

PHOTOGRAPHER SPOTLIGHT: SAM SCRIBNER

FOOTPRINT

Fall 2022 Volume 38 Issue 4

Magazine

**HIKE YOUR
OWN HIKE
EDITION**



**Trails
for All**
Accessibility on
the Florida Trail

**The Healing
Nature of
Hiking**



FLORIDA TRAIL ASSOCIATION



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Cover Image

Chuck Strong and his last trip on the Florida Trail at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Bart Smith

Our Mission

The Florida Trail Association builds, maintains, protects, and promotes the Florida National Scenic Trail (Florida Trail), and a network of hiking trails throughout the state of Florida.

The Footprint Magazine welcomes your comments. The editors are committed to providing balanced and objective perspectives. Not all letters received may be published. Letters may be edited for clarity or length.

communications@floridatrail.org

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Gainesville, FL 32601

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FLORIDA TRAIL FOOTPRINT

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1022 NW 2nd Street



OUR MAGAZINE

The *Footprint* is published by the Florida Trail Association, a volunteer-based nonprofit organization focused on Florida hiking and trail building. Since 1966, the primary mission of our organization has been the care and protection of the Florida Trail, a 1,500-mile footpath across the Sunshine State - Florida's own National Scenic Trail.

OUR GOAL

To provide outreach to our readers through informative articles that express appreciation for and conservation of the natural beauty of Florida; to inform our readers of Florida Trail Association efforts; and to provide information on Florida hiking and outdoor recreation opportunities.

CONTRIBUTORS

Please contact the editor at communications@floridatrail.org to discuss ideas for feature stories prior to submission.

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MEMBERSHIP

As a Florida Trail member, you receive a subscription to The *Footprint* magazine, membership in a local chapter, a local newsletter with local activities, opportunities for outdoor skills training, participation in regional and annual conferences and more. To become a member, you can visit our website, mail in the form on the last page of this magazine, or call 352-378-8823.

ADVERTISING

Reach a highly targeted demographic of Florida outdoor enthusiasts by advertising with us or becoming a regular sponsor. Your advertising dollars directly support production and publication of this magazine and assist the Florida Trail Association in fulfilling its mission. Call 877-HIKE-FLA or email communications@floridatrail.org for more details.



The *Footprint* is printed with
soy-based inks on paper with
post-consumer content

Executive Director's Corner

by Royce W. Gibson, Executive Director

I hope all our members who were affected by hurricane Ian are recovering and rebuilding. The trail sustained some damage to infrastructure which will take some time to repair. Otherwise, it was only downed trees which have been or are being cleared.

You should be receiving our 2022 year end report in the mail very soon. The FTA team and our volunteers had numerous accomplishments including two bring installations in Crabgrass Creek. The bridges survived the hurricane and a third will be built in 2023. I hope you will give generously to support the work we have planned for the remainder of this year and next year.

As I mentioned in the last issue of this magazine, we were looking to fill some staff positions. I am happy to report we were able to fill those positions before the start of our busy event and work season. Joining the staff are:

- Catherine (Cat) Selin**
– Panhandle Trail Program Manager,
- Hailey Dansby**
– Gateway Communities Coordinator,
- Rachel Shireman**
– Next Generation
Coalition Leadership Intern, and
- Justin Bright**
– part-time Office Assistant.

You can read more about them later in this issue. Welcome to the team everyone!

Also later in this issue is our call for nominations to become a member of the Board of Directors. Five members of the Board are elected every year for a three-year term. Anyone can nominate themselves or anyone else for the positions. Nominations are accepted through December 15, 2022. We are particularly interested in broadening the diversity of our board racially, ethnically, geographically, and professionally.

Additionally, we are looking for volunteers to serve on the various committees of the board. Those committees are Advancement (fundraising and outreach), Finance, Governance, and Trails Development and Planning. If you are interested in serving on a committee, please email me or call and I will forward to the committee chair.

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of the Florida Trail being designated a National Scenic Trail. The next issue of this magazine will be a commemorative issue and we want to hear your stories and see your pictures from each of the four decades. We will be sending out invitations to share several times over the coming months. You can send your articles to the office to the attention of the Footprint Editor.



I hope everyone has a wonderful Thanksgiving with family and friends. Enjoy the upcoming holiday season.

Happy trails,





Call for submissions

In 2023, the Florida Trail will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Florida National Scenic Trail designation. Our Winter Footprint will tell the story of the Florida Trail through the decades, including how the trail was routed, managed and maintained, and how the trail has evolved over the years. We welcome submissions from our dedicated trail community who experienced this history first-hand. Please pitch ideas before writing articles so we can plan the content of the magazine. Articles will be due by December 31, 2022.

PITCH IDEAS TO:
communications@floridatrail.org

Panhandle Trail Program Manager Catherine Selin

by FTA Staff



Hi, my name is Catherine Selin! I am a Florida native who grew up in sunny South Florida and currently lives in Tallahassee. My love of the outdoors started at a young age and evolved into a passion I wanted as a focus in my career. I went to the University of North Florida and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Coastal Environmental Science. As an undergrad, I worked for the outdoor recreation facility on campus called Eco Adventure. There I was the coordinator for the environmental education program and worked on maintaining the trails found on the 382 acre nature preserve

on campus. I also interned with the Public Trust Legal Institute where I designed and installed a native butterfly garden at Huguenot Memorial Park. After graduating, I worked with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on Everglades restoration until finally joining the Florida Trail Association. I enjoy anything and everything to do with nature and being outdoors, whether it's hiking, skiing, climbing, paddling,

or bird watching. In my free time, I enjoy drawing, baking, and traveling. I'm so excited to be the new Panhandle Regional Manager and provide people with the opportunity to connect outdoors.

Gateway Communities Coordinator Hailey Dansby



Photo courtesy of Mike Tamburino

Gateway Communities Coordinator Hailey Dansby stands with Next Gen Work Party volunteers Kaley Deal, Rilyn Crouch and Cody Peacock along the Florida Trail.

I'd like to introduce myself as the Florida Trail Association's Gateway Communities Coordinator. Growing up near the Gulf coast of Florida in Tampa cemented my love of Florida's diverse ecosystems. My family's travels were centered around outdoor adventures and now in Gainesville I can often be found hiking and camping in the North Florida area, usually with my dog Linus. I hold a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in Zoology from the University of Florida. Prior to joining FTA, I spent a few years as a research assistant at the Florida Museum of Natural History where I sought to answer evolutionary questions about moths and butterflies. I also worked in hospitality at Yellowstone National Park's Old Faithful Lodge. I am passionate about supporting responsible outdoor recreation and encouraging community members to become stewards of the natural environment. I am thrilled to work with the communities along the Florida Trail!

How far we've come

Originally developed in the early 2000s, the Gateway Communities Program was founded to build mutually beneficial partnerships with the communities along the Florida Trail. The program's goal is to enrich hikers' experience by educating them on trail communities and their resources. In turn, this brings revenue to smaller communities and gets them involved with the trail, fostering a sense of pride and stewardship in their community. Historically, FTA has spread the word about Gateway Communities' local businesses, collaborated with local government officials to form agreements, provided support for community development efforts, and worked with communities and dedicated volunteer chapters to organize events celebrating the trail.



2007 newspaper clipping from Jasper News. Celebration of White Spring's Gateway Community designation



Florida Trail Passport with stamps.

At one point the Gateway Communities program incorporated nearly 30 communities, starting with White Springs in 2007. In the past few years, FTA has been working to revitalize the Gateway Community program and its partnerships. A few exciting projects include our Passport Program where hikers and recreators are incentivized to visit Gateway Community passport stamp locations and create a personalized keepsake of their travels. We work with communities to develop unique stamp designs that showcase elements from their locale. Additionally, the program has been working to install informational kiosks and signage in designated Gateway Communities, generously funded by REI. These kiosks showcase the section of trail in the Gateway Community's area with information about the trail and the community itself.

Expanding our reach

The Gateway Community Program plays an integral part in realizing FTA's vision to connect people with places. In my role as Gateway Communities Coordinator, I aim to add more informational Florida Trail kiosks to the Panhandle and Southern region to enhance visitor and community member experience and knowledge of the trail. I will also expand our Passport Program by designating a collection of stamp locations at historical and cultural sites along the trail. Currently, I am working to revitalize partnerships with existing Gateway Communities and help Gateway Communities prepare for hiking season by spreading awareness about the trail and bolstering safety and support for hikers. I am excited to see more of Florida and meet the dedicated folks across the state that keep the Florida Trail accessible and enjoyable. I am already inspired by the trail's rich history and the impressive grassroots efforts to conserve and improve it. In the coming months I would like to take steps to expand the Next Generation Coalition's involvement within our organization through outreach in Gateway Communities.

Photo courtesy of Diane Strong



FNST kiosk recently installed in Gateway Community Oviedo.

Photo courtesy of Jane Pollack

Next Generation Leadership Intern

I was born and raised in Gainesville, Florida where I developed a deep sense of love and curiosity for our beautiful state and planet. In the last 4 years, I worked in education where my primary focus was on social emotional learning and the elements of nature. I worked for an outdoor education company in Japan where I managed a team of young leaders in outdoor expeditions. I am passionate about bringing diversity and inclusion into the outdoor education field. In my free time, you can find me adventuring at the springs, practicing yoga, spending time with friends, and walking in nature.

My leadership role for the Next Generation Coalition will focus on creating strategic goals and a governance structure for the group, as well as serve as a primary liaison between the Coalition and the FTA staff.



Rachel Shireman



**The Florida Trail
2023**



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The North Florida Trailblazers Chapter of the Florida Trail Association presents

The 2023 Suwannee River IDIDAHIKE

Come hike and be a part of our fundraiser to support the Florida Trail along the famous Suwannee River.

Save the Date!

**March
18th 2023**

Where: The Ball Field Adams Memorial Circle, White Springs, FL.
How much: your \$25 donation includes a shuttle to the trail head and aid stations along the trail.

To learn more about our chapter
Please Visit
[meetup.com/northfloridatrailblazers](https://www.meetup.com/northfloridatrailblazers)



The Hike

This section of the Florida Trail passes the famous Big Shoals rapids (the largest rapid in the state of Florida), beautiful Robinson Branch Creek and Falls, Bell Springs, two high bluffs 100 feet above the river and the Little Shoals rapids all while on the sandy forested banks of the Suwannee River!

Cash, check or credit card taken day of event or via pre-registration.

Choose from hikes of 4.4 miles, 6.6, 7.8, 9.3 or finish the entire IDIDAHIKE at 11.8 miles!



For more details and information on how you can participate and pre-register, visit floridatrail.org/ididahike or email ididahike2023@yahoo.com

38th Annual Southern Regional Conference

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Questions please email:
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Save the Date!

**January
13th - 15th
2023**

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Location is on the Price Sanders Scout Reservation, 38751 Bermont Road, Punta Gorda, Florida 33982



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ACCESSIBILITY ON THE FLORIDA TRAIL

This past April the FTA partnered with the Tallahassee based organization Sportsability Alliance for an event at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge that provided accessible trail experiences for hikers with disabilities. Sportsability Alliance was testing out the newest prototype of the Eco-Rover, an all-terrain tracked battery-powered chair designed for independent mobility over rough or uneven terrain. The purpose of this event was twofold: to create an opportunity for people with disabilities to access the FT in ways that are usually much harder, if not impossible, and to dip the FTA's toes into the world of accessible outdoor recreation.

FTA's organizational values encompass trails that are open to all and connecting the diverse and growing population to opportunities for recreation. That rapidly growing population in Florida includes thousands of people with disabilities that need assistance with access to the outdoors, specifically the Florida Trail. We are working towards that

goal through partnerships with groups like Sportsability and beginning the discussion of starting our own accessibility program on the Florida Trail. We envision a program run by the FTA staff but with full support from FTA's membership helping to coordinate adventures, events, and expeditions. With the right tools we can make the Florida Trail accessible to many that can not get there on their own.

Similar to how we feel about the FT, Harold Allen once described the Appalachian Trail as how it should, "be remote for detachment, narrow for chosen company, winding for leisure, lonely for contemplation, the Trail leads not merely North or South, but upwards to the body, mind, and soul of man" (or woman). Our desire is to create this experience and feeling for all people by creating an accessibility-minded program to open up the FT to people with a wide range of disabilities.

Groups like Sportsability are operating all over the United States, and there are others in Florida as well. Take Luke5Adventures,

a rapidly growing organization based out of Ohio, with chapters popping up nationwide, whose mission is to hike with those who can't hike themselves. At the Appalachian Trail Days festival this past May, FTA had the opportunity to talk with the owners of this organization and watch them as they took participants for hikes out on the AT. It was an inspiring and touching meeting that solidified the desire to create opportunities such as these on our own trail.

According to the US Census Bureau there are 43.5 million people with disabilities in the United States. 20 million of those people have ambulatory disabilities that could potentially make regular, unassisted travel on the Florida Trail difficult or impossible. Fortunately, every year adaptive technology for persons with disabilities increases opportunities to access the outdoors. Society's perception about the abilities of people with disabilities are now being outstripped by reality.

The following are just some of the few examples of adaptive recreational devices being used on trails such as the Florida Trail.



Joëlette

Luke5Adventures uses a Joëlette on its adventures. This is an all-terrain one-wheeled chair that enables any person with reduced mobility or disability, children or adults, to get involved in hiking excursions or running activities with the help of at least two guides. The rear guide handles the balance and the front guide controls the traction and gives the direction.

The FTA is currently looking into the purchase of a Joëlette for our own accessibility program. Its compact size, simple design, and light weight make it ideal for volunteer led trips on the Florida Trail. This is also the most economical choice for us both in its purchase price as well as the long term maintenance.



TrailRider

The TrailRider is an innovative remote access wheelchair. With one wheel and dedicated volunteer 'Sherpas' in the front and back you can cover any trail in comfort and safety. TrailRider users have explored the Grand Canyon, summited Mt. Kilimanjaro and reached Everest Base Camp, Machu Picchu and many other remarkable parts of the world. They have also opened up parks and trails in dozens of communities, which can be just as inaccessible when you have a disability.

Tough, comfortable and environmentally friendly, the TrailRider is a unique mobility device offering accessibility to wilderness areas. Two or more people power the device, enabling a person with a physical disability

to take part in hikes and excursions to enjoy nature as part of an inclusive and supportive team.



EcoRover

EcoRover is an All-Terrain Tracked Battery-Powered Chair designed for independent mobility over rough or uneven terrain. Easily traverse sand, gravel, dirt, mud, snow, grass, hills, tree roots, mulch and more. EcoRover is intuitive, safe, and allows outdoor independent mobility for people with mobility limitations. What was once thought impossible to independently traverse—sand, snow, grass, gravel, rocks, and creeks—is possible with this mobility device. EcoRover is designed to increase access through lower cost direct sales to the consumer and rental services.



GRIT Freedom Chair

Designed by MIT engineers, the GRIT Freedom Chair is a mix between a manual wheelchair and a mountain bike. Riders of different ages, strengths, and lifestyles have all found their lives transformed thanks to the GRIT Freedom Chair. The lever-driven all terrain wheelchair is resilient, serviceable, easy to transport, and even easier to use. It provides the opportunity to amplify one's self as opposed to needing sherpas or electrical power.

The Florida Trail is not an accessible trail in many locations by ADA or other widely used federal standards for use by people with disabilities. Limitations to access for all include infrastructure, swamps, sand, steep ravines, federally designated wilderness and so on. At the same time, given the plethora of access points along the entire trail and the general gentle topography of the trail across the state, there are many hundreds

of miles of the trail that can be accessed by people in wheelchairs. The US Forest Service, the federal administrator of the FT, has its own guidelines on accessible trails called The Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) of 2006 and the The Forest Service Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines (FSORAG).

Trails that meet the FSTAG have a broad range of appearance. While some accessible trails may be paved or surfaced, some are natural surfaced and just wide enough to allow for passage of a person using a wheelchair. In either case, the images brought by the mention of a fully accessible trail are not usually in a primitive or backcountry setting like the Florida Trail. Accessible trail design is in some respects less about accessibility and more about sustainable trail design.

Sustainable trail design, and universal trail design standards in general, encourage designing trails in sustainable locations, resulting in less maintenance while providing high quality trail experiences. These design principles and considerations make sense for any project and generally provide standards that work in frontcountry or remote backcountry settings. While fully accessible trails require wider tread widths and fewer obstacles, simply applying the universal design standards will create trails that are more sustainable and accessible, even if they do not meet all accessible trail guidelines.

Even without meeting all accessible trail guidelines, the FT is prime for creating an accessibility program like we envision. It is generally flat or with gentle grades, rocks and other natural obstacles are few and far between, and the trail is well maintained every season. We have an extremely dedicated corps of volunteers that would jump at the opportunity to serve their community by promoting access for all. It is in the very mission and values of our organization to make sure that the Florida Trail is for everyone.

With the help of partner organizations, FTA will create our own volunteer training program that will empower our members to safely and professionally bring people with disabilities onto the trail. Training components would include sensitivity training to work with people with different disabilities, maintenance lessons to field diagnose device problems, and most importantly safety for the crew and participants.

Stay tuned for more information on FTA's trail accessibility program. It is our hope that we can begin soon and make sure that everyone that wants to hike on the trail we all work so hard to protect and promote has that opportunity.

Members of the Florida Trail Association are eligible to join!

Learn more at nwfcu.org/membership



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A Newfound Passion

by Jane Pollack, Communications and Outreach Manager

PHOTOGRAPHING NATURE FROM A WHEELCHAIR WITH SAM SCRIBNER

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background. Are you a born and raised Floridian?

My name is Sam Scribner and I was born and raised in Central Florida and began traveling to New Smyrna Beach at a very young age. When I was nine years old, I began surfing and pretty much immediately knew I had found my passion. In 2016, I broke my neck at the C5 level, leaving me a quadriplegic and living my life full-time in a wheelchair.

What inspired you to get into photography? What keeps you motivated to create?

After breaking my neck, I have struggled to find how I could still interact with my passions. What began as me taking pictures and videos of my friends has since flourished into a new passion of mine. With my camera, I am able to interact with my surroundings in such an intimate way. My motivation to create comes from the human interactions I have when I'm out shooting. Inevitably, whenever I am out shooting I end up talking with other lovely individuals in my community.



You capture Florida's essence and natural beauty so well. How does your home state influence your work?

Well first of all, thank you! I would say that being an individual born and raised in the state, all of my work is so influenced by Florida. I've done some minor traveling and seen a little bit of elevation, however I will say that even without the elevation here in Florida we have so much to offer. From sitting on the beach watching the wildlife interact with the sunbathers and surfers, to coming inland and seeing the Wekiva River flow through cypress trees, we have such a diverse habitat that can quench any adventure's thirst for the wild.

What are your favorite subjects to photograph?

Growing up with such a passion for surfing, I would say that my favorite subjects to photograph are often at the beach. Some days it's the surfers, other days it's the wildlife. With my drone I'm able to get a really unique perspective of both.

What kind of photography equipment do you use? How have you adapted to capturing photos from a wheelchair?

I have a Canon DSLR that I mount onto my wheelchair and I also have a drone of which I'm FAA licensed to fly. It's taking me the better part of five years to figure out how to make it happen. Those professional grade cameras can be heavy and when I am out on the trail bouncing around the terrain can take a toll on the gear pretty quickly. I'm always looking for a way to better my system or any sort of pieces that help reduce the wear and tear I put on my gear. Most of what I use now is studio equipment and a few pieces I have taken from tripods. The drone is so amazing because I'm able to get a perspective on things that because I'm living in a wheelchair I couldn't get to.

Do you believe art and photography have a role to play in conserving Florida's unique habitats?

Absolutely! When people bring their photos or videos to platforms like the internet or social media others can consume Florida's TRUE state. I know that Disney, Universal, and other theme parks bring a large amount of tourism to our lovely state, but I hope that when people come to visit Florida they see these pictures and are more intrigued by our state's natural beauty.















PHOTOS

15 Sam enjoys capturing the natural beauty of Florida and believes showcasing nature through art will help inspire people to appreciate the uniqueness of our state.

15 Sam takes photos on the beach in his wheelchair that he has outfitted with his camera gear.

16 A bird's eye view of the boardwalk leading to New Smyrna Beach.

18 A drone shot of the old 7 mile bridge in the Florida Keys

20 Photographing surfers is one way Sam stays connected to his lifelong passion for surfing.

21 Sam gets out on the water with a little help from his friends.



FTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nominations for the Florida Trail Association's 2023 Board of Directors are now being accepted

The Nominating Committee will select the slate based on nominations received.

The Florida Trail Association is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity, generational and regional representation, and professional experience of our board members.

We welcome all nominations, including those that bring racial/ethnic diversity, female leadership, candidates from South Florida, as well as any candidate possessing professional skills commensurate with governance of a national not-for-profit organization.

Serving on FTA's Board of Directors is a chance to:

- ◆ help the organization face challenges,
- ◆ provide creative solutions,
- ◆ contribute to a fast-growing trail program,
- ◆ and affect long-term positive change.

Board service also offers you the opportunity to:

- ◆ grow personally and professionally,
- ◆ develop valuable skills in non-profit governance,
- ◆ gain unique experience, and
- ◆ make lasting connections with a team of other passionate and motivated professionals.

Please consider serving on the Board and submitting a nomination for the 2023 Florida Trail Association Board of Directors. For more information on our current Board of Directors as well as the general and specific responsibilities of our board members, visit:

floridatrail.org/board-of-directors/.

Please send your nominations to nominations@floridatrail.org.

Nominations should include the following information:

1. Name of Nominee, address and contact information (including email address).
2. Brief statement or cover letter outlining why the nominee would like to be a board member.
3. Resume or short background on the candidate in question (work history, non-profit experience, involvement with the FTA, interests etc.). and
4. Reference (optional).

****** NOMINATIONS CLOSE FRIDAY DECEMBER 15, 2022 ******

QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE FTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

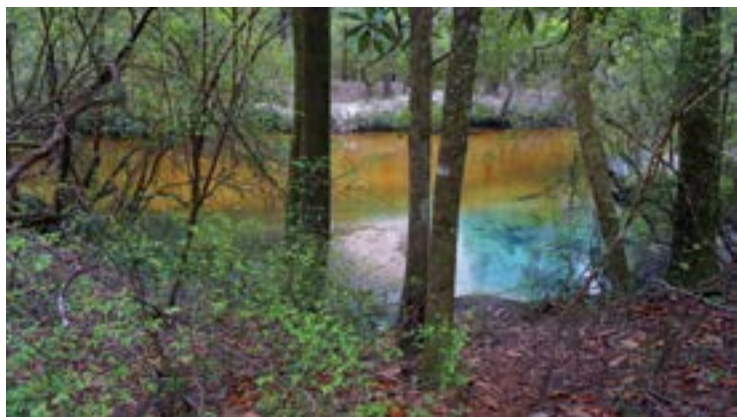
- 15 Members
- 5 Members elected each year
- Term is 3 years
- Can serve two consecutive terms
- Dec. 15, 2022 - Nominations Close
- January 2023 - Slate of Candidates announced
- January 2023 - Voting begins
- March 2023 - Voting ends
- April 2023 - Election results announced at Annual Membership Meeting

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A footstep at a time
A paddlestroke away
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Visit: floridatrail.org/legacy

Florida
Trail
Association
Building More Than Trails



The Healing Nature of Hiking

by Jenna Taylor, South/Central Regional Program Manager



Photo courtesy of Katlin Thompson

Everyone can spell out the physical benefits of a day spent on the Florida Trail: stronger muscles, longer life, a better microbiome, and a good tan. We know that an active lifestyle combats old age and can improve sleep quality, whether because of exercise, endorphins or pure exhaustion.

But what if there was more to it? What if hiking didn't just keep us physically fit but if it prepared us to face the onslaught of mental stressors that we face every day? In an instant world, where we are addicted to stimulation, what if we found the antidote standing in silence?

Let's talk about stress

Americans are stressed. According to research done in 2022 by the American Psychological Association, "the number of people who say they're significantly stressed is stunning relative to what we saw when we began the survey in 2007." Things like housing, the economy, and finances remain predictably at the top of everyone's list.

Stress impacts the entire body. While our body is equipped to handle stress in flight or fight responses (such as encountering a bear on the trail), it is not designed to stay there. The amygdala in the brain is responsible for the perception of emotions such as fear, aggression, anger, and sadness. When someone experiences a stressful event, the amygdala is the one sounding the alarm to the rest of the brain and body, that we are in danger. Unfortunately, bodies cannot always determine if there is actually an alligator charging you, or if traffic is just really bad. It perceives and responds to stress in the same way,

A trail maintenance group enjoys a campfire in Big Cypress.

flooding the body with unnecessary hormones, disrupting the nervous, endocrine, and digestive systems, tensing up muscles, and changing the synapses in the brain. Over time, this constant stress can lead to serious diseases like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. Toxic stress changes the DNA in our cells through a process called methylation. Changes that a Finnish study discovered are, quite literally, taking years of your life from you, 2.8 years to be exact.



FOR FURTHER READING ON THE TOPIC CHECK OUT

VITAMIN N - BY RICHARD LOUV

THE NATURE FIX - BY FLORENCE WILLIAMS

THE BIOPHILIA HYPOTHESIS - BY EDWARD WILSON

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS - BY ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

YOUR GUIDE TO FOREST BATHING - BY M. AMOS CLIFFORD

A CLOSER LOOK AT ECONOMIC STRESSORS

% Say Money/Economy/Housing is a significant source of stress

■ MONEY ■ ECONOMY ■ HOUSING

Ages 18-25



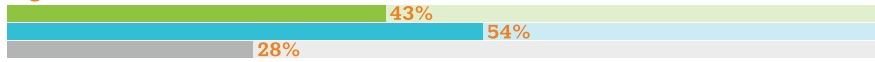
Ages 26-43



Ages 44-57



Ages 58-76



Ages 77+



Stress in America 2022: Covid Second Anniversary

2022 American Psychological Association

Mental Health

Stress isn't the only area we are suffering as a nation. One in five Americans will experience a mental health illness in any given year and 50% will be diagnosed within their lifetime according to the CDC. Anxiety disorders are the most common and 40 million Americans (19.1% of the population) will experience this every year. For those under 18 years old, 31.9% will experience significant anxiety.

As with stress, these mental health challenges have ripple effects that impact not only the individual but the community. In the United States, we lose \$300 billion annually to loss of productivity as a result of mental health.

Technology Addiction

We are addicted to our phones. Even while enjoying nature, we are checking FarOut, snapping photos, and checking in on social media. Phone alerts sing alongside the birds. According to research done by Review.org, Americans spend an average of 44 days of their lives a year on their phones (2 hours and 54 minutes a day). We check it upon waking (80%), we feel uneasy going anywhere without it (83%) and over half have never gone 24 hours without their cell phones. Another recent survey by Assurian found that the average American checks their phone 352 times a day, four times more than in 2019.

Cell phone addiction, whether we recognize it as such or not, manifests in a loss of interest in other activities, anxiety, irritability, and depression. Dopamine is released through phone usage, and without it, we crave another hit of dopamine and find ourselves stuck in an endless loop. We reduce our cognitive function and slow down creativity.

What if we could press pause on the impacts of stress and anxiety on our bodies? What if we could find ourselves prepared to face challenges when they came up? What if we could remain calm under pressure and recover faster from those perceived "bears?"

Biophilia Hypothesis and nature-connectedness

The Biophilia Hypothesis was introduced by Edward Wilson in 1984. Simply put, this concept is the human desire to connect with other forms of life. He proposed that we have an "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes," and to live in contrast to those interactions, is to live in contrast with the inner self. At first glance, this seems like idealism, a place we should want to be but not a realistic goal. However, as the research continues to find, living in consistency with this theory may be the way to make us healthier and happier while strengthening our economy.

In The Nature Fix, Florence Williams states that time in nature, "frees your brain up for other things," allowing the stress and distractions of life to fade away. David Strayer, a professor of cognition and neuroscience, found that our brains require breaks in nature in order to be creative. In one study he conducted, participants showed a 50% increase in creativity after just a few days in nature (which could explain why I did better working on this piece after a few days of trail maintenance). Another study shows that blood travels to the parts of the brain associated with pleasure, empathy, and unconstrained thinking when viewing images of nature. In contrast, when viewing urban pictures, blood flooded the amygdala, kicking off that fight or flight reaction.

If you're wondering whether only thru-hikers can come back refreshed and reformed after months on the trail, you will be pleased to know that multiple studies have indicated that the impact of nature can occur with just brief interactions. During a study involving repetitive tasks, those who took 40-second breaks to look at a greenspace rooftop performed significantly better than those who stared out at a concrete roof. In another study by Juyoung Lee, when Japanese males spent only two days outdoors, they saw positive changes in their heart rate, blood pressure, and stress levels.

A study by Song, Ikei, and Miyazaki studied the effects of forest therapy on blood pressure. They found that after just one day with intentional time outside, both the systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels significantly decreased. The effects lasted when tested three and five days later in participants. They concluded that even a "brief walk in an urban park" can reduce stress enough to impact the nervous system positively and decrease heart rate.

What does this mean for the Florida Trail Association and you?

The Florida Trail Association, chapters, volunteers, and users are uniquely poised to share the healing power of nature in a tired and stressed-out world. Providing opportunities through maintenance events, activity hikes and chapter meetings to experience the world is truly our greatest impact. The work we do matters and if we keep doing it, and keep pointing out the benefits, perhaps slowly, we can see a shift in the fabric of our communities.

This hiking season, consider the following:

- ◆ Start at home: Look for new ways to involve nature in your homes. Make nature a part of your holiday and family celebrations by incorporating a walk outside after meals or by joining an Opt Outside event on Black Friday.
- ◆ Take off without the tech: Make your smartphone dumb when spending time in nature. Put it on airplane mode, take your headphones out, resist the urge to take photos, and simply be present. Plan ahead by downloading maps so you don't get lost!
- ◆ Ditch the destination: Reduce the need to get somewhere. Wander slowly. Sit for a while in one spot. Listen and feel. Observe the surroundings as the sunlight moves and changes as time passes.
- ◆ Stop overthinking it: Keep it simple. Walk outside for ten minutes at lunch. Put a plant on your desk. Build nature into your

The RIPPLE EFFECT of Mental Illness

Having a mental illness can make it challenging to live everyday life and maintain recovery. Let's look at some of the ways mental illness can impact lives — and how the impact can ripple out.



People with serious mental illness have an increased risk for chronic disease, like diabetes or cancer

PERSON



Rates of cardiometabolic disease are twice as high in adults with serious mental illness



18% of U.S. adults with mental illness also have a substance use disorder



At least **8.4 million** Americans provide care to an adult with an emotional or mental illness

FAMILY



Caregivers spend an average of **32 hours** per week providing unpaid care



21% of people experiencing homelessness also have a serious mental illness

COMMUNITY



37% of people incarcerated in state and federal prison have a diagnosed mental condition



70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have at least one mental health condition



1 in 8 of all visits to U.S. emergency departments are related to mental and substance use disorders



WORLD



Depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide



Depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy **\$1 trillion** each year in lost productivity

Data from CDC, NIMH and other select sources. Find citations for this resource at nami.org/mhstats

NAMI HelpLine
800-950-NAMI (6264)

f NAMI

Twitter NAMICommunicate

Instagram NAMICommunicate

www.nami.org

nami
National Alliance on Mental Illness



“Just being surrounded by bountiful nature, rejuvenates and inspires us.” ~ Edward Wilson
Photo of Prairie Lakes in Three Lakes WMA

routine. Take the healing powers of nature off a pedestal and simply let it become a part of your life, wherever it fits in with ease.

When we review surveys from volunteer work parties, the overwhelming majority of folks say the connection to like-minded individuals was their favorite part of their experience followed very closely by time spent outdoors.

I often reflect as we sit around the

campfires, on what a unique experience the FTA offers volunteers. On our backcountry trips, it is a chance to entirely unplug. As we sat around last season on the last night of a Big Cypress trip, I noticed the shift in the group from when we first began. Tired as we were after five days of hard work, everyone was relaxed, laughing and entirely present. Conversation flowed, uninterrupted by cell phones since there was no signal to be had.

We debated things since there was no option to Google it. We roasted marshmallows and sat quietly in the dark. The trail was refreshed and so were we. Nature would reclaim the trail in a season, but it would give us back the chance to have this moment again and for that, we are all grateful. As an organization, we never know what people are bringing to our events, but I do know what we can help them release.

What do we mean by nature?

In this publication, we tend to think of nature as remote experiences on the Florida Trail. However, for the purposes of looking at mental health and nature, we can define nature as a spectrum of any green space ranging from vast wilderness to community parks and gardens in urbanized areas. Some research has even found that nature’s effects are felt by simply viewing nature photos, growing green things in our homes, and listening to nature sounds. Recently, more architectural trends have included these elements such as using reclaimed wood, adding additional windows, and planting green walls.



The Next Generation of Trail Maintainers

by Svetlana Kendrick



Photo courtesy of Jane Pollack

I had never been camping, and I had never heard of Caesar Weed. I had certainly never helped to build a bridge before.

When my college offered to take me and several other students to join a volunteer work party with the Florida Trail Association, I immediately said yes. Not because I knew what FTA was (I didn't) or because I had a lot of outdoors experience (also a definite no). It wasn't even because I'm an outgoing or extroverted person (again, no). I simply needed something to revive me during a break in my internship, and I'd been looking to get involved in something outdoorsy for a while. So when the opportunity came up, I thought "why not" and put my name on the list. Two weeks later, I was on a bus with four strangers, the head of Flagler College's student affairs division, and three seats full of backpacks and sleeping bags, making the nearly four hour drive to our campsite at the Riverwoods Field Lab in the heart of the Kissimmee River Basin. The following day, we would head out early to meet the Tropical Trekkers Chapter of the FTA for a day of trail maintenance and invasive plant removal near Chandler Slough on the Florida Trail.

Now, I was lucky in that my college was able to schedule some supplemental activities. However, even without such activities, I would still be able to say that that trip was not only

a highlight of my semester, but a transformative experience as well. Joined by two amazing FTA members, my college group met with some volunteers from the Tropical Trekkers to blaze trails, dig trail post holes, pull Caesar weed, and, yes, even to build a bridge. Every experience was completely new to me, but there isn't a single experience from that day that I would take back. From the moment we arrived, we were greeted with kindness and encouragement, and I can never say enough how wonderful each and every person was. Everyone helped how and where they could. When someone got tired of helping with the bridge, they switched to pulling Caesar weed instead. And when someone else got bored of Caesar weed, there was always work to be done with the bridge or with painting blazes. I am still in awe of the dedication of that work party. It was people coming together, regardless of their experience or background, because they wanted to help keep something beautiful.

But what about you? What if you're not sure if something like this is up your alley? What if you'd be nervous about going alone? These are the same doubts I had, and they're what made me want to share my story. I'm a stay-in introvert who had zero experience with working outside, camping, and building anything other than an IKEA shelving unit.

I was not, and still am not, a spontaneous or particularly adventurous person. And yet I'm telling you now to just try it. Even if your friends aren't interested or if it seems a little too daunting or different. Yes, it may end up not being your thing, but then you'll simply end up with an interesting story to tell. If, however, you're like me, a stay-at-home English major who deep down always hoped that I could surprise myself, you may find that you want to help keep something beautiful too. And what better state to do that in than the beautifully biodiverse state of Florida?

PHOTOS

30 *The Flagler College crew poses with pride on their freshly reconstructed bridge.*

31 *Svetlana drills planks into a bridge with help from their classmates.*

31 *Flagler College students and staff and FTA staff enjoy a swamp buggy ride through Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park.*



Remembering R.J. Sikora

Suwannee Chapter



As we each choose our paths from summer into fall, towards the rest of our lives, the Suwannee Chapter members reflect on the unexpected passing of R.J. Sikora on July 4, of this year, 2022.

We proceed many miles, and as Carl Dunnam often asserted, by "refreshing our memories," retelling colorful stories about R.J.'s meaningful contributions. Without question he and his wife, Stephanie Sikora gave more of their bodies, minds and hearts to the FTA's Suwannee Chapter and side trail maintenance or operations than any members in recent history.

R.J. brought extensive skill sets from decades of working in the automotive unions tumult, avid biking, bow hunting, and general camping excursions to the Suwannee Chapter. After suffering a catastrophic motorcycle accident he began an early retirement as a rebuilt bionic man. Considering location options of where to move, Suwannee County was selected by the criteria to maximize financial resources.

With these experiences acquired, Suwannee natives noticed he had something else, a kind of sure-footedness which comes to a feller who has learned to paddle his own canoe. The Sikoras rode mountain bikes to expedite the trail condition assessment for maintenance activities. They targeted times for applying equipment and membership efforts predicated on avoiding known hazards of heat and hunting seasons. R.J. held a strong sense of accomplishment in applying mechanical know-how to keep specialized equipment, like mowers, operational.

Over many years R.J. diligently held chapter offices as Trailmaster, Section Leader,

Trail Coordinator, and most recently Chapter Chair. With a workman-like functional outcome his focused attitude was undaunted by natural or bureaucratic obstacles. Achieving a usable trail was consistently his highest priority.

"R.J. was one who just 'did it', then asked for permission or forgiveness. He stepped on some toes in the process. One cannot argue with those excellent trail improvements." - Sam Bigbie

Over those years R.J. contributed to the following major projects:

- ◆ The 40 mile highway re-route from the Econfinia to Mill Creek North
- ◆ The Ellaville reroute under I-10 continuing to the Black Tract which removed a road walk
- ◆ The Ellaville re-route from Cooper's Bluff to the Withlacoochee River. This enabled passing under US 90 and the CSX Railroad bridge allowing viewing Ellaville ruins and creating a Blue Spur Trail to the Suwannee Spring
- ◆ Significant contributing input with the Suwannee River State Park (SRSP) land purchase to open the Big Oak Trail
- ◆ SRSP reroute moving the trail closer to the Suwannee towards SR 141 boat ramp
- ◆ Trail reroute from the Alapaha River to the SRSP property thus removing road walk
- ◆ The Memorial Bench at the confluence of the Suwannee and Withlacoochee Rivers

honoring members who have hiked further down this trail was the idea of the Sikoras.

Additionally, RJ participated in frequent Chapter Volunteer Work Parties. The Sikoras were integral in keeping our section of the Florida Trail in excellent condition. Some hikers might have approached their work in progress. They could easily know it was R.J. with the air peppered with "blue words", if not saturated, particularly post hurricane entanglements. Routinely the heavy sweat and grime of intense labor was observed. Periodically lacerated flesh leaking blood into the mix revealed the steel of his deep commitment.

There were also often good humored monthly membership events: breakfasts, lunches, or Trail Magic, extended camping events, caravans to paddles or special historical locations, along with annual Holiday Gatherings.

Today, as hikers walk this uniquely scenic section of the Florida Trail, the footprints of R.J. have vanished with the seasonal weather, much like the ashes of Governor George Franklin Drew's Mansion and the Ghost Town of Ellaville. Realizing R.J. has moved a little further up the trail, his caring handprints are forever everywhere.

"I can't imagine the Suwannee section of the Florida Trail without R.J.'s presence. He and Stephanie have done so much hard work in maintaining this area over the years."

- Adam Fryska

Respectfully,
Norm McDonald
Past FTA Suwannee Chapter Chairperson

OTHER WAYS TO GIVE THIS YEAR

Take stock in the Florida Trail

Donating stocks or mutual funds to the Florida Trail Association is a smart and simple way to help protect the natural world. By making a gift of appreciated securities, you may be able to avoid capital gains tax.

Give directly from your retirement account

If you are over age 70 ½, you have to take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your retirement account. No matter the amount of your RMD for the year, you can give up to \$100,000 to charities from your IRA as qualified deductions (QCDs). You do not have to pay income tax on the QCD's

Amazon Smile

Select the Florida Trail Association as your charity of choice and 0.5% of every qualified order will be donated to the FTA by Amazon.



For information on any of these
giving options contact Royce Gibson
royceg@floridatrail.org
352.554.6227

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Debra Taylor 978-732-6336

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Brevard and Indian River
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Janet Miller 561-422-2189

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St. Johns, and Union
Ron Fish 904-504-4359

PANHANDLE CHAPTER

Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson,
and Washington
Christine Doucette 772-285-5221

When you join the state-wide Florida Trail Association you automatically become a member of your local chapter based upon your zip code. However, members may attend the activities of any chapter and may transfer to any chapter they wish simply by informing the FTA Office.

Florida Trail activities are organized by our local chapters and are led by authorized volunteer activity leaders. Many of our activities are open to the general public so you can get to know us before you join. Activities can be found online at floridatrail.org. Click on "About Us" then click on the "Upcoming Events" button on the left. Local activities are usually also listed on the chapter websites, Facebook pages and Meetups. Click on "About Us" then "Our Chapters" for links to local chapter sites.

Participants in activities must sign an Assumption of Risk form and agree to accept personal responsibility for their safety and the safety of accompanying minors. Always contact the activity leader in advance for more information, to let them know you are attending, to find out any special requirements or equipment for the activity, and to check for any last minute changes.

For more information about chapters and links to websites/meetups/photos go online to FloridaTrail.org/about-us/chapters/ then select the chapter



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and Marion
352-378-8823
Karen Garren 352-316-3453

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MEMBERSHIP AND GIFT FORM

Photo by Todd Kelly

JOIN BY PHONE 877-HIKE-FLA OR ONLINE AT floridatrail.org/join

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Photo courtesy of Kathryn Kovach



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help us achieve our 2023 goals.
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