

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
Amendment 6, Florida National Scenic Trail Management
Area 4.6 and Forest-wide Standard LA-3

USDA Forest Service
National Forests in Florida
Baker, Columbia, Franklin, Lake, Leon, Liberty, Marion, Putnam, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa,
Wakulla, and Walton Counties, Florida

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) was designated by the U.S. Congress in 1983 by an amendment to the National Trails System Act of 1968 (the Act). The Act identifies the USDA Forest Service as the Federal Administrator of the FNST. When complete, the Florida Trail will extend throughout the State of Florida, from Big Cypress National Preserve in the south to Gulf Islands National Seashore in the western panhandle. The Florida Trail also includes spur trails to user amenities such as water bodies, side trails to points of interest, and alternate routes in case of high water.

Periodic acquisitions of properties along this trail require allocation to a Management Area in the 1999 Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Because parcels are small it's inefficient to revise the LRMP with each acquisition. In addition, trail management operations need to be consistent with the LRMP and the creation of a Management Area to provide general guidance for site-specific management is required.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which will create Management Area 4.6 (Florida National Scenic Trail Outside the Proclamation Boundary). In addition, this amendment will revise Forest-wide standard LA-3 to automatically allocate land acquisitions under the National Scenic Trails Act to be assigned this Management Area.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 5-6.

Alternative 1

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the current 1999 Revised LRMP would not be amended and future land acquisitions for the FNST would continue to be managed in a custodial mode according to standard LA-3.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in January 2005. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during a 30-day scoping period beginning in May 2005.

Based on public comment and internal review, no significant issues were identified for this amendment.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 6).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 6).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the amendment (see EA pages 6).
5. The National Forests in Florida has considerable experience with the management of the Florida National Scenic Trail. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 6).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 6).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 6).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 6). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant

scientific, cultural, or historical resources. This amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 6).

9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 6).
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA page 6).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

NFMA Significance: This amendment is not a significant change in the Florida Revised Forest Plan. The determination that this is a non-significant amendment is made in accordance with the regulations in 16 USC 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f), and the Forest Service Manual 1922.5, Land and Resource Management Planning, Amendments. This plan amendment meets the criteria for a non-significant amendment because these changes will not “significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goals and objectives originally projected...[or] have an important effect on the entire forest plan or affect resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period (FSM 1922.52)

Implementation Date

Implementation of this decision may occur after seven calendar days following publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Tallahassee Democrat.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, and be filed in duplicate with the Regional Forester within 45 days after the date of the published legal notice. Appeals should be sent to the following address:

USDA Forest Service
ATTN: Regional Forester
1720 Peachtree Rd., N.W., Suite 811N
Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102

The Appeal Deciding Officer is Charles L. Myers, Regional Forester. The appeal may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed on federal holidays. Any notice of appeal must include at a minimum:

- A statement identifying the document as a Notice of Appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the applicant.

- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which the appeal is being made.
- The reason(s) for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

The Forest Plan Amendment Project Record is available for public review at the National Forests in Florida Forest Supervisors Office, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee FL 32303. To review the Project Record, contact David Harris at the Supervisors Office. Copies of the Environmental Assessment and questions concerning this document can be directed to David Harris, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303 or (850) 523-8582.

/s/ Marsha Kearney
Marsha Kearney
Forest Supervisor

09/08/2006
Date

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LA-3 Allocate new acquisitions to a management area at least annually. Until that is completed, manage the acquisition in a custodial fashion—providing basic public safety, protection, and status quo maintenance of the land, resources, and infrastructure. Newly acquired lands outside the existing Proclamation Boundary, and purchased under authority of the National Trails System Act will be managed in accordance with Management Area 4.6 Florida National Scenic Trail.

Amended Forest Plan Page 4-34a, 4-34b, 4-34c**Management Area 4.6****Florida National Scenic Trail Outside Proclaimed Boundary**

VQO = 50% Preservation & 50% Retention

ROS = 100% Semi-primitive, Non-motorized

All acres unsuitable for timber production

4.6-Goal

To plan, construct and maintain the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) on newly acquired lands outside the National Forests in Florida proclaimed boundary in accordance with the National Trails System Act (16 U.S.C. 1241), the *Florida National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan*, and the *National Scenic Trail Study Environmental Assessment for the Florida Trail*.

4.6-Desired Future Condition

The FNST provides trail users with a predominantly undisturbed environment that gives a strong feeling of remoteness, solitude and closeness with nature. Trail users have opportunities to practice wildland skills and feel self-reliant. The FNST also provides opportunities for trail users to experience the diverse cultural heritage, history and unique traditions of Florida.

There are a wide variety of vegetative communities present along the Florida Trail corridor. Natural communities found along the trail include most subcategories of xeric uplands, coastal uplands, mesic uplands, rocklands, mesic flatlands, wet flatlands, seepage wetlands, floodplain wetlands, basin wetlands, lacustrine and riverine habitats. The landscapes are predominantly natural, with little remaining evidence of human disturbance. Historic and archaeological evidence of human disturbance is protected to the extent practicable and serves to connect the trail user to Florida's history, folk life and culture. Vegetation patterns are shaped by natural processes such as floods, fires (including prescribed fire), storms, insects, and diseases. Timber harvest is limited to habitat restoration, safety (with emphasis on Wildland Urban Interface needs), or trail administration needs. Forested areas are generally in mature age classes. Snags and downed wood are common. The quality of soil, water, and air is high.

The Florida Trail is managed as a foot travel "hiking" only trail, and provides the primary access in the area. Corridor lands with easements or outstanding rights will be managed consistent with deed transfer language. Visitors are usually isolated from the sights and sounds of human activity. Facilities such as primitive (Development Level 1 or 2) camping areas, trail bridges and boardwalks may be encountered. A few interpretive signs and trailheads as appropriate may occur.

A few relict roads may exist in the area, but new road construction is prohibited except for management needs compatible with FNST objectives. Road use is limited to administrative or emergency purposes. Relict roads have native surfacing and are level with the surrounding ground. In low areas, roads may have ditches or be above the surrounding ground. A few low-drainage points (bay crossing, streams, etc.) may have primitive crossings designed for minimal resource impact.

4.6-Standards and Guidelines

Access

4.6-1 Restrict motorized vehicle use to administrative purposes as described in the FNST Comprehensive Plan and Certification Agreement.

4.6-2 Restrict access along the Florida National Scenic Trail to foot travel only.

Fire

4.6-3 Use minimal impact suppression techniques on all wildfires, when possible.

Infrastructure

4.6-4 Road construction is prohibited except for management needs of the FNST or other purposes as described in the FNST Comprehensive Plan.

4.6.5 Existing roads that are needed for management of the area should be maintained at traffic service level D where jurisdiction allows. Where roads are not needed, they should be obliterated and rehabilitated.

Range

4.6-6 Prohibit range allotments except in cases where such allotments contribute positively to the hiking experience or meet other resource management objectives.

Recreation

4.6-7 Allow for other nonmotorized trail development and uses in the area only if the primitive experience on the FNST is not adversely impacted.

4.6.8 Plan, construct and maintain the FNST in accordance with the Certification Agreement between the National Forests in Florida and the Florida Trail Association.

4.6.9 Prohibit developed recreational facilities except for those needed for trail management and use such as primitive camping sites, appropriately designed trailheads, boardwalks, bridges and informational kiosks.

4.6.10 Allow camping areas at development level 1 or 2.

4.6.11 Hunting is prohibited except for exotic species control and other cases where necessary to maintain healthy native ecosystems and habitats.

Vegetation

4.6-12 Prohibit salvaging of dead trees except where needed for public safety.

4.6-13 This area is unsuitable for timber production. Trees may be harvested for other resource objectives such as FNST trail construction, habitat restoration or

public safety.

4.6-14 Utilize only locally native species for restoration and other land management or visual quality enhancement projects.

Wildlife and Fish

4.6.15 Prohibit cultivated wildlife openings and artificial structures except for Federally listed or Proposed species.

4.6.16 Conduct activities designed to preserve and/or restore the integrity of native fish and wildlife populations and enhance the trail users experience.