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## Coalition Members and Alternates in Attendance:

Kelly Russell	Forest Supervisor, USDA Forest Service
Shawn Thomas	FNST Program Administrator, USDA Forest Service
Beth Jackson	Environmental Program Supervisor, Orange County
Dale Allen	Executive Director, Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation
Jared Barber	U.S. Park 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
Robert Mindick	Public Lands Manager, Osceola County
Dan Brockhaus	Public Lands Specialist, Osceola County
Edwin McCook	Land Management Specialist, Suwannee River Water Management District
Taylor Stein	Professor, School of Forest Research & Conservation, University of Florida

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## Guests:

Chris Spori	Southern Region Director for Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage and Partnership/Volunteer Resources, USDA Forest Service
Deborah Caffin	Trails Program Manager, Wilderness/Dispersed Recreation, USDA Forest Service
Alex Stigliano	Trail Program Manager, Florida Trail Association
Van Tran	Community Outreach Coordinator, Florida Trail Association
Bill Turman	Board Member, Florida Trail Association
David Denham	Board Member, Florida Trail Association
Dara Osher	Graduate Student Intern, US Forest Service
David Waldrop	Vice President for Trails, Florida Trail Association
Ashlee Townsend	GIS Technician, US Forest Service

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## Next Meeting Information:

**July 19-20<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Location TBD (suggested Chinsegut [FWC property] in Hernando County near Brooksville)

Possible agenda items for July coalition meeting:

- Focus on land acquisition strategies and have someone present on the matter.
- Possible presentation by Visit Florida
- FNST GIS Technician could map mitigation banks
- Western corridor major gap focus

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## 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>.

## COALITION MEMBER UPDATES

### *National Park Service, Big Cypress National Preserve – Jared Barber (for David Fireman)*

Big Cypress National Preserve is still recovering from Hurricane Irma and, as a result, the Florida Trail was closed for several weeks. Some work clearing the trail was required to get it back up to par, including the removal of debris and downed trees. FTA volunteers replaced the mailbox for backcountry permits. Kelly Weiner and her crew are coming down soon to the middle of preserve with wagons to do trail maintenance. There will be increasing signage on the Florida Trail to be installed soon that will mitigate the number of search and rescues. There is a push to put in new pitcher pumps, but that is now still on hold for some backcountry camps.

### *Suwannee River WMD – Edwin McCook*

New kiosk panels have been created for White Springs, the first gateway community for the Florida Trail, that highlight the new Big Bend re-route and the town's proximity to the Suwannee Wilderness Trail. Once the new kiosk panels are installed, Edwin will set up a meeting with FDOT to request road signs that market White Springs as a biking, hiking, and paddling area. Accompanying brochures could include suggested hikes that augment the ease of user access to hiking options, as biking and paddling options are already more clear-cut. The Camp Branch kiosk local panels (displayed at the meeting) can highlight hiking opportunities on the Florida Trail that can also be transplanted to the Suwannee River WMD website.

### *FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails and Florida State Parks – Doug Alderson*

A study conducted this past fall, part of the Statewide Recreation Use Plan, shows that the number one use for recreation is walking/jogging for exercise, bringing in about \$13.5 billion per year to Florida's economy (study can be found on website's front page). State Parks have annual updated numbers for visitors. State Parks is trying to get \$60 million to aid in recovery from recent hurricanes. The last OGT acquisition was along Shingle Creek in Osceola County and now there is only \$200,000 left for acquisition. OGT will likely receive more money to purchase trail corridors if current proposals for Florida Forever funding passes. OGT has finished updating its 5-year plan and map process, which includes the Florida Trail re-routes and should be up on the website soon. If needed, can adjust Florida Trail routes, but right now the western corridor is back on, as are the new re-routes for Big Bend and Osceola/Orange Counties.

### *Orange County – Beth Jackson*

Orange County has approved its agreement this year with US Forest Service. Split Oak Forest is blazed now and there are plans to work with Kelly Weiner to get the other areas blazed in Orange County. A recent meeting with a private landowner representing a nearby conservation area could result in more reduction in roadwalk. The area sustained some hurricane damage and one property had to close for a month, but has since reopened.

### *US Forest Service – Kelly Russell*

USFS expresses appreciation for yesterday's ribbon cutting ceremony. The blowdown from the recent hurricane was mitigated by FTA help with blockages on the Ocala National Forest. The FNST program is hoping to fill the FNST Partnership Coordinator position in the second phase of hiring, but may potentially bring in a detailer in the meantime. USFS is continuing priorities with the Florida Trail and hoping to work with the FTA on 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary events.

### *US Forest Service – Deborah Caffin*

The USFS Chief's National Trail Strategy to be released, including six areas of action: leadership intent, organization and talent, relevancy of trails to users, sustainable trails systems, how to better engage partners and

users and recognize access to better information and accurate maps. There was a great convergence for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and associated events amongst the agency that has not been seen in a while.

## *US Forest Service – Chris Spurl*

At the national level, it is an exciting time for the USFS because recreation is receiving good attention. Our former Region 8 Forester is the newly selected Chief for the Forest Service and is a strong advocate for recreation. There is a lot of potential for shared stewardship and co-management, everyone working together to take care of recreation assets. The USFS Southern Region goes from Virginia to Florida and all the way to Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Puerto Rico (and everything in between); it is the second most visited region in the U.S. and averages about 26 million visitors a year. 110 million people within the Southern Region live within a 4-hour drive from a national forest, which is important in terms of fostering connections to local communities. A 2016 outdoor industry report showed an economic breakdown by state and compared outdoor recreation to other industries in the U.S. National outdoor recreation contributes \$880 billion to the U.S. economy, so it is a very exciting time to be in outdoor recreation (report from the Outdoor Recreation Industry Association). Regionally, USFS is working on a sustainable recreation strategy, including non-traditional partners.

## *Florida Trail Association – Leslie Wheeler*

After a two-day tour of the Big Bend area with some FTA Board Members, the area has left a great impression. It is better to have the Florida Trail on conservation areas that are protected. The big picture is to get it on land that we don't have to keep fighting for every few years. The 10<sup>th</sup> annual "I did a hike" at a state park is coming up and FTA Board hopes coalition members will reach out to the local FTA chapters to participate in these events. The event buses hikers to the start of the hike and will pick them up along the way. The FTA staff are evacuating the Gainesville office and moving into a modern office space closer to the downtown area.

## *Osceola County – Dan Brockhaus & Bob Mindick*

The Florida Trail route in Lake Lizzie, Osceola County has been blazed. There is work being done to get additional infrastructure, a bridge, put in crossing the FWC managed Tripl N to Osceola's community park. Osceola County is working on coalition building with Orange County and other partners. Unfortunately, a quarter acre of land costs around \$1 million in the Orlando area as development spreads further out from city center. In the Split Oak area, the Osceola Expressway (a six-lane highway with a train and a four-lane road adjacent) will be coming through and is on fast-track for development. Osceola County is working to highlight the need for under the road access for wildlife, maintenance, and the Florida Trail. The county is also developing relationships with applicable land developers which would include the Florida Trail as part of the discussion requesting features such as a buffer and trailhead and for the Florida Trail to be considered in development plans. A property transfer at Holapaw has been delayed for a few years, but Osceola County is involved in the development of a Kissimmee Prairie Master Plan and will continue to advocate for the Florida Trail.

## *Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission – Jerrie Lindsey*

Some trail has been added in Hernando County north of Brooksville, eliminating a few miles of roadwalk. It is a very beautiful area for pine trees and Sandhill wildlife species. Last year some work was completed on infrastructure with additional plans anticipated to start this year under Challenge Cost-Share Agreements with USFS. FWC has been working with the Foundation for Greenways and Trails, the FTA, and others on the Big Bend area re-route. FWC is celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its wildlife management system and hosted a walk on the Aucilla; the closing event will be on January 27<sup>th</sup> in Tosohatchee on the Florida Trail.

## *Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation – Dale Allen*

The Big Bend is an important corridor improvement that can only move forward once the Washington Office's approval has been given. The FNST Coalition's inclusion of local governments is fundamental to the Florida Trail. There is a pipeline of money coming, including \$50 million for parks and land acquisition. An audience for collective trails exists that has not been seen in many years, so it is vital to take advantage.

## *University of Florida – Taylor Stein*

There are visitor counters mostly in North Florida with permanent counters in the National Forests, including the Apalachicola, Osceola, and Ocala. There is an opportunity to work with other coalition members to do counts or marketing in their or new areas, such as seeing the difference in counts in the Suwannee area after Edwin's new kiosks are installed. Last April, a small class presented marketing materials that will hopefully be implemented, but there is a need for new partners (the classes can help with websites, Facebook, and other social media). Thanks for work with the USFS, new visitor assessment projects are happening in St. Johns River WMD and Hillsborough and Palm Beach Counties using counters and documenting uses. UF is expanding its capacity to do visitor counts, including surveys. Agency reports pertaining to areas where the Florida Trail goes through were conducted several years ago and it is time to make new ones again, so coalition members are encouraged to reach out if they want to collaborate. Taylors' class also made a Florida Trail website focused on star-gazing on the trail, highlighting the importance of having a good, clear website presence that can attract diverse and non-traditional users.

## **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:*

“The Florida National Scenic Trail meets as a collaborative body to inform better decisions and attract greater resources to advance, protect and connect people to the Florida Trail.”

### *Vision Statement:*

“From the Emerald Coast to the Everglades, the Florida Trail is a fully-designated corridor, actively supported by a network of partners dedicated to the advancement and protect of the Trail. The Trail is widely-valued as a national treasure and used by current and future generations to connect with the outstanding scenic, natural, cultural and historic resources of Florida.”

## 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.”

- Roughly 83.4 miles of trail have been developed but only a net of 32.4 trail miles 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.
- In 2012, there were 982 miles of designated trail and in 2016, there were 1062.7 miles
- Several infrastructure projects including the Swift Creek Bridge, Choctawhatchee River boardwalk, Cypress Creek boardwalk, and Ocean Pond Boardwalk have been completed.

- Several large infrastructure projects are in their planning phases including Alaqua Bridge at Eglin AFB, which has begun construction.

## 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
- Working on Statewide MOU with FDOT

## 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 distributed to our partners.
- FNST Junior Explorer Activity Book has been published, distributed to our partners, and is 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.

## Updates on Florida Trail Gaps and Re-Routes

### BIG BEND

- This re-route is a huge accomplishment since the road walk (over 50 miles) connecting Suwannee to Aucilla has been one of the largest gaps to tackle for the Florida Trail.

- Over thirty years, this gap issue remained despite several suggested options that did not pan out. This most recent solution helps to mitigate possibility of agreement withdrawals by private property owners and establishes a more scenic and protected route for the Florida Trail.
- The Big Bend is the longest continuous corridor of public lands in the eastern United States – it has well over 100 miles of protected coastline. Now, all counties and public agencies associated with the re-route are on board, just waiting for WO approval prior to initiating the certification process.
- There is an optional paddling trail on the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail.
- Four Rivers Timber Company is working with the FS on a draft agreement which ultimately will allow the Florida Trail to cross their property.
- The city of Steinhatchee is very excited to work on this project and to work with us to improve this gap area even further.
- The FS has received letters of support from all stakeholders involved

## OSCEOLA/ORANGE COUNTY

- No camping provisions on old FT through this section, but new re-route will have camping options within public lands area.
- The Orange County side of Split Oak Forest has been blazed.
- Agreements exist for all the land in Orange County, a few areas in Osceola, and the FS is in current discussions with other partners in this corridor.
- We will explore possible Federal Highway opportunities for a land bridge crossing the 528

## 2018 Implementation Guide and Strategic Plan Overview

Below is a review of the changes by the FNST team to the strategic goals and 2018 strategic plan based on previous feedback from the coalition and public input. The Implementation Guide acts as a road map for the USFS and FNST team in partnership with the FTA to implement the goals of the 2018 Strategic Plan Update.

## PROMOTE CONNECTIONS

- “Connect citizens with the natural and cultural heritage of Florida through increasing awareness, valuation and use of the FNST.”
- Major Performance Measure – Increase number and diversity of Florida Trail recreationists by 15% over 5 years
- Long Term Outcome – The Florida Trail is widely valued and used as a means for connecting people with the nationally significant resources of Florida,
- 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
- 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)
- Deliverables: public relations campaign, brochures and web-based trail information, trailhead information accessible online, junior explorer program, next generational trail ambassadors program

## VAN’S PRESENTATION ON FTA DIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

- Aiming to be part of the movement of welcoming underrepresented, diverse, and non-traditional groups to access the Florida Trail.



- 2016-2017 FTA Volunteer Demographic Data on Ethnicity and Race shapes FTA endeavors to have volunteer participation demographics reflect what's present in the state of Florida.
- Ways FTA can accomplish this task include a diversity plan, stated commitment to enhancing diversity on the FT, sharing stories, promoting inclusive events, and providing a platform for organizing and participating in a Roundtable on Diversity and implementing the Next Generation Trail Ambassadors Program. It is essential to build partnerships with diverse organizations to provide educational and inclusive opportunities for trail maintenance and recreation on the FT.
- Collaborative events will take place in the next few months for trail maintenance and stewardship.
- The FTA does not want to move away from the members it has already, it just wants more because the capacity for more is there. Everyone is valued equally and is equally important to the mission of the FTA.

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

- “Encourage and develop a diverse community of partners in the management, promotion and completion of the Florida Trail”
- Major Performance Measure – The Florida Trail Partnerships Program maintains high performing relationships that proactively contribute to development, maintenance or promotion of the Florida Trail.
- Long Term Outcome – The Florida Trail is supported by a network of land management, conservation and stewardship partners dedicated to the protection of the Florida Trail.
- 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 land management plans
- Deliverables: Contribute to partner publications; Create opportunity for a land manager E-Blaze; Semi-annual Coalition meetings; stronger FTA; pursue and diversify a variety of partnerships; Vets Work, FSU partnerships; MOUs and certification agreements; Partner with TNC, Land Trusts

## COMPLETE THE TRAIL

- “Add 50 high-quality, scenic miles of designated Florida National Scenic Trail that close critical gaps within the Trail corridor”
- Major Performance Measure – Remove 30 miles of trail connectors and add 50 designatable miles of trail to close critical gaps within the Trail corridor.
- Long Term Outcome – The Florida Trail is a fully designatable corridor, through ownership or permanent agreement, from the northern terminus in Gulf Islands National Seashore to the southern terminus in Big Cypress National Preserve
- Coalition feedback: shift language from trail connectors to road walk or gaps
- Measure success by quantifying the number of miles by which roadwalk/gaps were reduced
- Deliverables: corridor location reviews; FNST planning corridor; land acquisition atlas; large-scale infrastructure planning

## SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

- “Manage, monitor and maintain the Florida Trail and its associated infrastructure to ensure a high-quality recreation experience for current and future generations.”
- Major Performance Measure – 100% of the Florida Trail is managed to standard annually to provide maximum potential for recreation, conservation and enjoyment.

- Long Term Outcome – The Florida Trail is maintained as a high-quality, iconic, long-distance trail enjoyed by current and future generations.
- In terms of identity, we have learned that the FNST does not resonate but the Florida Trail does
  - Decision to shift from FNST to FT
- 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
- Deliverables: FNST resource atlas; infrastructure database; recreation use database; trail inspection protocol; citizen science, trail issue reporting; annual priority projects list; trail maintenance activities

## A LOOK AT THE FLORIDA TRAIL THROUGH GIS

- The Florida Trail is now roughly 1,500 miles, but no need to update documents to reflect this number.
- The designated trail has a length of 1,105 miles.
- Trail connectors (road walk) have a length of 443 miles.
- The trail on Conservation Lands:
  - Trail goes through 86 different managed lands totaling 912 miles
  - Need to include local lands and national parks
- Trail and roadwalk additions and removals: net gain of 8.4 miles of trail and 5.5 miles of road walk removal