

Coalition Members and Panel Guests in attendance:

Kelly Russell	Forest Supervisor, US Forest Service
Shawn Thomas	FNST Program Administrator, US Forest Service
Beth Jackson	Environmental Program Supervisor, Orange County
Dale Allen	Executive Director, Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation
David Fireman	Chief Ranger, US Department of Interior, National Park Service
Doug Alderson	Assistant Bureau Chief, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails
Jerrie Lindsey	Director, Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services, Florida Fish and Wildlife
Leslie Wheeler	President, Florida Trail Association
Melody Cox	Grants Administrator, Taylor County
Robert Mindick	Public Lands Manager, Osceola County
Taylor Stein	Professor, School of Forest Research & Conservation, University of Florida
Travis Pollard	St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
<i>(for Dan Frisk Project Leader, North Florida Refuge Complex, US Fish and Wildlife Service)</i>	

Guests:

Alex Stigliano	Trail Program Manager, Florida Trail Association
Ashley Killough	Regional Coordinator, FDEP Office of Greenways & Trails
Bill Turman	Board Member, Florida Trail Association
Dara Osher	Graduate Student Intern, US Forest Service
David Waldrop	Volunteer Vice President for Trails, Florida Trail Association
Jared Barber	U.S. Park Ranger, US Department of Interior, National Park Service
Jordan Nickle	GIS Technician, US Forest Service
Megan Eno	Partnership Coordinator, US Forest Service
Mark Sheddan	Board Member, Florida Trail Association
Simone Nageon	Consultant, Florida Trail Association

Next Meeting Information:

January 18-19th, 2018

Location TBD (suggested Orange County, perhaps Lake Nona area)

Meeting Summary:

FNST Coalition meetings are a gathering of land managers and partners to discuss progress towards the four goals of the 5-Year Strategic Plan. This document is meant to act as a summary of presentation and discussion items. For additional meeting materials, including presentations and a copy of the Strategic Plan, please visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/fnst/home>.

2012 Strategic Plan Accomplishment Report

GOAL 1: COMPLETE THE TRAIL

“Add 100 new scenic and designated miles of FNST towards completion of a high quality trail.”

- 83.4 miles of trail have been developed but only a net of 32.4 trails have been created in the past 5 years. 14.7 net miles of unofficial connectors have been removed. Notable accomplishments include Choctawhatchee River section, Kissimmee River, Camp Blanding and White Springs.
- Several infrastructure projects including the Swift Creek Bridge, Choctawhatchee River boardwalk, and Ocean Pond Boardwalk have been completed.
- Several large infrastructure projects are in their planning phases including Spring Creek at St. Marks NWR, Little Big Econ State Forest, and Alaqua Bridge at Eglin AFB.

GOAL 2: STANDARDS

“100% of existing designated FNST meets the recreation, information, and interpretive Trail standards within its resource classification category of 1-5.”

- 100% Trail classes implemented and maintained to current standard
- Main accomplishments for mapping have been development of an ArcGIS Online Interface and trailhead, kiosk, highway and railroad crossing inventories.
- Over the past five years both the Northern and Southern Termini have been developed.
- Developed Standard Trailhead Kiosk Information, Trail Infrastructure Inventories, and an ArcGIS Online Mapping Platform

GOAL 3: PARTNERSHIPS

“Each of the FNST land managers proactively contribute to Trail development, maintenance and promotion of their segment as part of a larger whole.”

- Innovative partnerships have been developed over the past five years specifically with local governments.
- The working relationship with the Florida Trail Association has strengthened.
- The infrastructure review has been streamlined, expediting project implementation.
- Transition from Certification Agreements to U.S. Forest Service MOUs has been an arduous process.
 - 10% of current agreements have been renewed and transitioned to USDA Forest Service standards

GOAL 4: PROMOTION

“100% of Trail recreationists know they are on the Florida National Scenic Trail, know the significance of the Trail, and know how their experience is part of the larger whole.”

- FNST Official Brochure has been published and is in the process of being distributed to our partners.

- FNST Junior Explorer Activity Book has been published, distributed to partners, and readily available online. A Spanish language version will be available soon.
- User studies show that ~80% of trail users know they are on FNST, either initially or subsequently answering “FNST” or “Florida Trail”. Families and ethnicities are the categories severely underrepresented in trail users. These groups tend to utilize trails because of the educational and cultural opportunities.

COALITION MEMBER UPDATES

National Park Service, Big Cypress National Preserve – David Fireman

David Fireman is now the the Coalition representative and Forest Service point of contact while Jared Barber is the primary point of contact for FTA access and maintenance. BCNP is establishing a foundation guiding document that will include management and implementation plans for future goals, like the website update, back country access plan, strategic planning, etc. The Florida Trail and the Forest Service play a big role in the backcountry access plan, which has potential for separating the FNST from co-located ORV trails. BCNP is also working on requests for preserve-wide pitcher pumps, small re-routes adjacent to nearby potential RV users, and a system which clearly demarcates hiking versus multi-use trails.

U.S. FWS- Travis Pollard

St. Marks NWR, in conjunction with the Forest Service, is working on a re-route for the Spring Creek trail, boardwalks and bridge, targeting NRDA funding to implement these projects. The reserve is working on a Bird Hammocks spur trail, a Bird family acquisition and future interpretive trail that highlights the history there, including a Native American village with burial mounds. In the wilderness area, the Port Leon Bridge was historically a railroad tram crossing over Port Leon Creek. St. Marks and the FS are planning to rebuild the bridge in order to restore the FT to this historical location, also targeted for implementation through NRDA funding. There are two maintenance sessions in spring and winter and it would help if the FTA could cover one of those. The process to convert the blazes on Swamp Hammock trail from blue to orange has been initiated.

Taylor County- Melody Cox

Taylor County has tier III money committed to land acquisitions with 12 properties pinpointed to provide public access. Two properties have been highlighted for trail facilities, Palm Grove Marina in Steinhatchee (which is a designated greenway and has good access to Suwannee WMA) and the Huchins property between Key Beach and Haggins Cove (which has good amenities with a large house converted to marina facilities and offers hikers a small store on the Gulf where other amenities in the area are lacking). Taylor County’s top acquisition priority is Bird Island, which is 250 acres. If acquired, will also get another \$12.5 million that would also be promised to further land acquisition. Taylor County fully supports the FNST’s Big Bend re-route proposal.

FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails – Doug Alderson

There was an acquisition in process that included a parcel near Suwannee State Park, but the appraisal did not meet the owner’s expectations. There are 11 public workshops going on around the state (a schedule will be out soon) allowing for public scoping of the priority mapping updates. A kiosk is being built on the Keystone Heights Trail. The Department of Environmental Protection has a new Secretary, Noah Valentine. Management plans are being updated, so it is an ideal time to get the re-routes into the plans even if they are open-ended. OGT has an economic study that will be ready in September and the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is finished, but not yet released. It includes a 5-year survey resulting in the addition of a new category – walking for exercise (not necessarily hiking).

Orange County – Beth Jackson

The expansion of the Central Florida Expressway is on extension through Split Oak, but has moved out of Orange County; however, impacts of the extension may require further refinement of that route. There has been no funding for land acquisition, but a 60 acre parcel within the Akon River has been picked up due to mitigation. There is hope of creating a corridor between public lands and the county is trying to open 3 of its parcels for passive recreational use. Once the FS/Orange County MOU is finalized the new FNST routing can occur.

US Forest Service – Kelly Russell

The USDA Forest Service does not support eminent domain for the Florida National Scenic Trail. Denise Rains is retiring from Public Affairs as of September 1st.

US Forest Service – Shawn Thomas

Graduate students at FSU's Department of Urban Planning Studio have spent the semester working on a trail corridor review and economic impact analysis of the Panhandle gap. A summer studio has also been working to study another gap between Econfinia Creek and Pine Log SF in the Panhandle. The Florida National Scenic Trail does not support the use of eminent domain for closing gaps in the trail. Because FNST budgetary money cannot be used for land acquisition, we value the efforts of our state and local partners in acquiring high priority parcels that benefit more than just the Florida Trail. New budget is uncertain as far as the next fiscal year is concerned. An inter-agency roundtable with the USFS, NPS, and BLM has been established to discuss strategic planning, funding, and other challenges facing National Scenic and Historic Trails. There is a NERDA proposal for Spring Creek and Port Leon in St. Marks and we made it through the first round.

Florida Trail Association- Leslie Wheeler

Leslie supports the Big Bend Re-route, but wants to wait until after the Board of Directors meeting on July 15th to discuss the written and signed letter of support. Leslie took pictures as she drove the roadwalk from Twin Rivers to Aucilla and feels far more passionately about the importance of the re-route after visiting Perry and the Big Bend area with Jerrie.

Florida Trail Association – Mark Sheddan

Mark heard Jim Kern speak about eminent domain at the 50th anniversary conference. Instead, Mark spoke to his legislator and representative about FNST closing gaps and received an optimistic response. Mark advocates for coming up with a good, coherent strategy to convince political representatives to help accomplish this task.

Osceola County – Bob Mindick

The county has allocated \$100,000 to new projects, including restrooms and boardwalks. Development groups within the county are still seeing old routes on the maps they utilize for planning, so there is a need to standardize and update maps as new bridges and roads are being built. New highway placement has the county considering one or two preferred scenarios for Split Oak. The Trail could be affected by highway placement. In the middle of discussions with Deseret Ranch to designate it as the westward boundary connecting to Split Oak. It's important to have national representatives contact locals in Osceola County to stress the importance of recreation and conservation.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission – Jerrie Lindsey

There have been recent maintenance and enhancement projects on the Tosohatchee under Forest Service partnership agreement. The maintenance and bridge design work for the Aucilla WMA will be implemented this year. A new trail planner has been hired. All road layers have been acquired for the planning and data collection for the Big Bend re-route. The 75th anniversary celebration of the wildlife management system in Florida will be this year, including birding tours, hikes, and paddles. The closing event will take place in Tosohatchee on

December 9th where there will be a hike on a portion of the FNST. New efforts have been made through social media about the management area system and GovDelivery with counts around 50,000 people.

Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation – Dale Allen

FGTF has found new sources of money through the development of a legislative package. Rural areas are aware of potential ecotourism markets, but lack resources and opportunities to galvanize major ecotourism marketplace within their counties. There is the idea to create a similar parks and community trails program to try to get trails money to develop paved trails connecting parks to communities.. Through PACT, a portion could be utilized by non-paved trails through FRDAP. There's no sponsor right now, but there is a meeting in place with the Secretary of DEP in early August.

University of Florida - Taylor Stein

Taylor reported that counts on the Florida Trail are holding steady, with approximately 364,000 annually (but probably an underestimate). Big Cypress National Preserve has over 10 years of counts, but in other areas, it's a little harder to do counts (like Lake O). Taylor's class of graduate and undergraduate students took a semester-long look at promoting the FNST regionally. In April, they visited the Supervisor's Office to report on their efforts and deliverables, including site specific kiosk panels, brochures, and a one-stop website. At UF, some difficulties with promoting FNST comes from student groups that recommend seeking outdoor recreation in other states, as opposed to Florida. The class also conducted 3 different mini-studies to determine how neighborhood people, families, and college students can get better access to the Trail. There are some issues with having multiple FB pages for FTA and FNST; Taylor suggested improving the navigational ease for users on the FTA website. Taylor will distribute UF's report with links to visuals of the products. After regional products are dispersed, UF will monitor the areas to account for changes in counts.

COALITION ROLE, MISSION, & VISION STATEMENTS

Role of the Coalition

The role of the coalition was briefly discussed, but mostly aligned with the 2012 Strategic Plan document. The coalition sets goals, works as a cooperative body of partners, and aims to achieve the mission of the FNST.

Mission Statement

Existing Mission Statement:

“Create the optimum recreation experience while protecting and enhancing the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural and cultural qualities of the areas through which the Trail crosses; and promote the FNST identity and brand.”

Statement from the Coalition:

Potential mission statements were discussed, but the FNST's mission statement does not explicitly state what our mission is or for whom it is optimum. What is an optimum recreation experience? There seems to be a need to determine who the mission statement is for so as to improve the language and make it less bureaucratic. Language should appeal to trail users and not to planners or managers. Member feedback:

- Mission is to provide access to our magnificent natural landscapes and resources for an increasingly urban population.
- Mission is to create access that is compatible with the resources we manage and which creates a quality experience for people using the Trail. The role of the coalition is to achieve the vision, but the mission statement should include more than the coalition's approach; it is best to focus more on the vision than the mission.

- We are not involved with protection, but with public access – to identify, secure, and coordinate the access, connectivity, consistency, and identity of the FNST through the development and implementation of a strategic process and plan.
- The overarching mission of the Strategic Plan is to share core values through partnerships and finding a common ground for completion of the goals.
- It was determined the FS will work with the Coalition comments and wordsmith the mission statement

Vision Statement

Existing Vision Statement:

“The natural and cultural resources of the Trail corridor are protected and conserved to afford a unique scenic trail experience. A complete FNST provides a seamless, optimum recreation experience enjoyed and appreciated by diverse audiences. The FNST has broad community and citizen support and engagement.”

- Of the two examples provided by FNST, general consensus on the importance of emphasizing future generations.
- There was the suggestion that the Trail itself is not a recreation experience, but provides one.

Statement from the Coalition:

“From Gulf Islands to Big Cypress, the FNST is a permanently secured route offering the opportunity to explore Florida’s beautiful natural landscapes. The Trail is valued and used by Floridians and visitors and is actively supported by a coalition of public and private partnerships.”

- This new statement highlights the important concepts of the FNST, especially its permanence and protection.
- Some contestation over wording, whether to use “from the Panhandle to...” instead of specific places, supposed ease of understanding for the public.

OUTDOOR AFRO PRESENTATION

The Coalition invited Tallahassee’s Outdoor Afro Leader, Mayowa Ogunjobi, to present on diversity. Mayowa’s presentation largely focused on the cross between wilderness and urbanization/civilization.

- Mayowa discussed what it means to be black and the importance of inclusion; he stressed the lack of wilderness education in Florida as a barrier to diversity in recreation.
- There should be less of an emphasis on race and more importance placed on social capital.
- His main point: “the Trail is for everyone, it belongs to everyone.”

Feedback from the Coalition:

- Importance in trying to empathize with the perspectives of other people
- Emphasis on creating a welcoming environment for all users
- The Coalition will organizing a roundtable on diversity in the near future and inviting Outdoor Afro and other, similar groups to engage.

2018 Draft Strategic Plan Overview and Update

Below is a review of the changes by the FNST team to the strategic goals and 2018 strategic plan with brief feedback from the coalition – individual edits and further feedback expected in the future.

****Note:** Potential 2018 Strategic Plan draft by mid-November, deadline for feedback to come.** The plan is to adopt the new Strategic Plan at the January 2018 meeting.

Goal 1: Promotion

- “Connect citizens with the natural and cultural heritage of Florida through increasing awareness, valuation and use of the FNST.”
- Shifted goal language to “Promote Connections”
- Promotion has shifted to number one goal, as was specified in the January Coalition Meeting
- Importance of promoting families on the Trail and addressing diversity, accomplished through surveys
- Overall satisfaction from the coalition with ‘promote connections’ and its usefulness in capturing the goals and objectives that exist in promoting the FNST, but some issue with the use of ‘non-traditional’ to describe users; suggestions include: a broad spectrum of users instead
- New objective: “connect citizens to the FNST through coordinated promotion efforts”
 - Promote, Engage, Educate
 - A number of associated projects (Junior Explorer Program, Florida Trail Gateway Communities, Social Media and Outreach)
- Several issues to address from the current 2012 Strategic Plan including:
 - Promote the value of and increase the user’s connection to the Trail
 - Increase number and diversity of FNST recreationists
 - New measures: increase number and diversity of FNST recreationists by 15% over 5 years
- Deliverables: public relations campaign, brochures and web-based trail information, and trailhead information accessible online, junior explorer program

Goal 2: Complete the Trail

- Shift language to “Add 50 high-quality, scenic miles of designated Florida National Scenic Trail that close critical gaps within the Trail corridor”
- Several issues to address from the 2012 Strategic plan including:
 - Though many miles have been developed, there are still 300 miles of gaps in the trail.
 - The focus should be on developing scenic, certifiable trail miles.
- Coalition feedback: is this measured as net gain? Is high-quality the same as scenic? Should ‘reducing roadwalk’ be included as a performance measure?
- Measure success by quantifying the number of miles by which roadwalk/gaps are reduced, but having roadwalk on an administrative road versus a highway should be factored into this process
- FSU Studio project that assigns economic value to having hikers and a Trail in a particular region, also emphasizes economic benefit of having FTA volunteers working on Trail maintenance; Shawn committed to sending this report out to the coalition.
- Deliverables: corridor location reviews; FNST planning corridor; land acquisition atlas

Goal 3: Standards

- Shift language to “Sustainable Management”
- Several issues to address from the current 2012 Strategic Plan including:
 - Even though we are maintaining 100% of the trail by Forest Service standards, this does not mean the trail is adequately maintained.
 - The goal focuses on maintenance rather than other administrative trail aspects.
- In terms of identity, we have learned that the FNST does not resonate but the Florida Trail does
 - Over 12,000 photos tagged with #FloridaTrail
 - Over 150,000 posts for #girlswhohike
 - Perhaps we adopt FT rather than FNST
- For management, is it realistic that the Trail is year-round when the volunteers who maintain the Trail do not actually do maintenance over the summer?

- Highlight areas that are ideal year-round and ensure ease of access, but educate users on areas that may not be suitable year-round
- Determine if high traffic facilities are standardized and appropriately documented?
- Insight from coalition: remove ‘well-managed’ (what is this meaning versus well-maintained?) and ‘accessible’ (because it is misleading in terms of disabled people and their inclusivity)

Goal 4: Partnerships

- Language for goal shifted to: “Strategic Partnerships”
- Issues to address from the 2012 Strategic Plan include:
 - Slow process and lack of progress with updating MOUs
 - Focus on maintenance rather than spectrum of partnership opportunities such as promotion.
 - Better paths of communication about regional happenings are essential to success of the program
- How can we measure partnerships?
 - Getting more and diverse partners
 - Accountability for partnerships – everyone isn’t going to be in the same place or have the same goals
 - The FT should be represented in all applicable partner land management plans

Provide an annual report that shows partners have helped to accomplish and further the goals of the Strategic Plan

