

United States Greenway Perspective

In 1994, American Lives, Inc. conducted a poll of more than 800 homebuyers in the high growth states of California, Texas, North Carolina, Florida and Georgia. The poll showed a significant shift in the consumer wants over a 10-year period. Consumers now want features designed into planned communities that promote interaction with others, such as bike and walking paths. In addition, citizens place a high premium on the interaction with the environment through the inclusion of wooded tracts and nature trails. The study found homebuyers expect and will pay extra for features, which create this link to an “outdoor living room”.

Thousands of Americans have said “yes” to preserving open space, greenways, farmlands and other important habitats through their vote at the ballot box. During 1998 election, voters in 44 states approved over 150 conservation-related ballot initiatives. Trails and greenways provide opportunities many Americans seek: close-to-home recreational areas, community meeting places, historic preservation, educational experiences, natural landscapes and beautification. Both trails and greenways help communities build pride by ensuring that their neighborhoods are good places to live and their children can safely walk or bike to a park, a school, or to a neighbor’s home.

Florida’s Greenway Perspective

In 1991, 1000 Friends of Florida and The Conservation Fund created the Florida Greenway Project. The project built a statewide constituency for greenways and initiated several greenway and trail prototype projects at the regional and community levels. In early 1993, Governor Lawton Chiles created the 40-member Florida Greenway Commission (FGC) to develop a coordinated approach for protecting, enhancing, and managing a statewide wide system of greenways. Members of this commission began to

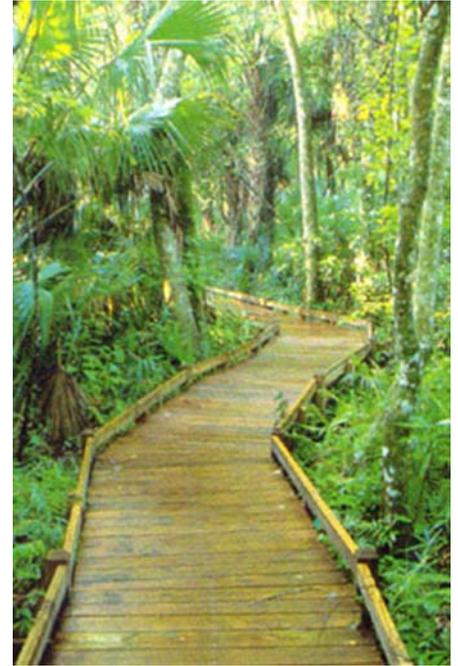


realize the issues that traditional environmentalists, conservationists, recreational enthusiasts, agriculturalists and businessmen, generally did not agree upon (after meeting on a regular basis) revealed that they had common goals. In 1994, the Commission recommended to the Governor and Legislature that Florida create a statewide system of greenways. The system would link natural areas and open space and would conserve native landscapes and ecosystems while offering additional recreational opportunities across the state. In 1995, the Legislature created a 26-member Florida Greenways Coordinating Council (FGCC) comprised of

businessmen, conservationists, landowners, recreational interest and federal, state, regional and local governmental agencies. Their mission was to promote greenway initiatives throughout the state, educate the public, coordinate partnerships among various organizations, and provide technical support and leadership.

According to the Rails-to Trails Conservancy, as of September 1999, Florida had more than 31 trails sub-totaling 280 miles with an additional 37 trails being planned totaling an additional 506 miles.

Having these trails already developed provides an opportunity for St. Johns County to see what already works and provides a better idea of the true cost and benefits of greenways. According to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Guidebook for Florida (funded by both DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails and the Rail-to-Trails Conservancy) the major Central Florida trails include Cady Way and West Orange Trails (Orange County); Cross Seminole Trail (Seminole County); Lake Minneola Scenic Trail/ Clermont Trail (Lake County); General James A. Van Fleet State Trail (Lake, Polk, and Sumter Counties); Pinellas Trail (Pinellas County); Withlacoochee State Trail (Citrus, Hernando and Pasco Counties); and South Florida trails include Cape Haze Pioneer Trail (Charlottee County) and Gasparilla Island Trail (Boca Grande, Lee and Charlottee Counties).



As of June 2003, several counties throughout the state of Florida have adopted their own Greenway Master Plans. These counties include Dade, Broward, Monroe, Manatee, Highland, St. Lucie, Hillsborough, Seminole, Orange, Brevard, Volusia and Duval Counties.

In 2000, DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails passed a Florida Statue (F.S.) Chapter 260 (Sections 260.011-260.018) cited as the "Florida Greenways and Trails Act". This Florida Statue addresses state policy and legislative intent; limitation on liability of private landowners whose property is designated as part of the statewide system of greenways and trails; definitions; greenways and trails system; greenways and trails program; greenways and trails council; composition; powers and duties; acquisition of land; general powers of the department; coordination with the Department of Transportation; restrictions; rules and agency recognition. Please see **Appendix B** for a copy of this Florida Statue, Chapter 260.

Northeast Florida Regional Planning Council Greenway Directives

In 1997, the Northeast Florida Regional Planning Council (NEFRPC) adopted a Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP) which provides regional greenway directives as stated below:

- Policy 4.3.8. Protect functions of the Natural Resources of Regional Significance (NRRS) through the actions such as the best management practices, public education programs, less than fee-simple acquisition and other voluntary and innovative practices.
- Policy 4.3.9. Increase funds for the acquisition, protection, restoration and maintenance of NRRS in Northeast Florida.
- Policy 4.3.10. Develop a *regional greenway system* by acquisition of fee-simple, less than fee-simple (i.e., easements) or other incentive-based mechanisms which connect existing and future public conservation lands; provides for the protection and enhancement of natural, cultural and historical resources; and provides open space for compatible human uses.

Policy 4.3.11. Acquire areas designated as NRRS, which are not already in public ownership. Consider NRRS in the development of state and regional and local acquisition programs.

Policy 4.3.12. Support the State’s Ecosystem Management initiative.

Policy 4.3.13. Develop partnerships that will efficiently, fairly and effectively implement natural resource protection.

Policy 5.1.5. Local government will coordinate with their adjacent communities in construction of bicycle paths and pedestrian ways which cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Policy 5.18. Local government and FDOT should accommodate bicycles and pedestrians in road design and construction whenever feasible and where not cost prohibitive.

St. Johns County’s Greenway and Blueway Directives

St. Johns County’s Comprehensive Plan’s Conservation/Coastal Management (CCM) policy E.2.2.23 specifically directed the preparation of the St. Johns County Greenway, Blueway & Trails Master Plan map and report. This policy states that *“by December 2002 or sooner, the County shall establish a Greenways program in coordination with the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Office of Greenways. Such Greenways shall protect and enhance the natural, cultural and historical resources of the County while providing interconnecting access ways between public conservation and parklands. The established Greenways shall be coordinated with the surrounding counties and municipalities.”*

Beyond the directives established by the Conservation/Coastal Management policy, there are other St. Johns County 2015 Comprehensive Plan Element’s Goals, Objectives and Policies (GOP's) that indirectly further the Greenways/ Blueways initiatives as stated in the Future Land Use, Transportation, Conservation /Coastal Management, Recreation and Open Space and Intergovernmental Elements’ GOPs.

Beyond the direct and indirect 2015 Comprehensive Plan GOPs, each of the county’s Visioning Groups (District 4 Visioning (Ponte Vedra); Southern District 4 Visioning (Vilano); Mid-Anastasia Island Visioning (west of St. Augustine Beach); South Anastasia Visioning (Crescent Beach Area) and the Southeast Visioning area (west of the Intracoastal and east of US 1) identified the need and desire for Greenways and Blueways within their identified visioning boundary areas.



Both District 4 and the Southern District Visioning Groups clearly state, *“There is a strong sense of disconnection and fragmentation among developments that are isolated from one another and the surrounding land uses”*. Other visioning statements within their document clearly indicate there is a lack of “connectivity in the community, create meaningful open spaces by providing better definition and greater flexibility”. Culture and leisure activities “contribute significantly to the common good, to

the general quality of life, to the expansion of horizons of the county's citizens, to the physical and spiritual well-being and to the acceptance of the diversity into our lives". Both of these Visioning Groups recognize that they choose the environment that they live in today because of its unusual natural beauty and wildlife and they realize, "the environmental aspects of the district is closely tied to the quality of life". There is a desire to preserve and protect the natural resources including coastal, wetland, uplands, their associated plant communities and wildlife habitats with a goal of saving these resources now and for future generations. Both Visioning Districts support greenways and wildlife corridors. Although there is a strong desire to support unpaved greenways and wildlife corridors, there is an equally important desire to create and implement a Bicycle and Sidewalk Master Plan and/or Multi-purpose Path in the Ponte Vedra and Vilano urban areas as stated in each Visioning District's documents and as stated further below:

Objective

Bicycle Path & Sidewalk Master Plan. As mentioned in a previous objective, much of District 4 is dominated by developments, which do not interconnect or access more than one arterial. Advancing this development pattern is the north-south orientation of the District's boundaries, the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, and its major artery, State Road A1A. The result is a series of fractionalized developments isolated from one another and the surrounding land uses. Throughout the Visioning Process, there has been a recurring theme regarding the lack of connectivity in the community. Furthermore, as envisioned Action Statements are implemented, how will they be accessible by the community? The result of this situation has been an overwhelming desire to create and implement a Bicycle Path and Sidewalk Master Plan.

- Action 1. Create and implement a Bicycle Path and Sidewalk Master Plan for District 4 that addresses the following community concerns:
 - bicycle and pedestrian safety;
 - enhanced community cohesiveness;
 - utilization of existing and future resources;
 - convenience and accessibility to surrounding land uses;
 - adequate design guidelines for bicycle paths and sidewalks;
 - roadway congestion;
 - personal health and fitness.
- Action 2. Utilize the bicycle paths outlined in the Master Plan to connect the North Shores community with the Ponte Vedra and Palm Valley communities.
- Action 3. Construct, repair, or retrofit all existing sidewalk and bicycle path deficiencies in order to create a complete system.
- Action 4. Create a safe bicycle and pedestrian-friendly atmosphere along Roscoe Boulevard and County Road 210.
- Action 5. Ensure that safe bicycle and pedestrian access is provided to all schools and public buildings.

Action 6. Ensure that all bicycle paths and sidewalks take into consideration the needs of the senior, youth, and handicapped populations. Measures should include, but are not limited to, accessibility ramps, crosswalk signals, appropriate road striping, shading, etc.



Both Mid-Anastasia and South Anastasia Island Visioning Groups' *vision* is to preserve and enhance a pedestrian friendly "*Seaside Community that preserves open space and places a high value on the preservation and protection of wetlands, estuaries and other environmentally sensitive environments*". Preservation and protection of the remaining resources of the Mid-Anastasia and the South Anastasia Island areas "*including coastal, wetland and upland areas and their flora and fauna, is of paramount importance.*" "*Maintain an acceptable balance between our developed and natural environments.*" "*Public nature walkways are to be encouraged in any new developing residential and commercial areas.*" "*Support construction of eco-recreational facilities such as nature trails, picnic areas, fishing docks and observation decks on newly acquired parklands.*"

The Southeast Visioning document clearly states a need for Greenway and Blueway trails in the Transportation section of this document, Objective 4, Action 2, as stated below:

Objective Greenways / Blueways

Establish an interconnected and diverse Comprehensive Greenway System throughout the SE Vision Area that will provide for multi-purpose pathways, hiking trails, linear green space, wildlife corridors.

Action 1: Establish and protect natural areas with blueways, greenways and natural trails to connect passive parks. Become the envy of entire state for our Greenway system, landscaping, conservation, and wildlife protection.

Action 2: Develop walkable and friendly parks and connections and establish nature trails.

Action 3: Initiate and coordinate efforts to create multi-use paths (bike paths, jogging trail, etc.) connecting the existing subdivisions throughout the SE Vision Area.

Action 4: Initiate a program to create a contiguous greenbelt from Vaill Point to Flagler County along the west shore of the Matanzas River.

Action 5: Encourage the County to establish Greenways adjacent to the west side of the SE Vision Area (west of Interstate 95) in the Greenway, Blueway & Trails Master Plan.

For additional information on the St. Johns County’s Visioning documents Greenway and Blueway directives please see **Appendix C**.

In addition to the St. Johns County’s 2015 Comprehensive Plan Element’s GOPs and the individual County Visioning documents Greenway and Blueway directives, there are several other existing programs previously established that directly or indirectly promote and enhance the St. Johns County Greenway, Blueway & Trails Master Plan. These programs include the following:

- A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Highway (National Scenic Byway – NSB) and FDOT Scenic Highway
- East Coast Greenway Alliance
- Southern Passages Heritage Trail
- Vilano Greenway/Nature Trail
- Northeast Florida Blueway Phase II – Guana Tolomato and Matanzas Rivers Florida Forever Project
- The Great Florida Birding Trail – Painted Bunting Cluster
- The “Important Bird Areas” Program (Bird Life International)
- Pellicer Creek State Canoe Trail
- Guana Tolomato and Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTMNERR)
- Northern Coastal Basin Program
- Nocatee Development of Regional Impact Greenway Plan
- Northwest Sector Plan
- William Bartram Scenic Highway
- St. Johns River Blueway Florida Forever Project
- American Heritage River Initiative
- 1987 St. Johns River Water Management District’s (SJRWMD) Surface Improvement Water Management (SWIM) Program
- SR 207 Rails-to-Trails
- St. Augustine to Lake City Rail Trail
- Nine Mile Road – Locally Designated Scenic Highway (formally called International Golf Parkway)
- Bartram/Durbin Creek Canoe Trail

The following St. Johns County’s Existing Programs and Resources section will describe these existing county programs and are described further below.