

A Visitor Assessment of Florida National Scenic Trail Visitors on Greenways in Florida



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Introduction to the Project

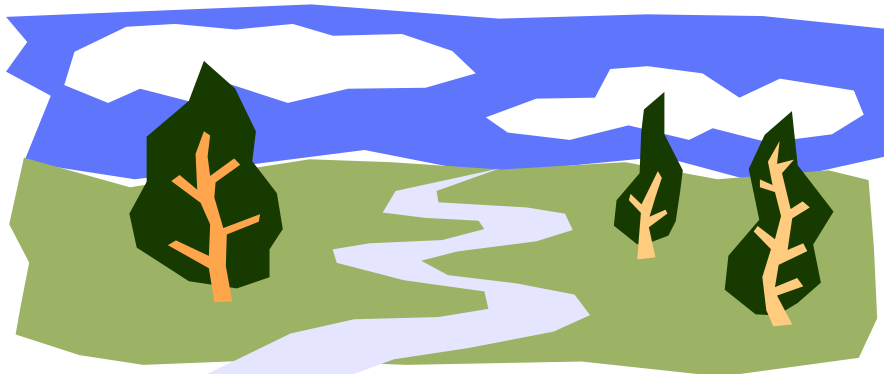
From the summer of 2003 through the summer of 2008, researchers from the University of Florida studied visitors on the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The Trail traverses almost the whole state from Pensacola to Big Cypress National Preserve. Researchers studied visitors to the Trail on public lands throughout the state with the cooperation of every type of public land agency. This includes the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida State Parks, Florida Greenways, and Florida's water management districts (Northwest Florida, Suwannee River, St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida).

The project consisted of two main parts: to count visitors and to understand who they are and why they use the Trail. In order to count visitors, mechanical counters (either infrared or pressure sensitive pads) were placed along the FNST near trailheads. This gave researchers 24 hour monitoring capabilities. Each site had a counter installed for one or more years, so seasonal fluctuations could be studied.

The data were analyzed monthly and cleaned to correct for counts triggered by wildlife or meteorological events. This produced fairly reliable counts for each section of the Trail that was monitored. In some instances, counters were not installed. Instead, different sampling strategies were used that included visual monitoring, permits, and other strategies.

A questionnaire was also administered to better understand the recreation habits and motivations of visitors to the FNST. Trained surveyors questioned visitors about their demographics, desired experiences, satisfaction, and other recreation activities involved in while on the Trail. This portion of the study was also completed in areas all over the State and on lands representing all the different types of land management agencies in Florida.

The following report is a summary of the results of the visitor counts for all of the Greenways where the study was conducted. Hopefully, this report will help the Greenways personnel better understand the recreation habits of visitors to their lands.



Cross Florida Greenway

2007-2008 Use

- Counter type
 - Rodman East: Diamond Traffic Eye
 - Rodman West: Diamond Traffic Eye
 - Santos: Diamond Traffic Eye
 - Land Bridge: Diamond Traffic Eye
- Counter related problems and solutions
 - Counters at Santos have been performing inconsistently. Since this counter belonged to CFG, we only

recommended CFG to replace the counter.

- Trail conditions throughout the year
 - Trail condition over CFG was generally very good throughout the year.
 - Severe storm in July 2008 caused fallen trees along the portion trail of Santos and may cause traversing the trail difficult. The trail was cleared very quickly.

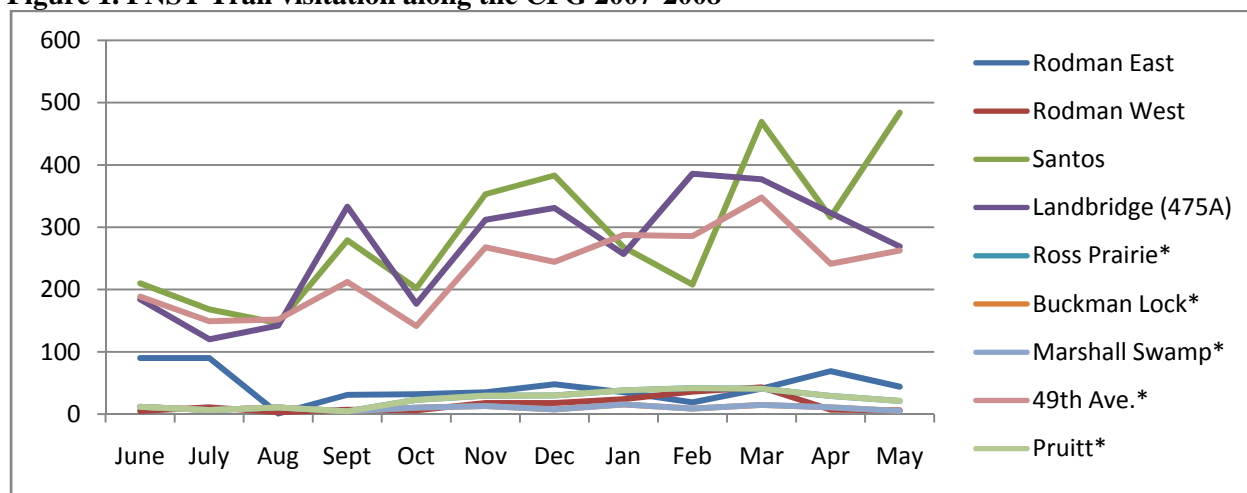
Table 1. FNST Trail visitation along the CFG 2007-2008

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug.	Sept	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
Rodman East	90	90	1	31	32	35	48	35	19	41	69	44	535
Rodman West	5	11	3	7	6	18	18	24	36	43	7	6	184
Santos	210	168	146	279	202	353	383	268	208	469	316	484	3,486
Landbridge (475A)	184	120	142	333	177	312	331	257	386	377	323	269	3,211
Baseline/ 64th St.^a													24,554
Ross Prairie[*]	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Buckman Lock[*]	12	7	11	5	10	13	8	16	9	15	11	5	119
Marshall Swamp[*]	12	7	11	5	10	13	8	16	9	15	11	5	119
49th Ave.[*]	189	149	152	212	142	268	244	288	286	348	242	263	2,781
Pruitt[*]	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Monthly Totals	725	564	486	880	625	1,071	1,100	979	1,036	1,389	1,037	1,118	35,562

^a Access Point is multiple use (Foot traffic = 14,089; Other traffic =10,465).

Due to the sampling strategy used, monthly totals are not available and only the annual estimate is reported.

^{*} Estimate calculated from access point averages.

Figure 1. FNST Trail visitation along the CFG 2007-2008

* Estimate calculated from access point averages

Questionnaire Results

(n=54)

Access Points Surveyed

- Baseline
- 64th Street

Socio-Demographics

- 54% of respondents were female
- 85% of respondents were married
- 44% of respondents had a college degree or beyond
- 52% of respondents were retired
- 52% of respondents were 60 years or older
- 83% of respondents were white
- 31% of respondents reported an annual household income of \$50,000 - \$59,999 annually
- 86% of respondents lived within 30 miles of the trail

Trip Characteristics

- 89% of visitors have been to the site before
- 63% of visitors had visited the trail 12 or more times in the past year
- 72% of visitors spend an hour or less on the trail
- 35% of visitors hike/walk 1-2 miles during their visit

- 49% of visitors report a 10 out of 10 for their experience that day
- 63% of visitors stated that hiking/walking was their primary activity
- 42% of visitors stated that viewing scenery was their secondary activity
- 39% of visitors visited the trail alone

Motivations

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| • Enjoy Nature | mean = 2.97 |
| • Escape | mean = 2.91 |
| • Promote Fitness | mean = 2.82 |
| • Reduce Stress | mean = 2.82 |

Destination Attractors & Settings

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| • The trail was close to their home | mean = 2.95 |
| • Good environmental quality of air, water and soil | mean = 2.93 |
| • Wilderness and undisturbed nature | mean = 2.82 |
| • Paved Trails | mean = 2.40 |
| • Loop Trails | mean = 2.46 |
| • Contact w/fewer than 6 groups | mean = 2.60 |
| • Travel in areas that are modified but appear natural | mean = 2.71 |

Withlacoochee State Trail

2005-2006 Use

The Withlacoochee State Forest received an estimated 17,403 visitors to the FNST in 2005-2006. The majority (11,516) of these visitors (66%) were bikers or users other than hikers on the Withlacoochee State Rail-to-Trail. The Withlacoochee Rail-Trail runs through and

adjacent to the Withlacoochee State Forest. Researchers conducted observation periods during which the Rail-Trail was visually monitored.. The resulting annual use estimates for the Rail-Trail are reported below (the counts for the Withlacoochee State Forest are reported in a separate publication).

Table 2: Annual use estimate of the Florida Trail along the Withlacoochee State Trail

Use Type	Use Estimate
`Withlacoochee Rail-Trail Foot Traffic	2,509
`Withlacoochee Rail-Trail Other Traffic	11,516
TOTAL USE	14,025

` Withlacoochee RT is an observation site that was not monitored monthly, so only annual data is given.

Questionnaire Results

(n = 25) [Sample includes both Rail-Trail and Withlacoochee State Forest visitors]

Use History & Knowledge

- 60% of the participants knew they were hiking on the FNST
- 72% of the participants had hiked this section of the FNST before
- 80% of returning visitors have visited the trail more than 12 times in the past year

Participant Trip Characteristics

- 68% of visitors did enter and exit from the same trailhead
- 83% of visitors spent a few hours or less along the FNST
- 39% of participants traveled alone and 31% traveled in pairs
- 43% of participants traveled with family or friends
- Participants visited the FNST to hike/walk, view scenery, and bird watch

Participant Trip Experience

- 100% of visitors rated their experience as a 7 or higher with a 10 being a perfect experience
- Reasons why the participants trip was not a ten included
 - Difficult terrain (hills)
 - Weather (hot)
 - Worried about hunters
- Some suggested improvements for this segment of trail included:
 - Better trail maintenance and blazing
 - Increase water availability
 - Better maps
 - Better enforcement of rules (foot traffic only Hog Island to River Junction)

Participant Demographics

- Age
 - 10% of participants were 70-79
 - 25% of participants were 60-69
 - 20% of participants were 50-59
 - 35% of participants were 40-49
 - 10% of participants were 18-39
- Gender
 - 56% were male
 - 44% were female

Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail

2004-2005 Use

Preliminary research conducted by UF researchers from 2001-2002 indicated that the St. Marks trail segment is a medium use site, receiving 366-999 visits per year. However, with the addition of researching the Rail-Trail the estimate for this site was significantly higher, placing St. Marks into the High Use category. Personal observations were conducted at the Rail-Trail in order to formulate visitor counts to this segment of the FNST. The result of this monitoring are reported as annual use estimates below.



Table 3. Annual use along the St. Marks Rail-Trail

Use Type	Use Estimate
St. Mark's Rail-Trail Foot Traffic	1,550
St. Mark's Other Traffic	11,791
TOTAL USE	13,341

Acknowledgements

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