

Florida Greenways and Trails Council

Meeting Summary December 3, 2008 Jacksonville, Florida

Members Present

Linda King, Chairman	Jerrie Lindsey
Bob Ballard	Susan Matthews
Jeff Caster	Clay Smallwood
Sara Fain	Bill Thomas
Mike Grella	Joe Tyberghein
Deno Hicks	John Waldron
Susan Kennedy	Kent Wimmer
Phil Laurien	

Alternates Present: Heidi McCree (for Kathryn Starkey), Kevin Porter (for Fred Gaske), Becky Nielsen (for Greg Chelius)

Members Absent: Mike Dannenhauer, Jeff Gove, Ken Reecy

Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Staff: Jena Brooks, Cindy Radford, Mickey Thomason. Via teleconference were: Jim Wood, Heather Pence, Tammy Salmon, Marsha Connell, Matt Klein, Robin Turner.

Others present: Tom Hocter - University of Florida, Thomas Eason – FWCC.

Chair Linda King called the meeting to order.

INTRODUCTIONS

Chair King asked members, alternates and visitors to introduce themselves. Those in the audience included: Jim Muller - Muller & Assoc., Howard Pardue - Fl. Trails Assn., Charlie Houser - Suwannee River WMD, Randy Wilder - Kimley Horn & Assoc., Robert Hutchinson - Alachua Conservation Trust, Kevin White -HDR, Sunshine Bullock - HDR, Tom Johnson - City of Tampa, Jason Burton – FWCC, Bob Mindick - Osceola County.

AGENDA

MOTION: Deno Hicks motioned to move the election of officers for 2009 to come after the Chair Report on the agenda.

SECOND: Bob Ballard

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

CHAIR REPORT

FUTURE MEETING DATE

By majority vote, the next meeting date was set for February 19, 2009 in Tallahassee.

ELECTION OF 2009 OFFICERS

MOTION: Deno Hicks motioned for the 2008 officers to be retained.

SECOND: Bob Ballard

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

OGT REPORT

OVERVIEW OF ACQUISITION WORKPLAN

Following up from the September meeting, Cindy Radford informed the council that the rules do not give OGT or the Council authority to remove or reassign projects on the list. However, Ms. Radford reorganized the layout of the workplan to display stalled projects in a separate space on the workplan, with no funding earmarked for them, and with an explanation as to why they aren't being actively worked on at this time.

Kent Wimmer inquired as to why the Blackwater Creek/Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) Connector was part of this group of projects. Ms. Radford explained that since funding partners could not be obtained per the original decision when adopted, the US Forest Service and DEP are in negotiations on how to proceed. Until that is resolved, OGT is not in a position to move forward. Mr. Wimmer and Ms. Radford discussed the Florida Trail Association proceeding with the appraisal.

Mike Grella asked about the Bagdad Heritage Trail. Ms. Radford said the original acquisition agreement was conditional upon permission from CSX to cross over their property. That permission has not yet been obtained.

OGT staff explained how and why some projects are being worked on while others are not and the conditions wherein those projects may shift to actively being worked.

ECOLOGICAL GREENWAYS NETWORK MAP

Dr. Tom Hctor, Director of the Center for Landscape & Conservation Planning at the University of Florida, explained the history of the Ecological Greenways Network Map and the two new data layers being added to the updated prioritization of the network. His presentation was for the Council to consider adoption of this revised map as part of the official greenways program plan.

Dr. Hoctor explained that the Ecological Greenways Network Map is part of the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project (CLIP). CLIP is a Century Commission project. The Century Commission is charged with looking at current trends, trying to predict future possibilities, and then to develop recommendations that would help lead Florida to a more sustainable future. CLIP was created to figure out where those areas most important for conserving the state's natural resources and ecosystems are located. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) at the University of Florida was retained along with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) to develop the CLIP database. CLIP incorporates nearly two decades of GIS data into one database of three primary categories: biodiversity, landscapes, and surface water. Each category has hierarchical levels. The Ecological Greenways Network is in the landscape category. It is also used by the Acquisition & Restoration Council (ARC) in the Florida Forever needs assessment process to evaluate Florida Forever projects.

Initially there were six priority levels. From the top two levels, two new levels were created for a total of eight. Within the top Priority Level 1 (critical linkages), a new level was extracted and the same within the original top Priority Level 2, a level of most importance in that category was created. These two new levels were moved to the top of the priority list and referred to as strategic linkages. The eight priority levels are now as follows:

- 1) Strategic Linkages 1 – critical for completing a connection. They have high ecological significance and threat of development
- 2) Strategic Linkages 2 – critical for completing a connection. Combined with SL1, would complete a statewide ecological network containing the most important large intact areas and best connection possibilities
- 3) Priority 1 –the remaining areas not included within Strategic Linkages 1
- 4) Priority 2 – the remaining areas not included within Strategic Linkages 2
- 5) Priority 3 – providing significant alternate routes to higher priority linkages
- 6) Priority 4 – mostly providing riparian corridors
- 7) Priority 5 – provide regionally significant opportunities to protect large intact areas
- 8) Priority 6 – all other areas that support a statewide ecological network.

Dr. Hoctor said this final draft report is available on the Century Commission website with a GIS data viewer in order to zoom in to specific points of interest.

In summary, he stated that no new conservation areas have been added to this update. The changes were extracting the most critical and separating them into two new levels, and reorganizing content. Jena Brooks added that CLIP and the Ecological Greenways Network Map are assessment tools for OGT.

MOTION: Susan Kennedy moved to adopt the updated Florida Ecological Greenways Network Map (FEGN).

SECOND: Jerrie Lindsey

VOTE: motion carries by a unanimous voice vote.

John Waldron asked that the Council invite Tom Hocter back for a workshop to provide more detail and understanding for the members.

CONSERVATION BLUEPRINT PRESENTATION

Dr. Thomas Eason, the Conservation Initiatives Coordinator with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), explained the FWC report entitled “Wildlife 2060: What’s at Stake for Wildlife”. According to estimates in the report, if 18 million new people come to Florida and development continues at the current rate, an additional 7 million acres of habitat will be destroyed. That is an area larger than the state of Vermont. Additionally, development is causing fragmentation and isolation of habitats. Therefore, the net effect may be double that acreage. The report shows that there are existing efforts to re-shape the direction Florida has been going for the past 30 years. Exerting influence and control over this direction will help preserve Florida. One effort underway is the Cooperative Conservation Blueprint.

The blueprint is a plan to create the future Florida that everyone desires, versus allowing the forecasted future as it will look if a planned, unified vision is not created. The blueprint’s elements include the map provided by CLIP which combines the commonalities of multiple conservation needs assessments into one source; making this source available and accessible to everyone to use; and, providing a variety of incentives to private landowners.

Dr. Eason displayed a map showing existing publicly owned conservation lands along with high priority private lands.

After Dr. Eason’s presentation, Kent Wimmer asked if OGT could discuss recreation and trails with the Century Commission (responsible for the CLIP project) or be involved in one of the committees of the Cooperative Conservation Blueprint. Jena Brooks responded that that would be something good for OGT to participate in.

FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL UPDATE

Howard Pardue with the Florida Trail Association gave an overview of the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The FNST is designated by Congress as one of only eight national scenic trails. It is recognized in state statute as Florida’s statewide non-motorized trail. In 2000, the original 20-mile wide corridor running from the Everglades to Gulf Islands National Seashore was narrowed and became known as the Preferred Routing Study. This Council adopted the preferred route as the state’s Hiking Trail Opportunity Map. A revision to the Preferred Routing Study has been done and will be presented to the Council at the next meeting in February 2009 for adoption as the revised Hiking Trail Opportunity Map.

Mr. Pardue stated that there are few significant changes in the route of the trail. However, there are a few areas where uncertainty remains. One of them is the Kissimmee River area where river restoration may flood some public lands. Other areas of uncertainty involve Bay County and Washington County, and the complicated central Florida area around Osceola, Orange, Polk and

Lake counties where urbanization and submerged lands are obstacles. To resolve this issue, they may look at the characterization of the trail instead of the natural wilderness corridor FTA normally aims to create. He added that flexibility will be built into the map the council members see to accommodate any alternative lines needed for the same connectivity. Since 2000, approximately 95 miles of gaps have been filled in the trail.

DESIGNATIONS

At the previous meeting, the council asked for a more comprehensive view of where each proposed designation fit into the overall system. Heather Pence with OGT prepared that information for each proposal. Representatives were present for each designation to answer questions. Jena Brooks presented each proposal to the members for a vote. The properties are:

Bayshore Linear Greenway - Pinellas County

MOTION Deno Hicks moved to approve the designation.

SECOND Mike Grella

VOTE Motion carries by unanimous voice vote

Shingle Creek Regional Park – City of Kissimmee and Osceola County

MOTION Susan Kennedy moved to approve

SECOND Deno Hicks

VOTE Motion carries unanimously

Shingle Creek Paddling Trail – City of Kissimmee and Osceola County

MOTION Kent Wimmer moved to approve

SECOND Susan Kennedy

VOTE Motion carries unanimously

Potano Paddling Trail – Alachua County

MOTION Kent Wimmer moved to approve

SECOND Mike Grella

VOTE Motion carries unanimously

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jena Brooks invited the council members to attend the Cabinet meeting on December 9, 2008 where OGT will be recognized with a resolution in honor of being named the Best Trails State in America for 2008. She thanked the council for their support and stressed that partnerships are key in OGT's work.

Ms. Brooks and Bob Ballard gave an update on the Progress Energy matters that were discussed at the previous meeting and announced a slight postponement in going before the Cabinet.

Kent Wimmer complimented OGT on establishing talks with Norfolk Southern. Ms. Brooks invited members to participate in the discussions.

Jim Wood mentioned three additional awards were given out at the American Trails award banquet in Little Rock in November, 2008. Linda Crider received the Florida Trail Advocate award for her integration of trails as part of Bike Florida. Renee Blaney received the Florida Trail Worker award for her work on the Santos Trail. The third award went to Lakewood Ranch in the Sarasota/Bradenton area as one of three recipients of the newly created American Trails Developer award.

Bob Ballard thanked Jena Brooks and Jim Wood for their work to help Florida win the Best Trails State award. Ms. Brooks thanked Ken Bryan with the Rails to Trails Conservancy for nominating OGT.

John Waldron announced several advancements in establishing off-highway vehicle recreation areas: the successful purchase in the Blackwater Creek area around Whiting Field for an off-highway vehicle park, one being built by Baker County, and funding given for one in Polk County. He mentioned a special workshop on January 14, 2009 for a ten county area in South Florida to address needs for an off-highway vehicle trail system. Jena Brooks said the Recreational Trails Program housed within OGT would be a good funding source for such efforts.

Bob Mindick, Osceola County public lands manager, informed the council of progress being made on Shingle Creek, including a nature center, and thanked OGT and the Council for their support.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION Bill Thomas

SECOND Susan Kennedy

The meeting adjourned at 11:30am.