

Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition Summary

9-10 January 2020 at Chinsegut Conservation Center, Brooksville FL

Coalition Members in attendance:

Shawn Thomas	Florida National Scenic Trail Administrator, U.S. Forest Service
Carrie Sekerak	<i>(for Kelly Russell)</i> Deputy District Ranger, Ocala National Forest, U.S. Forest Service
Beth Jackson	Environmental Program Supervisor, Orange County
Dale Allen	Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation
Daniel Brockhaus	Public Lands Specialist, Osceola County
David Waldrop	President, Florida Trail Association
Doug Alderson	Assistant Bureau Chief, Florida Park Service, Office of Greenways & Trails Division of Recreation & Parks
Edwin McCook	Senior Land Management Specialist, Suwannee River Water Management District
Jerrie Lindsey	Director, Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
Kotryna Klizentyte	<i>(for Taylor Stein)</i> PhD Student, School of Forest Resources and Conservation, University of Florida
Lorna Radcliff	Recreation Coordinator, Florida Forest Service

Guests:

Anthony Tridente	GIS Technician, Florida Natural Areas Inventory & U.S. Forest Service
Jenna Taylor	Central/South Trail Program Manager, Florida Trail Association
Kelly Wiener	Florida Trail Program Manager, Florida Trail Association
Philip Marley	FNST Deputy Administrator, U.S. Forest Service
Ralph Hancock	Vice President of Trails, Florida Trail Association

Next Meeting Information:

Date: Tentative early June 2020
Location TBD

Meeting Summary:

FNST Coalition meetings are a gathering of land managers and partners to discuss progress and best practices 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 ROLE, MISSION, & VISION STATEMENTS

Role of the Coalition

The role of the coalition was briefly discussed, aligned with the 2018 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 coalition body to inform better decisions and attract greater resources to advance, protect and connect people to the Florida Trail.”

2018/19 Strategic Plan Accomplishment Report distributed (attached) and will become available here: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/fnst/land-resources-management>

GOAL 1: PROMOTE CONNECTIONS

Major Performance Measure- Increase number and diversity of Florida Trail recreationists by 15% over 5 years.

- Noted that this goal is at the fore front of the goals
- 3 Standardized kiosk panel templates have been created for the FT: Trail-wide, local add-on and gateway community. We encourage this resource as a way to brand the FT consistently across the state.
 - We will provide panels or template (in needed format) if requested; reach out to your local FTA Regional Trail Manager for assistance.
 - 2 standard sizes 33”x33” & 48”x36”
 - We can make custom sizes if needed – Email FTA Regional Manager, Philip and/or Shawn with requests
 - We can also exchange maps, images, symbols, graphics, and text
- Regional trip brochures were created for Withlacoochee State Forest and Lake Lizzie as templates for land managers or volunteer chapters to utilize as desired and are intended for family use. Those would be provided to member/partners and they can print and distribute as needed
- Gateway Community passport program (collect unique stamps) up and running see <https://www.floridatrail.org/passport/> and learn more about the now 11 designated communities at <https://www.floridatrail.org/gatewaycommunities/>
- There is a new web app that replaces our previous web map. This is a cleaner map and should be easier to maintain and update. This new web app is not intended for trail navigation. Web map access available via FNST web site or directly at: <https://cosspp.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=04fbd8ae24a94db68957c89630d1eb3f>. All data that feeds the map is available as view-only via web service links, and could be consumed in members/partner applications.

GOAL 2: COMPLETE THE TRAIL

Major Performance Measure- Remove 30 miles of trail connectors and add 50 designatable miles of trail to close critical gaps within the Trail corridor.

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- FT is 1,583.92* miles long. (Gulf Islands to Big Cypress) **includes all designated trail, official side trail and connecting roadwalk*
 - Total designated trail length: 1,109.5 miles
 - Total connector (roadwalk and non-agreement trail) length: 446.66 miles
 - Total spur trail length: 27.75 miles
- It was noted that we use 1,300 miles in publications, quotes, etc. We are considering upping that number to 1,400 or 1,500 miles in publications and messaging to more accurately reflect data.
- 15.24 miles of trail added, and 14.05 miles of connector removed in 2019
- The Trail goes through 103 different managed lands.
- FSU graduate student intern working on a Lands Acquisition Decision Support Tool. This tool is based on land use / land cover data from FWC & FNAI. FS ranked all landcover classes into 5 separate categories based on most suitable to least suitable types for trail location. This data is then combined with multiple datasets (distance to trail, etc) to be used as a decision support tool. In the future, the tool would be able to be combined with a willing seller list to generate autonomous notifications when parcels become available within our designated areas of interest. There is not currently a willing sellers list, but we are researching the ability to leverage the Multiple Listing System (MLS) data to feed our tool. This has proven complex to achieve, but we are working to find a solution.
- There will be more communication between the FS and other agencies regarding FT priorities.
- Big Bend Reroute recommendation package may now have the ability to be signed at the FS Region level rather than having to go to Department. More on this as things process
- Trail is not listed as a single project regarding Florida Forever projects. We must work each individual land unit (parcel) as an individual project. May want to revisit request to consider entire trail.
- Members suggested FS may want to set up meeting with member's/partner's land acquisition teams.
- Noted that counties may be the best source of land acquisition funding opportunities and partnerships
- Hiking Trails need to be tied to Health and the Benefits on Hiking to legislatures.

GOAL 3: SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

Major Performance Measure- 100% of the Florida Trail is managed to standard annually to provide maximum potential for recreation, conservation and enjoyment.

- Demon Bridge on Alaqu Creek has been completed
- Spring Creek Bridge Project which is gearing up is a NRDA funded project
 - We have 3 years to complete (design -> implement)
 - Work would be completed with partners and volunteers instead of a full contract package
 - Article in Footprint magazine on the bridge project
- Infrastructure Database created, 645+ points collect so far
- FS has been updating FT GIS data schema
- FS has identified ArcGIS Online, Collector for ArcGIS, and Survey123 as tools for data sharing and publication
- Allowable Uses dataset complete and available under on our ArcGIS online map by clicking the "Permitted Recreation Usage on the Trail" box under *Show Contents of Map tab*
<http://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=b4f2fedc4c5848b1a221e21400938a02&extent=-84.0915,-26.6815,-78.7192,29.8689>
- Trying to have more consistency on management plan minimum standard and how to handle competitive events. Hoping to start including new language regarding in future MOUs/Agreements
- Beth requested extending MOUs past 5 years. We do have some ability to extend to a possible 10 years, but it does take additional time upfront. We are also exploring additional agreement tools that would allow for extended times.

GOAL 4: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Major Performance Measure- The Florida Trail Partnerships Program maintains high performing relationships that proactively contribute to Trail development, maintenance or promotion of the Florida Trail.

- FNST has 48 total active agreements, 9 Funded, 39 non-funded
- Kelly asked for member/land managers to email her (kellyw@floridatrail.org) if anyone needs volunteer hours specific to their lands/properties. FTA's new volunteer database will improve FTA's ability to pull more accurate and detailed data
- FTA had 550+ volunteers last field season. The volunteer hours equate to \$25.43/hr which comes to \$535,000+. These values do not include travel hours.
- Was noted that most FTA volunteers are FL residents while they get out of state people primary on work parties
- Members/partners expressed desire to use their social media platform to share FT posts, such as the YouTube video <https://youtu.be/t1IsxEAjb0Q> Questions was is there a way to have unique links to track what partners followers are viewing FT posts. We'll check.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

FTA & FS is working to update/redesign the 2018 Emergency Response Plan (ERP) & will submit to Coalition at a future meeting. It was asked if members/partners would like to help distribute the ERP to local responders. Most attending said they could assist with that distribution if requested/needed. The plan is for the ERP to be used by local responders rather than members/partners as they have their own protocols in place.

Highlight of Econfina Creek Hurricane Recovery and FS Saw Program

The FS brought in a professional saw crew from out west consisting of 3 sawyers, one which is a safety officer. This FS saw crew along side FTA, FOC, and volunteers worked for 2 weeks straight to finish clearing the trail. Majority of the saw work was high technical/complex cutting that our volunteers are unable to cut. During that 2 weeks they clear approximately 20 miles of trail. Some things to note from the overall hurricane recovery. 1) We learned how certain builds/styles of bridges handle falling debris and trees as well as handle the intense flooding event. 2) We learned that after this event, it was very tough to locate the trail under and through all the blow down and debris. 3) The professional sawyers noted this is the worst/most complex cutting they have encountered.

FLORIDA TRAIL VISITOR USE OVERVIEW

The total estimated annual visits for 2018-2019 are 337,753 visits. The number of visits for 2017-2018 were 364,290. As it looks like the number went down, a new counter system was deployed, and it is believed to show a more accurate number than the previous counters. New counters were placed at Little Shoals Preserve this year. The gender demographic was exactly 49.6% split between male/female. It was also noted that 54% hikers, 42% Retired, 33% annual income \$30k-69,999, and education was 40% college graduate. The University of Florida is open to adding questions to the survey and welcomes feedback. Attendees can communicate their comments to Kotryna Klizentyte. It was mentioned that there should be additional counters

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placed, and members/partners expressed the desire to have counters deployed and checked by their staff (who run counters) if the counters could be provided. This new expansion of counters is being researched further.

COALITION MEMBER UPDATES

Orange County – Beth Jackson

The FS and Orange County has an active MOU. There was a ribbon cutting ceremony on Split Oak. 85 miles of FNST on Orange County Conservation Lands. Crosby Island Marsh Preserve opened on July 17, 2019 with 40 people in attendance. Established 1 mile of FNST and Spur Trail on Crosby Island Marsh Preserve. Had 23 crew members for Central Florida Maintenance Crew. Maintained 1 mile of trail on Savage Christmas Creek Preserve. Installed 1 mile of trail and 2 stiles. Looking at conducting a feasibility study on Pine Lilly Preserve. Orange County got a \$100 Million commitment for acquisitions.

Florida Trail Association- David Waldrop

FTA has a new Central/South Regional Trail Manager, Jenna Taylor. Completed the Seminole SF gap closure. FTA receives a PNST grant to hire a Gateway Community intern, housed in Gainesville.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission – Jerrie Lindsey

FWC has a 5,000 acres land acquisition in south Florida. They also have a large acquisition in the panhandle, near Box-R and Apalachicola WEA area. The tourism academy is in February and Doug will be a speaker.

Suwannee River Water Management District – Edwin McCook

New trail town designation and are working with DOT to put up trail signage. They are working to enhance their website and are developing Storymaps.

Florida Forest Service – Lorna Radcliff

Knight property could get ~9 miles off of Hwy 20 and are actively following updates. There are a lot of private interest as well. FFS is interested new kiosks. They are also working on consistent/standard trail markings. FFS is trying to be consistent with FT standards.

US Forest Service - Carrie Sekerak

FS is working to sign a Shared Stewardship Agreement, but have been engaged in shared stewardship since the agencies existed. The FS chief and/or Secretary of Ag will come down and sign in February as the official signing. Praised the hard work by FTA/FOC for their major role in hurricane cleanup. Shout out to the O2O corridor work, with trail to assist with match. Scrub property is being acquired (~25 acres). There is a new ranger at Apalachicola NF who came from out of state. There is also a new deputy ranger on the Apalachicola NF and he is from the Apalach. Prospect Bluff acquiring land near bluff. Praised FTA's work with Juniper Wilderness and the Bear Can Program.

Florida Park Service, Office of Greenways & Trails Division of Recreation & Parks

- Doug Alderson

Doug mentioned Muscogee Nation of Florida in the small town of Bruce would like to be an overnight stop and potentially Gateway Community. No longer directly on the trail but they want to help hikers.

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Osceola County - Dan Brockhaus

Holopaw 1,500 acres mitigation bank. They own ~150 acres and working on additional acres to move more trail off road walk. Osceola County has a new Cost Share Agreement with the Forest Service.

Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation - Dale Allen

Dale mentioned 4 alternatives of the reroute. 35 miles road walk with no facilities (multiple gov/public lands with facilities). 98% completed although there is more road walk than we like. There are a couple of obstacles left they are working on. The is new dialog going on with Deseret. Also working for a land bridge to cross the 528.

US Forest Service – FNST – Shawn Thomas

Big Bend Reroute is in the priority maps at OGT. The package has been stagnate for several years at the FS Washington Office. After another recent look at the package through legal counsel, it seems we may be able to have the package approved by the FS Regional Forester rather than routing through the Department. The work should take place in 2 phases: 1) Environmental review and public scoping to inform final decision. 2) We move the trail and issue a correction notice that the trail has moved.

Tour of the Chinsegut Conservation Center and Florida Trail Friday January 10th

Attendees: Coalition members, FTA staff, FS staff, FWC staff

Chinsegut Conservation Center's Manager, Gina Long - welcome and remarks

Gina Long highlighted some of the work of the Center and showcased some of the tools that FWC uses on multiple projects and management activities.

Gina lead a hike on Chinsegut which included viewing a 3D archery course, boardwalk at May Prairie, and a section of FT.

We then traveled to Big Pine EA and viewed the southern most virgin Long Leaf Pine tract.

Finally, we visited Perry Oldenburg WEA. While in route be briefly stopped at a FT road crossing where the trail crosses onto a recent FAMU agreement tract prior to Perry Oldenburg. At the WEA, we hiked a section of FT and viewed Southeastern Kestrel Nesting boxes.

Big thanks for Gina Long for hosting us and for her and FWC staff for shuttling members on the site visit and the great information we received.

