

## **Summary: Special Challenges of Multi-Jurisdictional Trails**

**By Howard Pardue, Florida Trail Association**

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The Florida National Scenic Trail (i.e. FNST or simply Florida Trail) is one of Florida's lesser known treasures. When completed it will extend 1,400 miles from the Everglades in South Florida across the state to Gulf Islands National Seashore and the state of Alabama. It is one of 8 national scenic trails (like the Appalachian Trail).

It is a multi-jurisdictional trail only made possible by negotiated partnerships. Currently it runs through 36 counties, about 20 cities/towns, and multiple state and national parks, state and national forests, state wildlife management areas, a national wildlife refuge, water management areas, military bases, the Seminole Reservation, an island authority, and a college campus. It also runs through hundreds of large and small private holdings. These entities have significantly different missions and management objectives..... **Our** objective is to make these jurisdictional differences invisible to the trail user.

*(Virtual Tour of the Florida National Scenic Trail)*

Special complicating factors include Florida's population growth – In recent history in any given year Florida has been one of the fastest growing large states in the Nation. In 1930 we had 1.5 million residents, in 2008 18 million plus about 80 million tourists. Until this recent economic downturn, Florida has added about 300,000 additional residents a year ... that is a city the size of Tampa each year. More people means extensive land conversion – land conversion means more development and less opportunity acquire land needed to complete the trail – at least the type of wilderness trail we strive for.

Another complicating factor is weather - Hurricanes certainly cloud the Sunshine State. In 2004 when 4 hurricanes crossed the state some 70% of the Florida Trail was closed and had to be reopened. Every management entity had its own approaches and priorities. In Florida, seasonable flooding, even a 5 year flood, can make the trail to hazardous to traverse and difficult to maintain.

***With all those agencies to work with, how do they meet the multi-jurisdictional challenges on the Florida National Scenic Trail ?*** Challenges in route identification and land acquisition, trail construction, trail maintenance, trail mapping, volunteer development, agency coordination, and more.

- 1) Of the tools we have available, the strongest is our base of **volunteers** in 18 chapters of our 5,000 member statewide association. Over our 40 years history of working on public lands, our volunteers have created tremendous credibility with land managers. Having a strong volunteer base also increases recognition by elected officials when we go forth to education them about the FNST.
- 2) The trail is supported by a small, professional Federal and FTA **staff** working on all aspects - outreach and education, membership development, trail routing, land acquisition, agency coordination, trail construction, trail protection, etc.

- 3) The Trail has **authority**....it is established in state and federal legislation and state rules.

This is particularly important for closing the gaps in the trail. There are multiple references in legislation and rules for *state land acquisition* programs. Florida budgets \$300 million a year primarily for state and local land acquisition and has for almost 20 years through a program called Florida Forever – the money goes for state conservation lands, to water management districts, parks, greenways and trails, to local government projects, wildlife management areas, and state forests. The FNST is referenced in legislation and rules for several of those programs. Because of FTA's history of working well with agencies, those which acquire new lands are usually willing to have trail located on it.

- 4) The **proposed route of the trail** is identified in the 1983 Comprehensive Plan as a 20 mile wide corridor. That corridor has been narrowed to a more specific route through a Preferred Routing Study which in turn has been further refined into maps of proposed routes thorough specific properties that provide a basis for discussion with interested landowners. (Note: Land for the trail is only acquired where there are willing sellers. There is no eminent domain authority.)
- 5) **Partnership agreements** - are critical for the FNST. While we would love to have fee simple title or access easements on all the lands on which the trail lies, we don't. The USDA Forest Service, Florida Trail Association enters into certification agreements with all the public partners and two major private partners... Certification agreements specify where the trail is located on the partner's land and who carries out the various trail related responsibilities. In addition, the FTA holds a few simpler, older agreements between the Association and land owner that just provide permission to cross land.

A new program, the Gateway Community program, also uses agreements. In this program, our association seeks to build strong, mutually beneficial programs between our Association and communities that contain or are near the trail.

- 6) **Outreach** – we constantly try to get the word out about the Trail through Footprint magazine, special interest mailings, media releases, our website, videos, our chapters and special events like regional and state conferences, and an awards program.

- 7) **We pay attention and *never* go away.**

### **To Close...**

The FNST's strength and its weakness is the system of partnerships. Right now, we estimate that out of the 1,400 mile trail some 933 miles are certified (protected thru agreement with partners), about another 130 miles can be certified or protected on public lands, leaving 337 miles to be acquired.

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