

105: SCHEDULING, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING FOR TRAIL WORK PARTIES

This chapter addresses the scheduling, marketing, and advertising of trail workdays for both FTA volunteers and staff. It covers how the average volunteer (long-timer and/or first-timer) learns that a workday is scheduled, where it will be, and the work to be performed, and suggests some post-workday follow-ups that thank volunteers and encourage them to return. The logistical planning for a trail work activity is multifaceted and is covered elsewhere: crew leader skill sets in Chapter 103, trail standards in Chapter 201, trail design in Chapter 203, trail construction and maintenance in Chapter 204, etc.

Maintenance Cycle

Trail work on the Florida Trail goes on all year but the majority of maintenance and construction is accomplished from September through April.

Trail Work is Priority One

FTA volunteers and staff should strive to plan ahead of the FTA and chapter activity scheduling cycle so that trail work dates are selected, and trail work activities are scheduled, long before leisure activities are considered. Securing priority scheduling over leisure activities is best accomplished with long-term planning. FTA members from other chapters and members of the public are all potential participants, so broadly publicize work hikes and communicate all opportunities with other chapters and groups.

Transparency is Key

Transparency is the key to marketing one-day and multi-day work activities. Transparency increases volunteer participation and encourages new volunteer recruitment. Schedule and advertise all trail work activities as early and widely as possible. Multi-day work activities should be advertised well in advance (six months or more).

Coordination and Collaboration

The level of coordination and collaboration needed is dependent upon the task; but it is most important, if not essential, for multi-day trail work parties for the following reasons:

- Identifying dates that accommodate the desired level of volunteer, FTA staff, public, and land manager participation
- Determining the availability of work and camping locations
- Identifying secondary work and camping locations
- Ascertaining land manager plans that may impact the work party location or camping
- Deciding on the number of volunteers required and their critical trail-related skill levels
- Identifying and soliciting trail crew leaders
- Ensuring the availability of equipment and materials
- Ensuring the availability of FTA staff
- Seeking/obtaining funding
- Soliciting FTA member involvement
- Advertising in public media

- Avoiding scheduling conflicts with other major FTA activities

Fundamentals of Long-term Trail Work Scheduling and Marketing

In late spring to early summer, finalize the trail maintenance and construction work plan for the upcoming trail work season. The work plan should target the highest priorities early in the maintenance cycle.

Transparency avoids confusion and misunderstandings. Coordinate and collaborate with FTA trail staff, other Chapter trail leaders, land managers, and surrounding FTA chapters when developing work plans and scheduling.

Scheduling specific days of the week or month has proven to work well for maintenance activities. (*Example: First and third Saturdays and/or Sundays of each month during the maintenance cycle.*) It's also helpful to hold multi-day and multi-chapter work activities at the same time each year. (*Example: The first week in October, the last weekend in November.*)

As soon as the dates are reserved, prepare and submit a [Project Proposal Form](http://www.floridatrail.org/crew-leader-corner) [www.floridatrail.org/crew-leader-corner] for posting on the FTA website Volunteer Opportunities page and in other media as appropriate (chapter website, chapter Meetup, chapter activities calendar, etc.). Early descriptions should, at a minimum, identify the work to be performed (maintenance or construction), a trail section, and time duration. It is common for the full details of the work (camping, meals, degree of difficulty) and volunteer requirements to not be fully known in the early scheduling period, so update the Volunteer Opportunities page and other media with details as they become known.

Identify and contact non-FTA stakeholders who could provide volunteer, funding, or marketing support.

Advertising Tips

To avoid the need for multiple locations for updates, comments, and RSVPs, one site should be chosen for the full descriptions and updates, with postings in other locations linking back to this site. Post an announcement on the FTA website with a link to the chapter website/Meetup site. Use the chapter website/Meetup site for RSVPs, questions, and updates for volunteers.

Delay open sign-up to no more than 60-90 days prior to the start date; publish an announcement when the work hike is opened for sign-up. Periodically query those that signed up to update their availability status. As volunteers sign up, identify their skill sets and work preferences.

Where to Advertise

- Print and radio media: Community calendars
- Social media: Facebook, Twitter
- Footprint
- E-Blaze (published monthly)
- Chapter websites
- Chapter Meetups
- Community bulletin boards

- Trailhead and campsite kiosks
- Like-minded organizations

After the Trail Work Activity

Trail volunteers appreciate recognition and want to feel a sense of accomplishment. At a minimum they should receive a thank you together with a brief summary of what they and others accomplished (miles of trail maintained or constructed, bridge built, etc.). They should be told that they are welcome to come back for subsequent activities. They should be invited to participate in future FTA activities. If they are not FTA members they should be encouraged to become a member.

Be transparent to ensure that the *'what,' 'where,'* and *'when'* of the trail work done is communicated, so subsequent trail crews will pick up where the last crew stopped. Record work performed and volunteer participation in the Volunteer Hours Reporting System.

More Marketing

An 'elevator statement' is a marketing pitch for when you have only 30 seconds to talk to someone. Here is one example of how to do that:

WHY MEMBERSHIP MATTERS
by Ed Talone / January 31, 2015

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A HIKER TO ENJOY OPEN SPACES

Your financial support in the form of membership helps make statewide Greenways possible.

Some thoughts on membership: The main reason people don't join groups like FTA is that they do not think they are good enough hikers. When I did events I was told things like: I'm too old, bad knees, never hiked etc. When I told them that their financial support was key even if they only sat on a bench along a trail and read a book...out came their wallets. With people I met you could see a physical reaction: "They actually want me!" was written on their face. At public events everyone should be asked about membership. For the reasons noted above, most people will not join, even if they quietly take a brochure. If they are *not* hikers, relate the above idea: financial support matters. If they *are* hikers:

- Ask where they live in Florida.
- Ask if they've heard of the Florida Trail.
- If not, ask them where they hike, and describe (see below) a part of the Trail that might be nearby.
- If they are not from Florida, note that the Florida Trail is directly linked to a series of marked trails that stretches all the way to Canada and beyond—to Labrador.

Ed Talone describes the Trail

Here is how Ed describes (in general) the sections of the Trail from south to north:

Big Cypress. Florida's true wilderness. Expect wading. Incredible wildlife and solitude. Cypress domes and Sawgrass.

Seminole Reservation. Mostly on roads but an interesting look at a different culture.

South of Lake Okeechobee. A fascinating up-close look at the citrus and sugar cane industry. If you are lucky enough to see a cane field burnt off, you'll never forget it.

Lake Okeechobee (West). More isolated with some lake view. Don't miss Clewiston.

Lake Okeechobee (East). More lake views and a chance to experience small towns.

Kissimmee River. Farm pastures, cattle, live oaks and prairie.

Three Lakes/Prairie Lakes. Vast palmetto prairie with islands of dark enchanting forest.

Bull Creek. Tramways through dark forests. Love the palm trees here.

Deseret Ranch. A long interesting road walk offers a look at the workings of an enormous farm.

Tosahatchee. Feels like wilderness in Central Florida. Beautiful, well engineered trail.

Orlando area. Amazing route through Bronson SF followed by a well-thought-out rail trail route all the way to I-4.

Ocala NF. Easy, usually dry, walking through pine forests on wide trail. The hills begin.

Rice Creek. Just after Barge Canal remnant. More tramways. Amazing 9-mile swamp.

Palatka–Lake Butler Trail. Mowed rail trail. Great isolated route.

Osceola NF. Mixed forest and dark swamps.

Suwanee River. Wonderful views of dark waters and white sands along the Suwanee.

Paper Company Lands. Very isolated, actually great areas to see wildlife along sand roads.

Aucilla Sinks. Magical walk along a disappearing river.

St. Marks. Long levee walks mixed with dark forests of palm trees and views of the Gulf of Mexico.

Apalachicola NF. Mixed sand roads and brief visits to titi swamps, along with the wade through Bradwell Bay.

Econfina Creek. A trail of interesting bridges and creek-side solitude.

Eglin AFB. Gently rolling hills, clear streams and the best built trail you'll ever walk.

The Beaches. A chance to walk sand dunes and beaches before ending at a 19th-century fort right on the Gulf.