

# Florida National Scenic Trail 5-Year Strategic Plan



2012





M. Timothy O'Keefe



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Mike Knox





This is a landmark document for the Florida National Scenic Trail. For the first time since the original Comprehensive Plan of 1986 we have sat as a team of landowners to thoughtfully, and deliberately, set goals for the Trail. These goals provide an overall strategic direction by which we can focus collaborative efforts and allocate resources to achieve specific results that benefit both the Trail and trail user. This document is also significant in that it represents a new partnership model which more fully engages a diverse group of land managers who are connected to the Trail. With this Plan, we build a vision of the Florida National Scenic Trail that is much greater than the sum of its parts and that more fully appreciates the Trail for its distinct and unique scenic, historic, natural and cultural values.

Started in the 1960s by a group of dedicated hikers, the Florida National Scenic Trail is nearly 1,000 miles long, allowing an exploration of semi-tropical ecosystems unique to this region of the United States. As a whole, the Trail encompasses everything from the most remote wilderness of Florida to its most popular urban areas. The Trail is used by an estimated 350,000 recreationists per year. We are committed to ensuring a safe, accessible, and high quality recreation experience, while protecting the scenic, historic, natural, and cultural values of the trail corridor.

By legislation, the Florida National Scenic Trail is administered by the United States Forest Service (USFS), specifically, the National Forests in Florida. The Trail, however, is in large part the public asset it is today due to the enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work of the Florida Trail Association's staff and volunteers. We look forward to their continued support and participation as we expand our partnerships through the Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition of land managers and stakeholders.

Few realize that the Florida National Scenic Trail is one of eleven congressionally designated Scenic Trails in the Country, and of those, one of only three that are contained in a single state. The Florida National Scenic Trail is both a State and a National treasure. With this Plan, the USFS and our partners commit to protecting and enhancing that treasure for our residents and visitors, for daily recreationists and avid trail users, and for today's and future generations.

Susan Jeheber-Matthews  
Forest Supervisor, National Forests in Florida

## COALITION MEMBERS

Florida Forest Service

Florida Department of  
Environmental Protection,  
Division of Recreation and Parks

Florida Department of  
Environmental Protection, Division  
of Recreation and Parks,  
Office of Greenways and Trails

Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission

Florida Trail Association, Inc.

Northwest Florida Water  
Management District

Plum Creek Timber Company

Seminole County,  
Greenways and Natural Lands  
Division

University of Florida,  
School of Forest Resources and  
Conservation

United States Air Force,  
Eglin Air Force Base

United States Forest Service,  
National Forests in Florida

National Park Service,  
Big Cypress National Preserve

USDI Fish and Wildlife Service,  
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

# Overview

The Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition was formed at the invitation of the Forest Supervisor of the National Forests in Florida who has administrative responsibility for the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The Coalition is composed primarily of agency, district or company leaders who own or manage the land through which the FNST passes. The concept for the Coalition emerged from an analysis of the existing partnership between the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Florida Trail Association (FTA). The intent of the new model is to coalesce a broader, more representative group of partners to guide the management of the Trail and serve a broader base of recreationists. In addition, the FNST Coalition strives to reach a new generation who will enjoy, appreciate, and steward this natural resource and the Nation's natural heritage.

# Role

The FNST Coalition is dedicated to ensuring the development, maintenance, and promotion of the FNST to ensure an optimum recreation experience. The Coalition brings a diversity of perspectives, interests, and expertise and thus ensures that the Trail is a truly public asset that is accessible and enjoyed by diverse constituents.

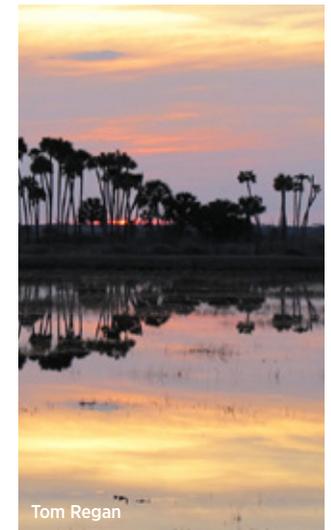
The Coalition serves primarily in a support role to the USFS. Collectively, the FNST Coalition will inform better decisions, attract greater resources, and create Trail champions across the State. Specifically, the Coalition agrees to:

- Complete the FNST Strategic Plan, oversee implementation of the plan, and work together to ensure accountability to goals and outcomes;
- Oversee adherence to trail standards for access, safety, signage, and interpretation to achieve the optimum recreation experience;
- Serve as Trail supporters and advocates and assist in attracting financial and human resources for Trail development, maintenance, and promotion;
- Foster coordination among various interests, networks, and stakeholders throughout the State.



Rachael Augspurg

**The National Trails System Act,** Section 3, 16 USC 1241, "National Scenic Trails...will be extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass."



Tom Regan

# Planning Process

This Florida National Scenic Trail strategic planning process began in April 2010 with a meeting between the United States Forest Service and the Florida Trail Association, long standing partners in building, protecting, and maintaining the FNST since its designation as a national public resource in 1983. At that meeting it was determined that a new partnership model, one that more fully engaged the dozens of FNST land managers in the decisions most affecting the Trail, would be critical to managing the FNST now and in to the future. The FNST Coalition of land managers and stakeholders was formed in the following months, each individual member contributing valuable expertise, insight and on-the-ground perspective in the development of the Florida National Scenic Trail 5-Year Strategic Plan which aims to guide the statewide development, maintenance and promotion of the FNST.

This Plan serves to unify disparate activities for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach which focuses and prioritizes resources to achieve standards and desired outcomes. This Plan also tells the living story of the Florida National Scenic Trail: what the value of the resource is, what will be accomplished, and how public and private resources will be utilized for the greatest benefit to the public and the lands through which the Trail crosses.

The natural and cultural resource data, maps, market research, recreational data, and expert analysis which contribute to this Plan are available for review at [www.fs.usda.gov/fnst](http://www.fs.usda.gov/fnst). The Plan was developed and approved by the FNST Coalition working with the USFS and the planning consultant. The Plan will ultimately address strategic issues affecting the Trail, define implementation priorities, and outline parameters to:

**Create the optimum recreation experience while protecting and enhancing the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural qualities of the areas through which the Trail crosses; and promote the Florida National Scenic Trail identity and brand.**



FTA Historical Archives

The Florida National Scenic Trail was designated by Congress in 1983 as part of the National Trail System which is host to 11 National Scenic Trails and 19 National Historic Trails across America. Congress delegated the protection and management of the FNST to the USFS, specifically, the National Forests in Florida. Long before its designation, the Florida Trail Association and its founder, Jim Kern, had championed the cause for a connected hiking trail the length of Florida. Nearly 1,000 miles and 45 years later, the USFS and FTA are still working in partnership to build, protect, and maintain the FNST, now with the support of the FNST Coalition and the guidance of this Strategic Plan.



# Vision

The natural and cultural resources of the Trail corridor are protected and conserved to afford a unique scenic trail experience. A complete Florida National Scenic Trail provides a seamless, optimum recreation experience enjoyed and appreciated by diverse audiences. The FNST has broad community and citizen support and engagement.

# Description

The FNST is a federally-designated, non-motorized, recreation trail that represents the diverse scenic, historic, natural, and cultural character of the Trail corridor. It is Florida's only congressionally-designated trail and is the only National Scenic Trail that explores a semi-tropical ecosystem.

# Optimum Recreation Experience

As a National Scenic Trail, the FNST provides readily available, safe, educational, and memorable opportunities across a spectrum of challenges; recreationists can expect signage, maintenance, accessibility, and interpretation to be standardized and to meet best trail management practices; and recreationists recognize and identify their experience as part of the larger, distinct National Scenic Trail experience.



Ed Selby



Robert Coveney



Robert Coveney

# Overview

The FNST Coalition has deliberately set core goals designed to define specific outcomes for the next five years. These goals create a more focused approach to the completion, protection, management, and promotion of the Florida National Scenic Trail. Priorities for projects, tasks, and resources will be defined to best achieve each goal.

This is not a land management plan or a routing plan. The goals do not provide management prescriptions for individual miles or segments. More detailed action plans and guidelines will be developed over time and made available at [www.fs.usda.gov/fnst](http://www.fs.usda.gov/fnst).

## Approach

The FNST Coalition Members are dedicated to:

- Coordination among all partners
- A cooperative relationship with landowners built on voluntary participation
- Using best current and available data from which to base decisions
- A shared vision and aspirations for the success of the FNST

## Goals

**Complete the Trail:** Add 100 new scenic and designated miles of FNST towards completion of a high quality trail

**Standards:** 100% of existing designated FNST meets the recreation, information, and interpretive trail standards within its resource classification category of 1- 5

**Partnerships:** Each of the FNST land managers proactively contribute to Trail development, maintenance and promotion of their segment as part of the larger whole

**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.



## GOAL: Complete the Trail

**Add 100 new scenic and designated miles of FNST towards completion of a high quality trail**

### Description

Completion of the Trail will require a final and formally designated route. Current estimates show a need for approximately 300 miles of Trail to be built or designated to complete the FNST from end to end with the remaining miles encompassing a diverse array of landowners. As we move towards completing the Trail, it will be necessary to ensure continued enhancement of those features that make the FNST unique.

### Strategies

- Define routing of a complete Florida National Scenic Trail, based on current and accurate data that defines on the ground conditions.
- Prioritize Trail segments to fill gaps; an ongoing and iterative process.
- Negotiate easements or formal agreements as options for Trail completion.
- Acquire segments as necessary for Trail completion.
- Transfer outlying parcels to neighboring Trail partners for more effective management.
- Enhance partnerships with nongovernmental organizations for long term protection of the Trail corridor to protect the integrity of scenic, ecological, and cultural values of the surrounding landscape.



## GOAL: Standards



**100% of existing designated FNST meets the recreation, information, and interpretive Trail standards within its resource classification category of 1- 5**

### Description

Recreationists enjoying the FNST are afforded experiences ranging from wilderness hiking far from a built environment to a multi-use trail with access and amenities for people of all ages and skill sets. However, within each of the resource classes, the Trail experience will be standardized so that the recreationist can anticipate the same level of access, amenities, and need for preparedness within each class. Bringing the FNST to standard will create a more consistent experience on the Trail and will promote an appreciation for the diversity of the resource.

### Strategies

- Build and maintain an accurate data base of Trail miles by class.
- Develop, manage to, and evaluate standards in a consistent manner across the Trail.
- Create and produce signs, electronic media, and print materials for visual identity and education.



## GOAL: Partnerships

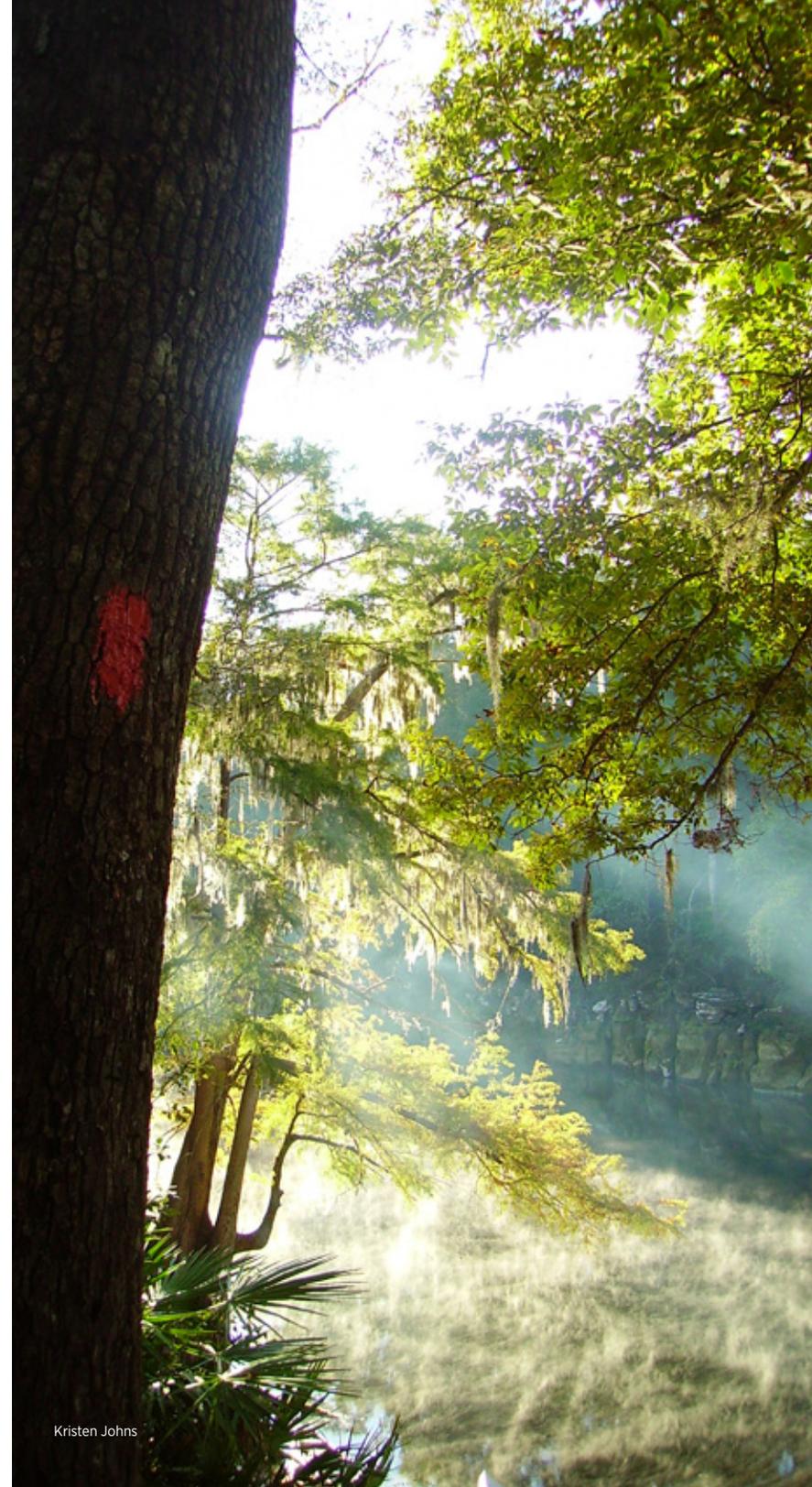
**Each of the FNST land managers proactively contribute to Trail development, maintenance and promotion of their segment as part of a larger whole**

### Description

The FNST traverses land owned or managed by 27 different entities covering 37 counties and 76 land management units in Florida. Federal agencies manage 44% of the land with the USFS as the single largest manager with 175 miles of FNST. State agencies currently manage 30% and State Water Management Districts 18% of the total mileage. The remaining lands are managed by both public and private interests throughout the State. Collectively, these land-owners and managers work as partners to ensure readily available, safe, educational, and memorable recreational experiences.

### Strategies

- Continue to work with the FNST Coalition to refine the partnership model.
- Work with land management partners to include FNST standards in their management plans and to ensure better coordination of land management practices on a regular basis.
- Complete and periodically review customized agreements between USFS and land management partners to define partner participation in FNST.
- Increase volunteer capacity to develop and maintain FNST that is highly coordinated with partnership agreements, plans, and FNST standards.
- Manage projects and allocate financial and human resources in a coordinated and systematic effort based on agreements and standards.
- Establish a coordinated and ongoing monitoring and evaluation program for assessing Trail standards.





Kristen Johns

## GOAL: 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

### Description

Promotion and outreach strategies focus on branding the FNST for a fuller appreciation of the diversity and uniqueness of the Trail by a greater audience. These efforts are intended to foster pride in the FNST as one of only eleven National Scenic Trails in the country. Recreational amenities, educational materials, and interpretive displays will enhance the FNST experience.

### Strategies

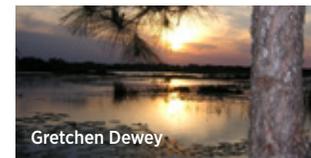
- FNST officially designated route to be publicized and promoted, along with information to help people understand how to access the FNST and its connector trails.
- Create and define the FNST brand, branding standards, and communication protocols.
- Create a message, maps, and materials to distribute through a variety of media and to constituency groups that represent diverse recreation users.
- Implement a public relations campaign.



Robert Coveney



Bart Smith



Gretchen Dewey

# The Florida National Scenic Trail

It is the variety of recreational experiences, from wilderness to urban areas, that makes the FNST unique. Our challenge is to manage this diversity while creating a distinct brand for the entire trail. A careful analysis of the Trail determined that it can be classified into five distinct classes to better facilitate trail planning. Each class is defined by natural resource condition and the desired recreation experience we wish to provide.

The USFS and its partners will continue to assess the Trail relative to these classifications and standards. As more standardized data becomes available, it will be posted online at [www.fs.usda.gov/fnst](http://www.fs.usda.gov/fnst).



Jack Hailman

	Class	Description	Recreation Experience
 <p>Sandra Friend</p>	1	Natural, unmodified setting with low to no human impact on the environment. <i>Example: designated wilderness areas.</i>	Requires advanced planning and a great degree of self sufficiency.  High likelihood of wildlife encounter and native ecosystems.
	2	Natural appearing environment, essentially unmodified setting with minimal site controls or landscape alterations. <i>Example: typical managed forest.</i>	Natural characteristics and recreation experience similar to Class 1 but more moderately challenging.
 <p>Barbara Bowen</p>	3	Semi-natural environment with visible human impacts or manipulated landscapes. <i>Example: wildlife refuges managed for a specific habitat or for recreation.</i>	Requires some preparation and self sufficiency. Users may find directional signing and interpretation of key focal spots.  Good wildlife and natural landscape viewing opportunities with a greater chance of encountering other users.
	4	Semi-natural environment which is culturally modified yet attractive. <i>Example: agricultural lands or county parks.</i>	Natural characteristics and recreation experience similar to Class 3 but with more developed infrastructure and access to services.
 <p>Jim Schmid</p>	5	Highly modified, potentially urban environments where vegetation is often planted and maintained. <i>Example: rail trails or paved trails that traverse communities.</i>	Requires little to no self sufficiency. Users can expect a high level of infrastructure and multiple uses.  Less of a natural environment, although aesthetically pleasing and accessible. Very likely that you will encounter other users.

# Florida National Scenic Trail Land Managers

Land Management Agency	Estimated Miles
Achua County School Board	1
City of Blountstown	2
City of Inverness	1
Florida Department of Environmental Protection	132
Florida Department of Military Affairs	4
Florida Department of Transportation	5
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	66
Florida Forest Service	140
Forever Florida	6
Hernando County	2
Keystone Airpark	2
MC Davis Conservation Easement	9
National Park Service	60
Northwest Florida Water Management District	29
Plum Creek Timber Company	23
Santa Rosa County	4
Santa Rosa Island Authority	3
Seminole County	31
South Florida Water Management District	100
St. Johns River Water Management District	11
Suwannee River Water Management District	25
Southwest Florida Water Management District	36
University of West Florida	1
US Air Force	62
US Army Corps of Engineers	101
US Fish and Wildlife	48
USDA Forest Service	175
<b>Florida National Scenic Trail</b>	<b>1,079</b>





## For More Information About the Florida National Scenic Trail

To find out how you can volunteer visit The Florida Trail Association's website at [www.FloridaTrail.org](http://www.FloridaTrail.org)

For appendices or more Trail information visit the National Forests in Florida website at [www.fs.usda.gov/fnst](http://www.fs.usda.gov/fnst)

### Appendices

- National Scenic Trails Act
- Land Managers and Website Links
- FNST Strategic Plan – Annual Work Plans and Reports
- Resource Class Definitions and Standards
- 2012 Priority Projects
- GIS layers, maps of natural, cultural and historic resources, additional data
- Historic Planning Documents: 1980 Environmental Analysis, 1986 Comprehensive Plan



Mike Knox

