



This publication was produced as a collaborative project of the USDA Forest Service, National Forests in Florida, and the Florida Trail Association, with funding support provided by the USDA Forest Service.



# CONNECTING FLORIDA'S PUBLIC LANDS

The Florida National Scenic  
Trail 5-Year Strategic Plan

MOVING FORWARD  
TO 2023



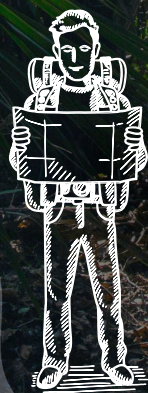
## OVERVIEW

The Florida National Scenic Trail, often known simply as the Florida Trail, is one of a prestigious group of 11 elite trails designated by the U.S. Congress. The Florida Trail spans from the Panhandle to the Everglades, connecting the state's unique natural, cultural and historic sites and offering year-round recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.



160  
entry  
points

1,300  
miles long



>360,000  
visitors each year

## NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL SYSTEM



The Florida Trail is a product of the ongoing work of the U.S. Forest Service, dozens of land-managing partners and dedicated volunteers from the Florida Trail Association, whose members recognized the need for long-distance hiking opportunities in Florida and came together to create, improve and steward the trail.

The Florida Trail accounts for more than **12%** of the **9,050 miles** of National Scenic Trails managed by the U.S. Forest Service.



### HIKE

75% of Florida Trail visitors use the trail for hiking, walking or running.

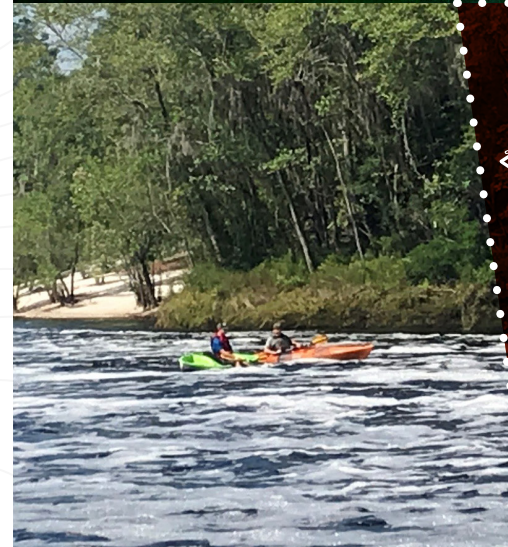
A recreational visit to the Florida Trail offers more than just vivid memories and a connection to nature — the fresh air and exercise improve your health too.

## RECREATION & BENEFITS

Over 18 million people live within an hour's drive of the Florida Trail. Whether it's by foot, wheel or water, anyone can enjoy the scenic natural beauty of the Florida Trail.

**RIDE** 

The trail is home to picturesque settings perfect for biking and horseback riding.



### PADDLE

The Florida Trail follows some of the state's most spectacular rivers, including the Suwannee River and the Kissimmee River.



Lowers risk of heart disease



Reduces anxiety



Improves short-term memory



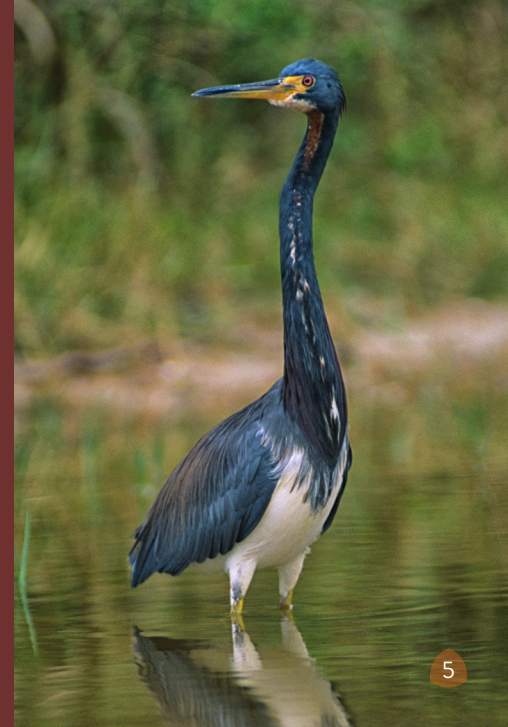
More broadly, the Florida Trail also provides ecological and community benefits.

- Adds protection to native wildlife by creating connections between vital conservation lands, helping animals with large habitat ranges travel safely from one area to another
- Provides economic opportunity to Gateway Communities, which feel direct impacts from visitors to the scenic path



The trail impacted me in a way I almost have a hard time putting into words. Hiking and being out on the Florida Trail changed my life drastically and for the better. The struggles we face as veterans, in my opinion, are best sorted amongst stamped palmettos and oak hammocks.

— BRIAN FAY, WARRIOR HIKER, 2017 FLORIDA TRAIL THRU HIKER



# MOVING FORWARD

The U.S. Forest Service, National Forests in Florida, manages and improves the Florida Trail. The Forest Service does this with professional input and information sharing from the Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition, a diverse collection of Trail partners dedicated to the development, maintenance and promotion of the Florida Trail.

## COALITION MEMBERS

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection – Office of Greenways and Trails, Florida Park Service
- Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation
- Florida Trail Association, Inc.
- National Park Service
- Suwannee River Water Management District (rotating member)
- University of Florida, Forest Resources & Conservation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Manage
- Florida Forest Service
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- U.S. Forest Service, National Forests in Florida
- U.S. Forest Service, Florida National Scenic Trail Administrator
- Osceola County
- Taylor County
- Orange County
- Seminole County
- Private Landowner Representative

Together, these partners crafted a 5-year strategic plan with goals to guide their steps to improve and expand the trail.



Promote Connections



Complete the Trail



Sustainable Management



Strategic Partnerships



The Florida National Scenic Trail is so much more than just a footpath, it is a network of people and special places. It provides outstanding recreational opportunities, while promoting conservation and connectivity to Florida's public lands. To ensure that this iconic treasure is available for all generations, we must prepare for its future — and that's why this 5-year plan is so important.

— SHAWN THOMAS, FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL ADMINISTRATOR, U.S. FOREST SERVICE

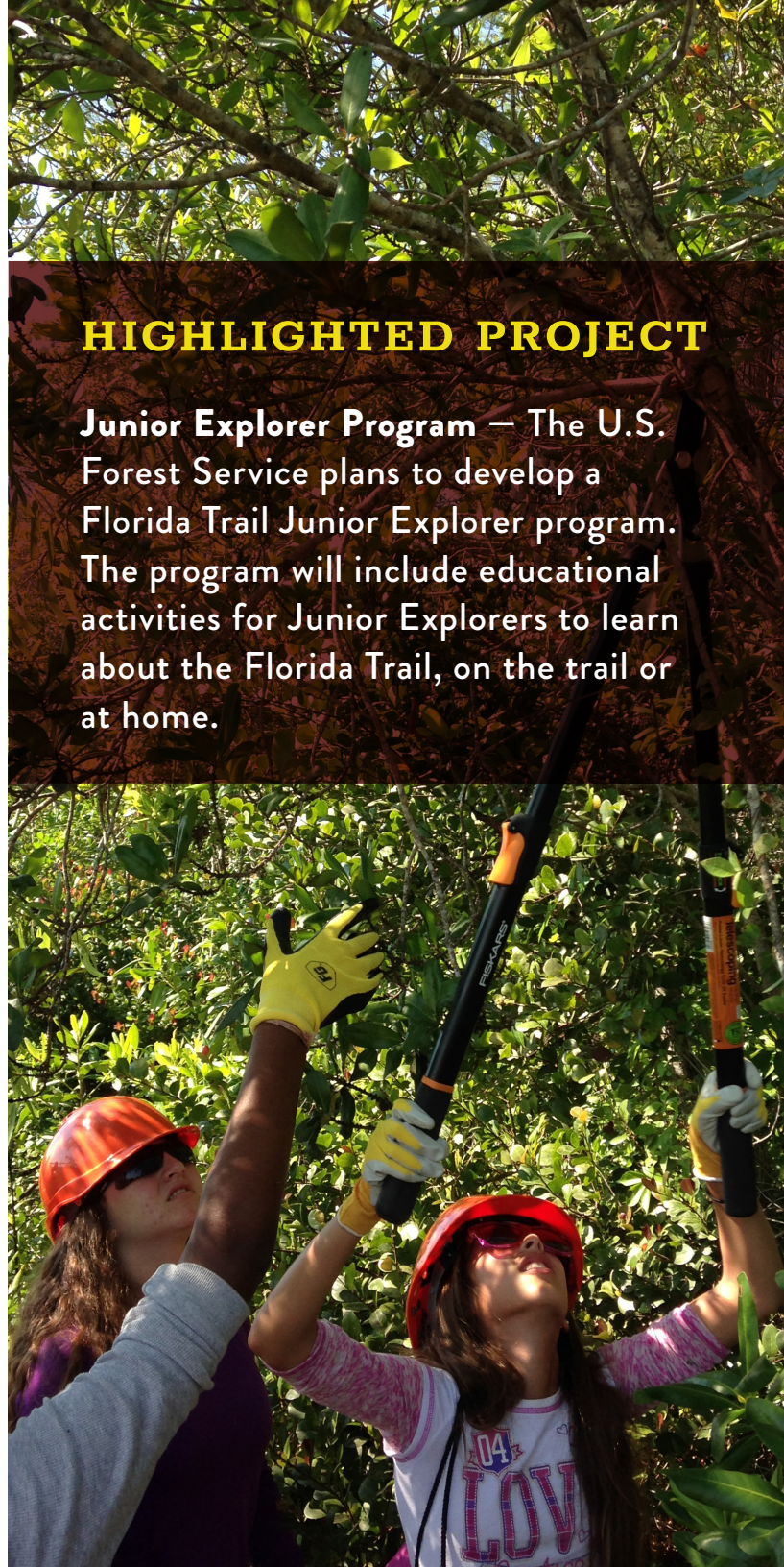
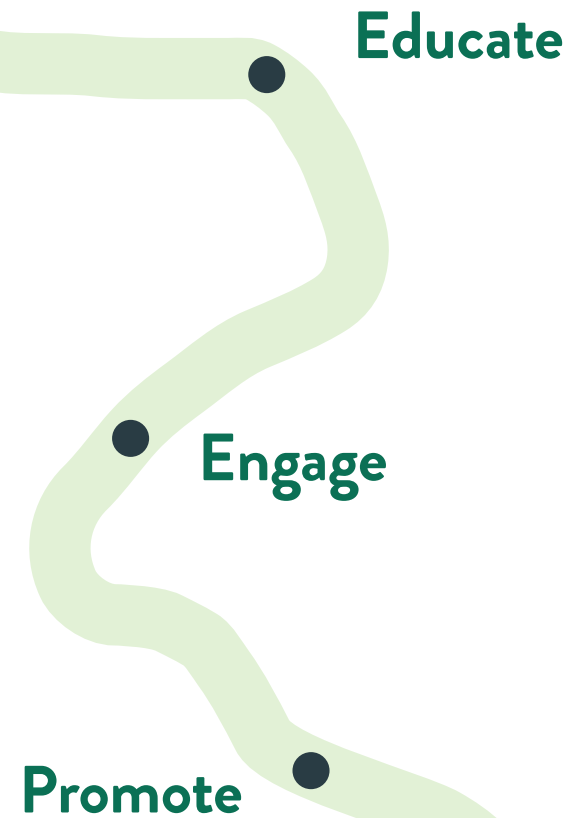




# GOAL 1

## Promote Connections

Connect citizens with the natural and cultural heritage of Florida through increasing the awareness, use and protection of the Florida Trail.



### HIGHLIGHTED PROJECT

**Junior Explorer Program** – The U.S. Forest Service plans to develop a Florida Trail Junior Explorer program. The program will include educational activities for Junior Explorers to learn about the Florida Trail, on the trail or at home.



# GOAL 2

## Complete The Trail

Close the gaps in the Florida Trail through long-range planning, acquisition and agreements for long term protection of the Trail corridor.



### HIGHLIGHTED PROJECT

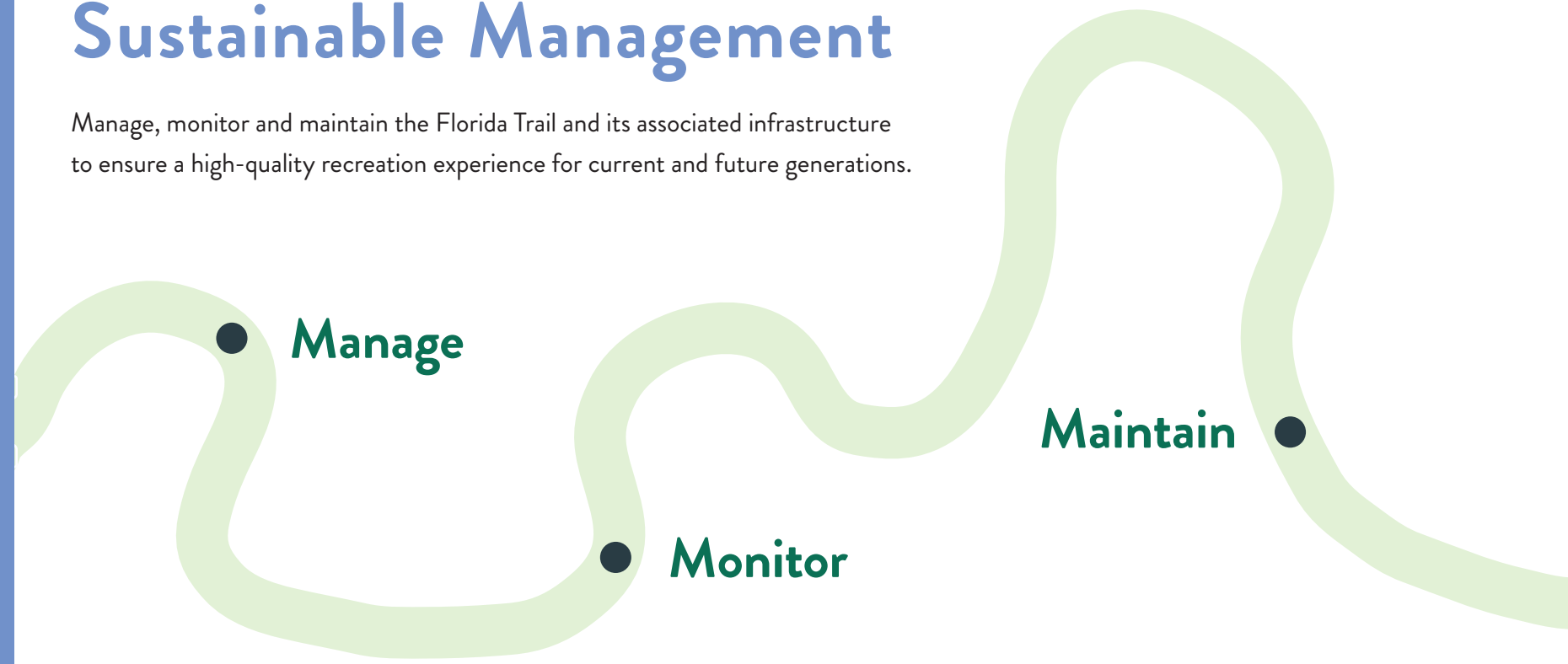
**Panhandle Corridor Location Review** – The Panhandle Gap is the largest gap along the Florida Trail. A team of reviewers plans to choose a route that boosts the Florida Trail experience by navigating through the unique ecosystems of the Florida Panhandle.



# GOAL 3

## Sustainable Management

Manage, monitor and maintain the Florida Trail and its associated infrastructure to ensure a high-quality recreation experience for current and future generations.



### HIGHLIGHTED PROJECT

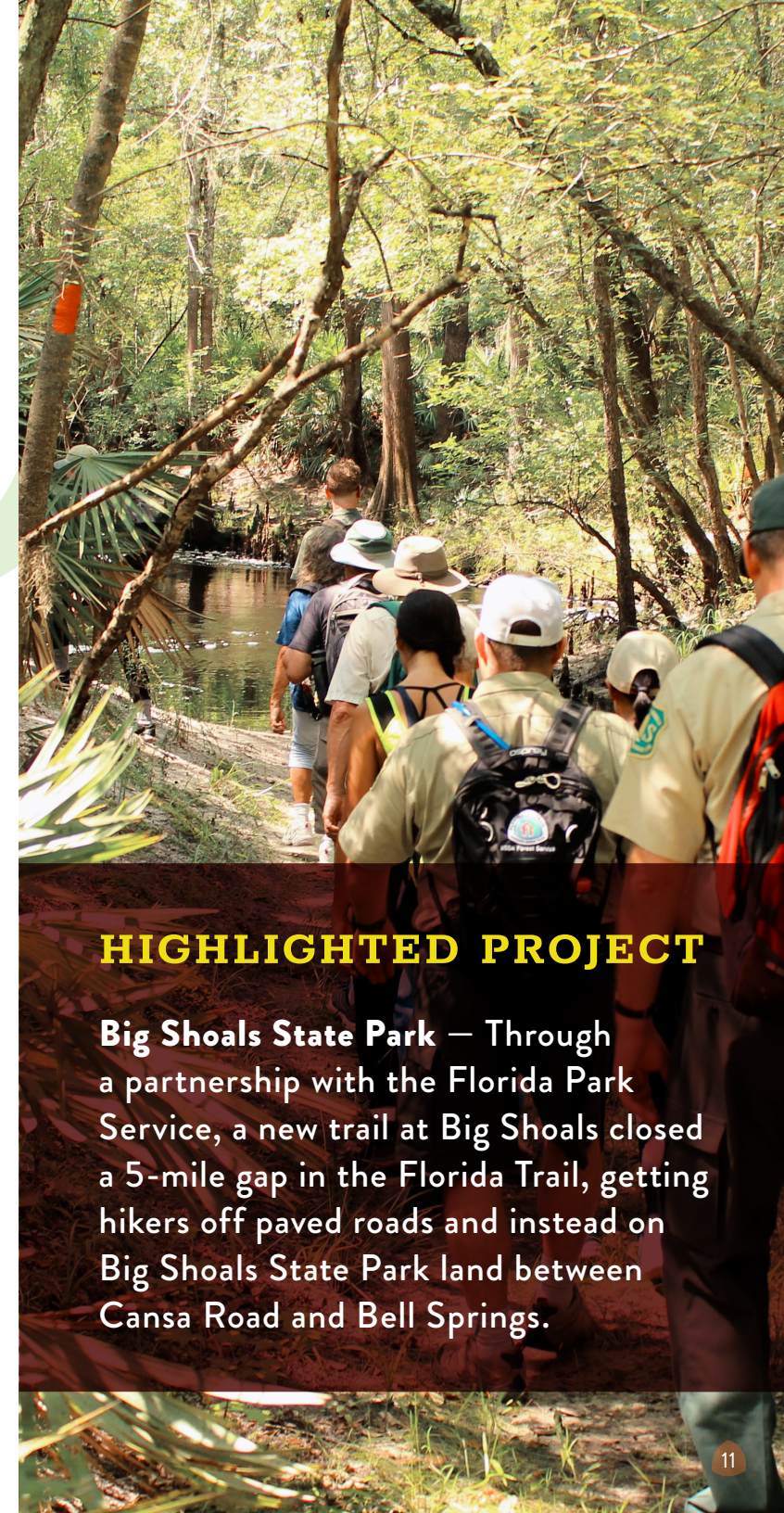
**Allowable Uses Database** – Though the Florida Trail can be enjoyed by many types of recreationists, it is sometimes unclear which types of recreation are allowed on particular segments. The Florida Trail Program plans to develop, publish and advertise a database outlining allowable uses within each trail segment.



# GOAL 4

## Strategic Partnerships

Engage and encourage a diverse community of partners in the management, promotion and completion of the Florida Trail.



### HIGHLIGHTED PROJECT

**Big Shoals State Park** – Through a partnership with the Florida Park Service, a new trail at Big Shoals closed a 5-mile gap in the Florida Trail, getting hikers off paved roads and instead on Big Shoals State Park land between Cansa Road and Bell Springs.

# GET INVOLVED



**MISSION:** Building upon a history of accomplishments, the Florida National Scenic Trail community will work in partnership to protect, promote, complete, manage and sustain the iconic Florida Trail.

**VISION:** From the Emerald Coast to the Everglades, the Florida National Scenic Trail showcases the distinct scenic, natural, cultural and historic resources of Florida. Stewarded by volunteers and supported by a network of partners, the Florida Trail is preserved and protected for all generations.

The 5-Year Strategic Plan guides the U.S. Forest Service and the Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition in their journey to improve the Florida Trail, but the Florida Trail's mission of a sustainable future requires the active involvement of the public as well. To ensure sustainability, trail users and community members must keep the trail socially supported, ecologically preserved and economically viable. This is done through:



Supporting programs that provide vital funding to protect the Florida Trail corridor, like the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Florida Forever.



Supporting land acquisition from willing sellers to provide connections for the Florida Trail.



Volunteering with the Florida Trail Association and more.

Taking these steps to fulfill the mission will bring the Florida Trail closer to realizing the vision of an enriching resource that is preserved and protected for all to enjoy.



Hosting the Florida National Scenic Trail allows the District to provide a great recreation resource to the public through a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the Florida Trail Association. Without this partnership the trail as it is today would not exist.

– EDWIN MCCOOK, LAND MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST, SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT



# FLORIDA TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Public enjoyment of the Florida Trail is built on volunteer citizen stewards, who dedicate their time to preserve and improve this national treasure. The volunteers at the Florida Trail Association have spearheaded Florida Trail initiatives and are the heart of the improvement process. Through their commitment, volunteers build a network of friendships and encourage others to share in the enjoyment of the Florida Trail while embracing a personal responsibility to maintain its scenic beauty.



Volunteers combine to provide an average of **26,000 hours of service** each year to maintain the Florida Trail, which has a value of **\$627,640**.



The FTA hosts **youth-oriented programs**, fostering the next generation of volunteers.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The exciting adventures for visitors along the Florida Trail are made possible by the shared stewardship of our partners. Each partner fills a specific role, whether it's a federal, state or local agency, local business or organization, private landowner or the primary nonprofit partner, the Florida Trail Association. They consistently give their time, funds and expertise to help maintain and expand the Florida Trail to help it reach its full potential.

