

APPENDIX **B**

Collier to Polk Regional Trail Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail System

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Prepared for FDOT District One
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Overview

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District One is developing a Master Plan for a regional multi-use trail system from Collier County to Polk County. The goals of the regional trail system are to:

- Connect and provide access to small towns, cultural & heritage sites, parks, preserves, wildlife corridors, and working landscapes
- Leverage existing destinations and infrastructure to maximize economic and nature-based tourism potential

This document defines the background for the development of Guiding Principles that will serve as the framework for planning and development of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. The Guiding Principles are the following:

Economy – Advance Economic Development and Tourism

Experience – Create a Safe, Diverse, and Engaging Trail User Experience

Destinations – Maximize Connections and Access to Small Towns, Heritage Sites, and Natural Areas

Investments – Leverage Existing and Programmed Trail Investments and Planning Efforts

Implementation – Plan for Implementation of a Complete Trail System

Developing the Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles were defined to ensure a consistent planning framework throughout Master Plan development. The first application of the Guiding Principles was to use them for defining appropriate criteria for evaluating which Conceptual Corridor will be the focus of the Master Plan.

The Guiding Principles were developed with consideration of three key sources:

- Takeaways from the Planning Study's *Regional Multi-Use Trail Corridor State of Practice Scan*
- Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan Goals and Criteria
- Shared Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail Criteria

Table 1 (pages 8-12) illustrates the relationship between the Guiding Principles and the takeaways, goals, and criteria from these sources.

State of Practice Scan

The Planning Study's *State of Practice Scan* (November 2023) provides an overview of statistics and information on representative long-distance trails to help define the potential economic impacts and benefits that the Collier to Polk regional trail system might yield. The scan's takeaways serve as likely "ingredients" for a successful regional trail and are appropriate to inform development of Guiding Principles. The key takeaways are:

- Economic Impact – There is significant potential for positive economic impact from investment in regional trail systems
- Long-Distance Trails – A fully connected long-distance trail system will likely deliver greater returns economically than an equivalent length of unconnected trail segments
- Partnerships – Promoting and partnering with individual towns along a trail can dramatically elevate its success and bring heightened value to communities
- Assets and Destinations – Leveraging assets and destinations in the vicinity of a trail is critical to enhancing the experience of trail users and maximizing the return on public investment
- Natural and Cultural History – A trail can be an important mechanism to tell the story of and engage users with a region's natural and cultural history
- Geographic Influence – Regional trail planning should define and consider an appropriate trail impact zone to help accurately document the geographic "influence" of the facility

Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan

The Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS) Plan is the overarching guide for establishing Florida's statewide system of greenways and trails. The plan's goals and criteria provide a comprehensive, partner-based, and publicly supported foundation to inform development of Guiding Principles.

The four goal areas of the 2019-2023 FGTS Plan are:

1. Delineate Regional Systems
2. Invest Resources Strategically to Advance System Completion
3. Promote and Market the FGTS
4. Establish Partnerships and Engage Stakeholders

The FGTS Plan's geographic component includes Opportunity and Priority Trail maps. The criteria for evaluating whether potential trail corridors should be included in the FGTS are the following:

Opportunity Trail Criteria

- Crosses or has the potential to cross county boundaries.
- Documented evidence of local or regional government endorsement.
- Leads to or connects to a destination that provides natural scenic qualities and diverse experiences.
- Provides access to conservation lands and historic, recreational or cultural sites.
- Supports the Florida Ecological Greenways Network.

Priority Trail Criteria

- Supports and further establishes national, state or regional trail projects, plans and initiatives.
- Builds on past and programmed state and federal investments in trails, particularly when matched by funding from local and private sources.
- Includes long-distance trails or provides connections between long-distance trails and/or long loops to join multiple counties and population centers.
- Demonstrates broad regional and community support, especially those entities willing to commit to trail management and long-term maintenance.
- Enhances access to nature-based tourism and economic development by connecting natural, recreational, cultural and historic sites.
- Enhances connections to state parks and trails and greenways.
- Coincides with and supports the Florida Ecological Greenways Network priorities.
- Protects public safety by offering non-motorized use that is separated from highways.

Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail Network

The Shared-Use Nonmotorized (SUN) Trail Network, established in 2015, is an important program to advance trails through set-aside state funding. The SUN Trail Network, a component of the FGTS, mirrors the Priority Trail System per FDOT policy. While SUN Trail Program Selection Criteria are most suitable to guide funding decisions for specific trail segments, the criteria categories are useful to inform appropriate considerations for the Guiding Principles.

SUN Trail Criteria Categories

- Project enhances the safety of bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists
- Project is recognized as having regional, state, or national importance
- Additional financial contribution committed to project
- Project blends transportation modes by completing, improving or enhancing existing facilities to improve mobility
- Construction Readiness
- Project has a high level of documented public support
- Project has a significant immediate impact to the quality of life by enhancing economic opportunities and providing connectivity to destinations.
- Project enhances or preserves environmental resources
- Project facilitates a system of interconnected trails by closing a gap in the SUN Trail Network
- Project includes cost-saving elements

Five Guiding Principles

Guiding Principle: Economy – Advance Economic Development and Tourism

This principle focuses on planning the trail for the purpose of stimulating allied business and economic activity, particularly in areas that would most benefit from economic growth. It also emphasizes the important role that the regional trail can play in growing nature-based, cultural, and heritage tourism. Promoting and partnering with individual towns along a trail can dramatically elevate its success and bring heightened value to communities. The relationship to bicycle touring is also important.

Key Considerations:

- Stimulate Business and Economic Activity
- Nature-based, Cultural, and Heritage Tourism
- Promotion and Marketing
- Geographic Influence Zone

Guiding Principle: Experience – Create a Safe, Diverse, and Engaging Trail User Experience

This principle focuses on planning the trail to provide a safe, comfortable, and inviting trail user experience. Ensuring that the trail is planned to maximize user safety is a critical emphasis area. This also includes other dimensions such as engaging trail users through interpretive opportunities highlighting the contribution that protected lands and

historic areas are to Florida's sense of place. It likewise includes planning for a full range of potential trail user experiences from local recreational trips to long-distance bicycle touring.

Key Considerations:

- User Safety and Comfort
- Accessibility
- Interpretive Opportunities
- Diverse Experiences

Guiding Principle: Destinations – Maximize Connections and Access to Small Towns, Heritage Sites, and Natural Areas

This principle emphasizes planning the trail to maximize connectivity to potential trail attractors and hubs that serve as destinations for the regional trail system. These include parks, preserves, nature-based attractions, heritage sites, small town main streets, and other locations. Connectivity to conservation lands emphasizes their role as components of the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Emphasis on small towns includes considering the reciprocal destination benefits of the trail to communities and vice-versa.

Key Considerations:

- Trail Towns
- Natural and Historic Florida
- Parks, Preserves, Refuges
- Wildlife Viewing
- Heritage Sites

Guiding Principle: Investments – Leverage Existing and Programmed Trail Investments and Planning Efforts

This principle emphasizes planning the regional trail to maximize past and currently programmed trail investments. It also recognizes the community desire expressed for trails as evidenced by publicly supported plans and planning efforts. This will ultimately include consideration of the approach to ensuring long-term trail management.

Key Considerations:

- Build on Past Trail Planning
- Understand Community Support
- Strategic Investment and Funding

- Trail Management and Maintenance

Guiding Principle: Implementation – Plan for Implementation of a Complete Trail System

This principle emphasizes planning segments of the regional trail to become integrated components of a comprehensive connected system from Collier County to Polk County. This includes focusing on the process for documenting, prioritizing, and programming trail segments and phases to methodically close gaps and complete the system.

Key Considerations:

- Identify and Prioritize Segments
- Program Project Phases
- Complete Long-Distance Trail

Table 1: Collier to Polk Regional Trail System – Basis for Guiding Principles

Related Takeaways, Goals & Criteria		Guiding Principle
Study Scan Takeaways	<p>Economic Impact – There is significant potential for positive economic impact from investment in regional trail systems</p> <p>Long-Distance Trails – A fully connected long-distance trail system will likely deliver greater returns economically than an equivalent length of unconnected trail segments</p> <p>Partnerships – Promoting and partnering with individual towns along a trail can dramatically elevate its success and bring heightened value to communities</p> <p>Geographic Influence – Regional trail planning should define and consider an appropriate trail impact zone to help accurately document the geographic “influence” of the facility</p>	<p>Economy <i>Advance Economic Development and Tourism</i></p> <p>Key Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate Business and Economic Activity • Natural, Cultural, and Heritage Tourism • Promotion and Marketing • Geographic Influence Zone
FGTS Plan	<p>Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote and Market the FGTS - Establish Partnerships and Engage Stakeholders <p>Priority Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhances access to nature-based tourism and economic development by connecting natural, recreational, cultural and historic sites. 	
SUN Trail Program	<p>Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project has a significant immediate impact to the quality of life by enhancing economic opportunities and providing connectivity to destinations. 	

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Study Scan Takeaways	<p>Natural and Cultural History – A trail can be an important mechanism to tell the story of and engage users with a region’s natural and cultural history.</p> <p>Assets and Destinations – Leveraging assets and destinations in the vicinity of a trail is critical to enhancing the experience of trail users and maximizing the return on public investment.</p> <p>Partnerships – Promoting and partnering with individual towns along a trail can dramatically elevate its success and bring heightened value to communities</p>	<p>Experience <i>Create a Safe, Diverse, and Engaging Trail User Experience</i></p> <p><u>Key Considerations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User Safety and Comfort • Accessibility • Interpretive Opportunities • Diverse Experiences
FGTS Plan	<p>Priority Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides public safety by offering non-motorized use that is separated from highways. - Provides access to and supports the Florida Wildlife Corridor. - Enhances access to nature-based tourism and economic development by connecting natural, recreational, cultural and historic sites. - Enhances connections to state parks and trails and greenways. - Coincides with and supports the Florida Ecological Greenways Network priorities. <p>Opportunity Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides access to conservation lands and historic, recreational or cultural sites. - Leads to or connects to a destination that provides natural scenic qualities and diverse experiences. 	
SUN Trail Program	<p>Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project enhances the safety of bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists. - Project has a significant immediate impact to the quality of life by enhancing economic opportunities and providing connectivity to destinations. - Project blends transportation modes by completing, improving or enhancing existing facilities to improve mobility. - Project enhances or preserves environmental resources. 	

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