are eligible for designation and will follow a shortened application process.

As part of the designation process, a designation agreement will be written which addresses management, operation and maintenance of the property, public access, public safety, procedures for modifying the agreement, and the owner's statutory right to have the designation removed.

For each designation application, the Florida Green-

ways and Trails Council will review the designation proposal, take public testimony, recommend approval or disapproval, and forward that recommendation to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection for final action.

Those public lands and waterways designated prior to May 30, 1998 have been "grandfathered in" by the Florida Legislature and are not subject to the designation process. However, proposed additions to the previously designated areas will fall under the new procedure.

For more information, contact the Office of Greenways and Trails at (850) 488-3701 or download the application form at <http://www.savefl.org>.

## New Connections In The Greenways And Trails System

By Cindy Krupp, Planner III

NEW CONNECTIONS are being made every day in the statewide system of greenway and trails. Two rail-trail conversion projects, one in Polk County and the other in Alachua County, were recently acquired by the state. When completed, the Winter Haven to Lake Alfred project will be a 3 mile multi-use paved trail providing excellent wildlife observation opportunities at four nearby lakes. It is hoped the trail will be used not

only as a recreational trail but also as an alternate transportation route between the cities of Winter Haven and Lake Alfred. The Gainesville Downtown Connector, in Alachua County, provides an opportunity to extend a bicycle-pedestrian route from the University of Florida through downtown Gainesville. The connector will serve as a link to three existing rail-trails, Depot Avenue Rail Trail, Waldo

Road Rail Trail and the Gainesville-Hawthorne Rail Trail. Visitors to the trail will be able to experience the natural beauty of Paynes Prairie State Preserve, Prairie Creek and the Lochloosa Wildlife Management Area.

For more information on these or other acquisition projects, please contact Cindy Krupp, Office of Greenways and Trails, (850) 488-3701.

# Resource Management on the Cross Florida Greenway

By Adele Mills, Environmental Specialist II

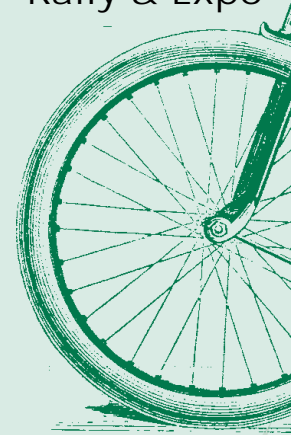
THE OFFICE of Greenways and Trails (OGT) is responsible for land management on the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway. One land management objective is to balance the need for low impact recreation with the need to protect and enhance natural resources. To help achieve this objective, OGT has developed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Florida Division of Forestry (FDOF) whereby the two agencies will work cooperatively to

plan land management strategies on the Cross Florida Greenway. As part of the agreement, OGT has a full time forester assigned to the Greenway. Forester Laurie Wiley will be stationed out of the OGT's Sharpes Ferry Office in Ocala. We would like to welcome Laurie.

With the agreement between OGT and FDOF in place, user groups will soon see numerous resource management projects along the Greenway. To

provide information about these projects, a series of articles in OGT's newsletter will discuss land management practices. Topics will include timber management, natural community restoration, exotic species control, prescribed burning, and reforestation. For further information about land management activities on the Cross Florida Greenway, call Adele Mills at (904) 329-3575 or Laurie Wiley at (352) 236-7143.

UPCOMING:  
Big O Hike  
and  
"Share  
the Road"  
Rally & Expo

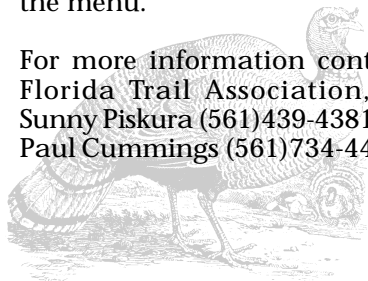


## NEWS, NOTES & EVENTS...

### BIG O HIKE

The 8th annual Big O Hike will be held Nov. 20-28. The nine day, 115 mile hike around Lake Okeechobee begins November 20th in South Bay, Florida at the Palm Beach County RV Park at the southeast corner of Lake Okeechobee, the second largest freshwater lake in the US. Hikers will head west to Clewiston and continue around the lake, arriving back at South Bay by noon, Nov. 28th. Hikers will shuttle each other to the day's hike beginning points each morning and from hike ending points to camp grounds or motels each evening. Several fine restaurants in Okeechobee serve Thanksgiving dinner, and a 115 mile hike will certainly justify extra helpings of anything on the menu.

For more information contact Florida Trail Association, or Sunny Piskura (561)439-4381, or Paul Cummings (561)734-4416.



### "SHARE THE ROAD" RALLY AND EXPO

To celebrate the passage of House Bill 601 and the creation of a "Share the Road" licence plate, Bike Florida has planned the 1st Annual Bike Florida "Share the Road" Rally and Expo October 1-3 in Kissimmee, Florida. For more information visit <http://www.floridabicycle.org> or <http://bikeflorida.org> or call (407) 943-7995.

*Top photo: Project Eagle — Young workers at the Santos Trailhead on the Cross Florida Greenway contribute to the 18.2 tons of trash collected during Project Eagle, an event coordinated by Keep Marion County Beautiful and the Florida Game and Fish Commission. Over 300 volunteers participated in the six-site cleanup countywide. Most of the trash was taken to the Marion County landfill after being sorted for recyclables.*

*Bottom photo: Jacksonville-Baldwin Equestrian Trail — After Law Enforcement Officer Scott Umstead volunteered his time to bulldoze thick vines and dense undergrowth, inmate crews from Montgomery Correctional Center cut overhead branches and cleared debris to make way for the Jacksonville-Baldwin equestrian trail.*

**OGT USER-FRIENDLY PHONE LINE**

Yvonne M. Parker,  
Staff Assistant

# And The Winner Is . . .

BLACKWATER State Forest recently received national recognition for completion of its Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant project. Forest manager John Webster participated in the ceremonies in Washington D.C. on June 9, 1999. The awards recognized eleven outstanding trails projects nationwide. The Sweetwater Creek Boardwalk, connecting

the Krul Recreation Area with the Bear Lake Recreation Area in northwest Florida, was cited for its environmental and wildlife compatibility. No mechanized equipment was used to construct over 2,000 feet of boardwalk and a suspension bridge connecting two popular recreation areas. The raised boardwalk allows for disabled access while protecting sensitive environmental areas and allowing for uninterrupted wildlife passage underneath.

The Office of Greenways and Trails now administers the Recreational Trails Pro-

gram, funded through the Federal Highway Administration. Alexandra Weiss moved with the program from the Division of Recreation and Parks in early August. Alex comes to us with over 20 years experience in the parks and recreation field. She has managed the program since its first submission cycle in 1992.

As we gear up for rulemaking and future submission cycles, OGT welcomes your thoughts and questions regarding this federally funded program. Alex may be reached at (850) 488-3701.

*The Office of Greenways and Trails has a new toll-free number. This line is for persons interested in receiving publications accessible through Greenways and Trails. There are two options available when calling this line. The first option is to leave your name, address, phone number and publication requests. The second option is to speak to an OGT staff member who will be answering the phone calls that need direct assistance. The number is 1-877-822-5208. We look forward to hearing from you.*



**NEW!**

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