



## **Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition**

Inaugural Meeting

21 September 2010

Goodwood Historical Home & Gardens, Tallahassee, Florida

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### **Agenda**

- Welcome and agenda overview
- Coalition member introductions and trail segment description
- FNST history and overview
- Coalition purpose, role, and responsibilities
- Proposed FNST planning process
- Summary, next steps, closing remarks

### **Coalition Participants**

#### **FDACS - Division of Forestry**

John Waldron, Forest Recreation Coordinator – The FNST runs through six State Forests. John has been involved in Florida outdoor recreation for 37 years and is working to form an Outdoor Recreation Coalition.

#### **FDEP - Division of Recreation and Parks**

Albert Gregory, Chief, Office of Park Planning – Represented at this meeting by Lew Scruggs whose department oversees the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and is currently working to make this plan part of an online, searchable GIS database. The FNST runs through eight State parks.

#### **FDEP - Office of Greenways and Trails**

Jena Brooks, Director – The Office of Greenways and Trails manages 110 miles of FNST and markets the trail as one of our State's largest attractions. Jena has been working to bring planning, acquisition, and promotion of recreation to the public through the new Visit Florida Trails website. Jena was accompanied by Jim Wood and Mickey Thompson.

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

Jerrie Lindsey, Director of Recreation Services – represented by Rich Noyes who brings an understanding of County level recreation issues as well as land and facilities planning expertise to the coalition table. Rich was accompanied by Liz Sparks.

**Florida Trail Association, Inc.**

Pete Durnell, Board President and Volunteer – The Florida Trail Association manages the volunteer trail builders and maintainers through their 5,000 strong memberships, of which 10% are considered active trail maintainers. The FTA also coordinates resources, training, and outreach for the FNST. Pete was accompanied by Kent Wimmer.

**Get Outdoors Florida**

Bob Wattendorf, FWC, Chairman of Get Outdoors Florida – represented by Robin Will, USDI Fish and Wildlife. The Get Outdoors Florida coalition represents an array of public and private partners that include federal and state land managers, state conservation, health and education agencies, educators, non-profits, and local businesses.

**Northwest Florida Water Management District**

Bill Cleckley, Director, Division of Land Management and Acquisition – the District owns 140,000 acres of public land for resource management and 14 miles of FNST within these lands. Bill brings deep knowledge of the panhandle and acquisition opportunities to the Coalition in its pursuit of completing of the FNST.

**Plum Creek Timber Company**

Greg Galpin, Senior Land Asset Manager – While only 5 miles of trail lie within the Plum Creek Timber Company lands, Plum Creek feels strongly about private business ties with conservation and recreation initiatives and hopes to act as an example for other private partners. Greg was accompanied by Charlie Dunn.

**Seminole County**

Julia Thompson, Manager, Parks and Recreation Division – Nearly 40 miles of FNST lie within Seminole County. Julia brings years of park and recreation management experience to the Coalition and is also on the Board of the Florida Recreation and Parks Association as well as the Florida Trail Association.

**University of Florida**

Taylor Stein, Associate Professor, School of Forest Research and Conservation – Taylor has worked with the FNST for nearly 7 years gathering trail user data and can provide great insight into the users of the trail and the type of recreational experience they desire.

**USAF-Eglin Air force Base**

Jesse Borthwick, Director, Range and Airspace Sustainment – While serving the primary mission of managing resources for national defense purposes, Eglin Air Force base has approximately 2/3 of its land mass open to recreation. Jesse has many years of experience as a planner in Northwest Florida and has worked on the Northwest Florida Greenway.

**USDA - Forest Service**

Susan Jeheber-Matthews, Supervisor, National Forests in Florida.

**USDI - Fish and Wildlife Service**

James Burnett, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Manager – represented by Chris Weber.

**USDI - National Park Service**

Ed Clark, Chief Park Ranger – Unable to attend this meeting.

***Additional Meeting Participants***

Andrew Dziobek – USFS, Engineering and Recreation Program Manager

Dan McKeague – USFS, Lands and Natural Resource Specialist

Jim Schmid – USFS, Trails manager and FNST interim manager

Jim Twaroski – Interim FNST trails manager

Megan Eno – USFS, Partnership Coordinator

Shelli Bischoff-Turner – Consultant and Meeting Facilitator, Conservation Impact

## **Overview of the FNST**

### ***Summary***

The USFS presented a history of the FNST. Participants agreed that FNST is a unique resource that should be promoted as an asset to residents and tourists of Florida, with an emphasis on encouraging young people to get outdoors.

The National Scenic Trail designation indicates trail use must be non-motorized, but it is a common misperception that the FNST is a footpath only. People spoke of the broadened recreation opportunities.

People talked about the diversity of uses. They began to talk holistically about the FNST and how their piece fit into the whole (like beads on a necklace).

There was discussion about partnerships, collaboration, and working with the resources that are already available, as well as bringing in new resources - private and public.

Much of the conversation focused on encouraging youth to engage in the outdoors - to use and appreciate the FNST and other outdoor amenities.

The discussion ended with a reminder about the importance of closing the gaps of the FNST and completing the Trail.

### ***Transcripts***

*Note: these are abridged versions of the comments*

- FL has one of the premier land acquisition programs in the country
- Need to involve private sector resources, such as outfitters
- Pay attention to interpretive resources
- Aging membership (of FTA) – we need to involve other generations, and it needs to be an important part of future plans and activities
- Consider tourism and bringing other people to use the trail - utilize Visit FL to promote the trail
- Important that FNST is a multi-use, non-motorized trail
- Broaden opportunities to look at multiple uses; most, but not all, uses are compatible with the resource
- Provide a spectrum of experiences - not all the same
- FL Greenways uses zoning areas, same can be done for the Trail
- Consider the differences between urban / rural - use exercise / education / different recreational experiences

- Imperative to have accessibility
- Diversity in recreation management has been an issue for decades
- Recreation opportunity – indicators and standards along the spectrum of desired experiences
- One thing that is missing – how do we partner with other properties that are part of FNST?
- The trail like a necklace and each property is a gem on the necklace - what else is available?
- Need a joint promotion
- Most of us have guides for our individual properties
- Need the overall piece and then the atlas of the other pieces
- It would help to look at multiple uses - some cannot occur on FNST but could occur elsewhere
- See also the gateway community program - full partner and identify all the amenities
- How do we get the youth involved in using the trail? This needs to occur on an aggressive level – get involvement and classes. The education sector? Adopt a trail section?
- Parks and recreation departments and boy scouts are becoming associate members of FTA. Yes!
- Tourism, education, youth-serving organizations, and college kids want something to do. Have a trail for every classroom, summer program for kids, and youth listening sessions.
- Citizenry be more informed about open space. Get grants for youth programs.
- How to take advantage of asset?
- Economic and natural value
- Leveraging the opportunity
- Informing the next generation and their values
- From acquisition to education
- Get youth back out into the wilderness
- We need to close the gaps in the trail – must effectively work together
- Work with green companies

### **Roles and Responsibilities of the Coalition**

#### ***Summary***

USFS and Conservation Impact presented the background and purpose of the FNST Coalition.

Conservation Impact outlined the proposed planning process. People agree that we need a plan to guide development, management, and promotion; to create a clearer identity for the Trail; and to help define it as a whole.

There was discussion about the data gathering and analysis phase of the planning process, as well as the type of data that is currently available. USFS will create a central location for the data. There will be a pre-planning meeting to review and analyze the data.

The group focused on marketing and promotion of FNST and was interested in the user studies assembled by the University of Florida. The format of the completed plan should be used as a public promotional piece to build the FNST brand and attract investment.

### ***Transcripts***

*Note: these are abridged versions of the comments*

- Need an overriding theme for FNST - define the overall look and continuity of the whole thing
- Identity of FNST is important
- Data is not collected centrally - define the data we need
- Office of Greenways and Trails did corridor studies (stories?)
- Opportunity maps with corridors
- There is a data base of State trails
- Facilities of Florida Greenways and Trails – first projects?
- Use expertise of the other National Scenic Trails and their strategic plans.
- Use trail conference as an information resource
- How do we educate everyone else?
- How do we use it for what we are doing? Not just an isolated planning
- We have regional planners around the state (Florida Greenways and Trails)
- Pull in other people to help with marketing: VisitFL website? SCORP?
- Marketing of the trail with newsletter and databases - work with counties
- Public relations: press conferences, elected official involvement, and executive summary
- Use public comment meetings for marketing vehicles
- Set up a location to centralize the data and share with the subject matter experts ahead of time
- It might be useful to have thematic groups for the data
- All the land management agencies have management plans. They will show what information is already publicly available
- Facilities, historic resources, and data layers
- FNST has a GIS person who can incorporate all the data
- How to complete, market, and sustain Trail?
- How do we get stewards to host trail events?
- How do we manage certain areas, and how do we deal with specific issues?
- After the planning process, we can discuss priorities and where to focus resources
- We need a big picture so we collect data based on the plan to fill the gaps

## **Closing Comments**

### ***Transcripts***

*Note: these are abridged versions of the comments*

- Nice to see everyone around the same table and on the same page
- Expect creativity and thinking outside the box – can't just tell people the trail is cool
- Having a consolidated, identified trail would be great
- When leading volunteers, it can be challenging to get them working in same direction – the plan and vision needs to convert to the volunteers making it happen
- It is great to meet our counterparts in other agencies
- Need to send proceedings so we can network
- Cool that we have an FNST system and so many resources to create this – it is multiple use!
- A plan that gives direction and time is desirable - a model that can be used with other recreational uses
- Psyched to have the momentum to assemble this group of people and to focus on efforts to get people outdoors!
- Hope we can build a great picture and everyone can find the information to bring them to the outdoors
- Trails and recreation always drop to the bottom because people don't see direct value. We all get it but have to get other people on board. The Coalition will help accomplish that
- We think the Visit FL website will help a lot
- Integrating uses – not just a hiking trail – it will benefit the entire state
- Cross-users are people who use the trail for many purposes
- The health benefits of outdoor activity are part of the larger picture. We have to tie it together
- I want to say we have the best NST in the nation, and no one else can compete! This is an incredible resource
- Getting word out on value is important
- Refreshing to see this as a short segment (a mountain bike trail on an ecologically sensitive area). We looked at numbers and how people were using the trail. The data were used to not build another trail for mountain bikers. We just did a shared use segment, and it will be important to see how it progresses. It makes sense to be multi use - FNST has to pull all the groups together.
- Land and resources and the trail have to come together – can't force the trail in an area for the connector
- Looking forward to re-examining some of the connectors
- Long distance trails – the vistas and experiences should include more than just a road walk
- The Coalition must be a sustainable partnership

- Needs a central website
- Efficient use of partners – a huge difference since 1988- and getting Outdoors FL would be a good partner
- Vision is creating a new generation of stewards
- How are the trails on our lands used - sometimes to get from a to b
- We need to better utilize the trails
- Others, like Plum Creek, might look to us. If we do it, others will follow suit
- Love affair with the FNST- from a recreational standpoint
- Great to feel energy and synergy to create and sustain this for Florida is fabulous!
- Encouraged to think outside of the box – to think about how we use the trail and how to sustain and enhance long term
- Economic evaluation is really important. We have to do a good job on that and how to place values
- Branding and advertising is important
- As an example, FTA is best organization in the state! We are all volunteer, and we get requests on lots of lands.
- FTA to get more creative in how to get message across and how to do business – need to look at how to get dollars
- Because of limited acquisition dollars, the challenge is how to close the gaps. We need to build relationships with landowners to get them together and figure out how put trail on their property
- Show it is successful
- Expectation for the group – will get a good analysis and advice with so much experience and expertise
- The coalition approach is right on!
- Hope that finishing the trail is the top priority
- A long time and a new strategy are needed to get the missing pieces taken care of
- We all need to focus on how to get younger people and minorities into the national areas – they won't be preserved if they're not loved
- FNST is a great key to getting people to love the outdoors – we need to market to wider and broader audience
- This is the partnership model that we need
- This is the best National Scenic Trail– they know they are on the trail and will have a sense of being on something bigger than themselves