HIKE THE HILL 2020
and the Great American Outdoors Act

Econfina Update

Rice Creek and Ocala BRIDGE REPAIRS
Cinnamon fern growing along the FT in Seminole State Forest. Van Tran, 2019.
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Our Mission
The Florida Trail Association builds, maintains, protects, and promotes the unique Florida National Scenic Trail (Florida Trail), along with a network of hiking trails throughout the state of Florida. Together with our partners, the Association provides opportunities for the public to contribute to meaningful volunteer work, engage in outdoor recreation, and participate in environmental education.
Florida Trail Association

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.

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.

Deadline for ads for the Summer 2020 issue of The Footprint is July 31.
In these unprecedented times, I wish to say thank you to all of our members, chapters, trail maintainers, staff and especially the trail users for your patience, understanding and support as we navigate the path forward. Never before have we asked our community to avoid hiking the Florida Trail. While we understand getting out on the trail is therapeutic for the mind, body and soul, it’s important to think of the bigger picture.

The beauty of the Florida Trail is that much of it passes through rural areas of Florida. When traveling to hike a section of the trail, you might stop for fuel or food within these rural communities. With many people having COVID-19 but showing no symptoms, there is a risk of exposure to individuals in these rural communities, where there are less medical facilities and resources. In addition, sometimes hikers require emergency evacuation. In this case, they are using valuable emergency resources that could be allocated toward COVID patients.

So again, thank you to everyone who helps promote, maintain and enjoy the Florida Trail. The FTA is doing all that we can to ensure the safety of our staff, volunteers, trail users and trailside communities as this situation continues to develop. We hope to be back to a new normal in the coming weeks. In the meantime, please continue to check the FTA website (floridatrail.org) for updates and guidelines regarding our response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

David Waldrop
FTA President

Greetings Florida Trail Community,

I wanted to take a moment to personally thank the many dedicated volunteers and public who steward and enjoy the Florida National Scenic Trail. From the thousands of hours of annual maintenance to promoting opportunities for so many people to enjoy, your efforts are a tremendous benefit to the Forest Service and the public. I would also like to acknowledge the recommendations that the Florida Trail Association has shared with our Florida Trail community and I hope you and those around you stay safe and healthy. I know the current situation we are all experiencing is challenging and it can be difficult to not go out and volunteer to work on the trail, so I offer a special thank you for holding back and waiting until we get the all-clear. In the interim, enjoy the virtual Florida Trail puzzles and photos FTA is sharing and we’ll connect on the Trail once again, one day soon.

Stay Safe,

Shawn Thomas
Florida National Scenic Trail Administrator
US Forest Service

Visit WarriorExpeditions.org for more information
Say, how many miles is the FT? 
Reader time discretion advised: I’m going to geek out into the trail numbers.

If you’re like me, you regularly find yourself talking with people who have never been exposed to the Florida National Scenic Trail. So, as you begin excitedly explaining what the Florida Trail is, you often get a response like, “So that’s kind of like the AT?” and, “How long is the Florida Trail?” My thought is, “How much time do you have?” and I respond, “Oh it’s about 1,100 to 1,500 miles—depending.” How many miles is the FT? Let’s get into the palmettos a little bit here and look at the data.

Over the past five years the Forest Service, in collaboration with FTA staff, have refined our data collection methods to better track true mileage and maintain the authoritative data set for the state of Florida. We are now in a good place to better answer this question. Although I must warn you; the answers may make you feel you have arrived at a four-way trail crossing. In short, it all depends on how one looks at the numbers.

The Florida Trail is sometimes thought of as a thru-hike, predominantly south to north, utilizing the eastern corridor and not including the Blackwater official side trail. As the Administrator of the FT, I think in terms of the state-wide system, which includes the official side trail, eastern and western corridors, official spur trails (those that lead to camping or other unique features), as well as the dreaded roadwalks. I will break down the data and attempt to provide some context so you can decide: how long is your Florida Trail?!

The 1986 Comprehensive Plan and our enabling legislation through the National Trails System Act (1983) outlines “a route of approximately thirteen hundred miles” and they go on to describe the general path of the trail. For this reason we have kept pretty close to 1,300 miles long in our messaging though we have long known that was not reflective of the true, on-the-ground length. Naturally, land use patterns have changed and Florida’s population growth has skyrocketed since 1983 and that has presented opportunities and challenges for securing a footpath in the woods. Since its inception, The Florida Trail was forecasted to need maximum routing flexibility should an end-to-end trail one day become complete; this is referenced several times in the original planning documents.

In an effort to more accurately reflect the total mileage and showcase the tremendous progress that has been made, as well as call to attention the scope of work ahead, I feel stating that the Florida Trail is 1,500 miles long is the general answer. Now, let’s unpack that a little more because I know some people are eager to see where this number is coming from.

**FLORIDA TRAIL MILEAGE BREAKDOWN:**

*Let me qualify this by saying that we use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to calculate these numbers, the individual user experience may vary slightly.

◆ An Eastern Corridor thru-hike (eastern Lake O, eastern central FL, including roadwalks and excluding Blackwater side-trail) yields 1,287.9 miles. Trail: 903 miles Road connector (road walks): 365.71 miles. The Eastern Corridor by itself is 248.52 miles long.
A Western Corridor thru-hike with the same qualifiers above yields 1,286.63 miles, Trail: 904 miles Road connector: 367.3 miles. The Western Corridor by itself is 247.35 miles long. How wild is it that the numbers are almost identical? This really surprised me at first and I’ll let you guess which I believed to have much more road walk.

The official Blackwater Side Trail is 48.6 miles, this trail is designated as part of the Florida National Scenic Trail in the 1986 Comprehensive Plan and thus why other connecting or spur trails are not included.

Crunching all the numbers, we arrive at 1,583.92 miles for the whole Florida National Scenic Trail. This brought the immediate question to my mind, “Well that makes sense but, surely if we close all the roadwalks that number would be vastly different, or would it?” I asked our resident GIS guru to examine this a little closer by looking at all the gaps and what those mileages are. Then, draw a straight line or an “as the crow flies” comparison between each gap so we can compare the values. The numbers indicate that in the entire system, we have 408 miles of gaps, and as the crow flies, we have 313.79 miles of gaps. This means that including the current 1,109.5 miles of designated true trail, if we closed every gap with trail in the most direct fashion, we would have a total completed length of 1,423.29 miles. The FT is dynamic and much of my focus in partnership with FTA staff and volunteers is to evaluate optimal routing and strategize new partnerships and opportunities to close the remaining road walks or gaps. For these reasons and as I stated at the onset of this article, our partnership has landed on the 1,500 mile number.

I would like to share a couple of fun facts and accomplishments over the past several years. Did you know that only 200 miles of the FT actually traverse National Forests lands? I mention this because we are truly a partnership driven effort, which includes many state and county public lands as well as other federal and private landowners. The Florida Trail truly connects Florida’s public lands for us all to enjoy and along the way, I hope we are helping to provide an important connected corridor for plants and wildlife as well.

We have had tremendous success in adding trail and removing road walks. For example, in our 2018 Strategic Plan our five year goal was to remove 30 miles of roadwalk and add 50 miles of trail by 2023. Two years into the plan, we have removed 30 miles of roadwalk and added nearly 45 miles of designated trail. It is through the efforts of the many committed citizens, dedicated volunteers, the FTA, partner agency staff, and our Forest Service team, that we have made significant progress in closing trail gaps, creating an inviting atmosphere that is inclusive to all peoples. A complete Florida Trail will extend beyond the trail tread and include a wider corridor of resource protection. To succeed in this effort, we are working on several major initiatives that extend beyond trail tread and miles, so I would encourage you to explore our five-year strategic plan and implementation guide, if you are feeling inspired, and see where you can get involved.

I wish you and those around you a safe journey as we all navigate this challenging time and until then, Happy Trails!

I almost forgot, how long is the Florida Trail?
This past February, a group of FTA staff and board members joined representatives from across the country to advocate for our National Scenic and Historic trails. The event, called Hike the Hill, is aimed at making congressional and agency leaders more aware of policy issues that affect the National Trails System, and show the importance of trails to the users and communities they represent.

More than 100 people representing 40 trail organizations traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in this year’s event. This year’s delegation from the FTA included myself, fellow FTA staff member Van Tran, and board members Amanda Kincaid and Leslie Wheeler. Amanda and Leslie deserve special thanks, as they paid their own expenses and donated their time to join us—effectively doubling our outreach capacity. Over the course of a very busy and productive three days, we visited all offices of the 27 House and 2 Senate members that represent the state of Florida. We also met with agency leadership at the headquarters of the US Forest Service.

Returning to Hike the Hill each year helps us build strong relationships with members of Congress and our agency partners—relationships we can draw on during the rest of the year whenever needed. Making sure that these contacts are aware of the importance and impact of the Florida Trail ensures that our trails, and outdoor recreation as a whole, are seen as priorities when they consider legislative or budgetary decisions.

**OUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY**

During our meetings, we started by educating the representatives and their staffers about the Florida Trail and the incredible effort made by FTA volunteers and members to manage, promote and steward the trail. We came armed with handouts, facts, figures, and personal stories that show that the Florida Trail is more than a path through the woods—it’s an important economic, environmental and social asset that connects Florida’s unique natural, cultural and historic resources.

We demonstrated that federal funding for the Florida Trail is an excellent return on investment that is matched by volunteer hours and financial support from our members and corporate sponsors. We also discussed bills Congress is currently considering that could influence trails, public lands and recreation. This year, our focus was to advocate for two bills: the Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act and the Restore our Parks Act.

**THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF) PERMANENT FUNDING ACT**

In the current highly partisan political climate, LWCF is one of the few government programs that consistently receives support from both sides of the aisle. For over fifty years, LWCF funding has protected irreplaceable land and water, and created access to outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans. LWCF is one of the most powerful funding mechanisms for conservation that Congress has.

The mechanism of the fund is simple: use revenues from the depletion of one natural resource—offshore oil and gas—to support the conservation of another—our land and water. Royalties paid by energy companies drilling for oil and gas in federal waters are put into this fund for the purpose of protecting national parks, areas around rivers and lakes, national forests, and national wildlife refuges from development, and to provide matching grants for state and local parks and recreation projects.

Many segments of the Florida Trail have benefitted from LWCF funding, including Apalachicola National Forest, Big Cypress National Preserve, Gulf Islands National Seashore, Ocala National Forest, Osceola National Forest, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, as well as numerous state, county and local projects. Chances are, there is a property within a short drive of your home that was a LWCF-supported project.

Last year during Hike the Hill, the Senate approved permanent reauthorization of LWCF, and shortly after, the bill passed in the House and was signed into law by the President. With LWCF permanently reauthorized, Americans have the assurance that these funds will continue to be set aside for conservation in perpetuity. As a result, the focus of our advocacy this year was to urge our state representatives to make sure the funds
are used only for those intended purposes by passing full permanent funding of the program at $900 million annually. In the program’s 55-year history, lawmakers have only appropriated full funding once, instead opting to divert roughly half of this funding elsewhere. Full, dedicated funding of LWCF would greatly benefit the FTA’s efforts to close gaps in the Florida Trail by helping to fund acquisitions and easements to permanently protect the land the trail traverses and get hikers off unsafe and unsightly road walk connectors.

**THE RESTORE OUR PARKS ACT (ROPA)**

During past advocacy efforts, a few lawmakers have argued that before providing full funding to LWCF to conserve new lands, we must first address the $21.5 billion backlog in maintenance needs on public lands. However, the consensus among the conservation community is that both land conservation and deferred maintenance need to be equally prioritized and simultaneously addressed. Opportunities to conserve land usually present themselves in a very narrow time window—often, if immediate action is not taken, an important property becomes permanently developed. Land conservation can’t wait.

Therefore, the second piece of legislation we advocated for during our meetings this year was the Restore Our Parks Act, which addresses the maintenance backlog on America’s public lands. ROPA would provide significant resources to chip away at the $21.5 billion needed to tackle overdue maintenance needs, such as crumbling roads, overgrown trails, broken water and sewer systems and outdated visitor centers. Similar to LWCF, the funding for this bill would come from royalties from energy companies, not taxpayer dollars.

**PROMISING NEW LEGISLATION: THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT (GAOA)**

No one could have predicted the series of events that occurred in the weeks after we returned home from Hike the Hill. Soon after sending routine “thank you” notes and follow-ups to our representatives, President Trump voiced his support for LWCF and ROPA on social media.

“I am calling on Congress to send me a Bill that fully and permanently funds the LWCF and restores our National Parks,” the President tweeted. “When I sign it into law, it will be HISTORIC for our beautiful public lands.” The President’s expression of support for mandatory funding legislation on these two important issues was a huge breakthrough that put them on the fast track.

Less than a week later, the Senate introduced the Great American Outdoors Act, which would combine full, permanent funding for LWCF and $1.3 billion to address the public lands maintenance backlog. The introduction of this bill was one of the most promising and exciting moments in conservation policy in the last 50 years. The bill quickly gained traction with 59 cosponsors, including Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer. There was great optimism that the legislation would move quickly from the Senate to the House to the President’s desk for a signature.

Each congressional office received a folder of outreach materials.

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Van and Leslie with Congressman Darren Soto, a strong supporter of the Florida Trail.
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
Just as momentum and enthusiasm for land conservation reached an all-time high on Capitol Hill, normal life as we know it was brought to a halt by the COVID-19 pandemic. With most Americans working from home, including congressional representatives and staffers, the path forward for the GAOA has been put on hold just like most of our regular activities.

However, it remains possible that the GAOA could be included in the federal government’s emergency stimulus package as an infrastructure investment, and we continue to work toward that goal. The need for investment in public lands will be even greater in a post-pandemic society. After quarantine measures are lifted, our parks, forests and trails will be in more demand than ever, and can greatly aid in the recovery of both our health and economy.

HOW YOU CAN HELP
If you would like to advocate for support of the Florida Trail and public lands across the country, you can do so from the comfort and safety of your own home. Fill out the form at https://americanhiking.org/advocacy/take-action, which will automatically contact your senators and ask them to protect, preserve, and expand trails and public lands by co-sponsoring and voting for the Great American Outdoors Act.

You can also learn more about key legislation in the conservation community and ways to support them at www.lwcfcoalition.com.
Bridge crossings, sunsets with colors so rich it drips from the sky, dinner with chipmunks. The little things. The Exos/Eja features uncompromised durability in an ultralight package that defies belief. The only way to discover wondrous moments is to get out there and find them. So grab your friends, pack your gear and make it happen.
As established as they are, there is a validating thrill to coming across an FT shield sign at trailheads. It serves as the welcome plaque to our treasured footpath, informing new or regular trail users that they have arrived at their destination—or that their journey has just begun. As you continue to explore the Florida Trail, the FT shield becomes a familiar emblem of the corridor, greeting you at each major crossing and serving as a reminder that you are immersed in a federally recognized and protected resource among a network of other distinguished national scenic trails. Often accompanying the FT shield, is an additional sign stating the trail they’re enjoying was made possible by dedicated efforts of our FTA trail stewards who maintain and support the trail. These signs along the path are enduring symbols of the Florida Trail legacy. Within this legacy, there are remarkable people who have passionately served as leaders and representatives of the FTA. Leslie Wheeler is among these ranks.

Leslie has been involved as a member and volunteer of the Florida Trail Association for over 20 years and is a welcoming fixture at FTA events. She is often standing with a warm smile and her arms open wide, ready to greet someone with a hug or inclusively wave other people over to her circle. I don’t know anyone else who makes a stronger effort than Leslie to engage with as many people as possible while consistently showing deference and enthusiasm towards each person she interacts with. With a gregarious spirit, Leslie approaches every individual she meets with an awareness that they have something unique and valuable to offer to the table. She is always ready to set that table and to gather us around it.

Some people are very fortunate to have been exposed to the outdoors from a young age. Leslie appreciates this as she recalls her childhood growing up along the Gulf Coast in Pascagoula, Mississippi where she enjoyed exploring and camping in the woods behind her family’s home. Her mom started a Girl Scout troop and would regularly take the troop camping, and her dad would take her and her sisters on overnight canoe trips in the summertime. The experiences Leslie shared with her family in nature have shaped her greatest life pursuits and values.

“I just associate the outdoors with my family. It’s always been something familiar to me.”

Leslie moved to Pensacola, Florida in 1990. She then discovered the FTA in 1997 while she was visiting her partner Jo in Jacksonville. She came across an FTA brochure at Black Creek Outfitters and soon after, decided to join as a member and get involved locally with the Western Gate Chapter. Leslie’s first outing with the chapter was an activity hike in Garcon Point Preserve, a prairie flanked by oak hammocks and longleaf pine forest between Blackwater and East Bay. The Western Gate Chapter maintains the trail
in this preserve as a part of the Florida Trail System. On this first hike with the chapter, Leslie was immediately moved by how friendly the chapter members were and how equally fascinated they were with the natural world as she was.

“We were out on a marsh looking at pitcher plants, sundews and butterworts together. We were practically down on our knees admiring these little plants and I kept thinking, ‘These are my people.’”

After meeting Jo and receiving a job managing a blood bank at Shands, Leslie eventually resettled in 2000 to Jacksonville where she would continue her involvement with the FTA through the North Florida Trailblazers (NFTB) Chapter. At the first NFTB chapter meeting she attended, the chapter was looking for new leadership to reinvigorate the structure and focus of their efforts. Without knowing anyone else but Jo in the chapter, Leslie raised her hand and offered to serve as Chapter Co-Chair alongside Paula Snellgrove. Her immediate willingness to step into this important leadership position for the chapter is an example of the ambitious and open-minded attitude Leslie has sustained throughout her commitments to the FTA. She has been an active volunteer ever since; forming strong bonds, close relationships and important partnerships along the way.

“My chapter members are a solid circle for me. I trust them as much as I trust my family.”

By serving as Chapter Chair for the North Florida Trailblazers, Leslie was able to regularly meet with FTA leaders from throughout the state at Chapter Council and board meetings. Overtime, her interest piqued in getting more involved with the organization on a statewide level, so she became a director on the board. Her position on the board has progressed from VP of Membership, to Secretary, and eventually to a term as president in 2016 through 2018. The FTA made significant strides under Leslie’s leadership as president including: completing reroutes in Big Shoals State Park and Osceola and Orange County which moved the FT off road walks and onto protected public lands, expanding the FTA Board of Directors election process, celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System, and many other meaningful accomplishments. Leslie frequently emphasizes how the organization’s achievements are a collective outcome of the hard work and steadfast efforts of our volunteers, partner agencies, the FTA board, the FTA staff and our valuable administrative partnership with the US Forest Service. As she so often does, in her final President’s Letter in the 2019 Winter Footprint edition, she earnestly recognized and listed each person who had contributed to the FTA’s successes within her term.

“You just don’t know how complicated the organization is until you get at that higher level. Our organization is able to connect the entire state. It’s huge. It’s 1,500 miles huge. If we didn’t have people that we could count on who have the FTA in their best interest, we would have fallen a long time ago.”

After serving as president and attending statewide and national conferences, Leslie has gained deeper perspectives on how the Florida Trail Association is an integral component of a vast trails network. She considers all the exceptional people in the FTA community she has come to know who have contributed immensely to the organization and she is fascinated and humbled to see that other associations within the national trails system have equally devoted people among them. This recognition fuels her commitment to the FTA’s slogan, “Building More Than Trails,” which was coined by previous Community Outreach Coordinator and board member, Megan Eidel.

“The trails system is important to people. People make the trails. And it’s not just about connecting to the outdoors, it’s about connecting people to each other and to different experiences. Connecting people to different abilities that they didn’t know they had.”

While serving as the FTA president, Leslie greeted every hiker who boarded the shuttle bus at the 2019 Ididahike. She also delivered a brief speech about the FTA, Ididahike and the ecology of the Suwannee River section during each shuttle ride to the start of the hike.

Maintaining trails with the North Florida Trailblazers Chapter.
In February, Leslie joined Kelly Wiener, Amanda Kincaid, and me at the 23rd Annual Hike the Hill in Washington D.C. This was her third time attending Hike the Hill as it is one of her favorite events to participate in as an FTA representative and board member. While many people would feel stressed and uncomfortable moving swiftly through the halls of Congress and attending multiple, consecutive meetings with state representatives for multiple days, Leslie thrives in that kind of environment—especially when it comes to doing the significant environmental advocacy work that is involved at Hike the Hill.

US Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, once said, “Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” Always maintaining diplomacy and tremendous amicability, Leslie has a way of forming connections and bridging gaps among others. She talks about the Florida Trail and the need to protect and preserve our public lands with such passion and sincerity that her message could easily be absorbed and echoed by anyone standing even at a far distance from her position. Leslie also has a profound ability to relate with others. She conveys a message with such personability that whatever topic she’s sharing—whether it be describing Florida’s diverse ecosystems or the spirit of our volunteer community—can feel familiar and meaningful to any stranger.

“She is so important that other trails systems and our congressional representatives know that the Florida Trail and the FTA exist.”

Outside of the FTA, Leslie dedicates her spare time to lending a hand where it is needed and supporting other great causes like the conservation efforts of our partners at the North Florida Land Trust. She has also started leading monthly educational hikes as a Florida National Scenic Trail Administrator, Shawn Thomas, presented Leslie with a USDA Certificate of Appreciation for her service as FTA president. FTA Annual Meeting, April 2019
Big Shoals Ribbon Cutting and Inaugural Hike, June 2018. The Big Shoals reroute closed a 5-mile gap in the FT, getting hikers off paved roads and instead, on Big Shoals State Park land.
Pausing between meetings at Hike the Hill to admire the architecture of a congressional building.
In October of 2018, the FTA celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System by hosting a National Trails Festival in Deland. Leslie got to personally meet environmental conservationist and activist, Audrey Peterman, who was one of the keynote speakers at the event.

Florida Master Naturalist at Bogey Creek Preserve, North FL Land Trust’s first public park. If there is an environmental initiative or ecological fact that could deepen someone’s connection to nature, Leslie is thrilled to learn and share it. Her favorite quote is from The Book of Camping and Woodcraft: A Guidebook for Those Who Travel in the Wilderness by Horace Kephart: “In the school of the woods, there is no graduation day.”

Currently, Leslie continues to serve as a director on the board and is spearheading the board’s effort to hire an executive director for the organization. One of the long-term goals she is also determined to further for the FTA and the National Trails Systems is to ensure that the FTA and our outdoor spaces are fully inclusive and equitable to people of all backgrounds. It takes many diverse elements to support a thriving system. Leslie understands that in order to grow and sustain the FT and our FTA community, we need to ensure that everyone can feel the same sense of home and identity with the Florida Trail that we do.

“My perspective is not unique. We love any trail that can get us outdoors and connect us to places and people. Nowadays, I think it’s so important for people to have even just an entrance to the outdoors. Even if someone is just walking on our trail for an hour...

You don’t know what kind of positive impact that may have on somebody and their wellbeing. And hopefully, they will pass that experience along to someone else.”
Celebrating the reopening of the Big Shoals section. June 2018

Leslie has been an active member of the North Florida Trailblazers Chapter since 2000.

Posing in the FT photo booth with Judy Trotta at the 1st Annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival. Jan. 2018
GRANITE GEAR

Dagger 22

New technical daypacks now available at granitegear.com
Limerick Writing Exercise
Write Your Own Florida Trail Limerick

A limerick is a humorous poem with five lines. They are often funny or nonsensical.
◆ The first, second and fifth lines rhyme with each other and have the same number of syllables (typically 8 or 9).
◆ The third and fourth lines rhyme with each other and have the same number of syllables (typically 5 or 6).
◆ Limericks often start with the line “There once was a...” or “There was a...”

Example:
There once was a hiker named Dale
He set off to backpack a trail
He slept with food in his pack
So a bear woke him for snacks
Then his trail name was Hiker Fail

Now write your own limerick about hiking!

Share your limerick on social media and tag the FTA (@florida trail on Instagram or @Florida Trail Association on Facebook)!
ACROSS:

5. In October 1966, Florida Trail Association founder Jim Kern and a handful of hikers painted the trail’s first blaze at this lake, which is also the beginning of the Ocala National Forest southern segment.

6. The FT runs through ______ ______ Conservation Area, where the trail follows a floodplain where ancient cypresses stand sentinel over the remains of a Revolutionary War-era indigo and rice plantation.

8. A short spur trail off the FT along the Suwannee River section, the ______ ______ Tract is home to the second largest bald cypress tree in the world as well as the world’s tallest live oak tree.

10. ______ ______ Preserve State Park is South Florida’s premier location for birdwatchers and photographers to have the opportunity to catch sight of a Florida grasshopper sparrow, crested caracara or burrowing owl. It is also a nationally-designated Dark Sky Park and is an excellent place for stargazing.

12. A former cattle ranch, ______ ______ Wildlife Management Area is a wetland restoration project, bringing the hydrology of the region back to what it was before Hamilton Disston started his first drainage projects around Lake Kissimmee in 1910 to open up new agricultural lands. The wet prairies around Lake Kissimmee provide crucial wintering grounds for both sandhill cranes and whooping cranes. The FT passes through palmetto prairies, pine flatwoods and open scrub.

13. Along the Western Corridor of the FT, ______ ______ State Forest is known for its abundant wildlife and challenging loop hikes, which have helped many outdoor enthusiasts train for the Appalachian Trail. The “crooked river” connecting its three large tracts helped this location earn the title of “10 Coolest Places You’ve Never Been in North America” by the World Wildlife Fund.

14. The trail north of Big Cypress National Preserve lies within the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation. Hikers view canals, orange groves, farm and cattle lands, and Seminole Indian homes including their picturesque chickees. The trail follows roads in the Indian Reservation that pass by unique local attractions — including the ______ ______ ______ Museum. This museum shows a blend of old and modern Seminole cultures and history.

◆ Answer Key on page 25
A diamante poem (also known as a diamond poem) is a seven line poem that forms the shape of a diamond. Instead of sentences, diamante poems are made with individual nouns, adjectives and verbs, and can either describe two similar topics or two opposite topics. Diamante poems do not have to rhyme. Below is the correct layout for a diamante poem:

- Noun
- Adjective, Adjective
- Verb, Verb, Verb
- Noun, Noun, Noun, Noun
- Verb, Verb, Verb
- Adjective, Adjective
- Noun

The two different types of diamante poems are called synonym diamante and antonym diamante. A synonym diamante poem describes two similar topics. An antonym diamante describes two opposite topics.

Now it’s your turn! Write your own FT-inspired diamante poem using the spaces below. You can write either a synonym diamante poem, or an antonym diamante poem.

Share your FT diamante poem on social media and tag the FTA (@florida trail on Instagram or @Florida Trail Association on Facebook)!

Here is a sample of an antonym diamante poem:

Here is a sample of a synonym diamante poem:
TRAIL TOOLS WORD SEARCH

Hedgetrimmer
Chainsaw
Brushcutter
Loppers
Scraper
Pulaski
Pry Bar
Shovel
Handsaw
Paint
Hammer
Brush
Mower
Spade
Drill
Rake

Answer Key on page 25
When asked about recommended day hikes within an easy drive of the FTA office in Gainesville, I always mention Rice Creek Conservation Area in Palatka. Like many other trail sections that are within an hour’s drive of our headquarters, Rice Creek is incredibly beautiful. But it’s more than just the scenic value that makes Rice Creek unique.

The National Trails System Act is the federal law which established the nation’s network of national scenic, historic, and recreation trails. It states that trails should “...provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass.”

All designated sections of the Florida Trail highlight at least one of these qualities, but few highlight all of them. In this light, Rice Creek is an exemplary section of trail.

The Rice Creek Conservation Area is protected by the St. Johns Water Management District as a watershed because the area is full of small creeks that eventually make their way into the St. Johns River. The watershed has not only shaped the area’s landscape, but also its history. Rice Creek and the swamp that borders it are part of the legacy of the American Revolution.

Skirting the edge of Nine Mile Swamp, the trail follows the tops of two hundred-year-old levees that were built as part of an indigo and rice plantation during the 18th century. Foot bridges span the numerous spillways that controlled the water level in the paddies. Just the sheer size of the plantation is staggering, especially when you consider that it was all dug by hand. Most of the uplands were managed as commercial pine plantations before being brought into public ownership, and most still are managed as active silviculture in a partnership with the timber company Weyerhaeuser.

The site protects a variety of natural communities, including floodplain swamps, flatwoods, dome swamps, floodplain forests and upland mixed forests. The trail crosses through most of these natural communities, making it a very diverse section of trail in a rather small area. In total, the FT passes through the area for just over 4 miles. However, there are roughly 2 miles of loop trail as well which is another reason why this area is a popular day hiking destination. There are few places in the north region where the FT is incorporated into a loop trail.

The highlight of the Rice Creek area is definitely the levee trail which navigates along the tops of the linear berms which once separated the agricultural fields. Along the loop, you’ll find a spur boardwalk to the 7th largest cypress tree in Florida. This...
A thick layer of duckweed makes the water look completely green and opaque and the massive cypress trees emphasize the prehistoric feeling of this section. Unfortunately, Hurricane Irma ravaged the area several years ago, toppling massive trees, some of which crushed the crossing. Repairs were made, but the tree damage will be evident for generations.

Rice Creek also serves as a wildlife corridor in that it is a critical linkage in the Ocala to Osceola corridor, which connects several large natural areas in northern Florida. Wildlife seen on the property includes black bears, alligators, white-tailed deer, turkeys, river otters, wood ducks and diverse migratory songbirds. It is rare to hike anywhere in Rice Creek and not see either a pygmy rattlesnake or a water moccasin.

Another highlight for hikers, especially overnighters, is the Rice Creek Hilton. There are only a small handful of trail shelters on the FT, and the Hilton is one of four in the North region with others in Etoniah Creek State Forest, the Osceola National Forest, and along the Suwannee River. The Hilton is a two story building, screened on both levels with picnic tables, a fire pit, and a water pump.

There is a large maintenance challenge that is inherent with the upkeep of nearly 50 structures that carry hikers over the creeks and ditches found along the levee. Building
with wood in a swamp is a recipe for slippery wood, rotten timbers, and down trees which means constant work for the volunteers that work tirelessly to keep the trail safe and open for the public.

Recently, a bridge was catastrophically damaged by a fallen tree which required a professional trail crew to come and assist FTA staff and volunteers with the extensive repairs. Fortunately, the team from Framing our Community (FOC), the US Forest Service’s infrastructure contractor working on the FT, was available to come help.

This winter the team from FOC and the FTA made extensive repairs to the suspension bridge located along the levee trail. Approximately a year and a half ago, the bridge had been hit by a falling tree, breaking one of the bridge stringers and leaving it passable but severely damaged. Over the course of three weeks, the crew made extensive repairs including constructing new towers, replacing the stringers, and replacing the decking. It was challenging technical work that required a lot of skill. FTA volunteers were a major part of this project, many of whom came for at least half the work days. The new bridge is a beautiful example of the kind of work FOC is doing around the state. The process of repairing the bridge started with hauling in many loads of lumber with the help of ropes and pulleys. New bridge stringers were built on site, and new suspension towers were jetted into the ground to support the cables holding the weight of the bridge. New decking was added as well. With proper maintenance, this bridge will hopefully last decades.
Florida is synonymous with water. All Floridians feel a deep sense of connection to our water resources, whether they are hiking along the Suwannee River, fishing on Lake Okeechobee, or visiting one of the over 700 natural springs. What has not been so easy to see, is the strategic planning, protection and redirection of these water sources to ensure Florida’s unique and varied ecosystems remain intact for decades to come.

Established in 1972, Water Management Districts (WMDs) are run by governing boards of nine members (13 for the Southwest Management District). These members must live in their district and are appointed by the Governor for a four-year term. Under the guidance of the Department of Environmental Protection, water management districts are responsible for the administration of water resources at the regional level. They do this by utilizing a 20-year plan that is updated every five years. Through careful monitoring of the regions, they ensure that communities and ecosystems have enough water to thrive.

Water reservations are controlled to protect the waters needed to ensure a supply is available for the local fish and wildlife; taking into consideration all of the species within a region—from the fish to apple snails, and from the wading birds to the alligators. Optimal water levels must be available to maintain ecological integrity. As WMDs monitor them, they also ensure that the quantity and quality of the habitats are being preserved. Too much water too quickly, and nests can flood and animals are drowned. Too little, and they can die out or dry out.

The Water Management Districts also play an important role in education. All five districts provide resources and outreach to communities surrounding water conservation through voluntary and incentive-based initiatives. During times of drought, they share restrictions but more importantly, they help residents learn simple ways that they can conserve water daily. A statewide Water CHAMP (Water Conservation Hotel and Motel Program) program has been utilized to educate hotels and motels about water saving techniques. This program has been implemented at over 500 hotels in Florida so far. Education programs for Florida’s youngest conservationists take place in all five regions through direct programming, resources and grants for teachers.

Each WMD purchases and manages tracts of land that are important in the protection of water resources by allowing those lands to remain in their natural state. The WMD land helps to filter out pollutants from runoff, prevent erosion and provide flood protection. Throughout the state, the districts manage nearly three million acres of lands. Much of this land is open to the public and the Florida Trail. WMD land managers...

The picturesque mesic oak hammocks and ranches along the Micco Bluff section of the Florida Trail are a part South Florida Water Management District land.
Northwest Florida Water Management District has planted over 15 million longleaf pine trees. 2019 Panhandle Gathering hikers stand among young longleaf pines and blooming goldenrod during a day hike through Econfina.
throughout the state allow hikers and the FTA to utilize campsites and facilities.

The land managed by the water management districts can also be used for cattle grazing leases. This furthers the continuation of their historical use while allowing the Districts access for their needs. Timber harvesting contacts are also conducted to facilitate habitat restoration and manage forest health. WMD lands are also used to develop natural ecosystems through prescribed burns, invasive plant removal and regeneration of desirable plants.

Each water management district is involved recreationally in their region, offering opportunities for hunting, fishing, camping, boating, cycling, horseback riding and of course hiking. The activities offered on the properties in each region vary based on what is compatible with the natural resources and land use priorities. Many of the services offered are fairly primitive to allow the lands to remain as natural as possible. Through partnerships with groups with interests like wildflowers, birds or oyster restoration, the districts are able to showcase the ecological value and beauty of their properties with more residents. The Florida Trail works with all five districts throughout the state and crosses through 22 water management district properties.

Water management districts rely on the use of volunteers for the maintenance of their recreational and conservation opportunities. Some of those volunteers come from partner groups like the FTA and affiliated groups that focus on specific lands or waterways. Others are needed to serve on advisory and regional boards that focus on targeted issues impacting the region.

Throughout the state, water management districts are protecting the most valuable resources throughout Florida: water and land. As a partner of the Florida Trail, they allow the trail to run through undisturbed environments, showcasing Florida’s natural beauty. The Forest Service and the FTA appreciate the strong partnership with each of Florida’s water management districts. They host more miles of the trail than any other agency and are a vital part of the trail’s success and beauty. Because of their oversight, wildlife and hikers alike would not be able to enjoy Florida in its natural state for years to come.
Panhandle Hurricane Relief
by Adam Fryska, Panhandle Trail Program Manager

On October 10th of 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall in the Florida Panhandle. Its impact on our communities was, quite simply, catastrophic. As a Category 5 storm with sustained winds of over 160mph, it caused extreme damage in Panama City and Mexico Beach, wiping out entire neighborhoods and then cutting a swath of destruction all the way up to the Georgia border. A significant section of the Florida Trail was rendered impassable, and the storm’s effects were keenly felt by our local FTA members. Many of our volunteers’ lives were severely disrupted; homes and properties were damaged, businesses closed and jobs lost. The process of recovery is slow and ongoing, and those of us who live here are still dealing with the aftermath. The same can be said for the FTA’s efforts to rebuild and restore our storm-damaged sections of the Florida Trail.

The storm’s greatest impacts on the trail were concentrated within the territory of the Panhandle Chapter, a 70 mile length between the Choctawhatchee and Apalachicola rivers. After the Florida Trail crosses the Choctawhatchee River, it dips into Pine Log State Forest before a road walk delivers hikers to the Highway 20 trailhead in the Econfina Creek Water Management Area. It’s here that major signs of storm damage begin to appear. The Econfina Section contains about 19 miles of Florida Trail footpath and was long considered one of the highlights of the Florida Trail. The footpath meanders through a variety of landscapes and ecosystems, climbing up over sandy creekside bluffs and down into spring-fed steephead ravines. Restored longleaf pine forests and gentle sandhills make way to mixed hardwood forests and wetlands along Econfina Creek, where hikers can peer into the startlingly clear blue-green water of numerous feeder springs. The winding creek features scenic limestone outcrops, minor rapids, and a few waterfalls where smaller tributaries pour into the main waterway. Two major bridges cross the creek and provide sweeping views along its banks. At its eastern end, the trail eventually departs from Water Management District land and begins a series of long roadwalks that pass through the rural communities of Altha, Blountstown, and Bristol, after which the trail once again enters the woods in western Apalachicola National Forest.

After the initial shock of the storm and its immediate impacts had passed, FTA staff and volunteers began to take stock of the damage to the Florida Trail within the Econfina area. What we discovered was breathtaking in its scope. Entire tracts of previously forested land along Econfina Creek were flattened. In some areas the tree loss was near 100%. What used to be a pleasant creekside footpath under a mature forest canopy was now buried under 10 vertical feet of accumulated blowdowns. Dangerous spring-poles were everywhere: small trees, bent over and weighted down by larger blowdowns, capable of whipping back into place and unleashing their energy on unsuspecting hikers or trail workers. Before long, new growth began to take advantage of the now plentiful sunshine and thick vines.
and thorny undergrowth began to entangle the entire mess of downed trees. We were faced with the task of effectively rebuilding the trail from scratch, through a landscape that had become hostile and unrecognizable.

With its close proximity to Panama City and two major trailheads, the Econfina section has always been a popular destination for local hikers. Any given weekend in the cooler months will see families out for a walk to visit Two-Penny Bridge, trail runners racking up miles, and FTA members out for a work party or overnight backpacking trip. Econfina also serves an important role for thru-hikers; the stretch between this Water Management Area and the Apalachicola National Forest is one of our longest remaining road walks, and Econfina is the first (or last) significant stretch of sheltered forest footpath for long distance hikers tackling that tiring walk along exposed highway shoulders. With the trail impassable, the alternative was now an even longer roadwalk, amounting to over 60 miles of continuous highway. It was clear that rebuilding this trail was an incredibly important goal, not just for future thru-hikers, but to restore this important recreational resource for our struggling local community.

And so we got to work! Our first major Volunteer Work Parties began in the spring of 2019. Progress was painfully slow, and clearing as little as 1/4 mile of trail in a day felt like a major accomplishment. The dangerous conditions stemming from large, complex piles of blowdowns meant that our sawyers had to be exceptionally careful and deliberate in their work. On top of these technical challenges, we were also faced with the challenge of recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers. Many of the local Panhandle Chapter members were still dealing with the innumerable difficulties that Hurricane Michael had brought to our community, and time for trail work was a luxury not many could afford. Nonetheless, we kept chipping away, and our volunteers’ capability was soon augmented by teams of professional sawyers and trail crew members from the USFS and Framing Our Community (FOC), our longtime infrastructure-building partner along the Florida Trail. It was a monumental effort, totaling 4 major staff-supported Volunteer Work Parties, 2 multi-week hitches by the professional sawyer crews supported by FTA volunteers, and numerous shorter Panhandle Chapter maintenance and scouting events. Our work stretched over two complete field seasons, with the final sections of trail north of Walsingham Bridge finally cleared in early December of 2019. When it was all said and done, well over 2,000 hours of work were logged by FTA volunteers, FOC staff, and USFS personnel.

None of this would have been possible without the tremendous leadership demonstrated by the Panhandle Chapter. Chapter Chair Darryl Updegrove and Trail Coordinator Eric Lewis were instrumental in organizing the volunteer response and motivating our trail crews in the field. Together with the rest of the chapter leadership, they’re responsible for the growth that this trail system has enjoyed over the last few years. The success of this project also highlights the strengths of the Florida Trail Association as a state-wide organization. In the usual routine of FTA trail maintenance and outdoor activities, we often work with the same small group of local volunteers. It’s easy to overlook that we’re all part of a much larger team, all focused on the same goal of Florida Trail stewardship. This larger support network jumped into action in the months following the storm, as volunteers from neighboring Chapters—and even clear across the state!—traveled to Econfina to assist with the trail clearing. The Choctawhatchee and Apalachee Chapters were particularly eager to help, with several extremely skilled sawyers lending their expertise. Finally, our Econfina team was also lucky to have at its disposal the significant trail skills and tireless work ethic of FTA Technical Advisor, Abe Christian. Abe was a key coordinator in our partnership with the USFS and FOC crews, and was an absolute force of nature as we cut through mile after mile of blowdowns.

The effectiveness of our response to Hurricane Michael was also made possible by the strength of the FTA’s partnerships with state agencies and the U.S. Forest Service. As the administrating agency for the Florida National Scenic Trail, the USFS took the lead in securing funding and technical assistance for our trail work in Econfina. Particularly important was arranging for the two multi-week hitches of professional sawyers who joined our volunteers. The crews provided much-needed technical assistance with the most difficult section of blowdowns, as well as providing valuable educational feedback for our certified sawyers. We couldn’t have done it without them. The Northwest Florida Water Management District was also extremely helpful in providing funding for chainsaws and other major tool acquisitions, as well as helping our teams acquire the necessary camping permits and access rights we needed to complete this project.

All of these factors have brought us to where we are now. As of spring 2020, the trail has been cleared of major blowdowns and is now passable for the entire distance between the Highway 20 and Scott Road trailheads. Both trailheads are open to hikers. The short Chipola section near Altha has also been cleared, as have other hurricane-impacted sections of the Apalachicola National Forest. Thanks to the tremendous accumulated work of our FTA volunteers and partner staff, this season’s thru-hikers were spared a long road-walk detour, and locals were once again out enjoying the unique natural beauty of Econfina Creek. However, trail conditions are still difficult. Longtime hikers of Econfina will be shocked by the
Clearing debris along Econfina Creek, March 2019
One of the many amazing Econfina trail crews involved in the recovery effort, March 2019
Former Panhandle Chapter Trail Coordinator, Eric Lewis, led groups of hikers through one of the sections of Econfina he dedicated tremendous effort in clearing.

Panhandle Gathering, Nov. 2019
The experience of living through Hurricane Michael and participating in the rebuilding of the Econfina Section has been a lesson in resilience.
changes; the near-total tree loss in some sections is jarring, and what was once a pleasant, shady forest path is now an exposed trek through piles of downed vegetation. In some areas, hikers are essentially passing through a narrow tunnel of bucked logs and branches from the cleared blowdowns. Much work remains to be done in widening and improving the trail corridor.

Of course, even with our best efforts, it will still be many years before the Econfina landscape begins to resemble what we remember. We strive to build and maintain a perpetually-protected trail system, but it’s important to remember that change along the Florida Trail is inevitable. There will always be hurricanes and floods that reshape the landscapes we love so much, especially as the reality of climate change begins to take hold in our state. The trail route itself changes every year; road walks are eliminated, re-routes are implemented, and new developments pop-up in the ever more fragmented rural environment of Florida. Within our own organization, new volunteers join while others retire or move on to other pursuits, and staff members come and go. Even as I write these words, our entire trail community is currently isolating at home as we come to grips with another slow-motion disaster, this time from the coronavirus pandemic. Already there is speculation about what this new challenge will bring for our volunteer community, the upcoming maintenance season, and our many volunteer training events. For us in the Panhandle, the experience of living through Hurricane Michael and participating in the rebuilding of the Econfina Section has been a lesson in resilience; the resilience of the Florida Trail, our Association, and the communities we live in. I’m confident we’ll weather these new challenges and all the unforeseen ones to come, and I’m excited to see what the future will bring for our footpath in the woods.
Did you know that many Florida Trail Association volunteer chapters maintain trails other than the Florida National Scenic Trail? These trails, officially adopted by FTA chapters, are known as parts of the Florida Trail System. A premier example of a popular and well maintained segment of the Florida Trail System is the St. Francis Trail.

The St. Francis Trail is a loop trail located inside the Ocala National Forest near Deland. The trail is a ten mile loop that provides access to a historical commercial settlement on the St. Johns River. About 2.5 miles from the trailhead, there has been a bridge consisting of three power poles and cable handrails. This water crossing was installed over 25 years ago and was finally succumbing to its years, with one pole having collapsed into the water and another ready to fail. The structure was becoming hazardous to the many hikers using the trail.

Jo Anne Rodkey of the Black Bear Chapter determined that this bridge needed to be repaired, and began working with Mike Martin of the Florida Forest Service to get new poles. Jo Anne became the “project manager” and recruited Francis Keenan and Bill Turman to provide the technical skills to make it happen.

One of the biggest challenges of the project was transporting the new 30 ft. power poles a half mile from the staging area to the bridge site. Francis and Bobbi Keenan began reaching out to the Central Florida and Highlanders chapter members for support. Both of the chapters immediately joined in helping with the preparation, doing site visits, gathering dollies to transport the poles, and attaining the necessary rigging tools, while communicating with their respective trail crews to ensure that there would be plenty of trail workers.

The crew also received assistance from Ocala National Forest staff members, including Forestry Technician, Harvey Howard, and Natural Resource Specialist, Tonee Davis. Tonee served as the coordinator for building materials. She arranged for the old telephone poles used for the project to be delivered to the staging area. Harvey transported the poles from their storage site at the OHV Center to the drop off point on an old logging road. This was no small task, requiring two trips: one to bring the poles by truck to the Old St. Francis Road and another to bring in a tractor to drag them the rest of the way down a very narrow logging road.

This project was truly one of volunteerism at its best. Each step of the way, someone with the right expertise stepped forward to handle the next phase of the job.” - Jo Anne Rodkey
On March 7th, the three FTA chapters met at the St. Francis trailhead where they held a project and safety briefing and then loaded up several vehicles to travel to the staging area. From there, they placed the first power pole on the dollies and headed up the trail.

With the dollies and the other straps attached to the poles, the half mile went smoothly. While part of the group went back to get the second and third poles, a crew remained at the bridge site to prep the bridge abutments as well as install the rigging equipment to position the poles over the water crossing. As two of the existing poles were still available, we used them to drag the new poles over the water and get them in position, saving the need for more complicated rigging.

The decision was made during the build to change the bridge from 3 poles to 4 poles, using one sound existing pole. This made for a better bridge but also required a rework of the cable handrail system.

By the afternoon, the bridge was replaced and the crews were on the way back to the staging area and trailhead. The project was a success largely due to the teamwork and cooperation of all of the Black Bear, Highlanders and Central Florida Chapter members.

Special thanks to Mike Martin of the Florida Forest and Harvey Howard and Tonee David of the US Forest Service for their continued support of the Florida Trail and the Florida Trail System!

**Crew Members**

**Black Bear:**
Jo Anne Rodkey, Abe Christian, Bill & Linda Taylor, Jonathan Nash, Bob Wright, Andrew Dominguez, Margaret Nonnemacher

**Highlanders:**
Francis & Bobbi Keenan, Brad Hoopes, Wade Williston, John Holmes

**Central Florida:**
Bill Turman, Paul Boudreau, Tom Drake, Jim Janninck

*Transporting 30 ft. poles to the bridge site.*
Making space for the 4th pole.

Linda Taylor, Bobbi & Francis Keenan
The team enjoying the newly repaired bridge.
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 www.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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