
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
Dan Brockhaus	Public Lands Specialist, Osceola County
Doug Alderson	Assistant Bureau Chief, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails
Edwin McCook	Land Management Specialist, Suwannee River Water Management District
Jerrie Lindsey	Director, Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services, Florida Fish and Wildlife
Leslie Wheeler	President, Florida Trail Association
Travis Pollard	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Florida Refuge Complex (For Project Leader, North Florida Refuge Complex, US Fish and Wildlife Service)

Guests:

Chris Spori	Southern Region Director for Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage and Partnership/Volunteer Resources, USDA Forest Service
Jamie Schmitt	National Lead for Trails, USDA Forest Service
Alex Stigliano	Trail Program Manager, Florida Trail Association
Halle Goldstein	FT Gateway Community Program Coordinator, Florida Trail Association
Brittney Moore	North Florida Regional Coordinator, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails
Dara Osher	Graduate Student Intern, U.S. Forest Service

Next Meeting Information:

January 24-25th, 2019

Location TBD (suggested Lake Lizzie in Osceola County)

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/detail/fnst/working-together/?cid=stelprdb5422488>.

COALITION MEMBER UPDATES

Suwannee River WMD – Edwin McCook

On the Holton Creek tract of the Suwannee River WMD, some historical and cultural resources on the blue-blazed trail from Holton out to the state co-champion cypress trees have been added in the form of an interpretive plaque. Edwin assisted Jeff Glenn of the FTA with some work on Big Shoals to help close a gap in the Panhandle. If any of the public finds public land for sale that could help close a gap in the Florida Trail, the Florida Land Trust, so any information is helpful. Edwin encouraged Leslie Wheeler to move the FTA office to the Nature and Heritage Tourism Building in White Springs.

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

In the recent quarterly newsletter released to 47,000 people, Halle Goldstein wrote an article about the Florida Trail Gateway Communities Program. Anyone can submit to this newsletter with an article of statewide significance. OGT's online calendar for statewide and regional events has been updated and is available on their website. There is a designation program for public lands and, recently, a multi-use trail from a hospital parking lot in Tampa was designated. Private land owners who provide easements can get liability protection and other incentives for collaborating. The Florida Trail goes through 11 state parks.

US Forest Service – Kelly Russell

USFS expresses appreciation for FTA staff and volunteers for their help when last year's hurricane came. They arrived right away to see how they could help with clearing trails since the Ocala and Osceola National Forests needed assistance.

Florida Trail Association – Leslie Wheeler

Leslie attended a Public Land Acquisition and Management (PLAM) meeting sponsored by the DEP as one of two non-profit tables and a sponsor of the event. These various entities had not convened recently due to funding cuts, but FTA's presence there helped to raise awareness for the organization. The old FTA office in Gainesville has been demolished and is temporarily located downtown while staff look for a more permanent residence. A survey has been created to ask for input on office locations. Several local chapters held events during national public lands day. The Florida Trails program has received over \$135,000 in grants and funding this year. FTA has applied to the U.S. Patent Office for a patent on the phrase "building more than trails." A recent volunteer drive added 160 members to the FTA.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge – Travis Pollard

Maintenance is continuing as usual. A group of volunteers typically conduct annual maintenance. Current priorities are completing a gap at Spring Creek which has been open for quite a few years. There used to be boardwalks, but they washed away in a hurricane. A bridge has been chosen instead and there is almost enough funding to complete the project. The Florida Trustees Interest group, formed in response to the BP Oil Spill, has been tasked with creating a restoration plan that will include enhancing recreation. That section of the Florida Trail rose to the top of proposals, so it seems funding for the bridge will likely come through. The bridge will eliminate a 5-mile road walk.

Osceola County – Dan Brockhaus

A composting restroom has been purchased for the north end of Lake Lizzie Preserve and the county is working on scheduling and installing it. All the trails in the area have been blazed, and the details are being worked out for when the dedication will be. There is a pedestrian bridge connecting Tripl N to Holopaw that is in the permitting and agreements process.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission – Jerrie Lindsey

The bridge on Aucilla, built through a cost-share with USFS, has been completed. There are corridor studies looking at possible re-routes. FTA volunteers will help create camping platforms in Tosohatchee. Trail staff is working together to keep wildlife management properties up to standard. FWC is honored to have the Florida Trail on their land.

Orange County – Beth Jackson

There are 85 miles of Florida Trail on Orange County conservation lands. Last year, an agreement between Orange County and USFS was established. September 22nd, 2018 established the Florida Trail on Crosby Island Marsh Preserve. Fifteen volunteers from FTA and GOAA helped with this effort.

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.”

FLORIDA TRAIL GATEWAY COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

- Gateway Communities Program aims to connect hikers to towns to enhance safety, awareness, publicity, and tourism. Hikers can take respite in the towns and their presence offers economic benefits to the towns. The program was funded by an interagency and FS grant.
- Presently, there are 10 gateway communities, but plan to add more. This program is a wonderful way for hotels, bars, restaurants, and stores (and their communities) to embrace hikers. The FTA passport approach targets involvement of local businesses by promoting advertising, in turn hoping businesses can accommodate hikers with storage or discounts. The approach also includes a renewed focus on business partnership, along with city or local governments.
- Hired someone to help revitalize the old program by focusing on ties between hikers and businesses. The next stage of the program is to utilize a \$25,000 grant to put kiosks in the middle of towns, providing hubs for hikers to access information and resources.
- Florida Trail Passport Program will officially launch in January; similar to those on the Appalachian and El Camino Trails. Provides options for thru hikers and mementos to the towns. Stamps can be found throughout towns and in local businesses. More information can be found on FTA website.

FLORIDA TRAIL VISITOR USE STUDY OVERVIEW

- The University of Florida Visitor Assessments provide a model to other national entities. Methods include counts from counters and personal observations.
- FT gets 1,034 visitors per day and has seen small, but steady growth over the years. In Eglin, a new bridge will hopefully increase visitor numbers.
- 62% of trail users rated the trail 10/10; 39% of non-FT users rated it 10/10
- A studio project resulted in the creation of brochures, a survey of suburban families in Orlando, and an online survey of residents in White Springs.
- Established a Facebook page and a webpage as well as an online map of the trail
- This year, potential sites for counters include: Econfina, Big Shoals, Swift Creek, Lake Okeechobee, Gulf Islands National Seashore, and Three Lakes WMA.

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 Florida Trail.”
- 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 Florida Trail 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

COMPLETE THE TRAIL

- “Close the gaps in the Florida Trail through long-range planning, acquisition and agreements for long term protection of 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: FT resource atlas; infrastructure database; recreation use database; trail inspection protocol; citizen science, trail issue reporting; annual priority projects list; trail maintenance activities

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 diversity a variety of partnerships; Vets Work, FSU partnerships; MOUs and certification agreements; Partner with TNC, Land Trusts