



## **Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition**

Meeting Summary

7 December 2011

Mission San Luis, Tallahassee, Florida

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### **Mission of Coalition**

*The USFS and its partners work to complete, protect, maintain, and promote the FNST as a distinct Florida recreational asset and to ensure an optimum, nationally significant recreation experience.*

### **Purpose of Meeting**

The meeting is to introduce the final Strategic Plan to the entire Coalition for review and comment, review current projects on the FNST and to set a calendar of 2012 Coalition meetings.

### **Overview of Meeting**

#### ***Strategic Plan***

The Florida National Scenic Trail 5-Year Strategic Plan strives to guide the USFS, FTA, and FNST Coalition in a more coordinated, comprehensive, and deliberate approach to completing, developing, managing, and promoting the FNST. The Plan includes a five year vision and presents four goals, with accompanying strategies, to help prioritize resource allocation in their accomplishment.

The plan is anchored in the FNST Coalition's desire to provide a memorable, safe, and accessible "optimum experience" on the Trail. This is possible by focusing on these four goal areas of the plan: completion, standards, partnerships, and promotion.

Coalition members praised the Strategic Plan and recognized its value in fostering discussions with their constituents, complimenting their existing management plans, and in justifying and attracting new resources.

Suggested improvements to the Plan included:

1. Enlarge the map
2. Add a date
3. Put website more prominently on back cover

4. Create a video or PowerPoint to ensure consistent presentations
5. Provide multiple copies to Coalition partners when the Plan is printed in early 2012.

### ***Steering Committee Issue Deliberation***

The steering committee raised issues they deemed important to address prior to implementing the Plan, mainly designation of FNST termini and concentration on a single, continuous route.

Terminus criteria discussed:

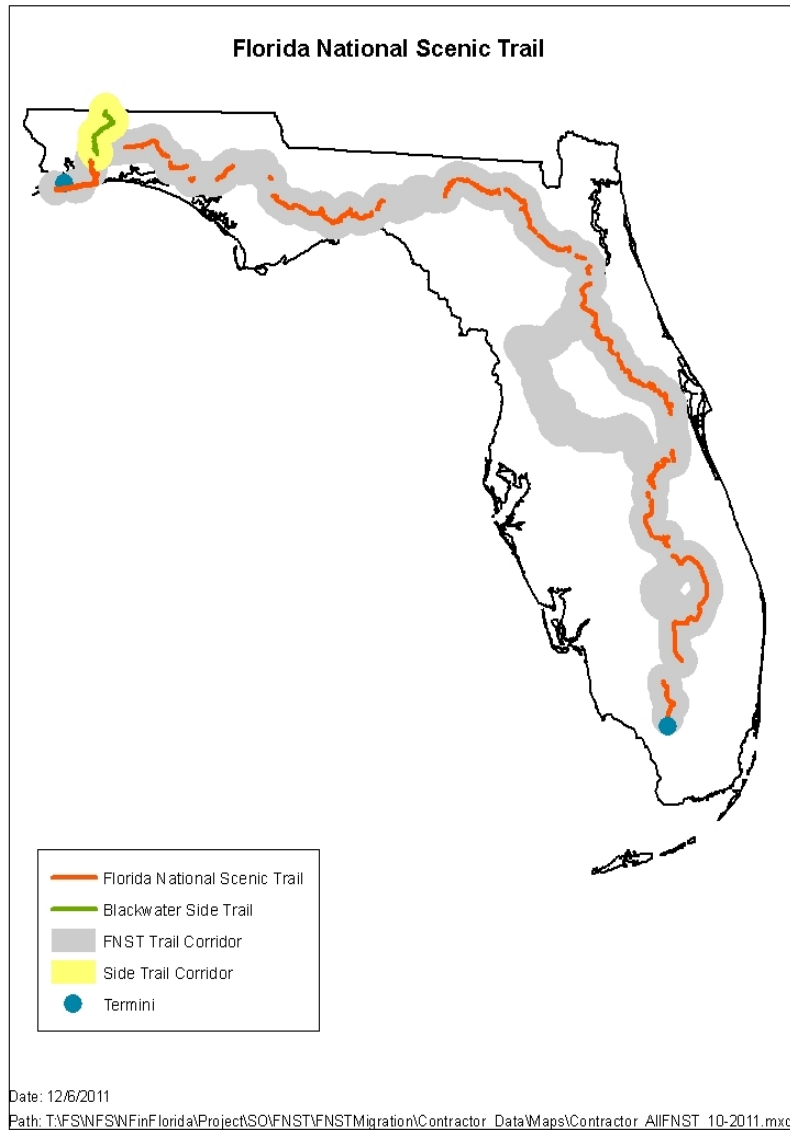
1. Locate to offer convenient public access
2. Provide secure parking for hikers/campers on extended trips
3. Have public facilities which also provide maps and information
4. Maintain a registration system to track users

Terminus location suggestions and comments:

1. Recommend designating the Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center as the FNST northern terminus
2. Recommend moving the FNST southern terminus to the Oasis Visitor Center
3. Land managers at each site agree
4. Coalition members commend the criteria and process

Single corridor concerns:

1. Amount of public land and length of FNST on these lands
2. Determine length of gaps and likelihood of public access
3. Major obstacles include river crossings and highway interruptions
4. Could better maintain registration system to track users
5. Represent quality of the natural, unique landscapes
6. History of land management and current commitment of managers
7. History and current strength of volunteer involvement and leadership along each route



### ***Implementing the Plan***

The USFS is committed to trail improvements both on and off the Forest System lands. They presented three projects on which they are currently working in an effort to begin implementation of the Plan, to demonstrate best practices, and to provide models of the optimum experience:

1. **Ocala Trail Assessment Project**, this assessment will help develop a comprehensive picture of the state of the trail and will provide insight into how to more effectively manage and maintain the trail in that section as a whole (to move away from the current “piecemeal” maintenance methods). Twelve trail segments were reviewed to determine their needs and priorities in addition to the four classes of maintenance required, routing,

addition, and obliteration. This information will be used to prioritize volunteer and agency resources in maintaining the Trail in the Ocala, ensuring that if only a handful of work days are possible they are spent in the area of greatest need.

2. **Big Cypress Trail Alignment**, BCNP has several core issues of interest to the Trail. The area has a history of ORV trails, and it has become necessity to realign the trail to avoid conflicts of with use and terrain, a current prescribed burn cycle of every 3 – 5 years frequently damages blazing and signage causing an increase in hiker rescue efforts, and finally, a recent fatality and subsequent lawsuit on the trail truly highlights the need for clarity regarding trail access, conditions, sign and communication plans across the state. BCNP, FS and FTA will engage in a trail re-alignment process in 2012- 2013 and ultimately address these issues.
3. **St. Marks Trail and Volunteer Assessment**, the Wildlife Refuge has expressed interest in more standardized signage and maintenance criteria. Recognizing that the Coalition will be reviewing trail standards this year the Refuge in partnership with the USFS has undertaken an end-to-end assessment, much like the Ocala NF assessment, and is including a volunteer and agency capacity assessment to maintain the trail with existing resources. Once the trail standards are established, this assessment will provide direction, based on the current conditions and capacity, as to how we bring the trail to standard and maintain it as such.

### ***Project Priorities***

The Plan and assessments will help to define project priorities to allocate staff, volunteers and resources. In Spring of 2012 the USFS will be issuing a request for projects to all land managers. Project list will be presented to Coalition at the June meeting.

The Coalition brainstormed the criteria for project prioritization:

- Balance between ongoing vs. new
- Contribution to safety
- Brings the Trail to standard
- Based on Plan goals and strategies
- Segment usage/ popularity
- Available resources and partner involvement
- Commitment to ongoing maintenance – particularly for new segments
- Affords multiple uses- i.e. recreation and outreach or education

A great deal of discussion centered around the need for standardized designs for common structures for land managers including bridges and boardwalks.

### Other Suggestions

- Do a matrix of segments and priorities i.e. maintenance, development, signage etc.
- Better coordination and sharing of resources between land managers
- Use GIS and website to communicate information about standards and assessment by standards
- Web could be used to coordinate events; groups; programs

### ***Task Committees***

Two discussion groups were formed around the Trail Standards and Volunteers goals within the Strategic Plan. The group brainstormed the following issues for consideration by each committee who will report back to the Coalition in June, bringing an pre-work to the Steering Committee in April.

### Trail Standards

- Signing and blazing as the most important standards; also important to safety
- Signage might include lat/long and logo
- Distinguish between FNST and Florida Trail
- Utilization of technology – QR codes including trail conditions and weather updates
- Blazes need attention- standardization, frequency, training for applicators
- Interpretive information – what information and where
- Communication of diverse uses on Trail segments
- Trailheads have to be standardized, parking, facilities, information- what is a trailhead, what is a parking area?
- ADA standards
- Be sure you have some standards that run across all classes – spectrum concept
- KEEP IT SIMPLE- there is no need for more than 10 categories for each class to communicate across the spectrum of resources and experience

Suggested Members of this Committee: Trail: John Waldron- FLORC, James Burnett or Chris Weber- St. Marks, Carlos Schomaker- FTA, Jim Wood- Greenways and Trails (Chris)

### Volunteers

- Define flow of volunteers- system or process
- All of us have volunteer program, could we share training? Need to have consistent training and all know the same thing
- Clarity of role of the Florida Trail Association
- Jurisdiction over volunteers
- Performance management to ensure quality and consistency of work
- How to communicate volunteer-ready projects and how to share volunteers if no projects available when interested volunteers call
- Retention: recognition, care and feeding
- Recruitment: particularly younger and more diverse
- Need different classifications of volunteer work for different skill/ interest level
- Delineate what is a volunteer job vs. not a volunteer job; not just economics because want to get people on the trail
- What does it mean to be a volunteer on the FNST (FNST certified?)
- Other sources: corporate, groups, military

Suggested Members of this committee: Carlos Schomaker-FTA, Lauren – State Forests, Bob Wattendorf-Get Outdoors Florida, Al Gregory – State Parks

### **Closing Comments**

- The USFS GIS web – accessible to land managers to get information about their segments – current and accurate (dates and tags).
- Do names / addresses/ phone list of new coalition participants.
- Send any corrections on plan by next week.
- Create presentation materials (video) of the plan so presentations are consistent.
- Process and criteria defined for project requests.
- Partners to submit project requests.
- Continued assessments on USFS segments.
- Form trail committee and form volunteer committee.

### **2012 Meeting Calendar**

- April 20 (Friday) Steering Committee Meeting
- June 6 (Wednesday) FNST Coalition Meeting
- July 13 (Friday) Steering Committee Meeting
- November 9 (Friday) Steering Committee Meeting
- January 23 (Wednesday), 2013 FNST Coalition Meeting

### **June 6, 2012 Coalition Meeting Agenda** (proposed based on these notes)

Update

Plan distribution and response

Trail Standards Committee recommendations

Volunteer Committee recommendations

Case study presentation

Project prioritization

Coordination and implementation

Next Steps