

# Office of Greenways & Trails CONNECTIONS

[www.FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://www.FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com)

## Freeride Trails

### If you don't build it, they will come anyway.

Defined by the International Mountain Biking Association, "freeriding is a style of mountain biking that celebrates the challenges and spirit of technical riding and downhilling." The past few years have seen a dramatic increase in the popularity of this extreme off-road bicycling style.

Florida has a growing and enthusiastic group of technically talented riders who are looking for challenging riding experiences within the trail systems. This demand will likely grow. The Santos trails, located on the Cross Florida Greenway and managed by the Office of Greenways & Trails (OGT), have the natural features that other freeride areas in Florida don't have--quarries, rocks, and acreage. In the past, jumps, stunts and drops have been constructed on the Cross Florida Greenway without permission and without an overall plan. With that in mind, OGT commissioned the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) to assess the Santos area and suggest ways to improve safety, navigability and sustainability of a mountain bike trail system that would include sanctioned freeride trails.

In September, OGT held a public meeting to discuss the proposed Freeride trail. Scott Linnenberger, IMBA



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Trail Solutions Coordinator, suggested reroutes and improved signage to resolve the erosion, navigation and unsanctioned trail development issues. Linnenberger also showed plans specifically designed for the jumps course near an area called Vortex. He made sure everyone understood that riders would be responsible for maintaining the additions and for keeping an up-to-date maintenance log.

Cross country riders concerned about losing trails to the freeriders concluded that most of those who ride the current "red trails" (technical trails for experienced riders) will still be able to ride the freeride trail, and that IMBA's freeride trail will be a welcome addition to the Santos system.

OGT has partnered with the Ocala Mountain Bike Association (OMBA) and the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) to make the Santos trail system an excellent experience for riders of all skill levels.

Development began December 1. Twenty-one volunteers, some from as far away as Jacksonville and Miami, participated in the first of three volunteer trail workdays. Freeriders will soon have their trails.

If you have questions or comments, please contact OGT at 352-236-7143.



## HEADS UP!

Open "Green" House  
Land Bridge Trailhead at 475A near Ocala  
Friday, February 3, 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM  
Hayrides to the I-75 Land Bridge  
Bring your bike or horse and explore the trails.  
Snacks and drinks provided  
More info: 850-245-2052,  
[FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com)

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## Greenways and Trails Forum for Orlando Area Development Professionals

On November 3, 2005, more than 80 people representing developers, builders, consulting firms, government and non-profit organizations came together at the Greenways and Trails Forum for Orlando Area Development Professionals to focus on trails and greenways as part of development and destination planning. The Office of Greenways & Trails designed the forum to provide an opportunity for interactive discussion and information sharing about:

- Developments that incorporate well-planned and connected trails and greenways.
- The economic and market value of greenways and trails.
- Strategies for expanding the greenways and trails network in the Orlando area.
- Integrating private and public greenways and trails.

"Coordinating the planning efforts of the private sector with public projects is essential to create a regional network of greenways and trails. This forum was a critical step towards forming partnerships to make that network a reality," said Jim Wood, Assistant Director for DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails.

Presented at the Rosen Centre Hotel, the forum brought together developers, landowners, resort operators, greenways and trails experts and regional and national planners to discuss strategies for expanding Central Florida's network of greenways and trails. The speakers showcased examples of developments that incorporate well-planned, connected trails and greenways into the design.

Facilitated discussions were directed toward developing guiding principles, identifying opportunities and constraints, and establishing next steps for the group. The forthcoming Forum Summary Report will highlight the results of these sessions and lay the groundwork for future steps.

A forum overview and presentations can be found at [FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com).



## "Take a Kid Mountain Biking" Day



The Ocala Mountain Biking Association (OMBA) hosted "Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day" in October to introduce kids (and their parents) to the Santos trails on the Cross Florida Greenway.

Local bike shops, fitness centers, an elementary school, and two newspapers helped promote the event. Santos Bike Shop supplied a mechanic, a cooler of sports drinks, and snacks. OGT was on hand to assist with the ride. The day's route—a loop around the John Brown lime rock pit— included a "pit stop" for a hike down to the swamp.

OMBA plans to host another "Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day" next year.

# Blackwater Heritage State Trail

## Trail Extension

In one of many Florida Greenways and Trails Month celebrations, OGT held a ribbon cutting ceremony to open an extension to the state's westernmost rail-trail, the Blackwater Heritage State Trail.

On October 29, about 70 people gathered to celebrate the official opening of the trail's 1.5-mile southern extension at the new trailhead on the corner of Old U.S. 90 and Tar Plant Road in Milton. The 12-foot-wide paved trail now extends for 8.5 miles from Whiting Field Naval Air Station to downtown Milton.



Mack Theatford – President, Blackwater Heritage State Trail CSO  
Bob Cole - Santa Rosa County Commissioner  
Richard Collins - Past President CSO  
Greg Brown - Representing U.S. Senator Mel Martinez  
Greg Evers - Florida Representative  
Lonnie Hawkins - Representing Congressman Jeff Miller  
Guy Thompson - Mayor  
Mike Diano - OGT's Blackwater Heritage State Trail Manager

OGT's Rick Halvorsen, regional trail manager, opened the ceremony with a brief history of the trail, which originally was a 7.1 mile "rails-to-trails" project built on the abandoned railway that went from Whiting Field to downtown Milton.

State Representative Greg Evers and Milton Mayor Guy Thompson attended the ceremony and spoke of the economic, health and recreational benefits the trail provides to the community.

Mike Wolfe, Secretary of the trail's Citizen Support Organization who won a Presidential Award for the amount of volunteer hours he has dedicated to the trail, also attended the ceremony.

The celebration included a bike ride and walk on the new trail extension. For maps, trail descriptions and directions to the Blackwater Heritage State Trail, visit [FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com](http://FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com).

## Trail Ride

Fun and funds were the outcome of the West Florida Wheelmen Bicycle Club's 7th Annual Dr. Fenner McConnell - Matt Wantz Blackwater Heritage Century, one of many Florida Greenways and Trails Month events throughout the state.

Organized in 1992, members are from Escambia County, Florida and Baldwin and Mobile counties in Alabama. Affiliated with the League of American Bicyclists, the non-profit bicycle club organizes the annual event to raise funds for charitable or public service organizations. Last year, the club donated \$2,800 to Baldwin County organizations. The American Cancer Society received the first four years' donations of over \$10,000. This year, the West Florida Wheelmen Bicycle club donated \$2,000 to the Blackwater Heritage State Trail Citizen Support Organization.

The event is held in memory of two deceased club members--Dr. Charles F. McConnell, Medical Examiner for the Northwest District of Florida and Mr. Matt Wantz, Bicycle Shop Manager.



250 registered riders enjoyed the Blackwater Heritage State Trail in the 7th Annual Dr. Fenner McConnell - Matt Wantz Blackwater Heritage Century.

# Boundless Playground opens on the Cross Florida Greenway

OGT has completed construction of a Boundless Playground at the Baseline Road Trailhead just north of County Road 464 on County Road 35 in southeast Ocala.

Barrier free, Boundless Playgrounds enable all children – including those with physical, developmental, cognitive and sensory disabilities – to experience independent, self-directed play.

Playground equipment is sensory rich so children with developmental and sensory disabilities can actively and safely play with their peers without disabilities.

Boundless Playgrounds is the first national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping communities create extraordinary playgrounds where all children, with and without disabilities, can develop essential skills for life as they learn together through play. Visit [BoundlessPlaygrounds.org](http://BoundlessPlaygrounds.org) for more information.



Hannah Price enjoys the new playground.

In February 2003, with his Florida Boundless Playground Initiative, Governor Bush challenged communities to build Boundless Playgrounds throughout the state.

Cross Florida Greenway Voted Best Greenway by *Florida Monthly* Readers in 2005

Blackwater Heritage State Trail Voted Best Trail by *Florida Monthly* Readers in 2005

# 165 Greenways and Trails Month Celebrations!

Another record-breaking hurricane season didn't stop Florida residents and visitors from enjoying the reasons they choose to be here—Florida's natural beauty, temperate climate, and friendly natives. All 67 counties hosted Florida Greenways and Trails Month events. Hiking, biking, paddling, and equestrian events, trail openings, trail clean-ups, and educational programs were included in the 165 Florida Greenways and Trails Month celebrations across the state.

Pinellas County hosted dozens of events, including the Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail's 15th Anniversary celebration.

Mayor for the City of Auburndale, Marvin H. Wiley, signed a proclamation recognizing Florida Greenways and Trails Month. The City of Auburndale supports the Office of Greenways & Trails in efforts to establish a statewide system of greenways and trails and actively participates in Polk County's greenways and trails initiatives.

The Hillsborough River State Park's Spirit of the Woods Outdoor Expo won the award for the best Florida Greenways and Trails Month event. Over 700 participants and numerous partners helped make the day a success.

Events on the Cross Florida Greenway included a "Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day" ride on the Santos trails in Ocala as well as other trail rides. (See page 2.)

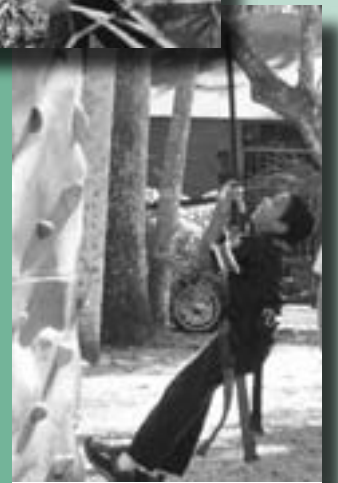
On other state trails, a record breaking 1086 riders participated in the 11th Annual Rails-to-Trails of the Withlacoochee Bike Ride on the Withlacoochee State Trail on October 2. The Blackwater Heritage State Trail was the site of the 7th Annual Dr. Fenner McConnell - Matt Wantz Blackwater Heritage Century Ride on October 1 and an opening celebration for a trail extension on October 29. (See pages 4-5.)



## Hillsborough River State Park is Winner

Congratulations to Hillsborough River State Park for an excellent Florida Greenways and Trails Month event. They were selected as the winner of the Greenways and Trails Month event. Their Spirit of the Woods Outdoor Expo on October 29 drew over 700 visitors.

Partners included local outfitters, state and local governments, public and private agencies, non-profit organizations and volunteers who helped promote the expo's theme—"Playing in Florida, Taking Care of Florida." Environmental education displays, a rock climbing wall, a guided nature walk, a canoe race, s'mores around the campfire, and other activities brought young and old outside to celebrate Florida Greenways and Trails Month.



## Florida State Parks wins the "Gold"

Florida State Parks brought home the gold from the National Recreation and Park Association Congress and Exposition in San Antonio, Texas.

The National Recreation and Parks Association's Gold Medal Award honoring the "Nation's Best State Park Service" is Florida's second, making Florida the first two-time winner.

The Gold Medal honors the nation's outstanding park and recreation agencies for excellence in the field of recreation management. The State Park Award focuses on the achievements of a state park system and its programs providing recreational, educational and leisure services to its citizens.

Florida's state park system is one of the largest in the country with 159 parks spanning more than 723,000 acres and 100 miles of sandy white beach. State park's 1,600 miles of trails include equestrian and multi-use trails and over 1,000 miles for paddling, 350 miles for hiking and 244 miles for biking.

In 2002, Florida's state parks were officially designated as part of Florida's statewide Greenways and Trails System.

For more information about Florida's state parks, visit [www.floridastateparks.org](http://www.floridastateparks.org).



## NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY Helping Hands for America's Lands

On September 24, 2005, nearly 90,000 volunteers participated in National Public Lands Day--the nation's largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance America's public lands.

On the Ocala portion of the Cross Florida Greenway, approximately 70 volunteers showed up to lend a hand.

Volunteer trail work parties included hikers, bikers and equestrians.

Hikers concentrated on cleaning and maintaining the Florida Trail loop between the Land Bridge Trailhead at 475-A and the Land Bridge over I-75.

Bikers continued working to implement the International Mountain Biking Association plan to connect three

intermediate level trails to form one long trail in the Vortex area between 25th Ave. and 95th St. in the Santos biking area.

The equestrians split up into several smaller parties to install new trail signage and clear the trail between Santos and Ross Prairie Campground at SR 200.

After a productive day, the Office of Greenways & Trails staff joined hungry trail workers from all three groups at the Land Bridge Trailhead for a picnic provided by OGT. Much needed trail work was accomplished, volunteers got a chance to show their appreciation for a wonderful trail system and OGT got a chance to let volunteers know how much their work is valued and appreciated.

# Postcard

Converted from a railroad corridor to a trail in 1999, the Van Fleet State Trail provides a view of a wild Florida landscape rapidly shifting from the norm to the rare. Long distance bikers enjoy the 30-mile trail; only five cross-roads slow their pace.

Those who travel at a slower pace find the trail an ideal place for exercising the body as well as the imagination. Those who can't quite imagine the *Orange Blossom Special* can surely smell a nearby citrus grove in bloom or see deer, turtles, alligators, a variety of birds, as well as wildflowers abundant in Green Swamp.



You don't have to be fast to enjoy the General James A. Van Fleet State Trail.



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