



WES-PP-07: TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: ADOPT

PROPOSED POLICY: SUPPORT state construction, improvement, and designation of additional trails for Floridians to increase accessibility between urban and rural areas.

BACKGROUND: According to the Florida Greenways & Trails 2019-2023 System Plan, “studies demonstrate that, in addition to economic prosperity, outdoor recreation delivers personal and social benefits on which healthy, happy communities thrive.” The Florida Department of Health has also stated that for every dollar spent on walking trails, approximately three dollars is saved in medical expenses. Based on empirical evidence, there is no doubt that recreational trails provide a benefit to local communities including contributing to economic development and personal health. Further, the US Treasury has recognized that investments in improving outdoor spaces is an appropriate and acceptable response to the negative impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANALYSIS: The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Division (Division) of Recreation and Parks, through section 375.031(1), F.S., to develop and execute a comprehensive, multipurpose outdoor recreation plan with the assistance of other public recreation land managers. In addition, section 258.004(3), Florida Statutes, directs DEP to study and appraise the recreation needs of the state, and to assemble and disseminate information pertaining to recreation. To further emphasize the importance of providing outdoor recreation in Florida, DEP has identified as one of its objectives “to plan, promote and provide outdoor recreation opportunities through a network of trails, access and information.”

The Office of Greenways and Trails within the Division has the responsibility of leading, planning and facilitating the development of an interconnected Florida Greenways and Trails System. The Office works with local governments to compile trails data to track an interconnected system of trail networks. The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is the state’s official document regarding outdoor recreation planning.

Currently, the Florida Department of Transportation administers multiple funding sources to help implement further development of trail systems. When combined with additional state appropriations and federal grants, local transportation planning organizations and county governments are able to realize trail network planning goals. Grant program funding sources include: Florida Forever, Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, Recreational Trails Program and Florida Communities Trust.

FISCAL IMPACT: Indeterminate. Associated costs with additional trail expansion are indeterminate and based upon the potential appropriation of the Legislature.



FAC STAFF NOTES:

- 2022 FAC Policy Conference
 - WES-PP-07 was recommended for adoption by the WES committee
 - This proposal was previously numbered WES-PP-08
- Trail and Greenway Administration in Florida:
 - The administration of Florida's trails and greenways falls primarily to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and its constituent offices, including the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT).
 - A series of statutes and rules provide the framework by which DEP governs trail development and acquisition, and ultimately develops their 5-year Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), as well as the Florida Greenways and Trails System (GTS) plan and map.
- Statutes:
 - [Ch. 260, F.S.](#), the *Florida Greenways and Trails Act*:
 - Recognizes the benefits of outdoor areas, and conserve, develop, and use the state's natural resources for recreational and healthful purposes.
 - Establishes a statewide system of Greenways and Trails to benefit environmentally sensitive lands and wildlife, and provide people access to healthful outdoor activities.
 - Provides guidelines for greenways and trails on both public AND private land and waterways.
 - Creates the Florida Greenways and Trails Council, to advise the Department on the execution of their powers and duties under Ch. 260.
 - Provides direction for coordination with the Florida Department of Transportation regarding leasing of abandoned or to-be-abandoned railroad rights of way for trail and greenway development.
 - [Ch. 253, F.S.](#) – *Public Lands and Property*, in conjunction with [Ch. 259, F.S.](#) – *Land Acquisitions for Conservation or Recreation*, governs the acquisition and stewardship of public lands for recreational and conservation purposes.
- Rules:
 - [Ch. 62-S1, F.A.C.](#) – *Florida Greenways and Trails Program*:
 - Establishes the procedures by which OGT solicits, evaluates, and selects lands for acquisition for the Florida Greenways and Trails System
 - [Ch. 62-S2, F.A.C.](#) – *Recreational Trails Program*
 - Governs Florida's administration of federally-matched Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).



- The program is administered by DEP's Land and Recreation Grants division
- Provides application requirements and evaluation criteria for project proposals addressing construction of new recreational trails (with restrictions for new trails on Federal lands); maintenance and restoration or renovation of existing recreational trails; development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities; and recreational trail linkages.
- Current and Future Planning of Outdoor Spaces:
 - DEP is directed by the legislature to cooperate with state and federal agencies, private organizations, and commercial and industrial interests in the promotion of a statewide outdoor recreation system. The resulting product is the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
 - The SCORP represents the state's official document regarding outdoor recreational planning and is developed on a five year basis.
 - The 2019 edition of the SCORP can be found [here](#).
 - Drafting of the revised 2023 SCORP is in progress.
 - The 5-year Florida Greenways and Trails System (GTS) Plan and Map will also receive a scheduled update in 2023
 - DEP is currently accepting public input on their 2023-2027 GTS DRAFT
 - In December 2022, following the public comment period, the plan will be presented to the Florida Greenways and Trails Council for final approval
- Bills:
 - 2022
 - [SB 1816](#) – *Land Acquisition Trust Fund*—Failed
 - Would amend section 201.15, F.S. to extend the retirement date of bonds issued to fund the *Florida Forever* program from 2040 to 2054.
 - Would prescribe a recurring appropriation of \$100 million to the Florida Forever Trust Fund.
 - [HB 1377](#) – *Land Acquisition Funding*
 - Would amend section 201.15, F.S. to extend the retirement date of bonds issued to fund the *Florida Forever* program from 2040 to 2054.
 - Would revise the distribution by DEP of *Florida Forever* bond proceeds. Most significantly, the measure would raise the distribution rate for the Florida Greenways and Trails program, from 1.5% to 2%.
- Miscellaneous:
 - Trails as an economic driver:
 - <https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/2019%20Trails%20Economic%20infographic.pdf>
- Past FAC statements & Guiding Principles



- WES-PP-09 (2021-22): SUPPORT state construction, improvement, and designation of additional trails for Floridians to increase accessibility between urban and rural areas.
- Guiding Principle WES 17: The Florida Association of Counties supports the allocation of matching funds to county governments to purchase environmentally sensitive and endangered lands.

SUBMITTING COUNTY: Lake

ASSIGNED COMMITTEE: WES

BOARD SUPPORT: N/A

UNFUNDED MANDATE: No

PROTECTIVE OF HOME RULE: N/A