

# **A Visitor Assessment of Florida National Scenic Trail Visitors on Ocala National Forest Lands**



Compiled at  
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## Introduction to the Project

From the summer of 2003 through the summer of 2008, researchers from the University of Florida studied visitors on the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The Trail traverses almost the whole state from Pensacola to Big Cypress National Preserve. Researchers studied visitors to the Trail on public lands throughout the state with the cooperation of every type of public land agency. This includes the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida State Parks, and Florida's water management districts (Northwest Florida, Suwannee River, St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida).

The project consisted of two main parts: to count visitors and to understand who they are and why they use the Trail. In order to count visitors, mechanical counters (either infrared or pressure sensitive pads) were placed along the FNST near trailheads. This gave researchers 24 hour monitoring capabilities. Each site had a counter installed for one or more years, so seasonal fluctuations could be studied. The data were analyzed monthly and cleaned to correct for counts triggered by wildlife or meteorological events.

This produced fairly reliable counts for each section of the Trail that was monitored. In some instances, counters were not installed. Instead, different sampling strategies were used that included visual monitoring, permits, and other strategies.

A questionnaire was also administered to better understand the recreation habits and motivations of visitors to the FNST. Trained surveyors questioned visitors about their demographics, desired experiences, satisfaction, and other recreation activities involved in while on the Trail. This portion of the study was also completed in areas all over the State and on lands representing all the different types of land management agencies in Florida.

The following report is a summary of the results of both portions of the study for all Ocala National Forest recreation areas where the study was conducted. Some areas only had visitor counting done and no questionnaires administered. It should be noted that the survey sample size was sometimes small in the lower use areas. The questionnaire sample size is noted above the results summary. Hopefully, this report will help the Ocala National Forest personnel better understand the recreation habits of visitors to their lands.



## Ocala National Forest

### Counter Data

#### Counter Type:

- Juniper Recreation Area: Diamond Traffic Eye
- Clearwater Recreation Area: Trail Master Eye
- Lake Delancy: Trail Master Eye
- SR 19: Diamond Traffic Eye
- Juniper Wilderness, Alexander Springs, Hopkins Prairie, Buck Lake, and Grassy Pond were visually monitored and access point averages were applied according to protocol.

#### Counter Related Problems and Solutions:

- Clearwater Recreation Area: transmitter of the unit (Trail Master) was stolen in December 2007 and the unit was replaced

with new immediately when the incident was noticed.

- SR19: the unit was found not functioning in August 2007, resulting in approximately one month of data loss. The counter was immediately replaced.

#### Trail conditions throughout the year:

- Throughout the year the trail conditions in Ocala were generally good.
- A prescribed burn occurred within the Clearwater Recreation Area in November 2007 and another prescribed burn within Lake Delancy in July 2008 which may have affected some trail use.
- A severe thunderstorm storm in July 2008 resulted in several fallen trees along the SR 19 portion of the FNST, which may cause traversing the trail difficult.

Table 1. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail in the Ocala National Forest: 2007-2008

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
Juniper Rec.	45	28	21	38	38	153	233	255	252	211	104	77	1,455
Clearwater	35	77	12	29	19	17	17	21	135	164	121	56	703
SR 19	72	18	38	94	73	119	101	108	149	138	75	163	1,148
Lake Delancy	4	11	8	5	42	23	23	25	47	42	21	2	253
Juniper Wilderness*	12	7	11	5	52	53	68	68	84	102	85	64	611
Alexander Springs*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Grassy Pond*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Buck Lake*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Hopkins Prairie*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>820</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>5,317</b>

\*Estimation calculated through access point averages

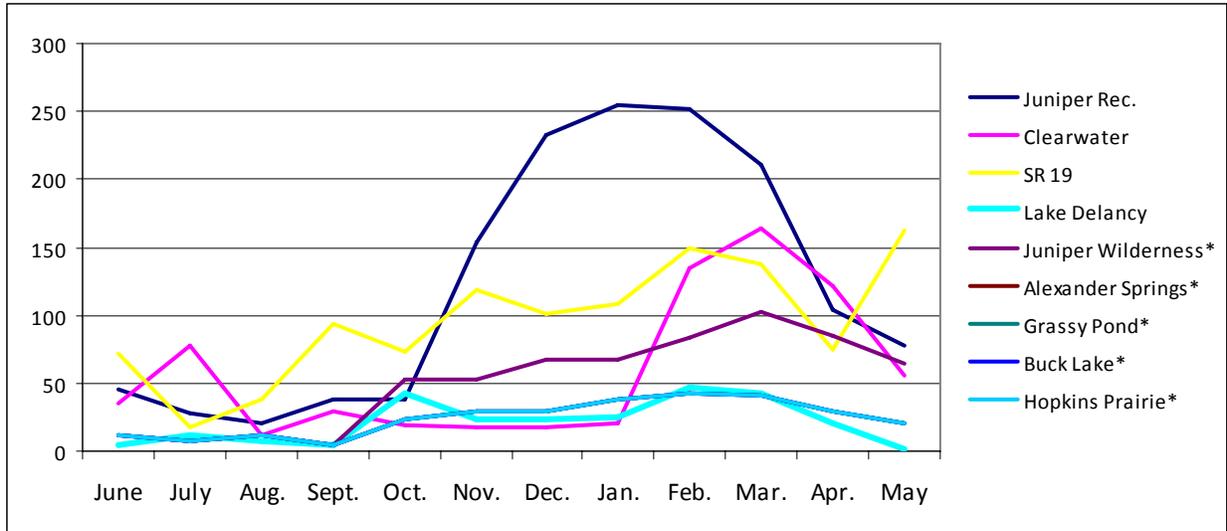


Figure 1. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail: 2007-2008

2003-2008 Use Estimates

A comparison of data collected from 2003-2008 shows that highest use year was the 2006-2007 study season with 6,481 estimated FNST visits.

Table 2. Use of the Florida Trail at the Ocala National Forest: October 2003- May 2008

Study Year	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	TOTAL
2003-2004	*	*	*	*	449	421	260	471	336	377	273	218	2,805
2004-2005	170	114	124	38	203	315	372	554	563	630	511	244	3,838
2005-2006	256	295	301	267	260	515	503	698	724	804	724	497	5,844
2006-2007	395	384	339	376	403	557	558	771	862	819	540	477	6,481
2007-2008	215	167	132	189	316	483	562	630	833	820	522	447	5,316

\*Data collection through the use of mechanical counters did not begin until October 2003

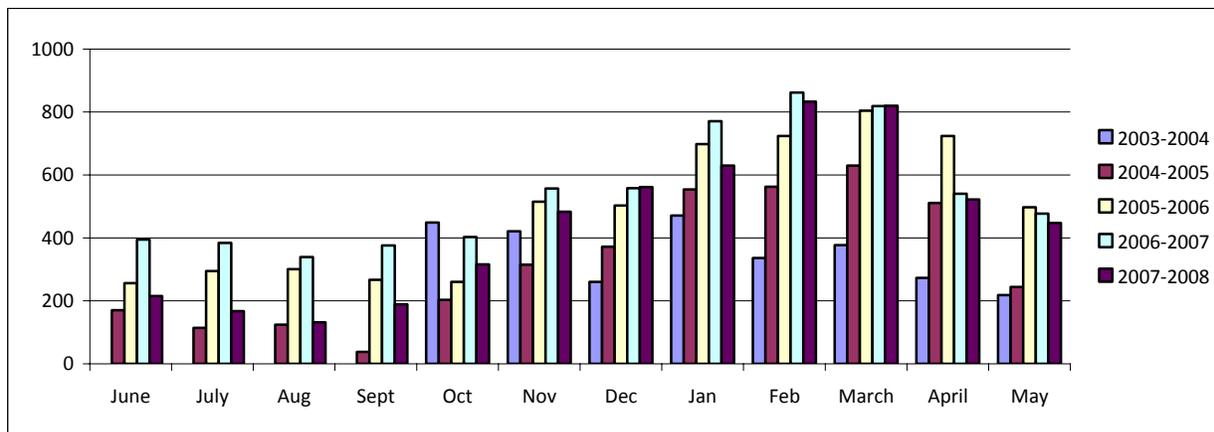


Figure 2. Use of the Florida Trail at the Ocala National Forest: October 2003- May 2008

## Questionnaire Results

(n=29)

### Visitor Survey Data

Surveys were conducted at the following access points:

- Juniper Wilderness (FR10)
- Clearwater Recreation Area
- Juniper Recreation Area
- SR 19

### Socio-Demographics

50% of respondents were male  
 50% of respondents were female  
 82% of respondents were married  
 57% of respondents had a college degree or beyond  
 68% of respondents were employed outside of the home  
 43% of respondents were between the ages of 40-49 years old  
 93% of respondents were white  
 36% of respondents travel between 30-60 miles to get to the trail  
 25% of respondents traveled between 61-90 miles to get to the trail

### Trip Characteristics

79% of visitors had been to the trail before

37% of visitors had visited the trail 2-6 times within the past year

46% of visitors spent a few hours on the trail  
 54% of visitors hiked/walked 3-5 miles during their trip

39% of visitors rate their experience a 9 out of 10

58% of visitors stated that hiking/walking was their primary activity

34% of visitors stated that viewing scenery was their second activity

61% of visitors were traveling with family

25% of visitors could not remember where they learned about the trail

22% of visitors said they learned about the trail from friends/family

### Motivations

Promote physical fitness (mean = 3.00)

Escape (mean = 3.00)

Explore the environment (mean = 3.00)

### Destination Attractors & Settings

Wilderness and undisturbed areas (mean = 3.00)

A chance to see wildlife/birds (mean = 2.96)

Good environmental quality of air, water, and soil (mean = 2.86)

Travel on dirt/grass trail (mean = 2.92)

Travel along loop trails (mean = 2.60)

Encounter 6 or fewer groups/day (mean = 2.85)

Travel in areas untouched by humans (mean = 2.85)

## **Acknowledgements**

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