



TRAILS

DRAFT 2025 TOOLKIT



CORRIDOR
CONNECT

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INTRODUCTION

Florida's climate, diversity of natural landscapes, and award-winning state parks and trails provide residents and visitors with myriad opportunities for nature-based recreation. With the passage of the SUNTrails bill (SB 106) in April 2023, and increased popularity of the Office of Greenways and Trails Trail Town program, there is considerable interest and funding to accelerate trails projects within Florida.

The Trails Corridor Collaboration Team (Trails Team), which is comprised of over 30 participants from nearly 20 organizations, was assembled following the September 2023 Corridor Connect Summit to align efforts around trail prioritization and the identification of opportunities, as well as establishing a process to recognize and assess potential impacts.

A subset of the Trails CCT compiled and summarized resources to create a **Trails Toolkit** for trail advocates to help promote and foster trail network progress in Florida, with particular emphasis on access to and conservation of the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Research strongly shows that trails provide myriad benefits to communities, including **economic, health & wellness, community value, alternative transportation & planning, community & regional connectivity,** and **conservation benefits**. This document is organized by these benefits so that Toolkit users can easily find articles and links related to a particular topic and multiple aspects of that topic. The Toolkit also provides **Planning Tools** that can help Toolkit users at various stages of the trail development process and **Funding Opportunities** that can help identify grants to fund trails projects. **Contributors** to the document are also acknowledged.

HAPPY TRAILS!

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Any trail, long or short, is an economic asset to a community. Trails provide free recreation for people of all ages and fitness levels and offer opportunities to study nature or local history. Long-distance or destination trails not only attract nearby residents, but also visitors from outside the community who travel specifically to use the trail. Studies show that the longer a trail is, the farther people will travel to visit it, the longer they will stay, and the more money they will spend. A day-user will spend four times the amount of a local user, and an overnight visitor will spend twice the amount of a day-user. Local businesses, especially those that cater to the needs of the trail users, commonly reap the economic impacts of these destination trails. In 2022, Florida trails generated \$52.3 billion in annual economic impact, creating 465,853 jobs and contributing \$26.4 billion in wages and salaries.

Articles/links related to the economic benefits of trails are provided below in the following categories: economic impact of parks/trails – national, economic impact of parks/trails – Florida, and economic benefits to trail towns and gateway communities.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PARKS/TRAILS – NATIONAL

» **Park Investment & Economic Vitality in Cities – Trust for Public Land, Sept 2024**

Parks are powerful engines for economic development. Local public park and recreation agencies in the United States generate more than \$201 billion in economic activity and support almost 1.1 million jobs that boosted labor income by more than \$63 billion from their operations and capital spending in 2021. Parks contribute to population growth and economic vitality by boosting quality of life and making cities more attractive places to live and work.

» **The Economic Impact of Local Parks – National Recreation and Park Association**

This website shows how local public park and recreation agencies in the US generated nearly \$201 billion in economic activity and supported almost 1.1 million jobs that boosted labor income by more than \$63 billion from their operations and capital spending in 2021.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PARKS/TRAILS – FLORIDA

» The Economic Impact of Florida's Greenways and Trails – Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation

FDEP's report shows how Florida's greenways and trails are significant contributors to the state's prosperity, demonstrated through:

- **State Parks' Contribution:** Florida State Parks attract over 28 million visitors annually, generating \$3.6 billion for local economies. These parks include more than 1,600 miles of multi-use trails, showcasing the popularity and economic significance of outdoor recreation.
- **Economic Impact:** The trails generate a substantial \$52.3 billion in annual economic impact, creating 465,853 jobs and contributing \$26.4 billion in wages and salaries.
- **Local Economic Drivers:** The Cross Florida Greenway and Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail illustrate the profound local impacts, driving millions in economic benefits. These areas underscore the vital role of greenways and trails in local economic strategies.
- **Community and Economic Growth:** The development and recognition of trail towns throughout Florida highlight the symbiotic relationship between community well-being and economic growth. These areas have transformed economically and socially, benefiting from the increased activity and tourism brought by the trails.

» 2022-2023 Economic Impact Assessment Report Florida State Park System – FDEP, Oct 2023

Based on Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023 data, a total of 28,701,075 Florida residents and visitors enjoyed Florida's award-winning system of state parks and trails. This year's estimated total economic impact of Florida State Parks is over \$3.6 Billion in direct economic impact, generating over \$241 Million in increased sales tax revenue. In addition, 50,427 jobs were supported by state park operations. The implication of this data is that for every 1,000 persons visiting a state park in Florida, the total direct impact on the local community is approximately \$125,498.

» Florida Greenways & Trails System Plan 2019-2023 – FDEP

Outdoor recreation activities thrive in Florida because of the year-round climate and available opportunities and in 2016 accounted for \$58.6 billion spent on trips, equipment and other items. -Outdoor Industries Association, 2017.

» FDOT Greenways & Trails Economic Analysis – A Focus on the SUNTrail Program (DRAFT for FDOT/FDEP/SUNTrail Florida) – Treasure Coast & East Central Florida Regional Planning Councils, Nov 2024

The SUN Trail network is envisioned to ultimately contain approximately 4,900 miles of trails, with over 1,500 miles currently constructed and another 1,000+ miles programmed or partially funded. This study examined five SUN Trail segments and found that these trails produce a substantial volume of macroeconomic effects, returning millions of dollars annually to local economies. More specifically, the 15 miles of trails studied appear to help stimulate nearly \$8 million in annual user expenditures. The study findings suggest the trails generate an estimated \$22 million in personal income, \$30 million in economic output and gross domestic product, and up to 320 jobs. Nearby residential property values are also especially benefited, with approximately \$125 million in added assessed values within study segments. Trail users on the two oldest, most mature trails (Dunedin and Tallahassee) were believed to generate 85% of total user expenditures, with estimated spending rates of \$500,000 to \$1.6 million per mile.

» The Economic Impact of Local Parks – National Recreation and Park Association

This website allows users to explore the impact of local park and recreation agency spending by state in 2021. Florida ranked in the top 3 of each of the assessed categories:

- **Economic Activity:** \$15,204,744,352 transactions generated by local parks and recreation. Ranked 2nd in the United States.
- **Value Added (GDP):** \$6,627,002,141 in added GDP by local parks and recreation. Ranked 2nd in the United States.
- **Labor Income:** \$4,235,872,315 in salaries, wages, and benefits due to local parks and recreation. Ranked 3rd in United States.
- **Employment:** 82,175 jobs supported by local parks and recreation. Ranked 2nd in United States.

» U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Florida's contribution to the nationwide outdoor recreation value is \$57.8 billion, second only to California. Florida also has over 469,000 jobs directly in the outdoor recreation industry, second only to California again.



ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO TRAIL TOWNS & GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

- » **Fix, P., Loomis, J., & Eichhorn, R. (2000). Endangered species and timber harvesting: The economic impact of the northern spotted owl. *Growth and Change*, 31(4), 419-434.**

Discusses how trail-adjacent communities benefit economically from eco-tourism, with trails acting as a draw for visitors who contribute to local economies through lodging, dining, and other expenditures.

- » **Kimmel, C., & Hull, R. B. (2012). Ecotourism as a livelihood strategy for gateway communities. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 11(3), 202-217.**

Explores how gateway communities near trails or protected areas can sustain livelihoods through tourism and recreation opportunities.

HEALTH & WELLNESS BENEFITS

Walking in nature has been scientifically proven to benefit both mental and physical health. Studies show that spending time in natural environments reduces cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress. Exposure to green spaces has been linked to improved mood and decreased symptoms of anxiety and depression. Research from Stanford University found that walking in nature lowers activity in the brain region associated with rumination, which is linked to mental illness. Additionally, natural settings can enhance cognitive function and creativity by reducing mental fatigue. Walking outdoors also increases exposure to sunlight, which helps regulate circadian rhythms and boosts vitamin D levels.

Studies indicate that spending time in nature can lower blood pressure and heart rate, thereby promoting overall cardiovascular health. The practice of “forest bathing,” popularized in Japan, has been shown to enhance the immune system by increasing the activity of white blood cells that destroy infected and diseased cells. Nature walks also promote physical activity, which aids in weight management and reduces the risk of chronic diseases. Overall, spending time in natural environments provides a holistic boost to well-being, making it a simple yet effective way to enhance overall health and quality of life.

Articles/links related to the health and wellness benefits of trails are provided below in the following categories: general health benefits, physical health benefits, mental health and stress reduction, cognitive benefits, health care benefits, health equity and accessibility, and forest bathing.

GENERAL HEALTH BENEFITS

» Parks and an Equitable Recovery – Trust for Public Land

Access to green space and time spent in nature correlate to a number of positive health outcomes: reduced stress, less depression and anxiety, improved concentration, lower obesity rates, reduced blood pressure, faster healing after surgery, and lower mortality.

» The Healing Nature of Hiking – Florida Trail Association

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 and provide tips for the hiking season, including: start at home, take off without tech, ditch the destination, and stop overthinking it. The article, on pages 26-29 of the Fall 2022 Edition of Footprint Magazine, also discusses stress (and its impact on the entire body), mental health, technology addiction, and the Biophilia Hypothesis.

PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- » **Bauman, A. E., et al. (2012). Updating the evidence that physical activity is good for health: An epidemiological review 2000–2003. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 7(1), 6–19.**

This study confirms the role of physical activity, such as walking or cycling on nature trails, in reducing the risk of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

- » **Sallis, J. F., et al. (2006). An ecological approach to creating active living communities. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 27, 297–322.**

Discusses how trails in communities promote active lifestyles by providing accessible spaces for walking, running, and biking.

MENTAL HEALTH & STRESS REDUCTION

- » **Hartig, T., Mitchell, R., de Vries, S., & Frumkin, H. (2014). Nature and health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 35, 207–228.**

This review highlights how exposure to natural environments, such as nature trails, contributes to improved mental health, reduced stress, and physical activity.

- » **Shanahan, D. F., et al. (2016). Health benefits from nature experiences depend on dose. *Scientific Reports*, 6, 28551.**

Demonstrates the “dose-response” relationship between time spent in nature and health benefits, showing how even short walks on nature trails can positively impact well-being.

- » **Bratman, G. N., Hamilton, J. P., & Daily, G. C. (2012). The impacts of nature experience on human cognitive function and mental health. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1249(1), 118–136.**

Demonstrates how time spent on nature trails reduces stress, improves mood, and enhances cognitive function.

- » **Ulrich, R. S., et al. (1991). Stress recovery during exposure to natural and urban environments. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 11(3), 201–230.**

Highlights the restorative effects of natural environments, such as trails, in lowering stress levels and improving mental health compared to urban settings.

COGNITIVE BENEFITS

- » Hansen, M. M., Jones, R., & Tocchini, K. (2017). Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) and nature therapy: A state-of-the-art review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(8), 851.

Highlights the psychological benefits of forest bathing, including reduced anxiety, depression, and fatigue, as well as improved mood and cognitive performance.

- » Bratman, G. N., et al. (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(28), 8567-8572.

Demonstrates how spending time in natural environments, such as forests, decreases rumination, a risk factor for mental health disorders.

HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

- » **Florida Greenways & Trails System Plan 2019-2023 - FDEP**

FDEP's System Plan cites the following related how trails provide health care benefits:

- Getting outside on a daily basis may help seniors stay healthy and live longer. - *Journal of Aging Health*, 2008
- For every \$1 spent on walking trails approximately \$3 is saved in medical expenses. - American Heart Association, 2016
- Investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure and programming could significantly lower long-term individual and public health care costs by reducing stress and obesity rates, improving physical fitness and strengthening social bonds with family and friends. - *Outdoor Recreation Economy 2017*, Outdoor Industry Association.

HEALTH EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY

- » Roux, A. V. D., & Mair, C. (2010). Neighborhoods and health. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1186(1), 125-145.

Highlights how trails in gateway communities improve health equity by providing accessible wellness opportunities for underserved populations.

- » Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2011). *The CDC guide to strategies to increase physical activity in the community.*

Identifies trails as critical infrastructure for increasing physical activity and combating obesity in communities.

FOREST BATHING

- » **Park, B. J., Tsunetsugu, Y., Kasetani, T., Kagawa, T., & Miyazaki, Y. (2010). The physiological effects of Shinrin-yoku (taking in the forest atmosphere or forest bathing): Evidence from field experiments in 24 forests across Japan. *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine*, 15(1), 18–26.**

Found that forest bathing significantly lowers blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels, indicating reduced stress and improved cardiovascular health.

- » **Li, Q., et al. (2007). Forest bathing enhances human natural killer activity and expression of anti-cancer proteins. *International Journal of Immunopathology and Pharmacology*, 20(2_suppl), 3–8.**

Demonstrates that exposure to phytoncides (aromatic compounds released by trees) boosts immune function, particularly natural killer (NK) cell activity.

- » **Song, C., et al. (2016). Physiological and psychological effects of a forest therapy program on middle-aged females. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 13(12), 875.**

Found that forest bathing significantly reduces stress markers, such as salivary cortisol, while improving mood and relaxation.

- » **Morita, E., et al. (2007). Psychological effects of forest environments on healthy adults: Shinrin-yoku (forest-air bathing, walking) as a possible method of stress reduction. *Public Health*, 121(1), 54–63.**

Demonstrates how forest bathing reduces anxiety and enhances feelings of vitality.

- » **Kuo, F. E., & Taylor, A. F. (2004). A potential natural treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(9), 1580–1586.**

Suggests that forest environments improve focus and reduce symptoms of ADHD, supporting the cognitive benefits of forest bathing.

- » **Li, Q. (2018). *Forest bathing: How trees can help you find health and happiness*.**

A comprehensive exploration of the scientific and practical aspects of forest bathing, including its health benefits and methods for integration into daily life.

- » **https://www.facebook.com/Arizona.Trail.Association/photos/day-5-of-our-2024-highlights-wildlife-monitoring-in-partnership-with-arizona-sta/1033503758818982/?_rdr**

This study provides robust evidence of the health and wellness benefits of forest bathing, supporting its integration into trail systems and gateway communities to promote holistic well-being.



COMMUNITY VALUE BENEFITS

Because of Florida's climate, diversity of natural landscapes, and award-winning state parks and trails, the state offers a tremendous selection of recreational experiences for residents and visitors, adding value to our communities. Studies have found that access to green space promotes community relationships, as reflected by stronger social ties, reduced loneliness, place attachment, greater social cohesion, and improved rates of community trust in local government. Access to trails promotes community health and reduces disparities in access to wellness resources by providing free recreational opportunities.

Trails can also play a role in community redevelopment, attract investments, and create new business opportunities for neighborhood revitalization. Studies have shown that homes near community trails have higher property values and are more attractive to potential homeowners. Trails and greenways can draw the public to historic places, connecting people to cultural heritage sites and providing an understanding of the scale of historic events, such as Native American trails. Access to rail-trails along historic corridors can give people a sense of place and reveal the importance of preserving transportation routes for community benefits.

Articles/links related to the community value benefits of trails are provided below in the following categories: quality of life/lifestyle, social and community wellness, sociocultural significance and community development, integration of Trail Towns and Gateway Communities, and community examples.

QUALITY OF LIFE/LIFESTYLE

» **The Common Ground Framework: Building Community Power Through Park & Green Space Engagement – Trust for Public Land, April 2023**

A number of studies have found that access to green space promotes community relationships, as reflected by stronger social ties, reduced loneliness, place attachment, greater social cohesion, and improved rates of community trust in local government.

» **ParkScore – Trust for Public Land**

This website ranks the 100 most populous US cities by comparing five park categories: equity, access, investment, amenities, and acreage. Data show residents in the top park systems are healthier, more active, and more connected with each other.

» **Florida Greenways & Trails System Plan 2019–2023 – FDEP**

Trails add value to new homes and are consistently among the top four community amenities sought by prospective homeowners of all ages. - National Association of Homebuilders, 2016

SOCIAL & COMMUNITY WELLNESS

» **Pretty, J., et al. (2007). Green exercise in the UK countryside: Effects on health and psychological well-being, and implications for policy and planning. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 50(2), 211–231.**

Explores how outdoor activities on nature trails enhance social bonding and community wellness.

» **Maas, J., et al. (2006). Green space, urbanity, and health: How strong is the relation? *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 60(7), 587–592.**

Discusses the role of green spaces, including trails, in promoting community health and reducing disparities in access to wellness resources.

SOCIOCULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

» **Marcouiller, D. W., & Green, G. P. (2000). Outdoor recreation and rural development. *Community Development Society Journal*, 31(2), 128-146.**

Highlights how trails and associated towns foster community cohesion, cultural exchange, and a sense of place among residents and visitors.

» **Mitchell, N., Leitner, H., & Peake, L. (2004). Sustainable tourism in gateway communities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(3), 624-639.**

Discusses the challenges and opportunities of managing tourism growth in trail towns and gateway communities while maintaining environmental sustainability.

» **Crompton, J., & Nicholls, S. (2006). An Assessment of Tax Revenues Generated by Homes Proximate to a Greenway. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 24(3): 103-108.**

Discusses how neighborhoods with access to and view of trails command higher property values that generate additional tax revenue for municipal and local governments.

» **Alderson, D. (2013). *The Great Florida Seminole Trail: Complete Guide to Seminole Indian Historic and Cultural Sites Open to the Public*. [Pineapple Press, Sarasota FL].**

Provides an illustrated guide to Florida's historic and cultural sites that directly relate to the Seminole tribe including early migrations, tragic wars, and contemporary culture.

» **Moore, D. L., Graele, A. R., Gitelson, R. J., & Porter, E. (1992). *The Impacts of Rail-Trails: A Study of the Users and Property Owners from Three Trails*. [The Program, Washington, D.C: National Park Service].**

The first extensive study that examines the benefits and impacts of rail-trails and examines trail users and property owners of said trails.

INTEGRATION OF TRAIL TOWNS & GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

- » **Maller, C., et al. (2006). Healthy nature healthy people: 'Contact with nature' as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations. *Health Promotion International*, 21(1), 45–54.**

Discusses how integrating nature trails with trail towns creates synergistic health benefits by combining physical activity with access to local amenities and wellness programs.

- » **Kaczynski, A. T., & Henderson, K. A. (2007). Environmental correlates of physical activity: A review of evidence about parks and recreation. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(4), 315–354.**

Demonstrates how proximity to trails and green spaces within communities fosters greater physical activity and social engagement.

- » **Tsunetsugu, Y., Park, B. J., & Miyazaki, Y. (2010). Trends in research related to “Shinrin-yoku” (taking in the forest atmosphere or forest bathing) in Japan. *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine*, 15(1), 27–37.**

Suggests that integrating forest bathing experiences with trail towns and gateway communities can enhance eco-tourism and community wellness.

- » **Wolf, K. L., & Flora, K. (2010). Mental health and function: A literature review. University of Washington.**

Discusses how urban-proximate forests and trails provide accessible opportunities for forest bathing, benefiting both residents and visitors.

COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

- » **Impacts of Projects: Florida National Scenic Trail – The Trust for Public Land, Mar 2025**

TPL's model can analyze service areas for designated project areas. A March 2025 model run of the Florida National Scenic Trail indicates that nearly 1.6 million people and 610,000 plus households live within a 10-minute drive of the Florida National Scenic Trail. The report also analyzes additional demographic information including age, income, and race/ethnicity. If you would like a copy of the report, please reach out to florida@tpl.org

- » **Park Investment & Economic Vitality in Cities – Trust for Public Land, Sept 2024**

The award-winning Atlanta Beltline is among the nation's largest infrastructure redevelopment projects. When completed, the Beltline will provide a contiguous network of 7,500 acres of public parks, multi-use trails, and transit along a historic 22-mile former railroad corridor in the City of Atlanta.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION & PLANNING BENEFITS

Recreational trail corridors provide enjoyable and safe alternatives to cars. Strategic trail network planning can help reduce traffic congestion and improve the flow of traffic on roads. Using human-powered transportation instead of cars can also reduce air pollution and carbon emissions. alleviate infrastructure needs and traffic congestion.

Florida's Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail Program, established in 2015, receives an annual allocation for the development of a statewide system of interconnected high-priority, paved, non-motorized multi-use trail that keeps bicyclists and pedestrians physically separated from vehicular traffic. The SUN Trail network aligns with the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan's Land Trail Priority Network and includes connections to and through lands of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act.

Articles/links related to the alternative transportation and planning benefits of trails are provided below in the following categories: transportation choices, Florida's SUNTrail network, safety, and reduced traffic.



TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

» Florida Greenways & Trails System Plan 2019-2023 - FDEP

FDEP's System Plan cites the following related to how trails provide transportation choices:

- Our communities increasingly are looking for a wider range of transportation choices, including passenger rail, bus, shared vehicles, bicycles, and walking. - Florida Transportation Plan, 2015
- Two-thirds of Americans would like more transportation options so they have the freedom to choose how to get to their destinations. - Transportation for America, 2010

FLORIDA'S SUNTRAIL NETWORK

» SUNTrail - FDOT

The Florida Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail Program, established in 2015 [Section 339.81, Florida Statutes (F.S.)], receives an annual allocation from the redistribution of new vehicle tag revenues pursuant to Section 320.072, F.S., motor vehicle licenses. These revenues are deposited in the State Transportation Trust Fund. The funding is for the development of a statewide system of interconnected high-priority, paved, non-motorized multi-use trail / two-directional Shared Use Path (SUP) within the SUN Trail network for bicyclists and pedestrians, physically separated from vehicular traffic. The SUN Trail network aligns with the Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS) Plan's Land Trail Priority Network overseen by the Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Greenways and Trail (OGT) [Chapter 260, F.S.] and includes connections to and through lands of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act (Section 259.1055, F.S.).

» FDOT Non-Motorized Traffic Monitoring Program Data Dashboard

Since 2018, the FDOT Transportation Data and Analytics Office has managed the Non-Motorized Traffic Monitoring Program. A key aspect of the Non-Motorized Traffic Monitoring Program is the network of Continuous Counters. Currently, there are 114 monitoring sites across the state (106 active and 8 under maintenance), with an additional 136 installations planned for 2025. All collected data are available through the Non-Motorized Traffic Monitoring Data Dashboard. On the SUN Trail Network page, there is a filter for sites within the Florida Wildlife Corridor (or within a mile from the corridor).

SAFETY

» The International CPTED Association (ICA) – Primer in CPTED – What is CPTED?

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), a concept developed by a criminologist at Florida State University in the 1960s, takes a multidisciplinary approach to deterring criminal behavior in the design process. This important work was based on previous research studying how the built environment influences the rate of crime. Designing Greenways using CPTED principles has the potential to reduce crime by focusing on three interrelated principles that comprise CPTED concepts and strategies: Natural Surveillance, Natural Access Control, and Territoriality. It also addresses the social environment by building a sense of community in areas thereby reducing the motivations for crime.

» Safety on the Trail – Map for Mobile

This website provides safety considerations used for the Three Mile Creek Greenway in Mobile, Alabama. It notes that trail safety begins with thoughtful engineering and design. Specific areas such as parking lots, trailheads, wooded areas and restrooms should be studied, planned and mitigated in order to reduce safety concerns. Planners and designers acknowledge the balance between retaining or creating a natural setting that is safe and preserving the naturalness of an area. Design strategies have included measures such as allowing clear visual access, having appropriate lighting and security features in key areas, and providing multiple access and egress points. Encouraging the use of the trail through community engagement and partnerships to continually increase the number of users will create more “eyes on the path.”

REDUCED TRAFFIC

» Active Transportation Transforms America Report – Rails to Trails Conservancy, Oct 2019

This report notes that more than half of all trips in the United States are within a 20-minute bike ride or less, and more than one in four trips are within a 20-minute walk or less. Opportunities to shift short trips from driving to walking and biking by creating safe active-transportation networks create remarkable economic returns and improve the quality of lives. Mode shift leads to fewer cars and light trucks on clogged roads, as well as less air and climate pollution, while also creating a transportation environment that favors physical activity. Trails also remove users from the stress of car traffic.

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY BENEFITS

Regional trails are multi-use trails that connect communities, neighborhoods, parks, and natural areas. Trail Towns and Gateway Communities play a crucial role in supporting and enhancing the value of these trails. Local businesses, especially those that cater to the needs of the trail users, commonly reap the economic impacts of regional trails, which people often travel to use. Service providers include restaurants, grocery or convenience stores, campgrounds and hotels, guide services and gear stores.

Articles/links related to the community and regional connectivity benefits of trails are provided below in the following categories: Trail Town and Gateway Communities, examples of regional trails in Florida, and examples of regional trails outside of Florida.

TRAIL TOWN & GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

» Trail Town Program – Florida Department of Environmental Protection

A Trail Town is a vibrant destination where people come together. It is a place where trail users can venture off a hiking, biking, equestrian or paddling trail to enjoy the amenities and unique heritage of the community, benefiting the town economically and socially. There are currently 21 designated Trail Towns in Florida.

» Gateway Communities – Florida Trail Association

A Gateway Community is a designated town in close proximity to the Florida Trail that offers resources to hikers such as lodging, restaurants, grocery stores for resupply, and other local attractions. This mutually beneficial program connects Florida Trail hikers to local businesses within the community and helps communities leverage the Florida Trail as an economic and recreational resource. The Gateway Communities Program invites hikers off the Florida Trail and into communities and community members onto the Trail. Look for the Florida Trail Service Mark in the window of business along the Trail. This decal signifies that the business has partnered with the Florida Trail to enhance the hiking experience. There are currently 16 designated Gateway Communities in Florida.

EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL TRAILS IN FLORIDA

» Florida Trail Towns Story Map

This Story Map allows one to learn more about Florida's Trail Towns.

» Gateway Communities Story Map

This Story Map allows one to learn more about the Florida Trail's Gateway Communities.

» Florida Trail Story Map

This story map allows one to learn more about the Florida Trail (FT), which was officially recognized as a National Scenic Trail in 1983. The FT is over 1,500 miles, crossing more than 100 land management units within the state and showcasing Florida's incredible biodiversity, history, and culture.

» L2L Story Map

This proposed multi-modal trail would run from Lake Monroe to Lake Okeechobee. It is an opportunity for ecotourism that is compatible with the Florida Wildlife Corridor and has identified crossing opportunities.

» Coast-to-Coast Trail Story Map

The Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail (C2C) was conceived as an ambitious effort to create a continuous paved multi-use trail across the state of Florida from the Gulf of America to the Atlantic Ocean, the first state trail of its kind in the United States. It will span approximately 250 miles and is currently 88 percent complete. The trail will link communities between St. Petersburg and Titusville along its entire length, allowing residents and visitors to explore Central Florida by bicycle or foot. This corridor includes most of the 51-mile East Central Regional Rail Trail, the longest single rail-trail corridor ever acquired by the Office of Greenways and Trails. The trail is linking all or part of several existing multi-use trails and will be managed by a broad range of communities and agencies.

EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL TRAILS OUTSIDE OF FLORIDA

» Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) Trail

The Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) is known for its hospitable trail towns, spaced favorably for day, overnight, and thru-trips. Multiple towns along a route connecting the GAP to the C&O Canal Trail (Pittsburgh to D.C.)

» **Genesee Valley Trail Town Initiative (New York)**

The Genesee Valley Trail Town Initiative is a program focused on revitalizing rural communities in Western New York by promoting outdoor tourism and supporting small businesses along the Genesee Valley Greenway.

» **Empire State Trail – Trail Town Map**

The 750-mile Empire State Trail welcomes bicyclists and hikers to explore New York State's extraordinary experiences, people, and places. In 2017, New York State launched the Empire State Trail to promote outdoor recreation, encourage healthy lifestyles, support community vitality, and bolster tourism-related economic development. The Trail welcomes bicyclists and walkers of all ages and abilities to experience the Empire State's urban centers, village main streets, rural communities, and diverse history, from New York City through the Hudson River Valley, west to Buffalo along the Erie Canal, and north to the Champlain Valley and Adirondacks.

» **Trail Town/Gateway Community Report by Cycle Forward and Just Trails**

Top impacts and findings observed in Trail Communities included increases in:

- Services, amenities, and business opportunities
- Community engagement and trail-oriented events
- Federal/state investment
- Awareness of trails
- Trail improvements and signage
- **Report PDF**

» **Continental Divide Trail (CDT) Gateway Community Program**

- Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Wyoming
- **Small Business Survey** of businesses along the CDT, with many being in Gateway Communities

» **A.T. Communities Program**

There are 56 communities throughout the 13 states the Appalachian Trail traverses through. These are assets for those using the A.T., providing food, supplies, recreations, history, volunteer opportunities and more.

» **Buckeye Trail (Ohio) – Trail Town Program**

The Trail Town Program currently includes 21 towns across the 1447-mile-long Buckeye Trail.

» **Arizona Trail Gateway Communities**

Stretching from Mexico to Utah across 800 miles, the Arizona Trail has 20 Gateway Communities.

» **U.S. National Park Service Economic impact in Park Communities**

This 2023 report shows the economic contributions to local economies/gateway communities in and near National Park sites.

» **Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative**

Launched by the Conservation Fund in 2007 with support from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts

» **5 Ways Having a Trails Plan can Benefit your Community - Shive Hattery Architecture + Engineering**

Trails are an important part of any thriving, growing community. Here are 5 ways having a trail plan in place for where and when you're going to build your trail is beneficial for your community:

- Planning helps to preserve the right of way for trails as development occurs
- Planning shows commitment when applying for funding assistance
- A trails plan can be used for economic development within a community
- Planning helps break trail projects up into management segments
- A trails plan can be used for public education

» **Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, 2019 Study**

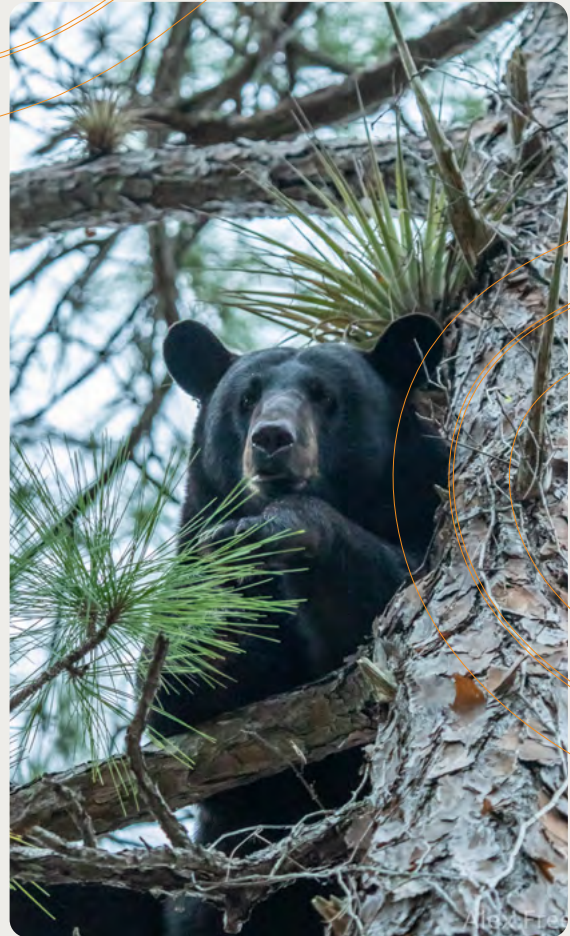
Showcases the Economic, Health, Environmental, and Social Benefits of connecting trails throughout Washington communities.

» **Michigan State University Study on Benefits of Trails**

Includes information on benefits of trails on local communities such as increased property values, healthcare savings, and increased tourism activity.

» **Global Sustainable Tourism Council publication on engaging with National Park Gateway Communities**

Utilizes Theodore Roosevelt National Park (North Dakota) and three surrounding gateway communities in Dickinson, Medora, and Watford City.



» Samuel J. Keith, Lincoln R. Larson, C. Scott Shafer, Jeffrey C. Hallo, Mariela Fernandez (2018), **Greenway use and preferences in diverse urban communities: Implications for trail design and management, Landscape and Urban Planning, Volume 172, Pages 47-59.**

Discusses how greenways attract demographically diverse visitors where neighborhood connectivity is highly valued by urban trail users. Nature-based recreation experiences are highly valued by suburban trail users.

» Austen R. Anderson, Mallory M. Lastrapes, Lindsey Ostermiller (2023), **Exploring the attitudes and experiences of those living near a multipurpose recreation trail in the southern United States, Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, Volume 43.**

Discusses how trails near and connected to communities are seen as beneficial yet an ongoing emphasis on ensuring user safety is key to the success of trails and greenways connecting communities.

CONSERVATION BENEFITS

Greenways and trails provide numerous environmental benefits that help protect the critical functions performed by our natural environments. Because of their linear nature, greenways and trails not only provide areas for recreation, but also function as corridors for plants and wildlife to move. By protecting and linking conservation lands and providing conduits for species to travel, this helps limit inbreeding and increases genetic diversity, increasing chances of survival. Greenways and trails can also improve water quality and flooding by creating a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by stormwater runoff. As green infrastructure projects increase in popularity as local governments develop innovative ways to address water quality impairments and flooding, these projects offer opportunities for greenway and trail connections.

Greenways and trails also provide opportunities for environmental education. For example, interpretive signage can inform recreational users about water quality issues or species sustainability. In a similar way, a greenway can serve as a hands-on outdoor classroom where people of all ages can experience natural settings, which fosters environmental awareness.

Articles/links related to the conservation benefits of trails are provided below in the following categories: wildlife usage, water quality/flooding/resiliency, and environmental stewardship and conservation.



WILDLIFE USAGE

» Statewide Wildlife Crossings Dashboard – FDOT

This dashboard allows users to view images of wildlife captured by underpass cameras put in place by FDOT and the fSTOP Foundation. These images show the diverse species that utilize wildlife crossings across Florida.

» Florida, United States – eBird

eBird.org is a global database and online program that allows birders to record and share their bird sightings. It is a citizen science project relying on contributions from individuals around the state (and world) to gather data on bird populations, distributions, and behaviors.

» Zooniverse

Zooniverse is a large online platform for citizen science, where members of the public can participate in real research projects. It connects researchers with volunteers to tackle big data problems across various scientific disciplines. Zooniverse offers several Florida-specific projects that allow volunteers to contribute to scientific research, including Everglades Wildlife Watch (documents wildlife in the Everglades Ecosystem) and Indigo Snake Watch (monitors eastern indigo snakes and their habitats).

» Florida, US · iNaturalist

iNaturalist is an online platform and mobile application used for sharing observations of nature, facilitating species identification, and contributing to biodiversity research.

» Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway – Florida State Parks

The Cross Florida Greenway is a wildlife corridor and the first in Florida to have a “land bridge” across a major interstate that both trail users and wildlife utilize. Black bears use the Greenway as a major corridor, especially on the eastern end near the Ocala National Forest, increasing the genetic diversity of bear subpopulations.

WATER QUALITY/FLOODING/RESILIENCY

» Florida Greenways & Trails System Plan 2019–2023 – FDEP

Greenways improve water quality by creating a natural buffer zone that protects streams, rivers and lakes, preventing soil erosion and filtering pollution caused by agricultural and road runoff. - Chuck Flink, Greenways, Inc.

» Why Flooding Greenways is Actually a Good Thing, September 30, 2022

Greenways help reduce the risk of flooding for neighboring properties by providing buffers that store excess stormwater runoff and protect surrounding natural areas that can absorb flood waters and filter stormwater pollutants. The natural vegetation in these buffer areas also helps reduce the chance of erosion and moderates water temperatures.

» Greenways and Trails as Global Resilient Landscapes – World Trails Network

With the threat of accelerating global climate change, greenways (dedicated open space corridors) offer an important and strategic landscape for the protection of streamside and coastal communities, mitigating the impacts associated with urban flooding and erosion, while providing landscapes that protect the health, safety and welfare for streamside and coastal residents around the world. Trails, which are often integral to greenways, help strengthen the benefits and constituency for these corridors by offering a broad amenity benefit and visibility—in contrast to attempting to simply set aside inaccessible open space.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP & CONSERVATION

» Fix, P., Loomis, J., & Eichhorn, R. (2000). Endangered species and timber harvesting: The economic impact of the northern spotted owl. *Growth and Change*, 31(4), 419–434.

Discusses how trail-adjacent communities benefit economically from eco-tourism, with trails acting as a draw for visitors who contribute to local economies through lodging, dining, and other expenditures.

» Kimmel, C., & Hull, R. B. (2012). Ecotourism as a livelihood strategy for gateway communities. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 11(3), 202–217.

Explores how gateway communities near trails or protected areas can sustain livelihoods through tourism and recreation opportunities.

» Stein, T. V., & Anderson, D. H. (2002). Community benefits of federally managed lands: The case of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(4), 421–447.

Examines how trails and nearby communities can act as stewards of natural resources, promoting conservation and education initiatives.

» Leung, Y.-F., & Marion, J. L. (2000). Recreation impacts and management in wilderness: A state-of-knowledge review. *USDA Forest Service Proceedings, RMRS-P-15*, 23–48.

Focuses on how trails and gateway communities can mitigate human impact on ecosystems while promoting sustainable recreation.

PLANNING TOOLS

Various planning tools exist to help prioritize where and how to site, design, and implement trails.

» **Florida Greenways & Trails / Florida Forever / Florida Wildlife Corridor Planning Map**

This map includes the current Priority and Opportunity Trail Corridors within the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2024-2028) and adds overlays for the Wildlife Corridor and the lands currently under consideration for purchase by the State under the Florida Forever program. This link can be used by cities/counties, local/regional planning agencies, MPO's and TPO's, as well as anyone involved in potential land purchases to get ahead of the Conservation Easement vs. Public Access discussion, so that public access is not potentially lost to Priority Corridors (and Opportunity Corridors) or to ensure that public access is discussed if a Conservation Easement is being discussed as a potential purchase near/intersecting an Opportunity or Priority Corridor. This tool may also be used to help find Florida Wildlife Corridor pinch points or separations to plan a better connection with the potential use of trails.

» **Online Trail Guide - Florida Department of Environmental Protection**

This map includes links to information on over 1,300 existing recreational trails located in the state of Florida. An existing recreational trail is defined as a paved or unpaved trail for hiking, biking, equestrian, multiple use, paddling or motorized use (all terrain vehicles, off-highway motorized vehicles and recreational off-highway vehicles) and is open to the public. This does not include on-road bike lanes or sidewalks.

» **Florida Greenways & Trails 5-Year Plan (2024-2028)**

The Florida Greenways and Trails Council has approved the 2024-2028 Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan.

» **ParkServe - Trust for Public Land**

Over 100 million people do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home. Trust for Public Land has mapped park access for every urban area in the US, including Puerto Rico. TPL's ParkServe mapping platform helps users pinpoint park investments to address park need, climate, equity, and health.

» **FDOT District 2 Trail Inventory - RCI**

This database provides asset information and can help prioritize trail maintenance needs.



» Access/Amenity Deserts Maps

These maps provide information on where in Florida we lack access to trails in the Florida Wildlife Corridor. The goals of these maps are to: 1) provide information for communities looking for funding to improve outdoor recreational opportunities/trails; 2) provide information for the Florida Trail Association to request funding of additional access points and amenities; and 3) provide information for Trail Town communities to identify proximal trails that do not connect or to help find opportunities for multimodal trails.

» Wildlife Sensitivity Tool – *in development*

The goal of this tool is to provide a wildlife sensitivity “heat map” that can be used to help site trails and to determine impacts associated with trails. Various criteria are used for the sensitivity analyses across multiple scales.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Various funding opportunities exist for trails at the state and national levels. It is important to note that state and federal funds are dependent on funding allocations, and while the programs listed below may be in place, funds may or may not be available.

FUNDING TOOLKIT FOR TRAILS

» Funding for Multiuse Trails: Trail-Building Toolbox – Rails to Trails Conservancy

Funding for multiuse trails and greenways takes a bit of ingenuity and plenty of research. When thinking about funding a project, it's important to think about the entire life cycle cost of your trail network, including land acquisition, planning, design, construction, maintenance and programming. This toolkit provides some potential funding sources divided among these various stages with a short description of the funding program and the types of projects it supports.

STATE GRANTS

» Recreational Trails Program FY2025–2026 Grant Application – Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a federal grant initiative administered by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, supporting the development and maintenance of recreational trails.

» Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TA) – Florida Department of Transportation

TA funding provides for projects and activities that improve conditions and expand and integrate accessible nonmotorized travel choices, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities, recreational trails, safe routes for non-drivers, vulnerable road users (VRU), safe routes to schools (SRTS), and improvements to help achieve accessibility for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. TA also funds cultural, historical, and environmental aspects of surface transportation infrastructure.

» Parks and Open Space Florida Forever Grant Program – Florida Communities Trust

The Florida Communities Trust (FCT) offers various funding opportunities for trails and greenways projects, including the Parks and Open Space Florida Forever Grant Program and the Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts Capital Outlay Grant Program. These programs provide grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations for the acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreation, including trails and greenways.

» **Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program – Florida Department of Environmental Protection**

The Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) provides grants to local governmental entities for acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreation use or to construct recreational trails.

» **Lawmakers Approve Gaming Funds for Environmental Projects – Florida Specifier**

The 2021 gaming compact between the Seminole Tribe and the state of Florida generates revenue, a portion of which is dedicated to conservation lands, resiliency efforts, and water quality infrastructure. This includes funding for trails and other recreational infrastructure. The program will provide \$4 million annually to trail managers to assist with cost-sharing for managing trails.

NATIONAL GRANTS

» **Rails to Trails Conservancy – Trail Grant Eligibility Requirements**

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is awarding grants to organizations and local agencies working to develop and connect equitable trail networks. The Trail Grants program aims to accelerate local and regional trail network plans across the country, expanding access to more places for people to safely walk, bike, and spend time outdoors nationwide.

» **Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant Program – US Department of Transportation**

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant program provides grants for surface transportation infrastructure projects with significant local or regional impact. The eligibility requirements of BUILD allow project sponsors, including state and local governments, counties, Tribal governments, transit agencies, and port authorities, to pursue multi-modal and multi-jurisdictional projects that are more difficult to fund through other grant programs. BUILD grants can be used for a variety of trail-related projects, including the development of new trails, the improvement of existing trails, and the construction of trail-related infrastructure like trailheads and parking areas.

» **Safe Streets for All – US Department of Transportation**

The **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** (IIJA) established the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) competitive grant program with \$5 billion in appropriated funds over 5 years, 2022-2026. The SS4A program funds regional, local, and Tribal initiatives through grants to prevent roadway fatalities and serious injuries. The SS4A program supports the U.S. Department of Transportation's **National Roadway Safety Strategy** and our goal of zero roadway deaths using a **Safe System Approach**.

» PeopleForBike Grants

PeopleForBikes Community grants support local trail initiatives to help transform communities through bike infrastructure.

CONTRIBUTORS

The Trails Corridor Collaboration Team is comprised of over 30 participants from nearly 20 organizations who are passionate about promoting and fostering trail network progress in Florida. The following list of contributors are a subset of the Trails Team and are acknowledged for compiling this Trails Toolkit.

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