National Scenic Trail System

Connect With Us

Florida Trail Association
Building More Than Trails

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Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AHS – American Hiking Society, Silver Spring, MD
FNST – Florida National Scenic Trail, also known as the Florida Trail
FTA – Florida Trail Association, Gainesville, FL
Imagine – Imagine Charter School, Weston, FL
St. Marks – St. Marks Trail Crew, Tallahassee, FL
TOR – Trail Operations Report
Trilogy – Trilogy Charter School, Gainesville, FL
UCF – University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL
UF FAB – University of Florida, Florida Alternative Breaks, Gainesville, FL
UF OAR – University of Florida, Outdoor Adventure Recreation, Gainesville, FL
UF TCD – University of Florida, Tropical Conservation and Development, Gainesville, FL
VWP – Volunteer Work Party
Dear Supporters of the Florida Trail,

The Florida National Scenic Trail, also known as the Florida Trail (FNST), is unlike any long distance footpath in America, providing access to what native Floridians call “the Real Florida.”

Not sure what that means? First, I recommend that you pick up a book entitled “Tales of Old Florida.” This collection of original articles and stories, written between the 1880s and 1910s, reveals a wilderness of swamp and beach, dense forest and abundant wild game, in a time before the arrival of the Mouse and the oceanfront condominium.

Second, I insist that you take a hike on the Florida Trail, because the great news is that even today anyone can experience those pristine habitats and have those grand adventures here in Florida.

The Florida Trail corridor showcases Florida’s distinct history and culture, and includes many large swaths of undeveloped land that are still home to a vast array of wildlife. Day users and thru-hikers alike can encounter American alligators, the Florida panther, gopher tortoises, wood storks, black bears, bald eagles, sea turtles and yes, even 6 species of venomous snakes! These are just a few of the many creatures that live in the forests, swamps, scrublands, prairies, marshes and beaches that host the Florida Trail.

Access to these pristine environments exist as a result of the Florida Trail Association’s (FTA) statewide network of volunteers, who work tirelessly to ensure that anyone can experience “the Real Florida.”

The Florida Trail Association (FTA) is dedicated to the maintenance, preservation and promotion of the Florida Trail. In addition to a robust and dedicated crew of nearly 400 active volunteers, we coordinate a trail-wide network of local, state and federal land management partners to provide opportunities for the public to engage in outdoor recreation, participate in environmental education and contribute to meaningful volunteer work. The FTA sponsors hands-on stewardship of the trail with materials, supplies, training, logistical support and administrative assistance. Our Trail Operations staff manage these efforts and are the driving force behind the successes that you’ll discover in this report.

For the 3rd year in a row, our Trail Operations program saw an increase in the total amount of volunteer hours, FTA-led maintenance events, participants in our signature training and certification courses, and the over-all number of miles of trail maintained. Our coalition of passionate outdoor enthusiasts continues to grow in size, diversity and impact. This expanding team of collaborators join a proud multi-generational tradition of trail construction and maintenance in Florida.

While the national media seems to have just “discovered” the Florida Trail—with features in USA Today, National Geographic, Men’s Journal, Outdoor and other magazines this past year—the Florida Trail Association will be celebrating our 50th year in 2016!

This Trail Operations Report is intended to both highlight and celebrate these accomplishments, and also to inspire you to join our efforts. There is still much work to be done to permanently protect the Florida Trail corridor, connect large gaps in the footpath and expand public awareness of this vital and completely unique public resource.

Please explore this report, and then visit our website to discover how you can contribute to this mission.

Alex Stigliano
Florida Trail Program Director
Florida Trail Association
Introduction

Read Our Trail Operations Report

Florida Trail Association’s (FTA) Trail Operations Report (TOR) provides a detailed account of the volunteer accomplishments on the Florida Trail and the Florida Trail System. It also recognizes contributions toward our mission for the 2014/2015 season.*

FTA recognizes that the future of the Florida Trail, the Florida Trail System, and our Association is dependent largely on our private citizens, who are willing to donate their time, talent, and resources. We highly value the contributions of our volunteers, members, donors, and land managers, and recognize the hard work that is contributed each year in support of our mission. We thank you for your time, talent, and treasure, and are grateful for your service.

We encourage our chapters and members to continue to get outside, perform trail maintenance, lead activities, and welcome new faces to the Florida Trail and the Florida Trail System.

*The 2014/2015 season ran from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015.

Meet the Florida Trail Association (FTA)

FTA is the nonprofit, volunteer-supported steward of the Florida Trail (FNST) and the Florida Trail System.

Since 1966, we’ve been working statewide to develop and maintain hiking trails for public use, most notably our 1,300-mile Florida National Scenic Trail, which was congressionally designated as a National Scenic Trail in 1983.

With 18 local chapters located throughout Florida, our Association provides a venue for hikers to gather and enjoy each other’s company in the great outdoors, while serving the public through their trail work.

We work in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service in Florida, state and local officials, and private landowners to keep our trail networks open for recreational use and ensure their long-term protection.

Discover how you can hike, engage in outdoor recreation, participate in environmental education, and contribute to FTA’s meaningful volunteer work at floridatrail.org.

FTA History

In 1966, Jim Kern was a Florida real estate broker and hiking enthusiast.

While his life was good, he lamented the fact that there were nearly no hiking trails in Florida. So, with resolve, he threw on his backpack and started to hike from 40 Mile Bend on the Tamiami Trail to Highlands Hammock State Park, near Sebring. It took him 12 days to complete the 160-mile trek.

He publicized the walk, and within a very short time Jim was surrounded by like-minded individuals from across the state. These individuals would form the nucleus of what is now known as the Florida Trail Association (FTA).

Their mission was simple: To build hiking trails in Florida. They set a goal to construct 500 miles of continuous trail, and in 1969 they had achieved their first major milestone by completing a 26-mile trail through the Ocala National Forest.

With this success and subsequent successes, the Association raised its goal to 600 miles, then 700 miles, and finally 1,000 miles.

This attracted interest from United States Department of the Interior (US DI), who conducted a three-year study of the trail. As a result of this study, the US DI recommended that the Florida Trail be officially designated as a National Scenic Trail.

In 1983, the 98th US Congress added the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) to the National Trail Systems Act of 1968, and appointed the USDA Forest Service in Florida to oversee the administration of the trail.

What was once considered a far-fetched dream is now a reality. By following the orange blazes, you can walk the entire length of Florida from Big Cypress National Preserve to Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island. Thanks to the efforts of thousands of volunteers, the Florida Trail is now one of the nation’s premier recreational resources, and a popular destination for visitors seeking outdoor recreation. Come experience what native Floridians call “the Real Florida.”
Come Experience the Trail in a Whole New Light
As a FTA volunteer you create lasting memories and enduring friendships.

From the moment you step onto the trail, you begin to share in an experience that bonds you, your fellow trail maintainers, and the trail together. Through the process of caring for this public resource, our volunteers leave the trail with a better understanding of themselves and their relationship to the environment. It’s a transformative experience that creates a lasting impression.

Our organization’s network of volunteers constitute a service-based community with a strong sense of identity, loyalty, and accomplishment.

This is why we invite you to participate in a Volunteer Work Party (VWP). VWPs are a lot of fun, and are an amazing opportunity for you to connect with the trail and with our 18 volunteer chapters.

At a VWP you’ll have the opportunity to learn more about the Florida Trail, and how we work with our chapters to maintain it. Working alongside seasoned veterans, you can expect to make new friends, learn more about trail construction and maintenance, and participate in a project that will help you discover your own meaningful connection to Florida’s wilderness. Our VWPs are an opportunity to experience the trail in a whole new light!

More than 350,000 people use the Florida Trail each year, and your contribution allows us to keep this trail open and accessible to the public. Thank you for your time and talent. We appreciate all that you do for the Florida Trail Association.

Visit our website to learn more about volunteering on the Florida Trail! www.floridatrail.org/volunteer/volunteeropportunities
### Volunteer Work Parties

1. **Oct. 1-6, 2015 - Suwannee Holton Creek Volunteer Work Party**  
   Florida Crackers Chapter, Holton Creek Conservation Area

2. **Oct. 18-22, 2015 - Western Corridor Volunteer Work Party**  
   Black Bear Chapter, Ocala National Forest, Fore Lake Camp Area

3. **Oct. 25-30, 2015 - North Ocala Volunteer Work Party #1**  
   Black Bear Chapter, Ocala National Forest, Northern Tier, OHV Camp Area

4. **Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2015 - North Ocala Volunteer Work Party #2**  
   Black Bear Chapter, Ocala National Forest, Northern Tier, OHV Camp Area

5. **Nov. 1-5, 2015 - North Ocala Volunteer Work Party #3**  
   Black Bear Chapter, Ocala National Forest, Northern Tier, OHV Camp Area

6. **Nov. 4-8, 2015 - Kissimmee River Region Volunteer Work Party**  
   Tropical Trekkers Chapter, Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park

7. **Nov. 5-14, 2015 - Multi-Chapter Maintenance Marathon**  
   North Florida Trail Blazers, Osceola National Forest

8. **Nov. 14-21, 2015 - Pine Log Gathering Volunteer Work Party**  
   Choctawhatchee Chapter, Pine Log State Forest

   Black Bear Chapter, Ocala National Forest, Juniper Springs Camp Area

10. **Nov. 16-20, 2015 - KICCO Volunteer Work Party**  
    Heartland Chapter, KICCO Wildlife Management Area

    Black Bear Chapter, Ocala National Forest, Owlpine Camp Area

12. **Feb. 5-12, 2016 - Big Cypress Volunteer Work Party**  
    FTA Staff and Big Cypress Chapter, Big Cypress National Preserve

13. **Feb. 12-14, 2016 - Eglin AFB Volunteer Work Party**  
    Choctawhatchee Chapter, Eglin AFB Reservation, Nokuse Plantation

    Western Gate Chapter, Blackwater River State Forest

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**To volunteer for a statewide Volunteer Work Party,**  
email volunteer@floridatrail.org or call the Volunteer Program Coordinator at 570-574-3240
Volunteer Hours Contributed to the Mission of the Florida Trail Association: 39,796

Florida Trail Association’s Mission

FTA’s mission is to develop, maintain, protect, and promote a network of hiking trails throughout the state, including the unique Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). By participating in work events that build and maintain trails in Florida, our volunteers are crucial part of this mission.

This includes trail maintenance on the Florida Trail (FNST) and on other trails throughout Florida. These other trails are known as the Florida Trail System. It also includes volunteer and member outreach, social hikes, paddles and other recreational activities, administration towards chapter organization, project planning on the Florida Trail and the Florida Trail System, tool and equipment maintenance, and special events, including our annual Trail Skills Training.

Contributions to the Florida Trail

As a core aspect of our mission, our volunteers spend time working towards the protection, preservation, and promotion of the Florida Trail. In the 2014/2015 season, FTA logged 25,970 hours on the Florida Trail. This statistic represents a 10% increase from the previous season, and a 43% increase from the 2012/2013 season. As FTA continues to refine its volunteer program and volunteer work reporting system, we expect to see a steady increase in the number of volunteer work hours and trail miles maintained, among other statistics.

Volunteer Work Dedicated to the Florida Trail

Volunteer Hours Contributed to the Mission of the Florida Trail: 25,970
Value of Volunteer Hours: $599,127
Trail Maintained: 1,664 miles
Trail Built: 9.15 miles
Structure Maintained: 3,701 feet
Structure Built: 102 feet
Volunteer Miles Driven: 221,365
Out of Pocket Contributions: $6,792

Florida Trail Hours Three-Year Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>14,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>23,451</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>25,970</td>
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WE ♥ OUR VOLUNTEERS
Staff
FTA is currently staffed with six full-time staff members. These individuals work to support the mission of the organization, and to advance volunteer efforts across the state.

Administrative Director: Responsible for providing administrative support, including finance and accounting, human resources, and office operations.

Florida Regional Representatives (2): Responsible for coordinating successful trail management, protection, and volunteer work on the Florida Trail (FNST).

Membership and Retail Coordinator: Responsible for providing support to FTA membership and chapter leadership. This individual is additionally tasked with running store operations.

Trail Operations Director: Responsible for developing a Trail Operations Program that is focused on volunteer engagement, construction, protection, and maintenance of the Florida Trail (FNST).

Volunteer Program Coordinator: Responsible for building and improving the Volunteer Program on the Florida Trail (FNST).

Crew Leader Program and Trail Skills Training
The introduction of our new Crew Leader Documents was a resounding success!

FTA is proud to report that these forms are currently being used by our chapters to promote communication and safety on the trail. These documents include an online project report form, tailgate safety briefing, communications packet, job hazard analysis forms, and volunteer injury packets. This information can be accessed on our website: floridatrail.org/volunteer/volunteerresources.

These documents will be presented in 2015 at our fall Trail Skills Training. This three-day training teaches trail skills and other skillsets to empower volunteers to lead safe and effective Volunteer Work Parties in the Florida wilderness.

Volunteer Hours Reporting System
FTA’s Volunteer Hours Reporting System now has the ability to track hours by individual members. The system is used by volunteers and land managers statewide. It is a web-based reporting system, where volunteers have the ability to enter their volunteer contributions. The system tracks volunteer hours, project type and location, miles of trail maintained and built, feet of structure maintained and built, out-of-pocket contributions, driving mileage, and partnerships. In addition, land managers now have the ability to automatically receive a project report, whenever volunteer work has been reported on their section of the trail.

Connecting Chapters and Volunteers Opportunities
For a person new to our organization, it can be a challenge to discover how to volunteer on the Florida Trail. To address this issue, we dedicated a portion of our website to Volunteer Opportunities. This section now serves as a hub for staff, chapters, and other trail crews to post their volunteer work opportunities to the general public! In 2013, we initiated “Chapter-Led Volunteer Work Parties (VWPs).” Since the introduction of Chapter-Led VWPs, we have seen a steady increase in the overall number of VWPs, the number of volunteers at our events, and the number of miles of trail that is maintained each year. Thank you for your support!

In addition to our central hub on the FTA website, you may find many opportunities to volunteer across the state on our chapters’ Meetup.com pages. Connect with our chapters on Meetup.com to find both volunteer and recreation activities. Our 18 chapters are active, and waiting for your call!

Statewide Volunteer Opportunities: http://www.floridatrail.org/volunteer/volunteeropportunities/
Additional Chapter Volunteer Opportunities: http://www.floridatrail.org/about-us/chapters/
TA is dedicated to providing volunteers with the opportunity to acquire trail skills to best prepare for volunteer work. Stewardship of the Florida Trail is a big responsibility, and we understand that a professionally trained volunteer corps is essential to FTA's operations in the field. With this in mind, we provide opportunities for our volunteers to receive training, get certified, and obtain the correct licensures that are required for certain maintenance activities. Our chapter volunteers consistently rank among the best in the nation, and we are proud to train and recruit a skilled volunteer workforce.

First Aid and CPR Courses
In 2014/2015, FTA sponsored three Wilderness First Aid (WFA) courses, three CPR/AED courses, and two First Aid/ CPR courses. These events taught basic medical education to help volunteers diagnose and treat illness, and to better prepare them for emergency evacuations. Partnering with the Florida Outdoor Academy, FTA coordinated first aid training events in the Panhandle, North Florida, and Central/South Regions.

During each two-day WFA course we taught backcountry medicine and emergency first aid. FTA engaged students in both classroom and outdoor-based scenarios to teach wilderness medicine. At the end of the course, our participants had the knowledge, skills, and ability to make sound decisions in emergency situations. This includes treatment for heat, cold, and trauma injury, and emergency protocols for safe backcountry evacuation.

Students also completed First Aid/ CPR/AED classes throughout the year. These courses focused on front country medicine to supplement their WFA certifications. First Aid/AED/CPR training is a great resource, and can help assist emergency dispatchers. Not only do you have the knowledge to save a life, but you also have the knowledge of emergency protocols. Volunteers who are

Second Annual Trail Skills Training
The second annual Trail Skills Training was hosted at Lake Oklawaha in the Ocala National Forest. During this two-day event, attendees participated in interactive workshops and hands-on training to better prepare them for volunteer work on the Florida Trail. In these Trail Skills Training workshops, participants learned more about FTA's Volunteer Program: volunteer hours entry and project paperwork, work crew leadership skills, trail clearing standards, and preventative maintenance for hand tools and mechanized equipment. 60 participants successfully completed FTA's Trail Skills Training workshop.
able to quickly relay information to dispatchers can actually save a life by reducing response times!

With both WFA and First Aid/CPR/AED, volunteers can take preventive measures to prevent backcountry injury and/or death. Medical knowledge is the first line of defense against any life-threatening scenario, and we encourage volunteers to look for the signs and symptoms of serious illness in our volunteer crews. Volunteer safety is our number one priority.

119 volunteers were successfully certified in Wilderness First Aid and First Aid/CPR/AED in the 2014/2015 season.

Cross-Cut Saw Training

The Juniper Wilderness is located within the Ocala National Forest. It is one of the only places on the Florida Trail that requires the use of traditional and primitive wilderness tools, such as the cross-cut saw. As a wilderness preserve the Juniper Wilderness is governed by the Wilderness Act of 1964, which prohibits the use of mechanized tools like our beloved chainsaw. Furthermore, as a wilderness preserve there are certain restrictions that govern trail maintenance activities. To safeguard the wilderness, FTA sponsored a two-day cross-cut saw training to introduce volunteers to this type of maintenance activity.

Here FTA staff and members of the Black Bear Chapter practiced the art of bucking trees with cross-cut saws. They also spent a great deal of time honing their axe skills. These skillsets will be used in the 2015/2016 season at the Juniper Wilderness. **10 volunteers were successfully certified in the use of a crosscut saw in the 2014/2015 season.**

What is a Wilderness?

Wilderness, as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964, is “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

Chainsaw Certifications

FTA organized and hosted three, two-day chainsaw certification courses for our volunteers in all three regions of the state.

The first day of the course was spent in the classroom, where students were quizzed on saw maintenance, cutting techniques, and safety. The second day was hosted in the field to practice the lessons learned from the previous day. The USDA Forest Service certified a total of 27 active FTA volunteers, as either an A or B level sawyer, in the 2014/2015 season.
Volunteer Work Parties (VWP) are opportunities for our membership and extended trail community to participate in hands-on stewardship events that contribute to FTA’s volunteer mission. At these events volunteers work to construct new trails, or maintain existing networks. Since the Florida Trail is a volunteer maintained trail system, volunteer work is essential to keeping our trail open to the public. At staff-led Volunteer Work Parties, we can coordinate volunteer registrations, food purchasing, equipment procurement, crew leadership, and database entry. These events tend to be larger in scale.

Bridge Replaced in Little Big Econ SF

On April 26th, volunteers from the Central Florida Chapter and students from Seminole State College met in Little Big Econ State Forest to replace an ailing footbridge. This project is a great example of how collaboration works between our volunteers, the community, and the land manager. First, the Central Florida Chapter identified the need for this bridge to be replaced, and began to assemble an experienced group of builders, who knew how to construct a safe and sturdy footbridge. Then, while working with the Little Big Econ forester to gain permission to replace the bridge, that forester identified surplus lumber that was able to be donated to the project. With the materials, permits, and builders in place, the only missing part was a crew of energetic laborers, who could move the materials and equipment from the staging area to the worksite. The Seminole State College volunteers were more than happy to help! With this collaborative effort, the 30’ bridge was replaced in one day of hard work. During this project, volunteers contributed 60 hours and 120 driving miles.

Second Annual Multi-Chapter Maintenance Marathon

The Multi-Chapter Maintenance Marathon (MMM) is an annual 8-10 day event, where volunteers strive to maintain a large trail corridor in the Osceola National Forest and along the Suwanee River, near White Springs, FL. It is a showcase event, as three FTA chapters typically join in on the fun! Work started at the Olustee Battlefield, Osceola National Forest, and moved west through the forest canopy. Basecamp moved to White Springs at the end of the first week, where two days were spent working on the trail west from Bell Springs to Sal Marie Branch. 20 miles of trail were maintained in total. During the MMM, volunteers contributed 507 hours and 3,500 driving miles.

Big Cypress Volunteer Work Party - Big Cypress National Preserve

One of the most anticipated volunteer events of the trail season is always the Big Cypress National Preserve VWP. As it is the most remote location along the entire Florida National Scenic Trail, the allure of wilderness attracts some of the most hardcore backpackers and trail maintainers, who hiked 10 miles to a basecamp to perform trail maintenance. This backcountry basecamp was established between 7 Mile Camp and 13 Mile camp. During this event, nine volunteers and three staff members spent more than a week maintaining 10.3 miles of the Florida Trail. This was a very dry year in the swamp, and miraculously the trail was nearly free of any standing water. Compared to normal trail conditions, this made the work easy, but the crew still worked extremely hard to restore the trail. During this project, volunteers contributed 316 hours and 2034 driving miles.
FTA relies on its partner groups to maintain our trail systems, and to help introduce new faces to the Florida Trail. We recognize that as servant leaders it is our duty to prepare the next generation of leaders to promote and protect the trail, and we strive to connect our citizens to nature, to share our wealth of knowledge, and to inspire them to action. Through our partner organizations, we help bridge the gap between our community and the Florida National Scenic Trail. In the 2014/2015 season, we partnered with two charter schools to introduce the Florida Trail to the next generation of trail maintainers.

Imagine MS Maintains Trail in Big Cypress
While their classmates were on spring break, 26 seventh and eighth grade students from the Imagine Charter School participated in a Volunteer Work Party in the Big Cypress National Preserve. These adventurous and intrepid students met with FTA staff to learn more about the Florida National Scenic Trail, and to learn some basic trail maintenance skills. They learned how to correctly use a lopper, and were invited to travel more than a mile into the swamp to clear the trail corridor. FTA staff led team building exercises, and Imagine teachers shared the unique history of the area. This field trip is an excellent example of how our youth can be engaged on the Florida Trail. **During this project, volunteers contributed 40 hours and 130 driving miles.**

Trilogy Primary and Secondary School Trims Juniper Prairie
The Trilogy School in Gainesville is FTA’s newest trail partner. Trilogy is a private grade school, whose core values align with the mission of the FTA. In their first year working with FTA, the Trilogy School worked on two projects; one in Juniper Wilderness, and one in Rice Creek Conservation Area. FTA’s Volunteer Program Coordinator presented a program on the importance of the Wilderness, and then invited the students to clear a small section of trail in the Juniper Wilderness, using loppers and hand saws. FTA’s seasonal Technical Advisors provided staff support at this event. Meanwhile, at Rice Creek students used hand tools to maintain a section of the Florida Trail. The partnership between FTA and Trilogy is burgeoning and more adventures are anticipated in the coming years. **During this project, volunteers contributed 230 hours and 1050 driving miles.**
A s a volunteer-supported organization, the heart of FTA exists within each one of our 18 statewide chapters. Each chapter hosts maintenance projects, outdoor activities, and monthly chapter meetings. Visit our website to learn more about your local chapter, and to find an event near you: http://www.floridatrail.org/about-us/chapters

Black Bear Chapter, 2014/2015 VWPs
The Black Bear Chapter has been extremely active, contributing more than 3,200 volunteer hours. While much of the work is completed by a diverse group of section leaders, trail masters, and trail maintainers, two projects are particularly noteworthy.

The Juniper Wilderness Work Week
The Juniper Wilderness Work Week is a longtime tradition at the Black Bear Chapter. It includes Camping at DeLeon Springs in the Ocala National Forest, and encompasses nine miles of trail work along the Florida National Scenic Trail. This Volunteer Work Party started as a canoeing trip with camping midweek, but has since evolved into a series of day trips, where volunteers trek into the wilderness to maintain this section of the forest. Since there are no crossroads, volunteers must hike in from either end to the work area – increasing the intensity of the work. Due to a recent wildfire they must also work along an exposed section of the trail, under the intense Florida sun. This VWP is considered strenuous. But, despite these harsh conditions, volunteers flock from across the state to clear the way for the backpacking season. In the fall and winter, Hidden Pond is a gathering place for backpackers and scouts. The Juniper Wilderness Work Week assures that backpackers have a safe place to hike. During this project, volunteers contributed 464 hours and 2,288 driving miles.

The North Ocala Work Week
The North Ocala Work Week is an important work week within the Black Bear Chapter. During this week, volunteers mow, lop, and brush cut their way through the thick canopy of the Ocala National Forest. They also re-blaze sections of the trail that were damaged by weather and fire. Black Bear Trail Masters are adept in the art of trail blazing, and will actually remove trail blazes, where they are not necessary. This restores the forest back to its natural state and improves the user experience. While the event was a lot of work, volunteers did find time to relax and kick off their boots. Chapter Chair, Ruth Lawler, even made a birthday cake, decorated with our signature orange Florida Trail blaze to celebrate the birthdays of three trail volunteers. During this project, volunteers contributed 280 volunteers hours and 950 driving miles.

Highlanders Chapter, Buck Lake VWP
The Highlanders Chapter hosted a Volunteer Work Party to re-open the Florida Trail around Buck Lake. This was a special project as this section of trail shares history with the Florida Trail Association (FTA). In the 1960’s FTA founder Jim Kern led a campaign to blaze the Florida Trail through the Ocala National Forest. The Buck Lake route was one of these early trails, and remains one of the heaviest traveled routes on the FNST. It is a haven for backpackers, and hosts potable water, latrines, and camp facilities. In recent years it had become overgrown and was lost to the forest. Partnering with the Student Conservation Corps and FTA’s Technical Advisors, the Highlanders Chapter was able to brush cut, mow, lop, and chop their way through the thicket to restore the trail to its former glory. This project also involved some technical chainsaw work, as well as a partial re-route around a clear cut section of the forest. During this project, volunteers contributed 263 hours and 1470 driving miles.

Happy Hoofers Chapter, Nobles and Carpenter Camp VWP
In November, the Happy Hoofers Chapter met at I-75, near Nobles Road, to clear, mow, and blaze the Florida Trail (FNST) near the Big Cypress Indian Reservation. This project took place early in the season before any thru-hikers started their march northbound. As part of the project, the Happy Hoofers installed directional signs at all intersections, and mowed the Noble’s campsite. During this project, volunteers contributed 63 hours and 760 driving miles to maintain 7.4 miles of FNST.

During the same weekend, volunteers also cleared, mowed, and blazed the Florida Trail from the southern intersection at Carpenter Camp to the northern intersection at Nobles and Jones Grade. Directional signs were installed along this trail, and the campsite was mowed. This project also involved the removal of several fallen trees. During this project, volunteers contributed 175 hours and 1936 driving miles.

Heartland Chapter, KICCO VWP
At the beginning of the trail season, 16 volunteers gathered at the KICCO campsite for a five day maintenance event to mow, lop, and blaze 12 miles of the Florida Trail (FNST), from KICCO Camp North to the KICCO Trailhead at River Ranch. The trail is noted for its beautiful old oak hammocks, and is a top destination for hikers and day users. The trail was in rough shape and had overgrown to a narrow path, with fallen trees. This made mowing a chore. Volunteers cut and chopped their way through the forest to establish a clear path. During this project, volunteers contributed 476 hours and 2,805 driving miles.
Urban development, agriculture operations, and energy production are all essential components of modern living for the vast majority of the American public. However, these projects also come at a cost. The associated impacts can have a significant effect on visitors’ experiences on the Florida National Scenic Trail, and in some instances, destroy the very values that Congress intended to preserve when the FNST was designated.

For that reason, Trail protection continues to be a top priority for our organization. FTA works to minimize threats to our trail, and to find alternative solutions to proposed development. We track and influence these proposals, and work alongside our extended network of agency partners and professional volunteers to mitigate development that would negatively impact a user’s experience on the Florida Trail.

Closing the Deseret Gap

There used to be a time when hikers could walk from Bull Creek WMA to the Tosohatchee WMA on a footpath through the Deseret Ranch. However, nearly a decade ago the Florida Trail was closed within Deseret. Since then, hikers looking to walk the entire Florida Trail have been forced to bridge the gap between Bull Creek and Tosohatchee by walking nearly 30 miles along Dear Park Road, Nova Road, and SR 520. Obviously, this lengthy road walk does not meet the nature, nor the purpose of a National Scenic Trail, as it was described in the National Trail Systems Act of 1968.

There have been some encouraging developments in 2014. Osceola County has been working with the Deseret Ranch to draft a sector plan that will eventually develop nearly 133,000 acres of the property. They estimate the first development happening in 2060! The plan has yet to be adopted, and reactions to the so called “North Ranch Sector Plan” have been mixed. Nonetheless, we are all heartened to see that this plan includes three conceptual routes for the Florida Trail. While still 40 to 60 years away, the eventual implementation of this proposed plan would reestablish this section of the Florida Trail.

Still, this plan has not been finalized, and we do not want to wait another 40 years to eliminate this road walk! The USDA Forest Service in Florida has partnered with the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation and the FTA to investigate an alternate route that would put the Florida Trail back onto wild lands. We have assembled a team of leaders from FTA Chapters, representatives from Osceola and Orange Counties, St Johns River Water Management District land managers, and private landowners. This team is dedicated to finding a viable route, and is currently examining the feasibility of a path that would bypass the Deseret Ranch to the west. We will keep our members abreast of developments, as this project progresses.

Bridging the Middle Aucilla Conservation Area/Twin Rivers State Forest Gap

Earlier this year the New York Times announced that a vast swath of forest, nearly 560,000 acres in northern Florida, was up for sale. This enormous tract of land, owned by the Foley Timber and Land Company, was nearly the size of Rhode Island! Unfortunately, this was no April Fools’ Day prank, and the implications that this sale would have on the nearly 55 miles of Florida Trail within this massive parcel, had already begun to effect hiker access.

Due to changing land ownership between Twin Rivers State Forest in Madison County and the Middle Aucilla Conservation Area in Jefferson County, a new series of road walks were identified by FTA volunteers and staff to connect thru-hikers to existing sections of the Florida Trail, along the Aucilla and Suwanee Rivers.

This route is a mixture of FL Department of Transportation Right of Way and slow-traffic dirt roads, with some forest canopy. Resupply and camping opportunities are available at I-10 and SR 53 in Madison County.

FTA, the US Forest Service, a consortium of Federal, State, and Counties officials, and private land owners continue to work on establishing a permanent route in this area. Our staff is committed to finding an alternative route to reconnect the Florida Trail. Staff updates are announced on our website, as information becomes available. To view the latest trail closure and notices, please visit our website: http://www.floridatrail.org/fnst/closures-and-notices.
### CHAPTER CONTRIBUTIONS

The following chart shows chapter contributions for the 2014/2015 season: April 1, 2014 – March 31, 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>FNST Hours</th>
<th>Total Hours Towards Mission</th>
<th>Miles Driven</th>
<th>Out of Pocket Expense</th>
<th>Miles of Trail Maintained</th>
<th>Miles of Trail Built</th>
<th>Feet of Structure Maintained</th>
<th>Feet of Structure Built</th>
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### PARTNER GROUP CONTRIBUTIONS

The following chart shows partner group contributions for the 2014/2015 season: April 1, 2014 – March 31, 2015.

<table>
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<th>Partner Group</th>
<th>FNST Hours</th>
<th>Total Hours Towards Mission</th>
<th>Miles Driven</th>
<th>Out of Pocket Expense</th>
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<td><strong>$75</strong></td>
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**Partner Acronyms**

- **AHS**: American Hiking Society
- **Imagine**: Imagine Charter School, Weston, FL
- **St. Marks**: St. Marks Trail Crew, Tallahassee, FL
- **Trilogy**: Trilogy Charter School, Gainesville, FL
- **UCF**: University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL
- **UF FAB**: University of Florida, Florida Alternative Breaks, Gainesville, FL
- **UF OAR**: University of Florida, Outdoor Adventure Recreation, Gainesville, FL
- **UF TCD**: University of Florida, Tropical Conservation and Development, Gainesville, FL
Trail Operations Program

Florida's Trail Operations Program is focused on the management and protection of the Florida Trail. Our field staff and volunteers work with agency partners to prevent and mitigate impacts that could affect the nature and purpose of the Florida Trail. We respond to potential threats, coordinate meetings with stakeholders, and help provide volunteer stewardship and training opportunities on the Florida Trail. We are committed to supporting our volunteers, and to working alongside our agency partners to ensure optimal trail routing and a high quality user experience. We work to provide up-to-date information on the Trail's condition, and to close gaps on the Trail. Our staff is dedicated to protecting the Florida Trail in perpetuity, and to engaging local volunteers and partners in everything we do. We recognize that effective trail management and protection can only happen when volunteers, FTA staff, and our agency partners work collaboratively with a common framework.

We look forward to the upcoming trail season, and wish to thank everyone, who worked towards fulfilling FTA's mission in the 2014/2015 season. Thank you again for your support, and we look forward to meeting you on the trail!

The Florida Trail Association
Administration and Human Resources - FTA Headquarters, Gainesville, FL
Janet Akerson, Administrative Director
Email: JanetAkerson@floridatrail.org

Membership and Retail Store - FTA Headquarters, Gainesville, FL
Diane Strong, Membership and Retail Coordinator
Email: DianeS@floridatrail.org

Trail Operations and Management - FTA Regional Office, Tallahassee, FL
Alex Stigliano, Florida Trail Program Director
Email: AlexS@floridatrail.org

Volunteer Program - FTA Headquarters, Gainesville FL
Karl Borton, Volunteer Program Coordinator
Email: KarlB@floridatrail.org

Please refer any questions or comments about the Trail Operations Report to the Volunteer Program Coordinator.
ORDER BY PHONE 877-HIKE-FLA  ORDER BY FAX 352-378-4550  ORDER ONLINE www.floridatrail.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND GIFT FORM

Name ___________________________________________ Daytime Phone Number __________________
Address __________________________________________ Email __________________
City ___________________________________________ State _________ Zip ____________

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Please mark one of the boxes below if you are joining or renewing your membership in the Florida Trail Association.

☐ $35 Individual ☐ $50 Family*
☐ $125 Sustaining* ☐ $250 Supporting*
☐ $1000 Individual Life ☐ $1500 Family Life*
☐ $30 Senior (65+) or Student (18-23) ☐ $45 Senior (65+) or Student (18-23) Family

☐ I do not want my address shared with FTA-affiliated organizations

Employer/Occupation ________________________________
Spouse Name ___________________________________________
Spouse Occupation ________________________________
Number of children ________________________________
I learned about the Florida Trail from ________________________________

☐ Please send a gift membership to:

Name ___________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________
City ___________________________________________ State _________ Zip ____________
Daytime Phone Number __________________
Email ___________________________

☐ My gift is☐ In Memory of ________________________________ ☐ In Honor of ________________________________

☐ The Footprint magazine? ☐ Digital ☐ Printed

☐ Send membership package to ☐ Me ☐ New Member

SEND FORM AND PAYMENT TO:
FLORIDA TRAIL ASSOCIATION
5415 SW 13th St., Gainesville, FL 32608

MEMBERSHIP TOTAL __________________
GIFT TOTAL __________________
GRAND TOTAL __________________

PAYMENT OPTIONS:
CHECK: Make checks payable to “Florida Trail Association”.

CREDIT CARD: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express ☐ Discover

Credit Card Number: __________________ Exp. Date: __________________
Signature: ___________________________________________ Security Code (3 or 4 digits): ____________

To order merchandise from the Florida Trail General Store, visit www.FloridaTrail.org
or call the Florida Trail office at 1-877-HIKE-FLA.
Partners

A special thank you to our primary partner and administrator of the Florida Trail:

• The USDA Forest Service

Thanks to Our Partners

A Big Thank You to All of Our Land Managers

• Camp Crystal Lake Outdoor Education Center
• City of Blountstown
• City of Inverness
• City of Keystone Heights
• City of Orlando
• Escambia County
• Florida Department of Military Affairs
• Florida Department of Transportation
• Florida Department of Environmental Protection
• Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
• Florida Forest Service
• Florida National Guard
• Hernando County
• Keystone Airpark Authority
• National Park Service
• Nokuse Plantation
• Northwest Florida Water Management District
• Osceola County
• Plum Creek Timber Company
• Seminole County
• South Florida Water Management District
• Southwest Florida Water Management District
• St. Johns River Water Management District
• Suwannee River Water Management District
• US Department of Defense
• US Fish and Wildlife Service
• USACOE
• USDA Forest Service

Thank You! Florida Trail Association

Members and Volunteers