

COLLIER TO POLK

TRAIL MASTER PLAN



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**THE COLLIER TO POLK REGIONAL TRAIL MASTER PLAN
WAS PREPARED FOR THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION, DISTRICT ONE BY KIMLEY-
HORN AND ASSOCIATES. AUGUST 2024**

Public participation for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan was solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability or family status. Persons with questions regarding nondiscrimination or Civil Rights, please contact the District One Title VI Coordinator Cynthia Sykes at (863) 519-2287 or at Cynthia.Sykes@dot.state.fl.us.





Table of Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. INTRODUCTION	2
The Vision.....	2
A Regionally Significant Trail.....	2
What is the Florida Greenways and Trails System?	3
What is SUN Trail?.....	3
Guiding Principles	3
The Master Plan.....	4
2. WHY A REGIONAL TRAIL?	7
State of Practice Scan Takeaways	7
Trails Have the Potential to Transform Communities.	8
Trails are Desired by Residents and Visitors	9
Investing in Trails.....	10
3. EXPERIENCE.....	12
What Will the Trail Look Like?.....	12
Trail Concepts	13
4. THE REGION.....	16
The Planning Area Counties.....	17
Connecting Communities	23
Basic Characteristics of a Successful Trail Town	24
Connecting to Natural Florida	25
SUN Trail and The Florida Wildlife Corridor	26
5. ENGAGEMENT	28
Highlights of Public Input.....	28
Stakeholder Engagement.....	29
Open Houses	31
6. PLANNING THE TRAIL.....	36
State and Regional Trail Planning and Connections	36
SUN Trail – A Willing Seller Program	36
Developing the Preliminary Routing Alternatives	39
Collier County	43
Hendry County.....	45
Glades County.....	47
Highlands County	49
Hardee County	52
Polk County	55
7. THE PATH FORWARD	59
What Happens Next?	59
Important Considerations	63





Appendices

- A.** Regional Multi-use Trail Corridor State of Practice Scan
- B.** Collier to Polk Regional Trail Guiding Principles
- C.** Resolutions of Support for Collier to Polk Updates to State Priority Trail Network
- D.** Collier to Polk Planning Area County Profiles
- E.** Stakeholder Summaries and Public Comments
- F.** Environmental Scan
- G.** Matrix of Select Criteria
- H.** Planning Level Cost Estimates by County
- I.** Conceptual Typical Section Examples
- J.** Paradise Coast Trail Feasibility Study
- K.** Marco Island Loop Trail Feasibility Study and Conceptual Design
- L.** Preliminary Estimated Schedules





List of Figures

<i>Figure</i>	<i>Page</i>
FIGURE 1. Example Typical Section of Trail Along US 17	13
FIGURE 2. Example of Trail Connecting to Entrance of Paynes Creek Historic State Park.....	13
FIGURE 3. Trail Concept in Various Contexts.....	14
FIGURE 4. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail Planning Area	16
FIGURE 5. Trail Town Candidates	23
FIGURE 6. State and Federal Conservation & Recreation Lands	25
FIGURE 7. Open House Welcome Flyer	32
FIGURE 8. Virtual Open House Platform.....	33
FIGURE 9. Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan Website.....	34
FIGURE 10. Florida Greenways and Trails – Statewide Regional Trail Corridors.....	37
FIGURE 11. Overview Map of Preliminary Routing Alternatives	40
FIGURE 12. Collier County – Defined Planning Boundary.....	44
FIGURE 13. Hendry County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives	46
FIGURE 14. Glades County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives	48
FIGURE 15. Highlands County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives	51
FIGURE 16. Hardee County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives	54
FIGURE 17. Polk County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives.....	57
FIGURE 18. Collier to Polk Regional Trail Segmentation.....	60

List of Tables

<i>Table</i>	<i>Page</i>
TABLE 1. Collier to Polk Regional Trail Preliminary Work Plan	61



CHAPTER 1

Introduction





1. INTRODUCTION



The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), District One prepared this Master Plan to define the initial vision for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail, a connected multi-use trail through Collier, Hendry, Glades, Highlands, Hardee, and Polk counties. Multiple factors led to this planning effort including:

- » Completion of District One's Active Transportation Plan (2022) which identified trails as a preferred bicycle facility type by regional residents
- » Passage of Senate Bill 106 (2023) [Ch. 2023-20 Laws of Florida] which emphasizes that state trail priorities include Regionally Significant Trails
- » The potential economic and other benefits a connected long-distance trail could provide to the region and its communities

See [Chapter 4](#) for information about the region and Master Plan study area.



THE VISION

The Vision for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail is to establish a paved, multi-use trail that connects and provides access to small towns, cultural and heritage sites, parks, preserves, wildlife corridors, and working lands.

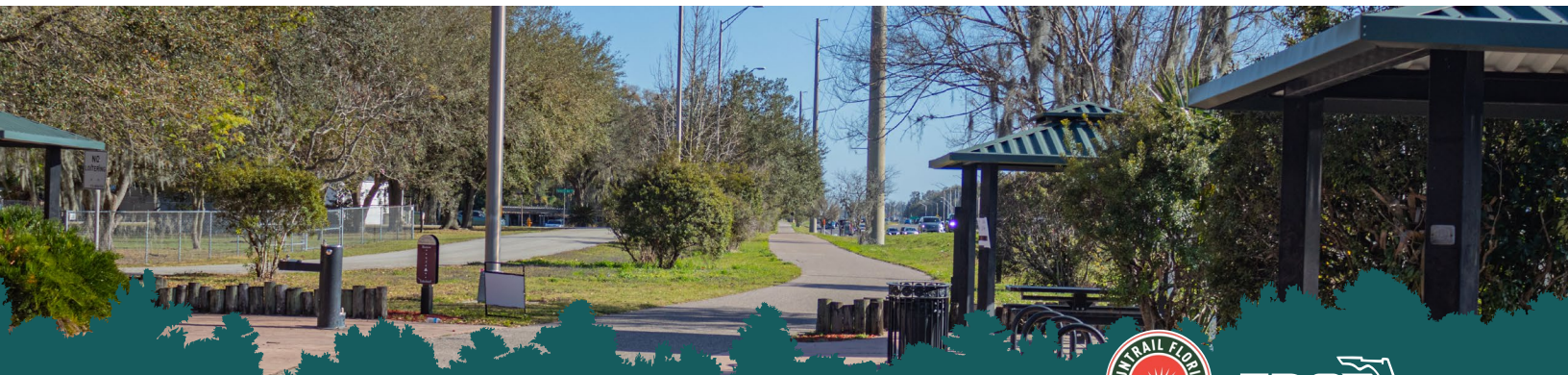
A REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT TRAIL

The Collier to Polk Regional Trail has been designated by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) as a Regionally Significant Trail which means it is recognized for its potential to:

- » Cross multiple counties
- » Attract national and international visitors
- » Provide opportunity for economic and ecotourism development
- » Showcase the value of wildlife areas, ecology, and natural resources
- » Serve as a main corridor for critical links and trail connectedness across this region of Florida



The Regionally Significant Trail definition and process was established with the passage of Senate Bill 106 [2023-20 Laws of Florida]. See Section [260.0142\(4\)\(c\)](#) and Section [339.81\(5\)\(a\)](#) Florida Statutes for the complete language.



WHAT IS THE FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS SYSTEM?

As a Regionally Significant Trail, the Collier to Polk Regional Trail is within the Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS). Planned by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Office of Greenways and Trails, the FGTS combines local and regional trails into a coordinated statewide plan and network. The FGTS Plan includes two land trail components:

- » The Opportunity Land Trail Network represents the overall system of major trails
- » The Priority Land Trail Network represents the highest priorities within the Opportunity Network (SUN Trail is a refined version of the Priority Land Trail Network)

The FGTS Plan, which is approved by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council, includes four goals:

- 1 Implement Regional Systems**
- 2 Allocate Strategic Investments and Resources to Accelerate the Completion of the System**
- 3 Promote and Market the Florida Greenways and Trails System to Residents and Visitors**
- 4 Establish Partnerships and Engage Stakeholders**

The Plan also identifies Priority Corridor criteria and key strategies for implementation of the system. To learn more, visit the [FGTS Plan](#) web page.

WHAT IS SUN TRAIL?

The Collier to Polk Regional Trail is being planned as a component of the Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail network. The SUN Trail network is a refined version of the FGTS Plan's Land Trail Priority network. The SUN Trail Program, administered by FDOT, provides funding for the development of the SUN Trail network, a statewide system of interconnected paved multi-use trails for bicyclists and pedestrians, physically separated from the road. SUN Trail funded projects improve intermodal connections by closing gaps in the statewide paved trail system to increase the reliability of Florida's transportation system. To learn more, visit: www.FloridaSunTrail.com.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As part of the Master Plan process, a framework of Guiding Principles was developed to guide long-term planning and development of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. The Guiding Principles are based on:

- » Key takeaways from the Regional Multi-Use Trail Corridor State of Practice Scan ([See Appendix A](#))
- » FGTS Plan Goals and Priority Corridor Criteria
- » SUN Trail Criteria

See [Appendix B](#) for complete background on development of the Guiding Principles.



The Guiding Principles are:



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, Programmed, and Planned Trail Investments



Implementation

Plan for Implementation of a Complete Trail System

These Guiding Principles are intended to provide consistency across the entire Collier to Polk Regional Trail corridor as individual segments move forward for project development beyond the Master Plan.

THE MASTER PLAN

This Master Plan was developed to evaluate the development of a regional multi-use trail system from Collier County to Polk County and to provide the foundation for advancing the Vision.

Master Plan At-A-Glance

- ✓ **Evaluate Possibilities**
- ✓ **Define Concepts and Alternatives**
- ✓ **Position for Success**
- ✓ **Deliver Comprehensive Master Plan**

The Master Plan development process consisted of the following steps:

- » Conduct high-level evaluation of existing conditions
- » Review current trail planning and programming
- » Define the expected trail experience ([Chapter 3](#))
- » Identify communities, destinations, and attractions the trail could connect ([Chapter 4](#))
- » Engage the public and stakeholders for meaningful input ([Chapter 5](#))

Based upon the data and information from these steps, high-level concepts for trail routing alternatives were developed ([Chapter 6](#)).

Finally, the path forward which includes high-level recommendations is defined ([Chapter 7](#)).

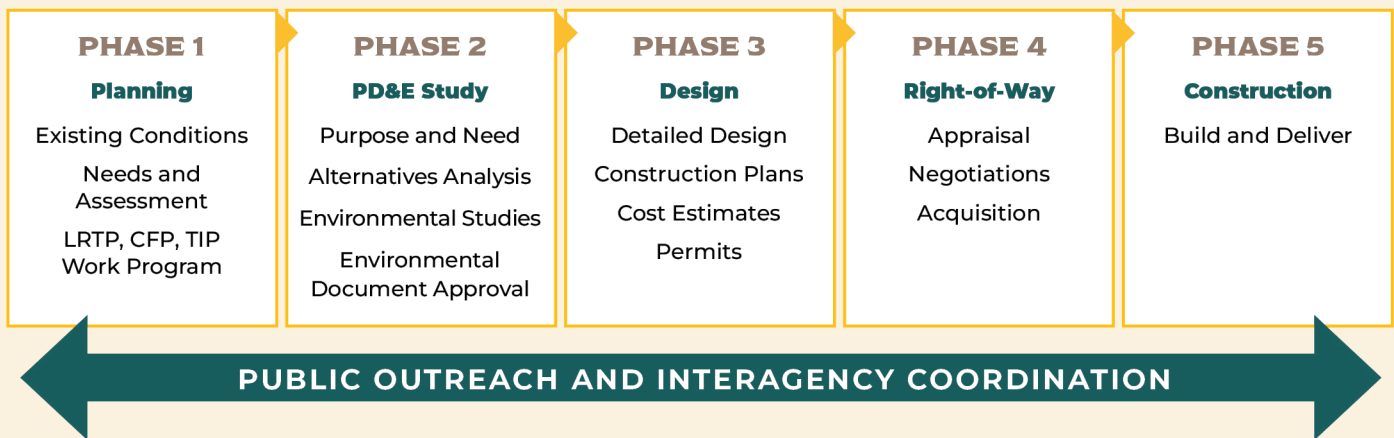


How does the Master Plan fit into Long-Term Project Development?

The Master Plan is the initial step for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. In the process outlined below, the Master Plan falls under Planning (Phase 1). The next phase, PD&E Study (Phase 2), has been funded for the entire corridor and will begin following completion of the Master Plan.

- » Like any transportation project, a trail will often go through most if not all of the phases outlined below.
- » Some segments of the trail may not require a full PD&E Study (Phase 2) so they will move more quickly to Design (Phase 3).
- » If no right-of-way is needed to build a given trail segment as designed, then it will bypass Phase 4 and move to Construction (Phase 5).

TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



Moving forward beyond the Master Plan, the Collier to Polk Regional Trail will be segmented into smaller project limits for the purpose of advancing the trail through the project development process. Some segments will move faster than others and the timeframe will vary for each segment depending upon a range of factors including phase readiness and available funding.



CHAPTER 2

Why a Regional Trail?

2. WHY A REGIONAL TRAIL?

The Collier to Polk Regional Trail has the potential to bring a range of economic, health, recreation, and transportation benefits. At the start of the Master Plan process, a **State of Practice Scan** ([Appendix A](#)) was developed to provide an overview of potential regional trail economic impacts and benefits. The Scan highlights long-distance trail systems that serve as representative examples to consider during development of the Master Plan.

Common characteristics and outcomes of the highlighted regional trail systems are useful for understanding the potential benefits that might result from investment in the Collier to Polk Regional Trail. The following are key themes drawn from the case examples and statistics in the State of Practice Scan:

STATE OF PRACTICE SCAN TAKEAWAYS

- » There is significant potential for positive economic impact from investment in regional trail systems
- » A fully connected long-distance trail system will likely deliver greater returns economically than an equivalent length of unconnected trail segments
- » Promoting and partnering with individual towns along a trail can dramatically elevate its success and bring reciprocal value to communities
- » 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
- » A trail can be an important mechanism to tell the story of and engage users with a region's natural and cultural history
- » Regional trail planning should define and consider an appropriate trail impact zone to help accurately document the geographic "influence" of the facility

These factors were considered during development of the Guiding Principles for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail outlined in [Chapter 1](#).



Existing long-distance regional trail systems provide evidence of the impact of trails:



The **46-mile Northwest Arkansas Razorback Greenway** has given the region it traverses an estimated **\$137 million worth of economic and health benefits** (2018)



The direct economic impact of the **150-mile Great Allegheny Passage Trail** which runs from Pittsburgh, PA to Cumberland, MD is **nearly \$75 million** (2019)



The **240-mile Missouri Katy Trail State Park** had an estimated **\$18.5 million economic impact** in 2012



The developing **250-mile Florida Coast to Coast Trail** was **estimated to generate \$235 million in sales, \$143 million in personal income, and add \$140 million to the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the counties it crosses over a ten-year period** (2017)



TRAILS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES.

Important Florida examples include the following:



WINTER GARDEN West Orange Trail

- » The West Orange Trail has been a key component behind the transformation of Downtown Winter Garden.
- » The success of the trail helped earn the city recognition as a Great Place in Florida (Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association).



DUNEDIN Pinellas Trail

- » Dunedin, along the Pinellas Trail, saw downtown business occupancy rates go from 30% before the Trail to at or near 100% since the trail opened over two decades ago.
- » Dunedin's Economic Development Director, Bob Ironsmith, touts the trail as an 'economic engine.'



INVERNESS Withlacochee State Trail

- » Inverness has invested in the development of a highly visual gateway to downtown from the Withlacochee State Trail.
- » The Inverness Depot District consists of two parks, an open-air event pavilion, and other facilities centered around the trail.

Each of these communities is a state designated Trail Town. For the proposed Collier to Polk Regional Trail, it was important to identify candidate Trail Towns that might derive the greatest possible public and private benefits. For more information about these communities and the Trail Towns program, see [Chapter 4](#).



TRAILS ARE DESIRED BY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

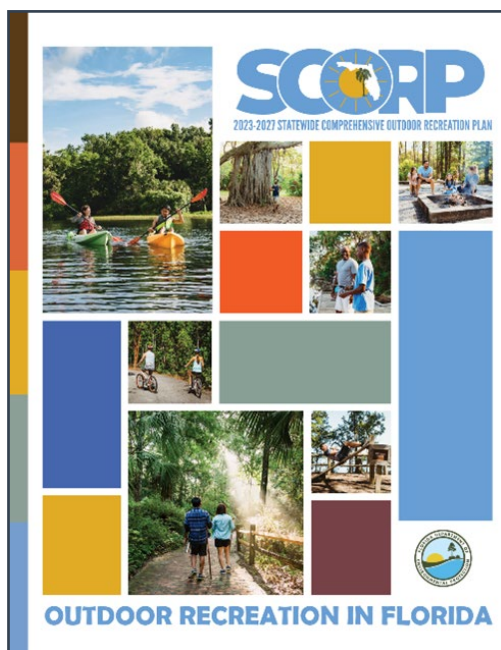
One of the purposes of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail is to address the needs and preferences of residents in the region. [FDOT District One completed an Active Transportation Plan](#) in January of 2022, which included a survey of District One residents.

In the survey, trails were identified by 96% of District One residents as the bicycle and pedestrian facility where they are most comfortable.

This aligns with other studies indicating that people typically desire to be separated from roadways when walking or riding a bicycle. This even includes preference for trails alongside roadways separated by a buffer in contrast to an at-grade bicycle lane immediately adjacent to vehicle traffic.

According to [Florida's 2023-2027 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#), greenways and trails are the type of outdoor recreation facility that Sunshine State residents would most like to see built in their communities.

Once a trail is in place, it can be a significant draw to residents. In a 2019 Pinellas Trail survey, over 75% of respondents indicated that they use the trail 2 or more days a week, with 27% using it 5 or more days a week.



Trails are often sought as a means for improving personal **health and wellness**. The SCORP survey notes that the top reasons Florida residents participate in outdoor recreation are to enjoy the scenery, for mental health, and for general health.

The attraction of trails for **tourism** is also important. A survey for the Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town Program suggests 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.

Trails are increasingly desired as a **community amenity** that homebuyers seek when choosing where to live. As a result, planned developments, like Ave Maria in Collier County, are incorporating trails as a key component for biking and walking. In fact, the Ave Maria trail connection will serve as a component of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail system.



INVESTING IN TRAILS

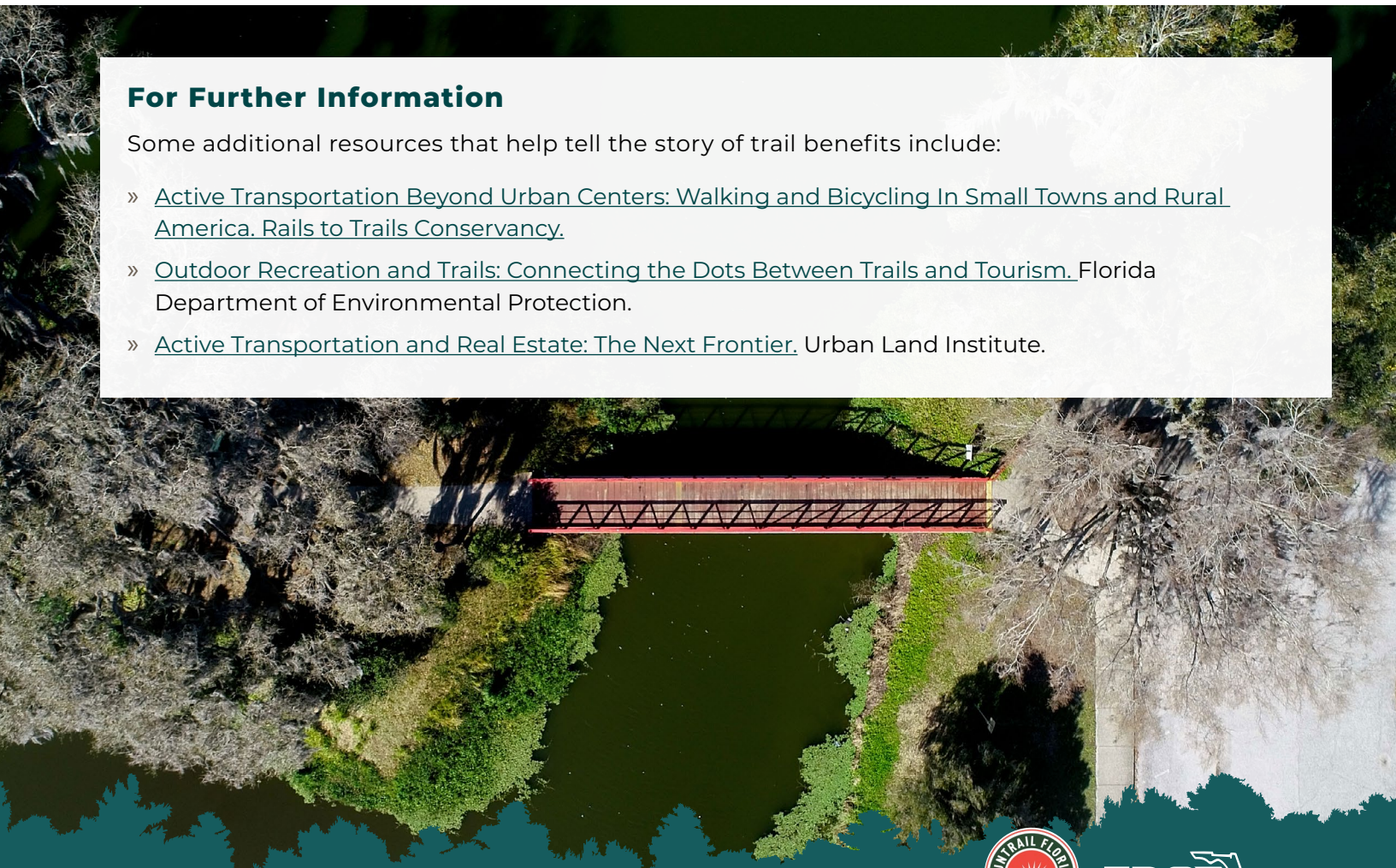
The current state of practice demonstrates that trails improve the economic vitality of communities. Trail networks serve public purposes such as enhancing a region's outdoor recreation and conservation spaces, and improving safety, mobility, and connections as components of a multimodal transportation network. Trails also spur local investment, economic and community development projects, and can serve as attractors and destinations for tourists. Key business sectors that may directly support or be supported by a trail network include hospitality (food, beverage, accommodations), retail (goods and supplies), and recreation and entertainment (tours, festivals, events).

Florida is making investments in trails through programs like SUN Trail and development of the Florida Greenways and Trails System. Federal resources have also provided important contributions through programs such as Transportation Alternatives and Safe Routes to School. And many Florida communities have invested in trails through local standalone or matching funds. Nonetheless, it remains critical to clearly articulate and communicate the need for future public investment in trails, especially with the scale of a project like the proposed Collier to Polk Regional Trail. The highlights included in this chapter and the State of Practice Scan ([Appendix A](#)) are meant to illustrate why such investments are beneficial.

For Further Information

Some additional resources that help tell the story of trail benefits include:

- » [Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers: Walking and Bicycling In Small Towns and Rural America. Rails to Trails Conservancy.](#)
- » [Outdoor Recreation and Trails: Connecting the Dots Between Trails and Tourism. Florida Department of Environmental Protection.](#)
- » [Active Transportation and Real Estate: The Next Frontier. Urban Land Institute.](#)



CHAPTER 3

Experience



3. EXPERIENCE

WHAT WILL THE TRAIL LOOK LIKE?

Over 30 total miles of shared use path that will be part of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail exist today. For those not familiar with paved multi-use trails, these projects help to provide an idea of what regional trail segments will look like. Examples of existing trails include:



Auburndale-TECO Trail



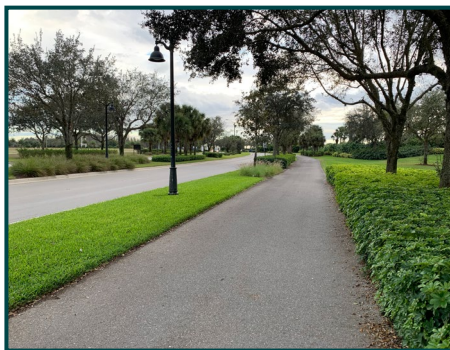
Baker Park Trail



Rich King Memorial Greenway



Fort Fraser Trail



Ave Maria Trail



Gordon River Greenway

The specific context of a trail determines its experience and aesthetics. Settings for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail will vary depending upon the selected route and may include segments:

- » In communities along streets and other available rights of way
- » Along but separated from major roadways
- » Connecting to and traversing public natural areas
- » Crossing through planned developments

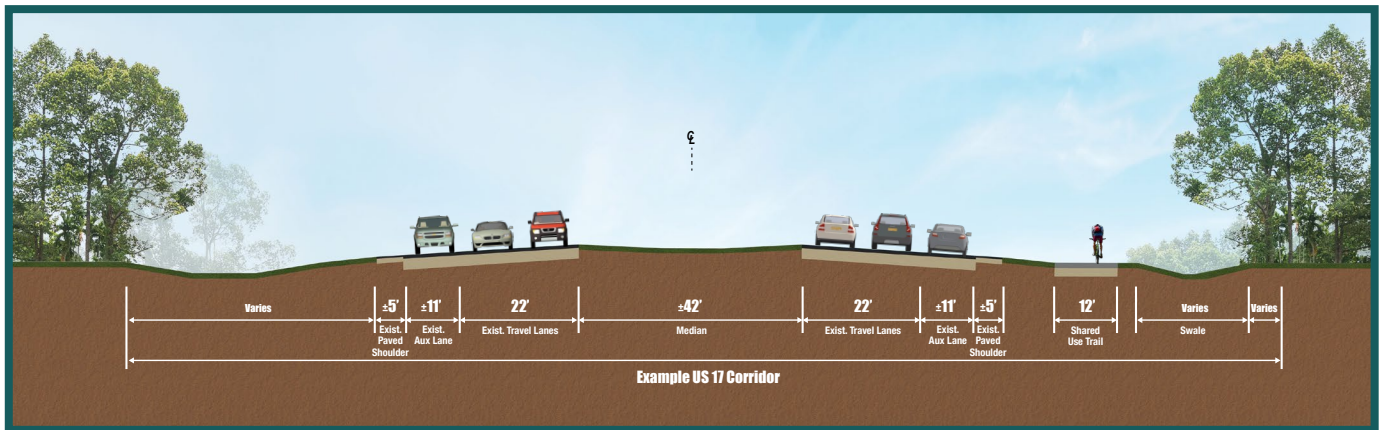
Important to the experience of the trail will be factors like safety, diversity of settings, and access to wayside areas, trailheads, and other facilities. This aligns with the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Guiding Principle to **Create a Safe, Diverse, and Engaging Trail User Experience. Planning the Trail** ([Chapter 6](#)) provides additional information about these considerations.



TRAIL CONCEPTS

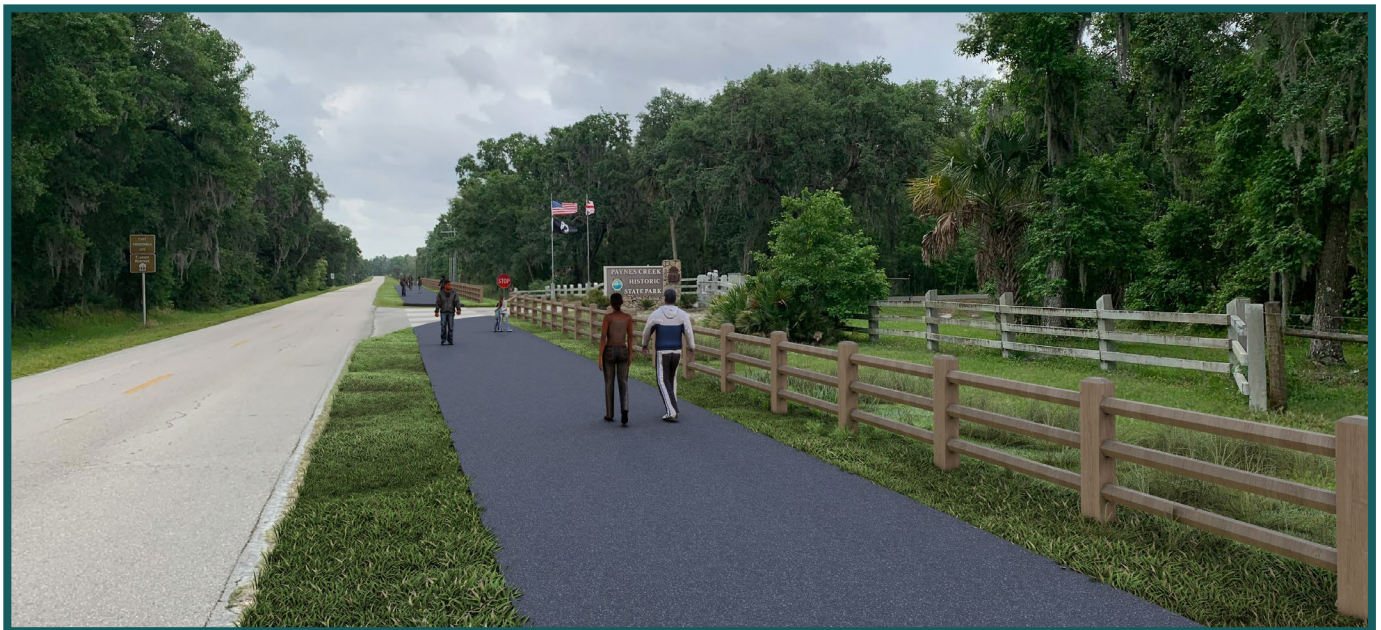
For consistency with SUN Trail standards, the target profile for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail is a 12' wide paved shared use path. The renderings and typical sections below provide an idea of what the trail experience may be like in different contexts.

Figure 1. Example Typical Section of Trail Along US 17



Where the trail is along a roadway, it will be located within road right-of-way but will be separated from travel lanes.

Figure 2. Example of Trail Connecting to Entrance of Paynes Creek Historic State Park



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN



See [Appendix I](#) for additional typical section examples.

Chapter 4 provides information about the region the trail will traverse to give further understanding of what the broader experience will be.

Figure 3. Trail Concepts in Various Contexts



CHAPTER 4

The Region

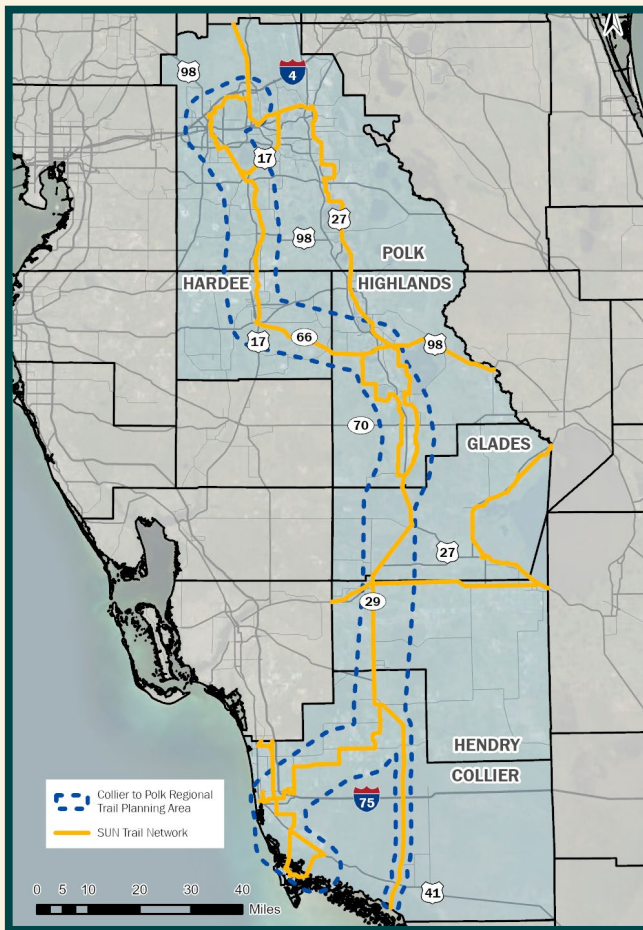


4. THE REGION

The **Collier to Polk Regional Trail Planning Area** crosses six counties (Figure 4):

- **COLLIER COUNTY**
- **HENDRY COUNTY**
- **GLADES COUNTY**
- **HIGHLANDS COUNTY**
- **HARDEE COUNTY**
- **POLK COUNTY**

Figure 4. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail Planning Area



The Planning Area is a 10-mile wide swath to provide flexibility for development of routing options. The path of the Planning Area was developed based on providing a potential route for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail that will:

- » Meet the definition of a Regionally Significant Trail
- » Advance the identified SUN Trail Network and align with existing and planned trails in the region
- » Maximize economic benefits and nature-based tourism potential by incorporating communities that are appropriate candidates as state-designated Trail Towns
- » Include diverse user experiences and interpretive opportunities by providing access to major regional features such as the Peace River, Lake Wales Ridge, and Big Cypress National Preserve
- » Maximize trail connections to existing managed areas such as state parks, state forests, and wildlife management areas

Figure 4 also illustrates the identified SUN Trail Network corridor within the Planning Area. The Collier MPO (Collier County), Heartland TPO (Hendry, Glades, Highlands, Hardee counties), and Polk TPO (Polk County) partnered with FDOT District One to close the gaps in and define a continuous SUN Trail Network corridor from Collier to Polk. Each of the M/TPOs adopted resolutions of support ([Appendix C](#)) and submitted a formal request to the FGTC to update the state Priority Trail Network which is the basis for SUN Trail. At its December 2023 meeting, the FGTC approved these updates, solidifying the foundation for the Master Plan.

THE PLANNING AREA COUNTIES

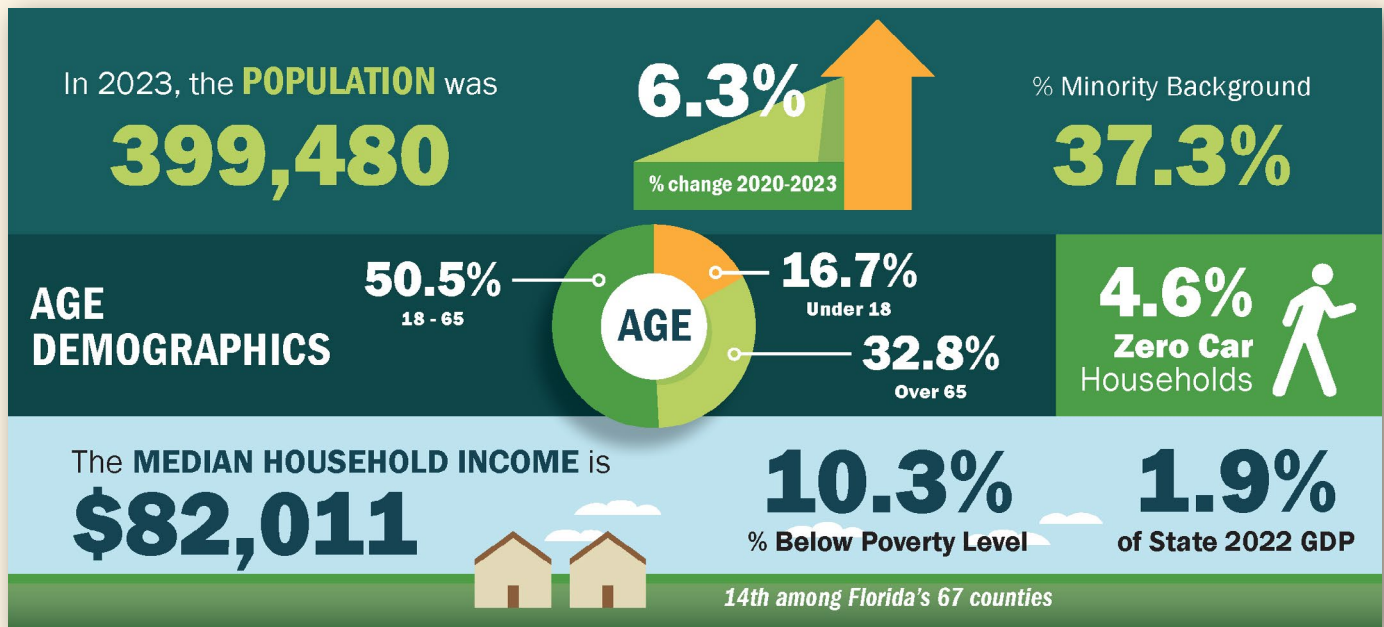
Profiles were developed for the six counties that make up the Collier to Polk region. See [Appendix D](#) for the complete profiles. Highlights for each county are included below.

Collier County

The largest and southernmost county in the study area, Collier County offers a diverse range of landscapes, attractions, and amenities. It is home to the communities of Naples, Golden Gate Estates, Marco Island, Everglades City, Immokalee, and Ave Maria, as well as major outdoor destinations such as Big Cypress National Preserve and Collier-Seminole State Park. Additional local highlights include Baker Park, Gordon River Greenway, and the new Paradise Coast Sports Complex. The recently completed study for the Paradise Coast Trail envisions a 70+ mile multi-use trail network traversing the county and connecting many of these key destinations.



COLLIER COUNTY AT A GLANCE



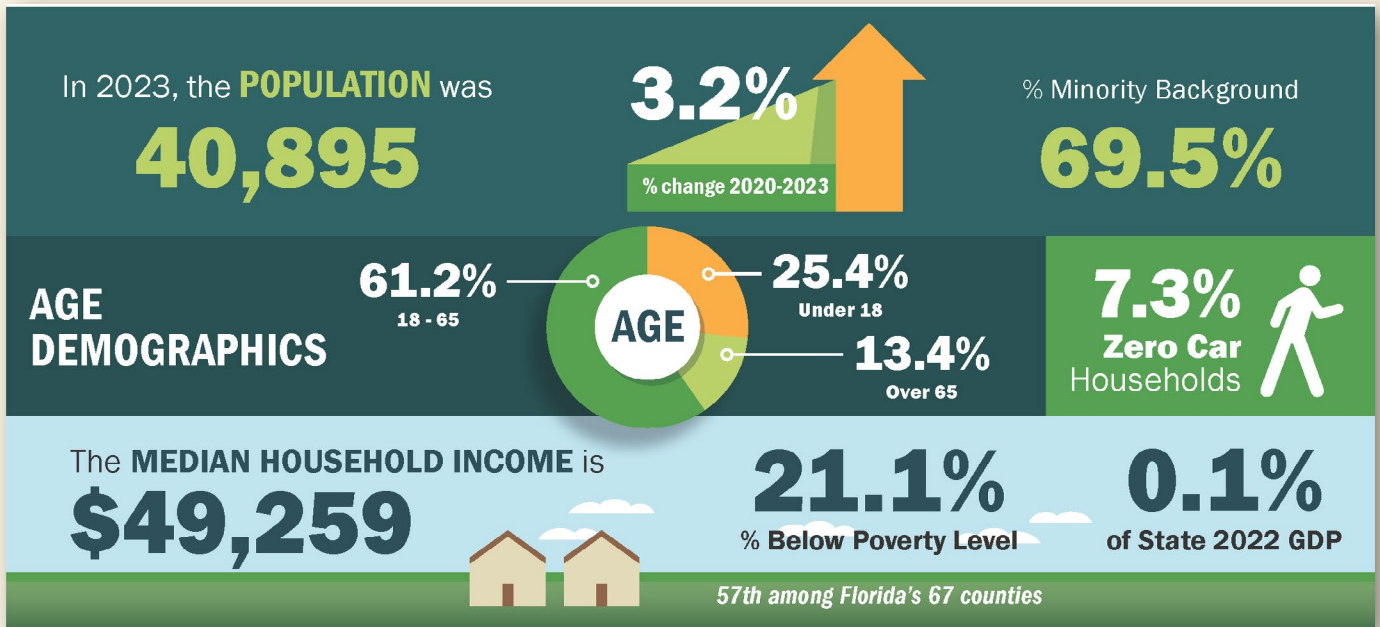
Sources: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research; US Census American Community Survey

Hendry County

Located in Florida's Heartland, rural Hendry County is home to the small towns of LaBelle and Clewiston and extensive agricultural acreage for pasture, and for crops such as sugarcane and citrus. The county is connected to Big Cypress National Preserve along its southern border and Lake Okeechobee in the northeast, and is home to multiple state managed conservation and recreation lands: Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest, Okaloacoochee Slough WMA, and Dinner Island Ranch WMA. The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Big Cypress Reservation, in the southeastern portion of the county, includes visitor sites such as the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.



HENDRY COUNTY AT A GLANCE



Sources: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research; US Census American Community Survey

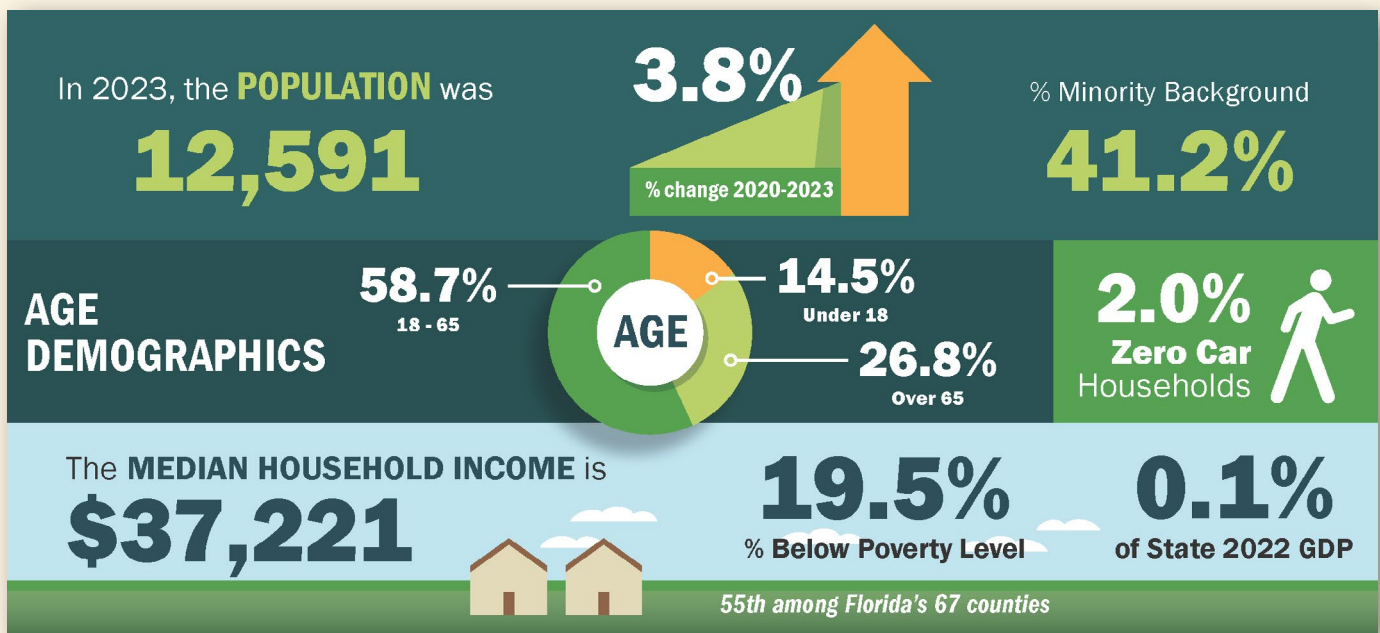
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Glades County

Glades County was named for the Florida Everglades and is located in the Florida Heartland on the western bank of Lake Okeechobee. The county has significant natural resources and recreational activities, including more than 30 miles of Lake Okeechobee shoreline, 60 miles of Caloosahatchee River frontage, and 52 miles of paddling trails on Fisheating Creek. The City of Moore Haven serves as the county seat with dining, lodging, and recreation options near Lake Okeechobee. The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Brighton Reservation includes visitor sites such as the Seminole Arts and Crafts Center and the Florida Seminole Veteran's Building.



GLADES COUNTY AT A GLANCE



Sources: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research; US Census American Community Survey

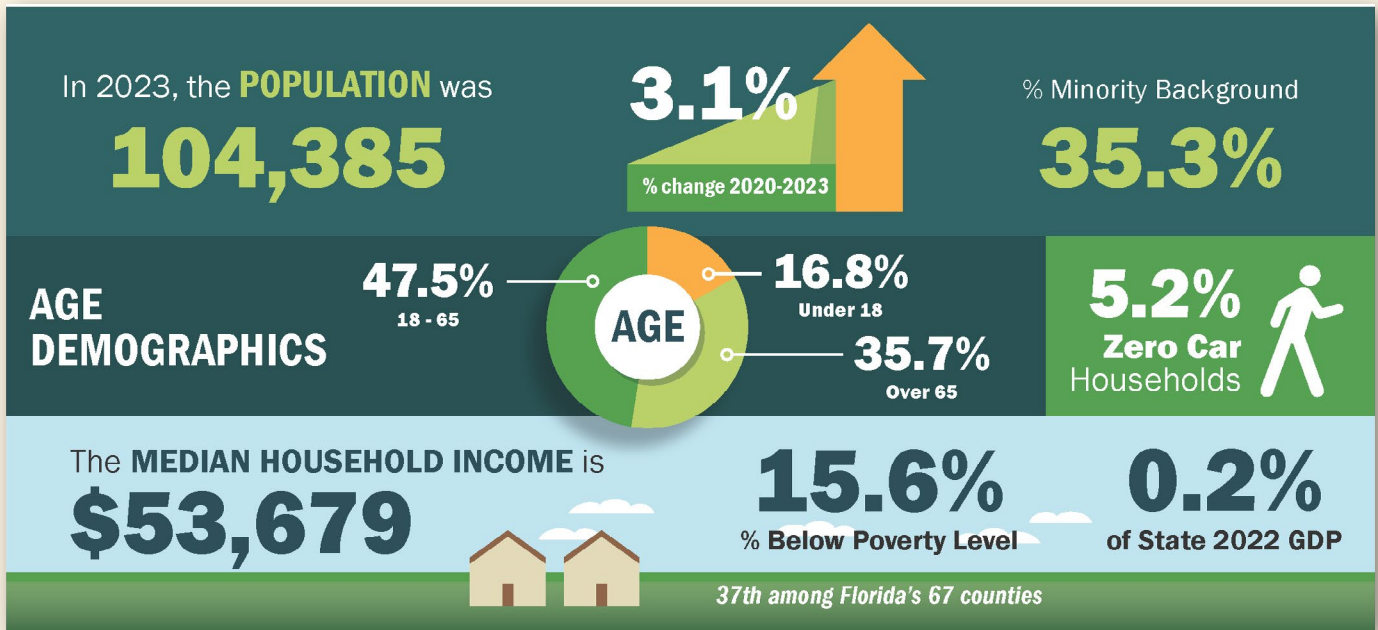
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Highlands County

Highlands County, located in Florida's Heartland, has been referred to as "lake country" because of its more than 100 lakes surrounding the towns of Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid. A combination of natural areas and recreational opportunities make Highlands County a desired location for outdoor activities. Conservation lands include Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, Lake June-in-Winter Scrub State Park, Highlands Hammock State Park, and Hickory Hammock WMA. Local activity offerings include shops, restaurants, paddling, swimming, boating, golfing, hiking, and the Sebring International Raceway.



HIGHLANDS COUNTY AT A GLANCE



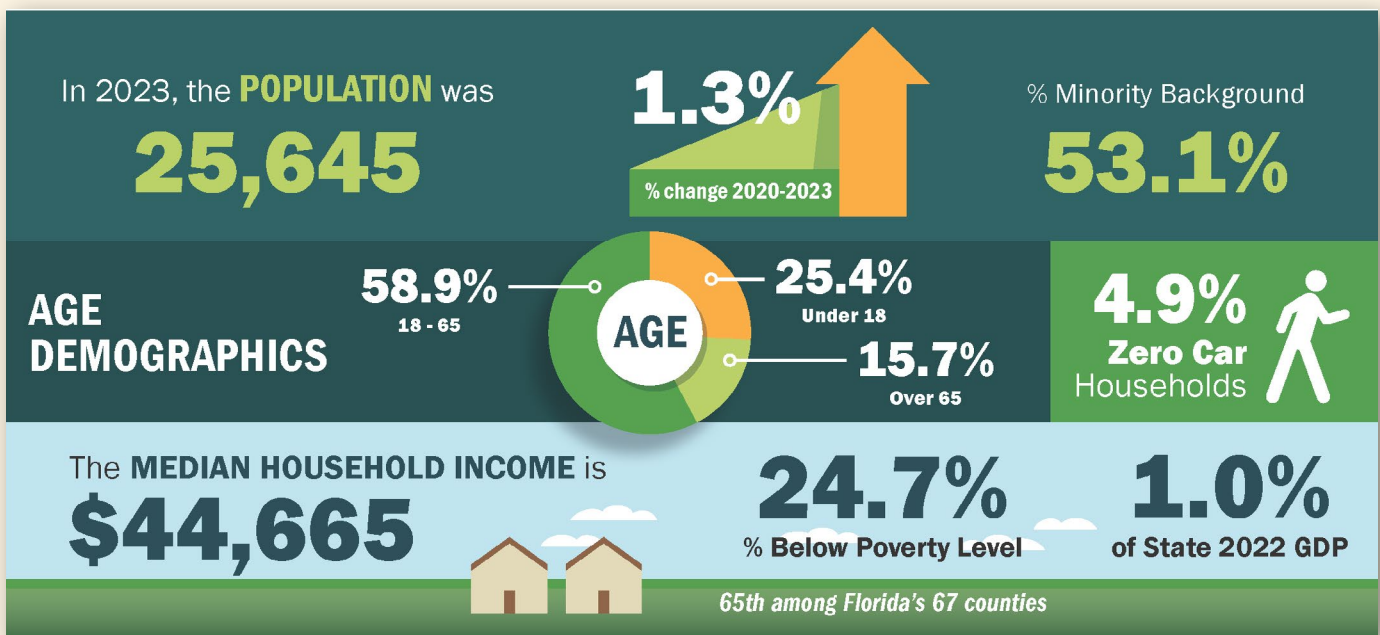
Sources: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research; US Census American Community Survey

Hardee County

Hardee County is located in Florida's Heartland, and like many of the counties in this region, is relatively rural. Hardee County is known for phosphate mining and its primarily agriculture-driven economy, with citrus groves and cattle ranches. The Peace River winds its way through the county, providing residents and visitors opportunities such as paddling, wildlife viewing, and camping along the Peace River State Paddling Trail. Despite Hardee's rural nature, small towns like Wauchula, the county seat and a Main Street community, offer visitors small town amenities such as shops and parks in a setting rich with Florida history.



HARDEE COUNTY AT A GLANCE



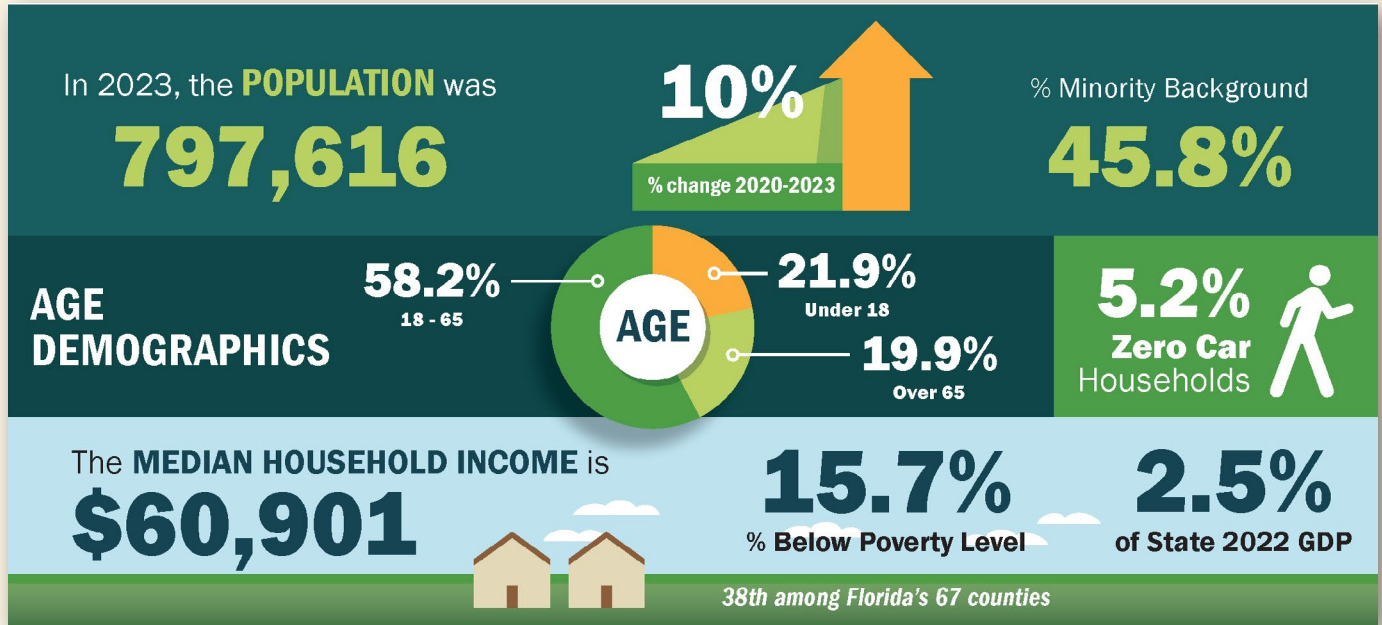
Sources: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research; US Census American Community Survey

Polk County

Located at the northernmost portion of the study area, Polk County is one of the fastest growing areas in Florida and is home to 17 municipalities including Auburndale, Bartow (County Seat), Haines City, Lakeland, Lake Wales, and Winter Haven. The county includes a wide variety of destinations from its downtowns and historic sites to state parks and scenic highways. Polk County currently boasts a robust network of existing trails, including a segment of the General James A. Van Fleet State Trail, with additional plans in place for further expansion and the connection between trail systems throughout the county and the region.



POLK COUNTY AT A GLANCE



Sources: Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research; US Census American Community Survey

COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

The region is anchored by two higher population counties, Collier with nearly 400,000 residents and Polk with nearly 800,000. In contrast, the central part of the Planning Area traverses rural areas within Florida's Heartland where populations are markedly lower such as Glades County and Hardee County with approximately 12,500 and 25,000 residents respectively.

Regardless of a given county's profile, each provides opportunity for partnership with the regional trail. Existing trail segments in Polk and Collier counties, for example, will provide a jump start for further trail development. For all counties, the developing regional trail will build on the unique character and experience that each offers to advance investment that will enhance nature-based tourism. Trail-related economic activity could be particularly important to the rural counties.

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Figure 5. Trail Town Candidates

Within the counties along the planning corridor, there is a series of small-towns and communities that reflect the region's culture and history that could benefit from the presence of a long-distance regional trail:

- » Bartow
- » Fort Meade
- » Bowling Green
- » Wauchula
- » Zolfo Springs
- » Sebring
- » Lake Placid
- » LaBelle
- » Immokalee
- » Marco Island

Each of these communities (Figure 5) will be explored as potential candidates to become state designated Trail Towns. They would join **Everglades City**, at the southernmost end of the planning corridor, which is already a designated Trail Town.



Everglades City Hall



Florida Trail Town Program

The Trail Town program was established by the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails to encourage and create trail hubs. The Florida Greenways and Trails Council approves the state designation of Trail Towns. As defined in the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan, the goal of the Trail Town program is to “inspire cities and communities to fully capitalize on the economic opportunities afforded to them by trails and trail tourism.” A Florida Trail Town is a community located along, or in proximity to, one or more long-distance, nonmotorized recreational trails.



BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL TRAIL TOWN INCLUDE:

- » Incentives to attract trail users off the trail to explore the town
- » Clear and safe connections between the town and trail
- » Wayfinding and readily available information about the town
- » Businesses that offer goods and services to meet the needs of trail users
- » Festivals and events are held that draw people to the trail who may not normally be trail users
- » Safe connections to work, schools, parks, and shopping
- » Relationships with adjacent communities that promote the regional trail as a tourist destination

Senate Bill 106 (2023) [Ch. 2023-20 Laws of Florida] places a heightened emphasis on designation of Trail Towns to “maximize use of nearby trails as economic assets, including specific promotion of trail-based tourism.”



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

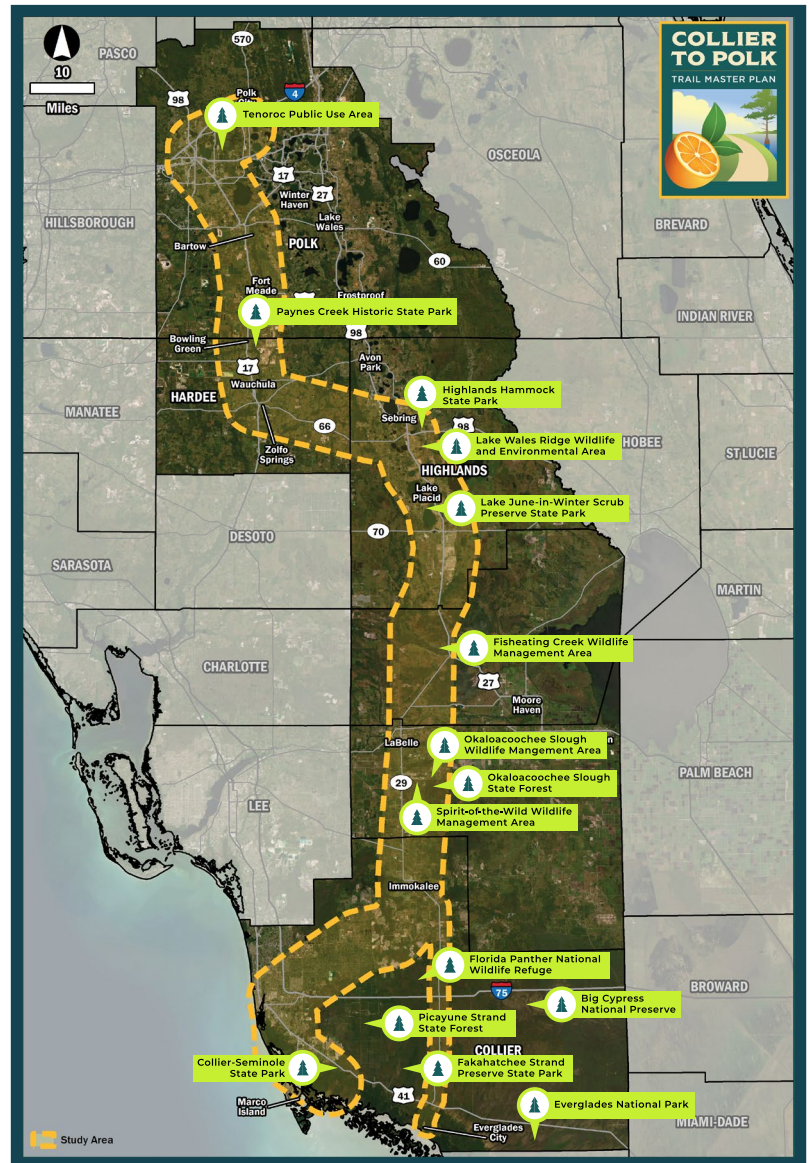
CONNECTING TO NATURAL FLORIDA

The Collier to Polk Regional Trail is being planned to provide trail users connections to the abundant open space and natural lands within the region. In addition to community parks in small-towns and cities, there are many state and federal conservation and recreation lands within the Planning Area (Figure 6):

- » Tenoroc Public Use Area
- » Paynes Creek Historic State Park
- » Highlands Hammock State Park
- » Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area
- » Lake June-in-Winter Scrub Preserve State Park
- » Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area
- » Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest and Wildlife Management Area
- » Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area
- » Picayune Strand State Forest
- » Big Cypress National Preserve
- » Collier-Seminole State Park
- » Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park
- » Everglades National Park

The preliminary routing alternatives were developed with consideration for how to connect trail users with these natural areas.

Figure 6. State and Federal Conservation & Recreation Lands





SUN TRAIL AND THE FLORIDA WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

Senate Bill 106 (2023) [Ch. 2023-20 Laws of Florida] establishes a connection between the Florida Wildlife Corridor and SUN Trail. The Florida Wildlife Corridor, which is aligned with the highest priorities of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN), comprises nearly 18 million acres of contiguous wilderness and working lands crucial to the survival of many of Florida's imperiled animals. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail is being planned with consideration of this new legislation that specifies:



... the provision of paved multiuse trails within or between areas of the Florida wildlife corridor would provide the public the ability to enjoy Florida's natural resources and bring ecotourism and economic opportunities to local trail town communities.

Florida Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network Section 339.81, Florida Statutes



CHAPTER 5

Engagement



5. ENGAGEMENT

Public and stakeholder engagement was critical to development of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan. Engagement included:

- » Coordination meetings with stakeholder agencies and organizations (December 2023 to March 2024)
- » FDOT Project Web Page – www.swflroads.com/project/449504-1 (February 2024 to Present)
- » Comprehensive Project Website – CollierToPolkTrail.com (March 2024 to Present)
- » Environmental Stakeholders Webinar (March 2024)
- » Five in-person Public Open Houses held across the six-county region (May 29 to June 6, 2024)
- » Virtual Open House providing same materials for review and comment as in-person Open Houses (May 29 to June 10, 2024)
- » Participation in the inaugural Collier to Polk Regional Trail Alliance Meeting (June 20, 2024)

Key engagement components are described further in this chapter.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PUBLIC INPUT

Through the Public Open Houses, Virtual Open House, and web platforms, over 150 comments were received. Based upon the public input received, the Collier to Polk Regional Trail concept has overwhelming support. Key items identified as important by multiple commenters include:

- » Trail-user safety and the need to provide facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians
- » Being attentive to the trail experience and factors like aesthetics, shaded areas, and trailside facilities
- » Emphasizing the connection to communities and towns
- » Connecting the trail to natural areas to enhance user experience
- » Defining trail routes that minimize impacts to environmental areas and wildlife
- » Consideration of separated grade crossings where the trail will cross major roadways

There were very limited comments suggesting any specific adjustments to the routing as proposed in the Preliminary Routing Alternatives. While trails along major roadways were expressed as a concern by some, they were supported by others.



In addition, there were multiple questions related to project development such as:

- › How and when will alternatives be selected?
- › What is the order that segments will be developed?
- › How long will it take to complete the entire trail?

The full set of public comments are included in [Appendix E](#).



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Planning Team conducted stakeholder meetings with more than 50 representatives of the following agencies, local governments, and organizations:

- › M/TPOs: Collier MPO, Heartland TPO (Central Florida Regional Planning Council), Polk TPO
- › Counties: Collier, Hendry, Glades, Highlands, Hardee, Polk
- › Cities/Towns: Naples, Immokalee, LaBelle, Sebring, Lake Placid, Zolfo Springs, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Fort Meade, Bartow, Lakeland
- › Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- › Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
- › Florida Forest Service / Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- › South Florida and Southwest Florida Water Management Districts
- › National Park Service
- › US Fish and Wildlife Service
- › Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation
- › Environmental Stakeholder Organizations (webinar)

COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN



Through the tribal consultation process, FDOT also reached out to the Miccosukee Tribe and Seminole Tribe of Florida to inform them of the Master Plan and will continue this coordination through the next phase, PD&E Study.

Each of the stakeholder meetings included a presentation that addressed the three following topics:

- What is the Collier to Polk Regional Trail?
- Why the Collier to Polk Regional Trail?
- What is the Planning Process?

The presentations were followed by facilitated discussion that included the general questions below and additional questions tailored to each agency or organization:

- What are your initial thoughts about the Collier to Polk Regional Trail concept?
- What data and information do you have that would be helpful to this planning process?
- What do you see as key opportunities for this project?
- What challenges do you anticipate for the project?

The summaries for the stakeholder meetings are included in [Appendix E](#).



OPEN HOUSES

Five in-person Public Open Houses were held across the six-county region to provide information about the project. The locations and dates for the Open Houses were:

HARDEE COUNTY

HARDEE COUNTY AGRI-CIVIC CENTER

- » 515 Civic Center Drive,
Wauchula, FL 33873
- » Wednesday, May 29, 2024

HIGHLANDS COUNTY

HIGHLANDS HAMMOCK STATE PARK RECREATION HALL

- » 5931 Hammock Road,
Sebring FL 33872
- » Thursday, May 30, 2024

POLK COUNTY

FDOT DISTRICT ONE CONFERENCE CENTER

- » 801 N Broadway Ave, Bartow, FL 33830
- » Tuesday, June 4, 2024

HENDRY COUNTY/ GLADES COUNTY

LABELLE CIVIC CENTER

- » 481 W Hickpochee Ave,
LaBelle, FL 33935
- » Wednesday, June 5, 2024

COLLIER COUNTY

UF/IFAS COLLIER EXTENSION OFFICE

- » 14700 Immokalee Road,
Naples FL 34120
- » Thursday, June 6, 2024

The Open House Welcome Flyer ([Figure 7](#)) illustrates how the display boards with information and maps were organized for public review. There were 105 attendees across all in-person Open Houses.



Figure 7. Open House Welcome Flyer

THE COLLIER TO POLK REGIONAL TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Financial Project Identification (FPID) No. 449504-1



WELCOME TO THE COLLIER TO POLK REGIONAL TRAIL MASTER PLAN OPEN HOUSE!

The Florida Department of Transportation is hosting this Open House to obtain public input for development of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan. The Open House is organized as follows:

WELCOME – Please sign-in here and pick up a comment form.

OVERVIEW – Learn about the Collier to Polk Regional Trail.

- **What is the Collier to Polk Regional Trail?**
Background on the Collier to Polk Regional Trail and SUN Trail program.
- **Why a Regional Trail?**
Overview of regional trail benefits.
- **The Collier to Polk Regional Trail Experience**
Views of existing trail segments and concepts.
- **The Collier to Polk Regional Trail Planning Area**
Highlights of communities and natural areas the regional trail could connect.

THE MASTER PLAN – Learn about the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan.

- **The Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan**
The approach and schedule for the Master Plan and how it fits into the Transportation Development process.
- **Planning the Collier to Polk Regional Trail**
Key points and questions to be considered when determining and evaluating potential trail alternatives.

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES – Review proposed alternatives and defined planning corridors within each county of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail planning area.

- **Collier County**
- **Hendry County**
- **Glades County**
- **Highlands County**
- **Hardee County**
- **Polk County**

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Submit your comment form at the comment station. You can also submit comments through the Virtual Open House listed below or by mail or email addressed to:

Katherine Chinault
Planning Project Manager
801 N. Broadway Ave
Bartow, FL 33830
Katherine.Chinault@dot.state.fl.us
863-519-2511

Virtual Open House: A Virtual Open House is available online from May 29th until June 10th. It includes the same materials from the in-person Open Houses and provides another way to submit your comments. For a direct link to the Virtual Open House, please visit colliertopolktrail.com/get-involved/.

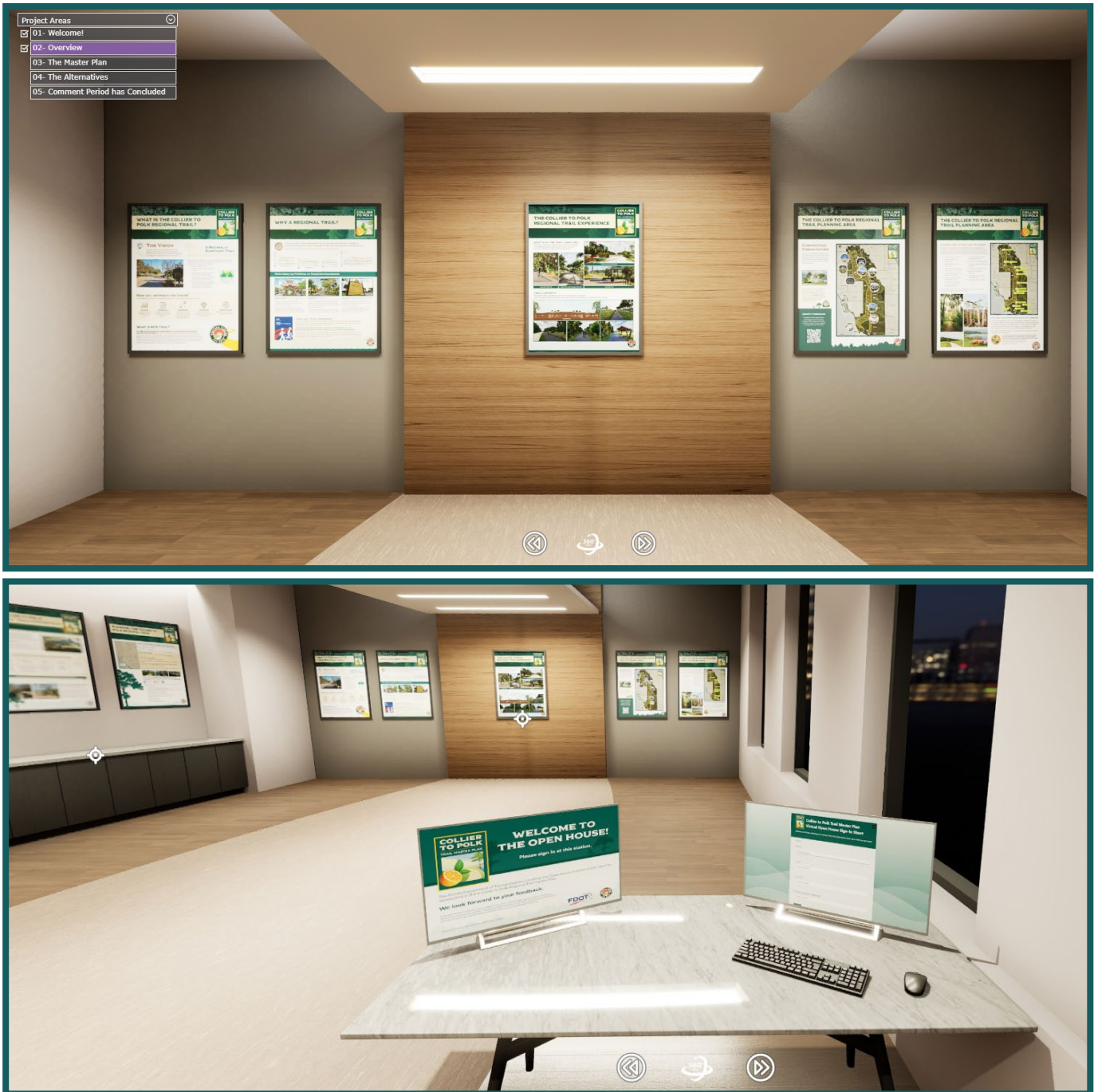
Stay Connected: To follow the progress of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan visit colliertopolktrail.com. The final Master Plan will be posted during Summer 2024.



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

In addition to the in-person Open Houses, a **Virtual Open House** was open for comments from May 29 to June 10, 2024. This platform provided the ability for the public to use a computer or mobile device to review the exact same materials from the in-person Open Houses and provide comments (Figure 8). This could be done any time of day. Over 130 people visited the Virtual Open House portal during the comment period.

Figure 8. Virtual Open House Platform





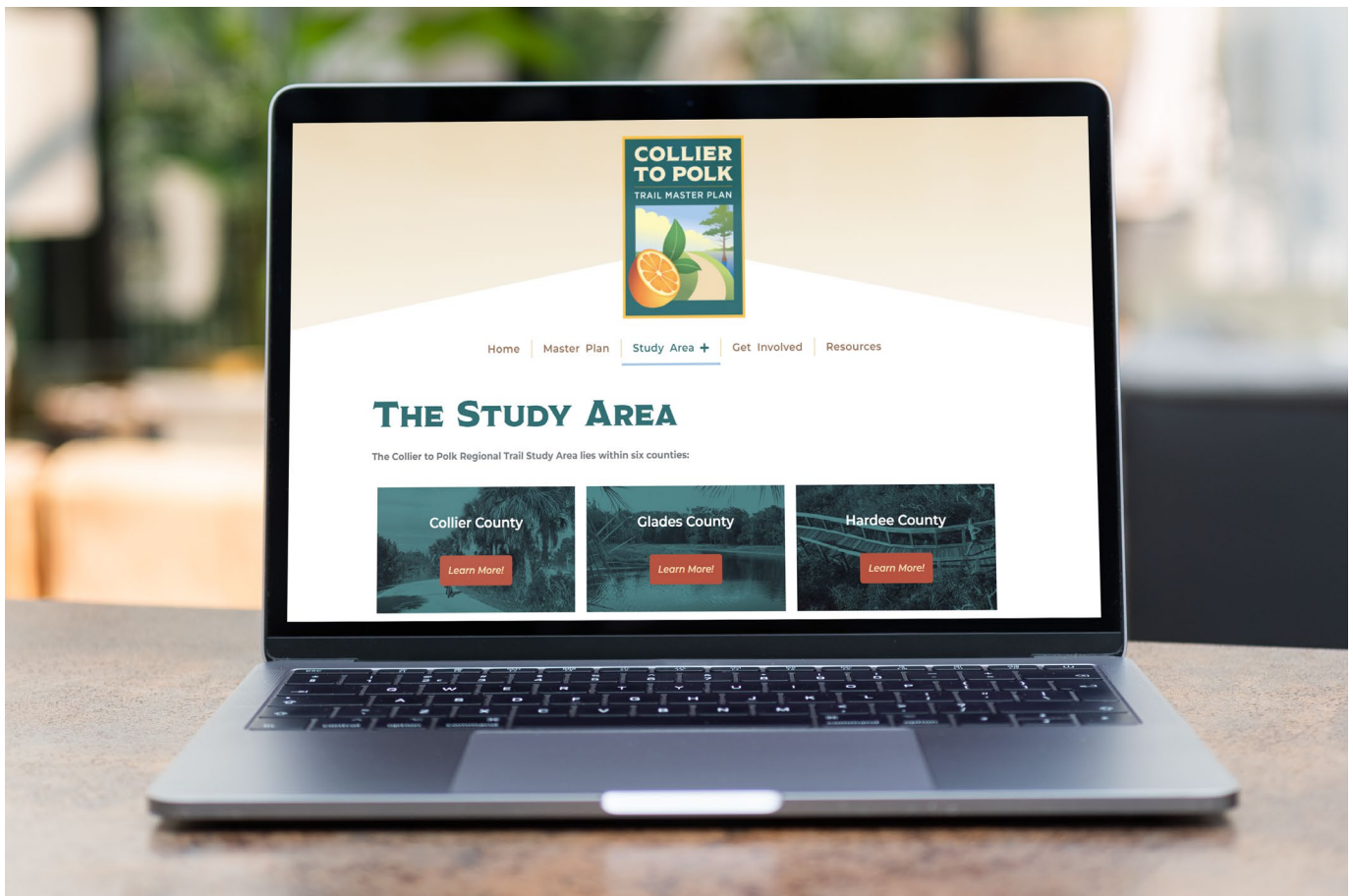
WEBSITES

Information about the Collier to Polk Regional Trail and Master Plan was made available online during the Master Plan development process through a SW Florida Roads (FDOT District One) Project Web Page (www.swflroads.com/project/449504-1) and a comprehensive Project Website (CollierToPolkTrail.com) (Figure 9).

The Project Website consisted of information regarding:

- » The proposed Collier to Polk Regional Trail including information about the benefits of regional trails
- » The Master Plan development process including a GIS-based viewer to review trail and other data
- » The Study Area including county profiles
- » Information about how to Get Involved through the Open Houses or to provide comments and inquiries through the website

Figure 9. Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan Website



CHAPTER 6

Planning the Trail





6. PLANNING THE TRAIL

This chapter provides an overview of the six county segments of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail including the Preliminary Routing Alternatives that were developed as part of the Master Plan process.

STATE AND REGIONAL TRAIL PLANNING AND CONNECTIONS

The Collier to Polk Regional Trail sits within the broader statewide system of Regionally Significant Trails as defined by FDEP ([Figure 10](#)). For example, by way of its connection in Polk County to the Auburndale-TECO Trail, the Collier to Polk Regional Trail will ultimately connect to the **Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail**, which crosses the state from St. Petersburg (Pinellas County) to Titusville (Brevard County). Since the Collier to Polk Regional Trail includes the planned Paradise Coast Trail in Collier County, it connects into the developing **Florida Gulf Coast Trail** that will provide linkage from Collier to Pinellas County. Potential “spur” connections to major nearby trail systems, such as the **Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail** which is part of the congressionally designated **Florida National Scenic Trail**, will also be considered as part of the long-term planning effort for this project.

The Collier to Polk Regional Trail is being planned and developed as a component of the SUN Trail Network. The SUN Trail Program, administered by FDOT, provides funding for the development of projects within the SUN Trail Network. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Planning Area includes a continuous SUN Trail Network corridor ([Figure 4](#)). The Preliminary Routing Alternatives were all developed to be consistent with the intent of the SUN Trail Network corridor.

SUN TRAIL - A WILLING SELLER PROGRAM

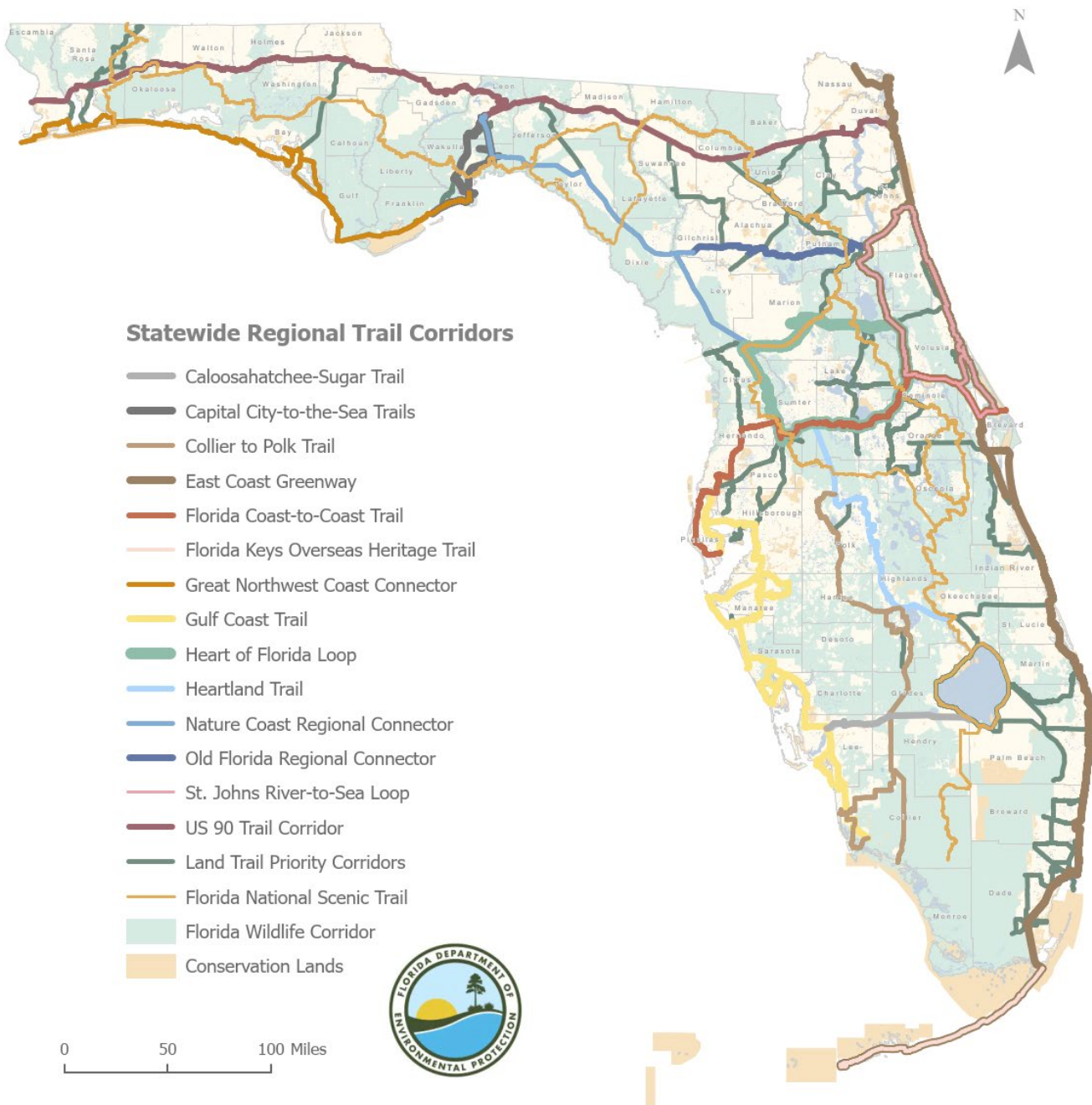
The best route for a trail is influenced by many factors. One of them is available right-of-way, whether it is publicly held today or can be acquired in the future. As noted in the [SUN Trail Implementation Handbook](#), it has been a practice of FDOT to not utilize eminent domain to acquire land for trail projects. If right-of-way is necessary for a proposed route and there are no willing sellers, then alternative routes need to be considered. In some cases, the most feasible alternative is to locate the trail within road right-of-way since there is already public ownership of a linear corridor.



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 10. Florida Greenways and Trails – Statewide Regional Trail Corridors

Map Source: Florida Department of Environmental Protection



FDOT District One's Active Transportation Plan was developed to guide investments in bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the State Highway System (SHS). While the proposed Collier to Polk regional trail system will be planned to provide a diverse user experience which includes routing alternatives away from roadways, it is expected that multiple segments may be co-located in SHS corridors such as US 17, US 27 and SR 29. This may particularly be the case as the trail approaches and traverses small towns. With this understanding, there are some key highlights from the Active Transportation Plan that are useful considerations for this planning effort:

- » Based upon the responses to the Walking and Biking Survey, **District One residents selected trails (96%) and bicycle facilities physically separated from vehicle traffic (78%) as the facilities where they are most comfortable riding a bicycle.** This confirms the value of creating a multi-use trail system to provide facilities where residents will feel safe bicycling.
- » **Only 6.9% of District One SHS facilities include a trail which is the facility that provides the lowest Level of Traffic Stress (LTS), a measure of stress experienced by people while walking or biking.** Therefore, any segment where the Collier to Polk Regional Trail is developed as a separated trail along an SHS corridor will provide the benefit of addressing this gap.
- » The plan defined High Multimodal Demand Areas as those areas with the highest (top third) active transportation demand score. **Multiple communities in the study area were identified as having High Multimodal Demand Areas including Naples, Immokalee, LaBelle, Sebring, Wauchula, Bartow, and Lakeland.** This affirms the value of considering routes for the trail that traverse these communities.





DEVELOPING THE PRELIMINARY ROUTING ALTERNATIVES

The Preliminary Routing Alternatives included in this Master Plan are the result of the factors described above considered in coordination with the following:

- » Advancing current trail plans and building on existing and programmed trails
- » Maximizing connections through communities and to natural areas and historic and cultural sites
- » Reflecting stakeholder and public input

Determining a potential trail route requires consideration of several key questions such as:

- Is there available right-of-way?
- What will the experience be for the trail user?
- How can potential routes minimize impact to environmental features, natural resources, and wildlife while still providing connections to conservation lands?
- Is a paved multi-use trail compatible with the area where it is being proposed?
- What is the estimated cost of the potential route?

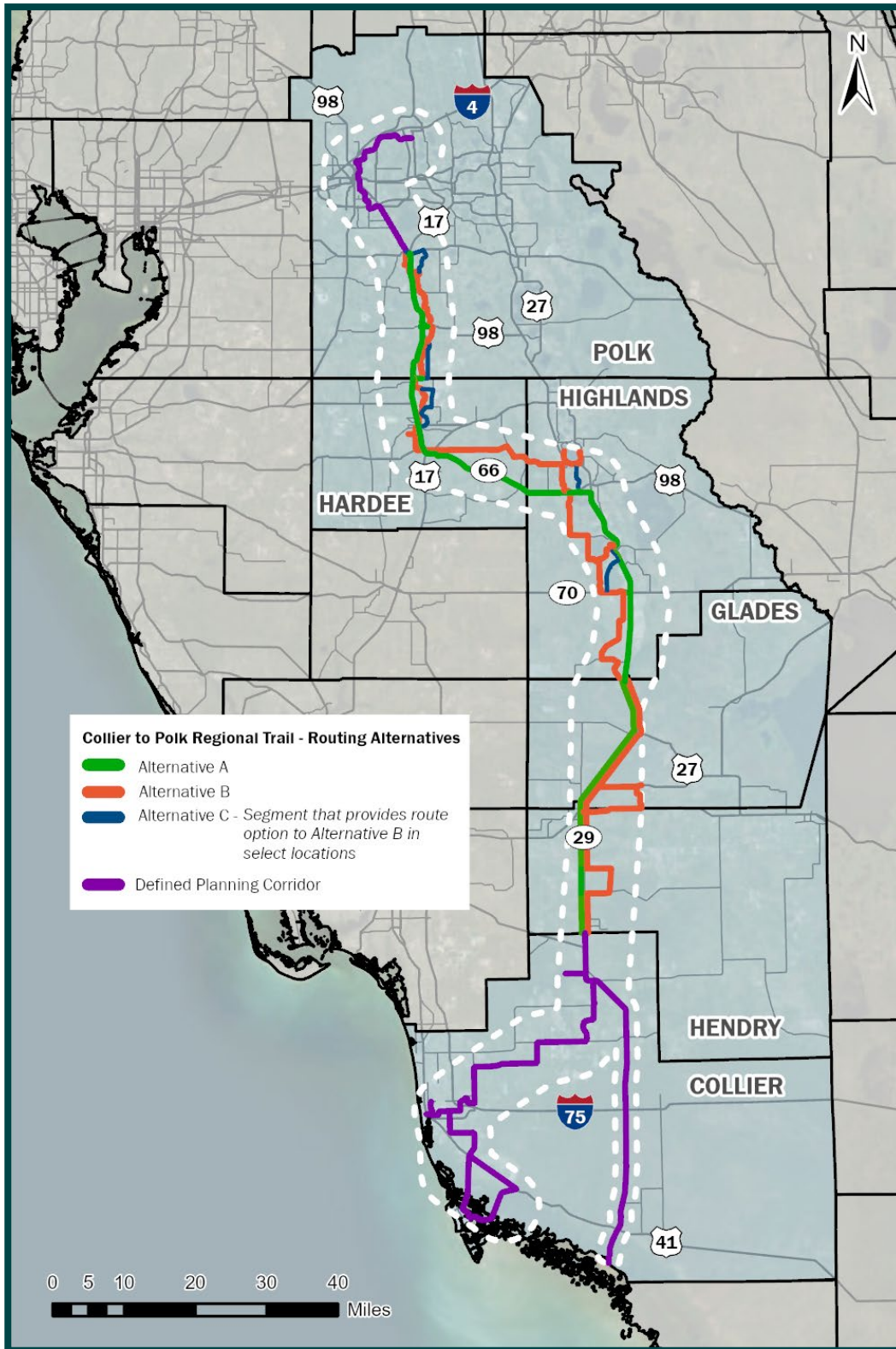
Preliminary Routing Alternatives are summarized in this chapter for each of the six counties. The summaries provide a general description and map of the respective alternatives for each county accompanied by a list of key destinations for routing consideration and related plans/studies.

[Figure 11](#) provides an overview map of the Preliminary Routing Alternatives.



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 11. Overview Map of Preliminary Routing Alternatives



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Routing meetings were held with land management agencies, M/TPOs, and local governments to receive input regarding initial options. These were in addition to the initial comprehensive round of stakeholder meetings described in [Chapter 4](#). The routing meetings were helpful forums to receive stakeholder input for development of the Preliminary Routing Alternatives that were presented to the public.

The Preliminary Routing Alternatives were provided for public review via the in-person Open Houses and Virtual Open House. As noted in the summary of public input in the previous chapter, there were very limited comments provided for suggested changes to the preliminary alternatives. Refinements were only made to the Highlands County Alternative B based upon this input.





As a prelude to the summaries of alternatives by county, it is useful to highlight some key points:

HIGH-LEVEL ROUTING OPTIONS

This Master Plan is intended to provide a high-level view of potential options for the trail. The Master Plan's Preliminary Routing Alternatives are considered planning corridors and, although the conceptual centerline for each alternative is described below, this does not imply that these are fixed or final routes. It is expected that trail routing feasibility, including the possibility for additional alternatives, will be evaluated in more detail as project development for each segment progresses after the Master Plan.

A BLEND OF ALTERNATIVES

Much of Alternative A across the Collier to Polk Regional Trail follows major roadways such as US 17 and SR 29. On the other hand, Alternative B, and C where defined, are generally away from major roadways and include local roadway segments or follow along natural areas like the Peace River. A future final route for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail may end up being a blend of these alternatives that combines both types of routing.

TRAILHEADS AND TRAIL USER FACILITIES

Parks and recreation areas are listed because of their potential role to serve as hub locations for the trail and to provide wayside areas, parking, and amenities for trail users. Leveraging existing locations can be a cost-effective approach to providing these types of facilities. SUN Trail funding is focused on development of the trail and does not include funding for amenities such as trailheads. [Chapter 7](#) includes a recommendation that addresses future coordination with local agencies regarding trailhead facilities.

DEFINED PLANNING CORRIDOR

Due to the completion of recent trail studies or because of advanced planning and trail development already happening, Collier County and part of Polk County include defined Planning Corridors in lieu of alternatives. This is explained further in the respective county summaries.

In addition to the information provided by county in this chapter:

- » [Appendix F](#) includes a high-level environmental scan for the alternatives
- » [Appendix G](#) includes a matrix of additional factors for consideration by alternative

These resources were prepared to support future evaluation of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail as it proceeds forward through project development and to inform development of the initial Work Plan in [Chapter 7](#).

For each of the alternatives below, a Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost is provided. [Appendix H](#) provides the full approach and methodology for developing these estimates.



COLLIER COUNTY

Key Destinations for Routing Consideration

▶ TRAIL TOWN

- » Everglades City

▶ TRAIL TOWN CANDIDATES

- » Immokalee
- » Marco Island

▶ STATE AND FEDERAL MANAGED LANDS

- » Picayune Strand State Forest
- » Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park
- » Collier-Seminole State Park
- » Big Cypress National Preserve
- » Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
- » Everglades National Park

▶ OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

- » Gordon River Greenway
- » Baker Park
- » Paradise Coast Sports Complex

Related Plans/Studies

- » Collier MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- » Paradise Coast Trail Feasibility Study and Pathway Report ([Appendix J](#))
- » Marco Island Loop Trail Feasibility Study and Conceptual Design ([Appendix K](#))



Defined Planning Corridor: In Collier County, Collier to Polk Regional Trail planning is aided by recently completed studies for the Paradise Coast Trail and Marco Island Loop Trail. The Collier MPO is also currently updating its Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan (to be completed in 2025) and is incorporating the primary corridors from the Paradise Coast and Marco Island Loop studies directly into the plan's trail network. The Bicycle & Pedestrian plan will also include the SR 29 corridor where the trail is intended to use FDOT right-of-way due to the environmentally sensitive lands the roadway traverses.

Because of the focused nature of these three efforts, the proposed routing for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail in Collier County is a Defined Planning Corridor collectively capturing the Paradise Coast Trail (Connections 2-5 from the Study), Marco Island Loop, and SR 29. Collier County and the Collier MPO support the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan focusing on the Defined Planning Corridor as described above. The consensus from public comment was consistent with this approach. This is one of two locations within the Master Plan that does not include additional Preliminary Routing Alternatives. Nonetheless, the corridor within Collier County will be evaluated in more detail as segments proceed into the PD&E Study phase. Potential adjustments, where applicable, may be proposed at that time.

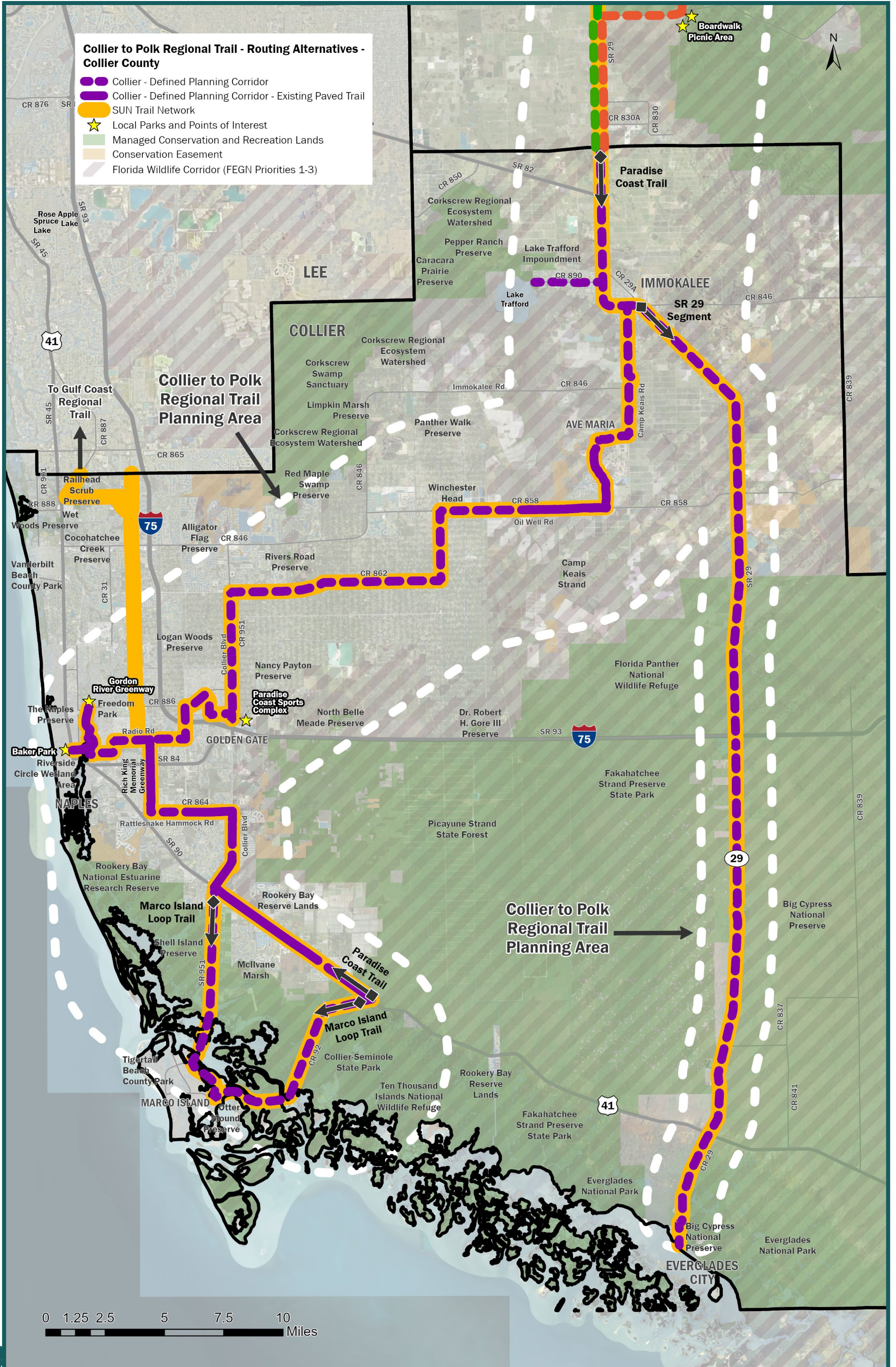
Approximate length: 136.3 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$202.2 million to 236.9 million

(note that these estimates exclude any segments that are existing as trail or shared use path)

COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 12. Collier County – Defined Planning Boundary





HENDRY COUNTY

In Hendry County, there are two preliminary routing alternatives proposed. See map in [Figure 13](#).

Key Destinations for Routing Consideration

▶ TRAIL TOWN CANDIDATE

- » LaBelle

▶ STATE AND FEDERAL MANAGED LANDS

- » Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area (WMA)
- » Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest
- » Okaloacoochee Slough WMA

▶ KEY POINTS OF INTEREST

- » LaBelle Nature Park
- » LaBelle Heritage Museum
- » Barron Park
- » Veterans Memorial Park

Related Plans/Studies

- » Hendry County Comprehensive Pathway Plan
- » Heartland Regional TPO – Heartland Regional Opportunity Trails

Alternative A: Follows SR 29 within Hendry County with the intent of including a trail separated from vehicles travel lanes but within road right-of-way. This route passes through LaBelle providing potential connection to LaBelle Nature Park, LaBelle Heritage Museum, Barron Park, and Veterans Memorial Park. A key issue in the LaBelle area will be identifying where the trail will cross the Caloosahatchee River. Multiple SR 29 widening projects were going through project development at the time the Master Plan was being completed. Some

of those were at a stage where the typical section included a shared use path. As project development moves forward for the trail, this will be an important consideration as the potential solution.

Approximate length: 18.5 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$31.0 million to \$36.7 million

Alternative B: Follows SR 29 as described above except where it follows a segment of CR 832 (Keri Road) east, then north along an alignment on the edge of state forest land, and returning west to SR 29 along Sears Road. The intent of this alternative route is to provide more direct access to entry points for Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Okaloacoochee Slough WMA, and Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest. Alternative B also includes a spur along SR 80 in this area to connect to Ortona Lock South Campground in Glades County.

It is important to note that, during stakeholder engagement meetings, the state land management agencies expressed concerns about the consistency of a paved multi-use trail with their respective resource management plans. Therefore, the north-south segment along State Forest and WMA land will require further evaluation and coordination to determine feasibility.

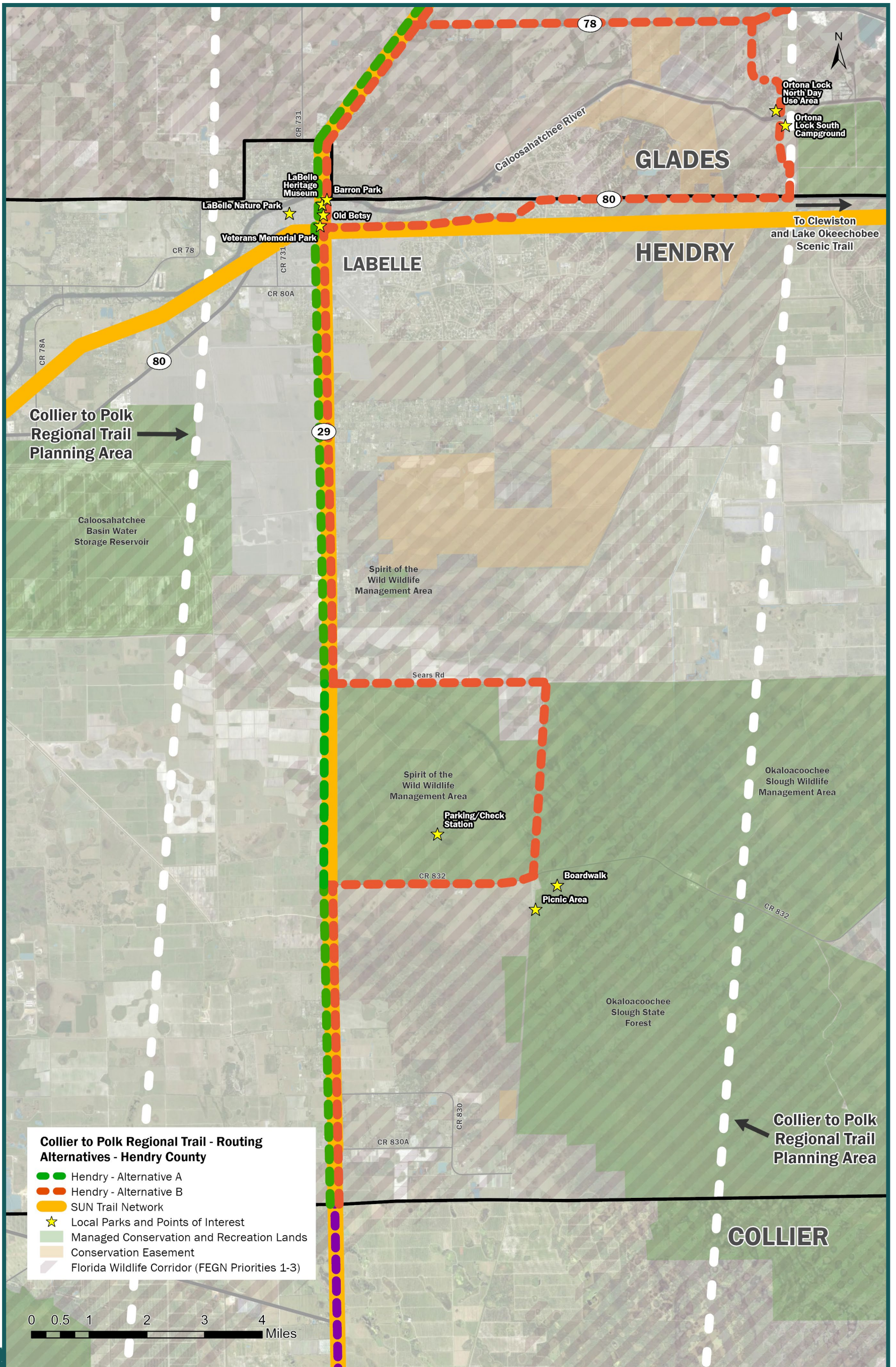
Approximate length: 34 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$56.3 million to \$66.8 million



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 13. Hendry County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives



GLADES COUNTY

In Glades County, there are two preliminary routing alternatives proposed. See map in [Figure 14](#).

Key Destinations for Routing Consideration

- ▶ **STATE AND FEDERAL MANAGED LANDS**
 - » Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area
- ▶ **KEY POINTS OF INTEREST**
 - » Fisheating Creek Outpost
 - » Knobby Knee Trail
 - » Paradise Lake Trail
 - » Ortona Lock North Day Use Area
 - » Ortona Lock South Campground

Related Plans/Studies

- » Heartland Regional TPO – Heartland Regional Opportunity Trails



Alternative A: Follows SR 29 proceeding north until it terminates at the intersection with US 27 just south of Palmdale and access to the Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area which includes the Fisheating Creek Outpost, Knobby Knee Trail, and Paradise Lake Trail. It then follows US 27 for the remainder of the route to Highlands County. The intent of this alternative is to locate a trail separated from vehicles travel lanes but within road right-of-way. Multiple SR 29 widening projects were going through project development at the time the Master Plan was being completed. Some of those were at a stage where the typical section included a shared use path. As project development moves forward for the trail, this will be an important consideration as the potential solution.

Approximate length: 20.7 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$33.9 million to \$40.3 million

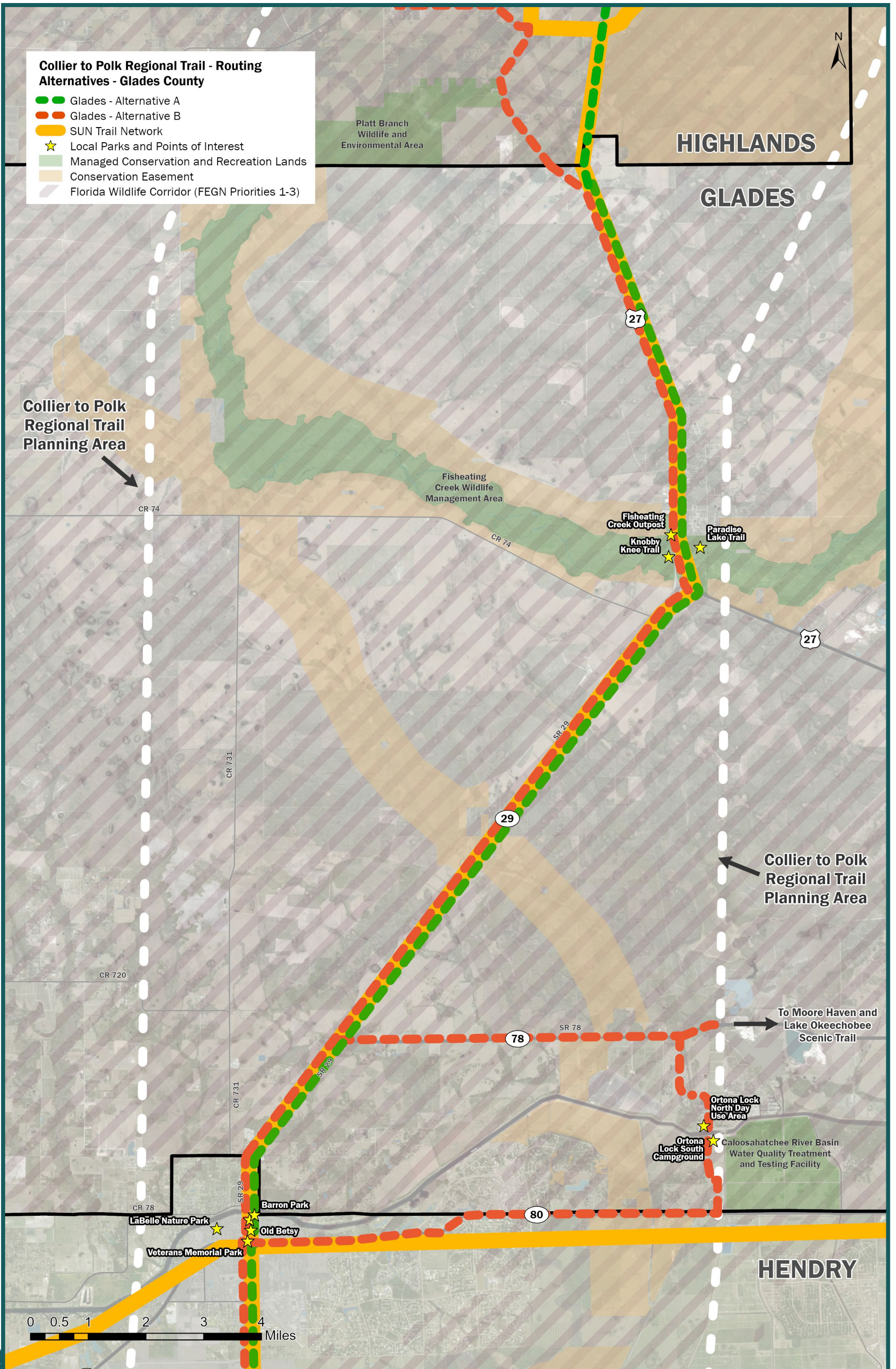
Alternative B: Follows the same route as Alternative A but also includes a spur along SR 78 to Ortona Road and ultimately terminates at the Ortona Lock North Day Use Area. Alternative B in Glades County also includes the segment that extends north from SR 80 in Hendry County (Alternative B) along Dalton Lane to terminate at the Ortona Lock South Campground.

Approximate length: 30.7 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$50.4 million to \$59.9 million

COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 14. Glades County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives





HIGHLANDS COUNTY

In Highlands County, there are three preliminary routing alternatives proposed. See map in [Figure 15](#).

Key Destinations for Routing Consideration

▶ TRAIL TOWN CANDIDATES

- » Lake Placid
- » Sebring

▶ STATE AND FEDERAL MANAGED LANDS

- » Platt Branch Wildlife and Environmental Area
- » Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area
- » Lake June-in-Winter Preserve State Park
- » Highlands Hammock State Park

▶ KEY POINTS OF INTEREST

- » Archbold Biological Station
- » Devane Park
- » Stuart Park
- » Lake June Park
- » Lake Placid Historical Society
- » Max Long Recreational Complex
- » Veterans Beach Park
- » Circle Park
- » City of Sebring Pier and Beach

Related Plans/Studies

- » Highlands County Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- » Heartland Regional TPO – Heartland Regional Opportunity Trails

Alternative A: Follows US 27 until it reaches Main Avenue and then follows that road continuing north through Lake Placid. A short spur extends to W. Interlake Boulevard and terminates at Devane Park. The route continues north on Main Avenue until it turns east on Heartland Boulevard and rejoins US 27. At Skipper Road, the route goes west until it connects with SR 66 where it continues west into Hardee County.

Approximate length: 36.9 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$60.7 million to \$72.0 million

Alternative B: Follows CR 17/Detjen's Dairy Road past the Platt Branch Wildlife and Environmental Area to CR 731. From there, it proceeds along Old SR 8/CR 17 past the entrance of Archbold Biological Station and then north to SR 70. There the alternative continues west on SR 70 until it continues north on Placid Lakes Boulevard, crossing through the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area, then proceeds to Washington Boulevard NW until it turns north and continues along the western edge of Lake June-in-Winter Scrub Preserve State Park. From the entrance of the state park, it continues north on Daffodil Street, turns west on Miller Avenue and then north on Henscratch Road. It briefly jogs west on Lake Josephine Drive and then continues north on S. Orange Blossom Boulevard to SR 66 where it goes briefly west to Burkett Avenue. It continues west on the route for Viburnum Drive and then Wisteria Place to Violet Terrace, Lakeside Drive West, Rise Terrace, White Cedar Road, Queen Avenue, Hazel Road, Woodbury Avenue, and Key Lake Drive which becomes Lakewood Road. The route continues north passing the





entrance to Max Long Recreational Complex and then connecting to Hammock Road where it proceeds west through Highlands Hammock State Park and continuing into Hardee County.

Two additional spurs are part of this alternative.

One spur continues north on Placid Lakes Boulevard to Catfish Creek Road where it proceeds east and then north to W Interlake Boulevard with one segment terminating at Devane Park and another segment continuing north on N Tangerine Avenue to Lake June Park and then east on Heartland Boulevard.

Where Lakewood Road connects to Hammock Road, a second spur proceeds east to US 27 continuing in both directions, terminating at Veterans Beach Park on the west side of Lake Jackson. To the east, the spur follows US 27 to SR 17 and terminates at Circle Park, east of Lake Jackson.

It is important to note that, during stakeholder engagement meetings, the state land management agencies expressed concerns about the consistency of a paved multi-use trail with their respective resource management plans. Therefore, the alignment along the unpaved portion of Hammock Road through Highlands Hammock State Park will require further evaluation and coordination with the Florida Park Service to determine feasibility. Archbold Biological Station also provided comments expressing potential concerns regarding any alignment that would impact its managed area. Follow-up coordination with the biological station will be necessary for further evaluation.

Alternative B approximate length: 59.6 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$96.8 million to \$115.1 million

Alternative C: Follows the same route as Alternative B except in two locations.

The first segment is along SR 70. In lieu of continuing west to Placid Lakes Boulevard, the alternative turns north on Placid View Drive and continues past the trailhead and parking area for the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area. The segment continues along Placid View Drive until it reaches the railroad right-of-way just before US 27. The segment follows the rail corridor north to Devane Park where it reconnects with the Alternative B.

Use of the rail corridor is consistent with a proposed trail route identified in the County's trail plan. Coordination with South Central Florida Express (SCFX) will need to take place to determine whether co-location of the trail with the active rail to become "rail with trail" is feasible.

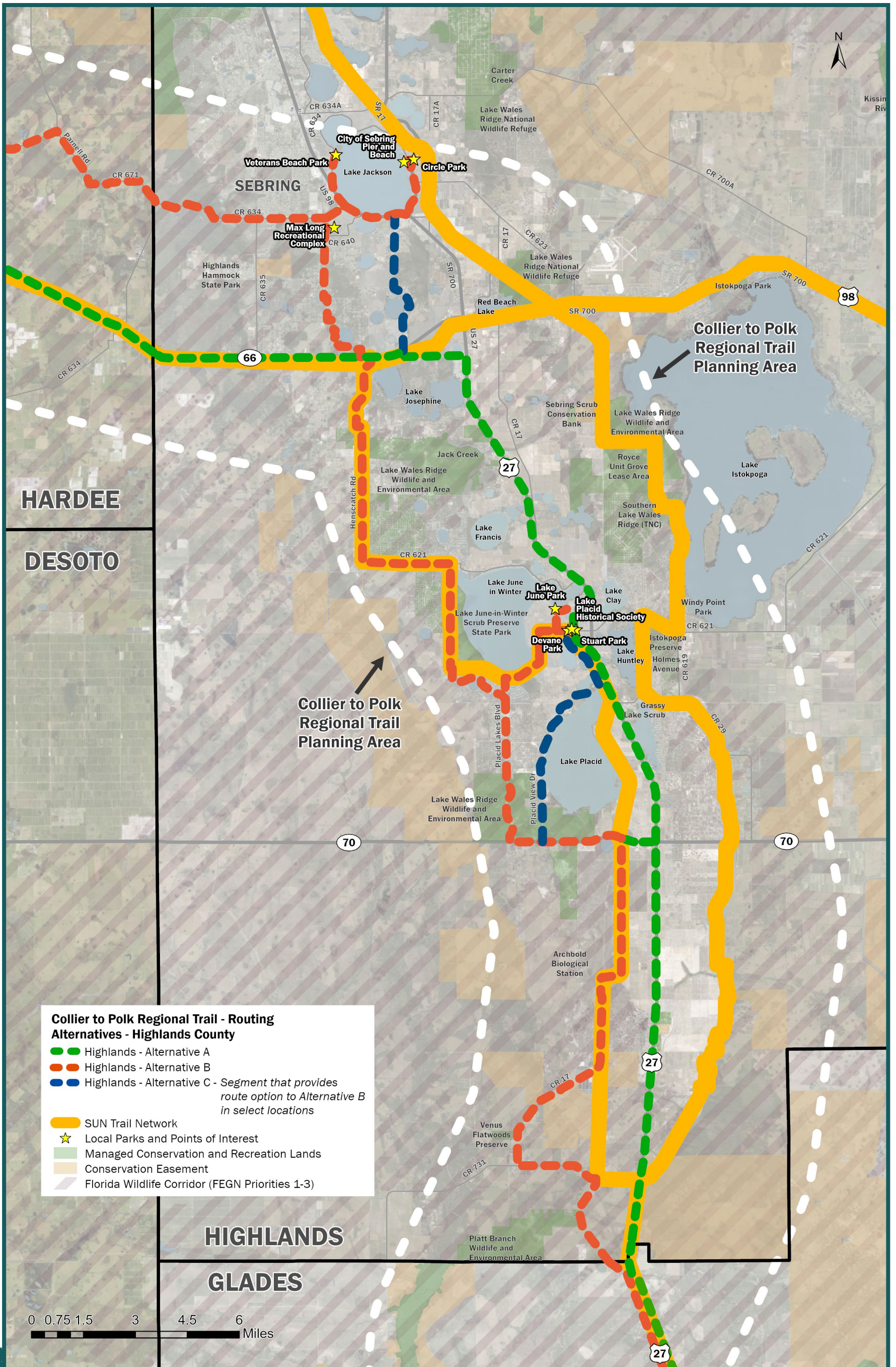
For the second segment, where South Orange Blossom Boulevard intersects with SR 66, the route proceeds east to Sparta Road and follows it to US 27 where it reconnects with Alternative B.

Alternative C approximate length: 60.5 miles
Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$98.3 million to \$117.0 million



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 15. Highlands County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives



HARDEE COUNTY

In Hardee County, there are three preliminary routing alternatives proposed. See map in [Figure 16](#).

Key Destinations for Routing Consideration

▶ TRAIL TOWN CANDIDATES

- » Zolfo Springs
- » Wauchula
- » Bowling Green

▶ STATE AND FEDERAL MANAGED LANDS

- » Paynes Creek Historic State Park

▶ KEY POINTS OF INTEREST

- » Pioneer Park
- » Hardee County Wildlife Refuge
- » Hardee County Fairgrounds
- » Main Street Heritage Park
- » Wauchula Veterans Memorial
- » Peace River Park
- » Crews Park

Related Plans/Studies

- » Hardee County Parks, Recreation & Trails Master Plan
- » City of Wauchula Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Plan
- » Heartland Regional TPO – Heartland Regional Opportunity Trails

Alternative A: Follows SR 66 until it connects with US 17 where it proceeds north and passes through Zolfo Springs and past the entrance of Pioneer Park. The route continues north following the northbound lanes where US 17 divides and continues to SR 636/Main Street in Wauchula where the alternative heads west

and then turns north to follow the southbound lanes for US 17 past the Wauchula Veterans Memorial. The route turns east on E Oak Street and then returns to the northbound US 17 lanes to proceed north through Bowling Green and on to Polk County.

Approximate length: 26.7 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$49.2 million to \$58.4 million

Alternative B: Follows North Hammock Road to Parnell Road where the route heads north to Steve Roberts Special and continues west to SR 64. The route follows SR 64 past US 17 and the entrances to Pioneer Park and Hardee County Wildlife Refuge over the Peace River and to S. Florida Avenue where the alternative turns north. A spur from S. Florida Avenue turns west onto Stenstrom Road and terminates at the area that includes the Hardee County Fairgrounds, Hardee County Agri-Civic Center, and Doyle Mildred Carlton Park. The main route continues along S. Florida Avenue to SR 636/Main Street and turns east to cross US 17 and turn north onto N. 4th Avenue to E. Oak Street and then to Heard Bridge Road, where it continues to the Peace River. At this location, the proposed route follows the river corridor north until Lake Branch Road where the alternative continues along the roadway and past the entrance of Paynes Creek Historic State Park. From there, the alternative proceeds to Main Street and heads west to W. Central Avenue and follows that north to W. County Line Road in Polk County.

Approximate length: 30 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): Ranges from \$51.8 million to \$61.0 million

COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Alternative C: Follows the route of Alternative B except at the intersection of SR 636/Main Street and N 4th Avenue, the alternative continues east to the Peace River, Crews Park, and Peace River Park. The route then follows the river corridor north to Heard Bridge Road where it turns east to CR 664, heads north to Lake Branch Road and continues west to where the route rejoins Alternative B at the Peace River, just east of the entrance for Paynes Creek Historic State Park.

Approximate length: 37.2 miles

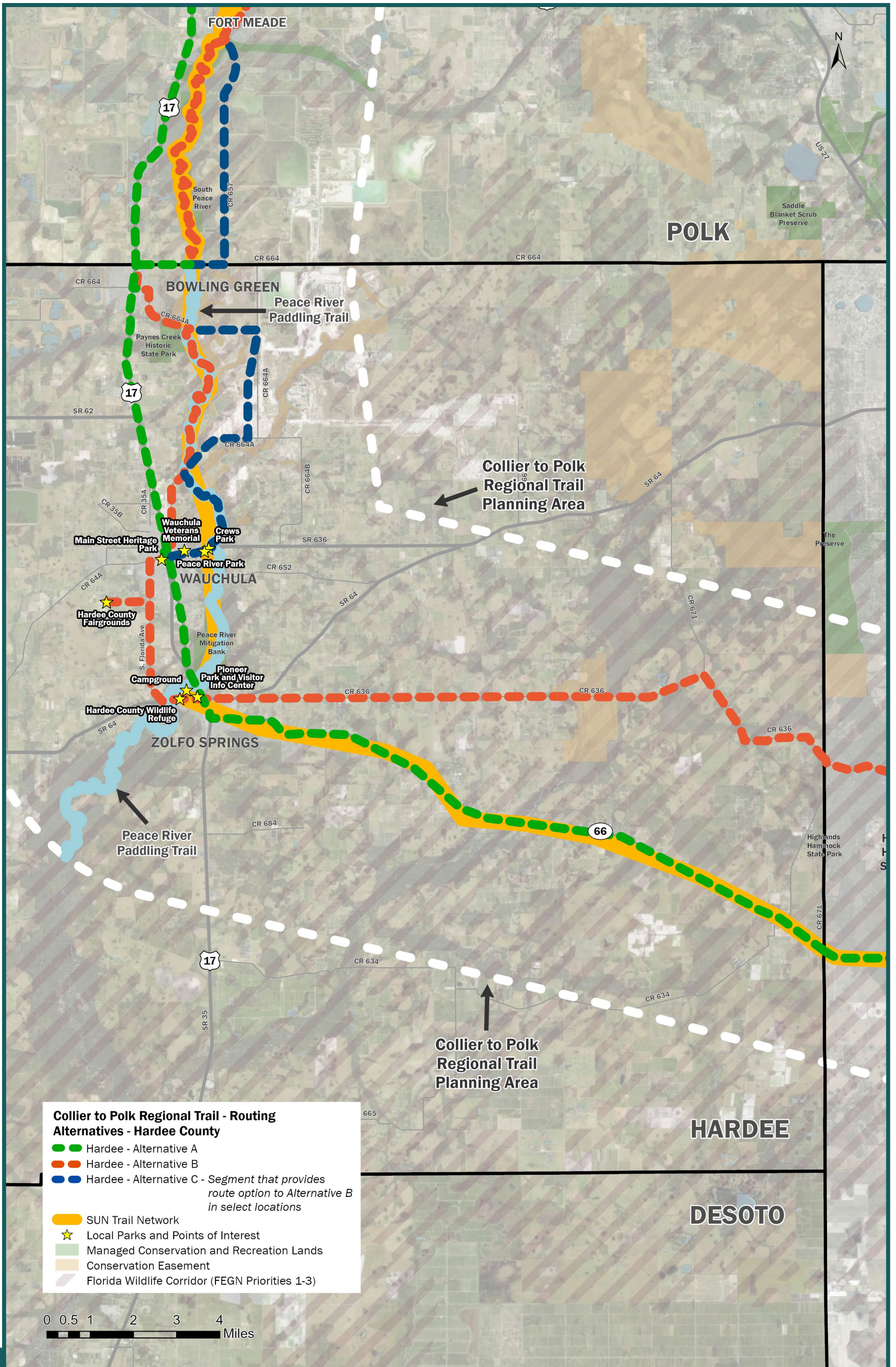
Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$62.5 million to \$73.9 million

The Peace River corridor sections included in Alternatives B and C follow the alignment of the SUN Trail planning corridor in this area. The statewide SUN Trail corridor is based upon local and regional input and planning. While location of the trail along the river was received favorably by the public through the Master Plan process, these segments present potential challenges in terms of feasibility for development of a paved multi-use trail due to environmental sensitivity. These sections are included in the Master Plan's preliminary alternatives so that they have opportunity to be more fully evaluated during the PD&E Study phase.



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 16. Hardee County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives



POLK COUNTY

In Polk County, there are two preliminary routing alternatives proposed. See map in [Figure 17](#).

Key Destinations for Routing Consideration

▶ TRAIL TOWN CANDIDATES

- » Fort Meade
- » Bartow

▶ STATE AND FEDERAL MANAGED LANDS

- » Teneroc Wildlife and Environmental Area

▶ KEY POINTS OF INTEREST

- » Monument Park
- » Heritage Park
- » Patterson Park
- » Fort Meade Outdoor Recreation Area
- » Mosaic Peace River Park
- » Mary Holland Park
- » Bartow Park Sports Complex
- » Fort Fraser Trail – Lakeland Trailhead
- » Holloway Park
- » Lake Somerset Park
- » Lake Hollingsworth Park
- » Lake Parker Park

Related Plans/Studies

- » Polk TPO Long Range Transportation Plan – Polk County Trails
- » City of Lakeland Comprehensive Plan - Proposed Pathways Corridors Map TRN-8
- » Bartow to Fort Meade Trail Study

Alternative A: Follows US 17 from Hardee County to just south of SR 60 in Bartow where it proceeds west very briefly along the railroad alignment until it connects with the southern end of the Fort Fraser Trail in the Defined Planning Boundary (described below).

Approximate length: 19.8 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$32 million to \$38.1 million

Alternative B: From the intersection W. Central Avenue and W. County Line Road, this route proceeds east to the Peace River. The alternative then follows the river corridor north to where it crosses Mount Pisgah Road where the trail joins the entrance of the Peace River Trail (a currently unpaved route) and follows it through the Fort Meade Outdoor Recreation Area until it reaches the recreation area's main entrance at US 98. From there, the route proceeds west along US 98 until it turns north at Edgewood Drive N. At this point, the route follows the preferred route from the Bartow to Fort Meade Trail Study which continues briefly east on 9th Street NE and then heads north along the western edge of the river. It then turns west and crosses US 17 to reach S. Kissengen Avenue, departing the Bartow to Fort Meade Trail Study route. The alternative continues north to E. Mariposa Avenue, proceeds west to E. Hermosa Avenue, follows a paved path to De La Bosque Avenue and then connects to another paved path that crosses through the northern part of Mary Holland Park. From there, the route follows Shumate Drive to E. Clower Street, and then continues north along S. Jackson Avenue past the Bartow Middle School, High School and Summerlin Park into Downtown Bartow until it reaches E. North Street and then east to the southern terminus of the Fort Fraser Trail.



Approximate length: 27.4 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$47.4 million to \$55.6 million

Alternative C: Follows Alternative B except in two segments. For the first, it continues past the Peace River on W. County Line Road and then turns north on Mount Pisgah Road until it reaches the entrance to the Peace River Trail and rejoins Alternative B. The second segment, rather than heading west from the Peace River to S. Kissengen Avenue, traverses generally northeast along the river corridor to SR 60 and then proceeds west along SR 60 to the connection with the Fort Fraser Trail.

Approximate length: 34.9 miles

Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$55.2 million to \$65.8 million

The Peace River corridor sections included in Alternatives B and C primarily follow the alignment of the SUN Trail planning corridor and/or Bartow to Fort Meade Trail Study in this area. While location of the trail along the river was received favorably by the public through the Master Plan process, these segments present potential challenges in terms of feasibility for development of a paved multi-use trail due to environmental sensitivity. These sections are included in the Master Plan's preliminary alternatives so that they have opportunity to be more fully evaluated during the PD&E Study phase.

Defined Planning Corridor: The northernmost segment of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail is the Defined Planning Corridor within Polk County. It extends from the southern end of the existing Fort Fraser Trail at SR 60 and continues north to where University Boulevard intersects with the Auburndale-TECO Trail crossing. This trail corridor is in advanced stages of trail development and planning and includes multiple existing trail segments such as Fort Fraser Trail, Lake Hollingsworth Trail, Lake Parker Trail, and University Boulevard Trail. A major project along this corridor is the Fort Fraser Trail Bridge (FPID 440272-1) which will connect the trail across SR 60.

This Defined Planning Corridor aligns directly with the SUN Trail corridor and local trail plans. The Polk TPO, Polk County, and the City of Lakeland support the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan incorporating this Defined Planning Corridor as described above. Therefore, as in Collier, no routing alternatives are being proposed as part of the Master Plan in this area. As the larger Collier to Polk Regional Trail moves to PD&E Study, some segments within this corridor may require further evaluation. Potential adjustments, if applicable, may be proposed at that time.

Approximate length: 28.4 miles

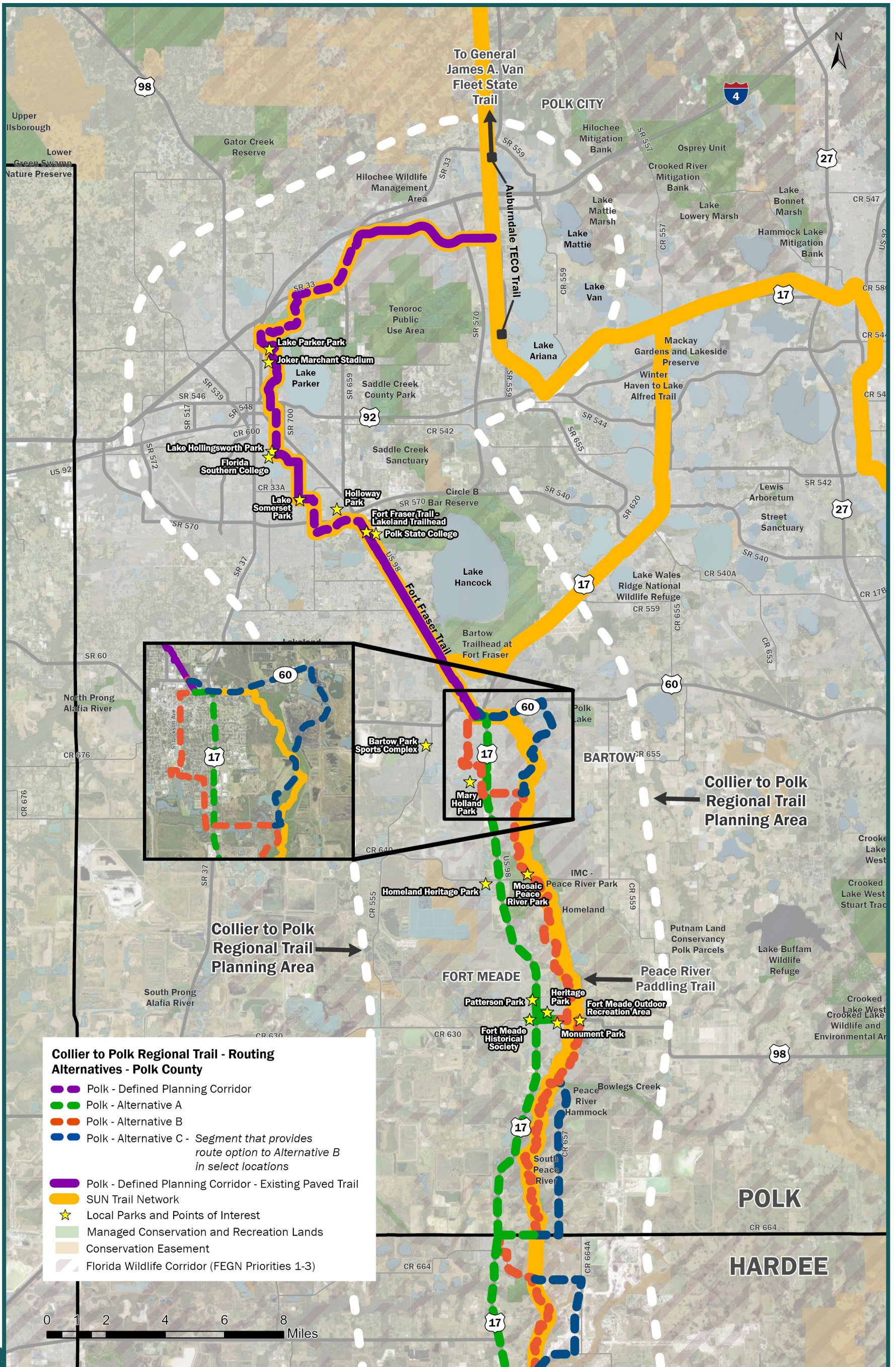
Planning-Level Estimate of Probable Cost (PD&E, Design, Mitigation, CEI, and Construction): \$16.5 million to \$19.6 million

(note that these estimates exclude any segments that are existing or fully programmed as trail or shared use path)



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 17. Polk County – Preliminary Routing Alternatives



CHAPTER 7

The Path Forward





7. THE PATH FORWARD

This Master Plan was developed over a ten-month period from October 2023 to July 2024. It provides a high-level vision for a large-scale project. Its purpose is to serve as a foundation for implementation and moving forward with project development. Key steps achieved through this planning effort included:

- » Regional Trail State of Practice Scan
- » Guiding Principles
- » Identification of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Planning Area
- » County Profiles
- » Planning Review
- » Inventory of Trail Town Candidates, Destinations, Managed Area, and Points of Interest
- » Stakeholder Outreach
- » Routing Coordination
- » Public Engagement
- » Identification of Preliminary Routing Alternatives
- » Environmental Scan
- » Evaluation Summary
- » Visualizations and Typical Sections
- » Preliminary Work Plan

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

FDOT District One will use the Master Plan as the basis for moving forward with initial implementation of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail.

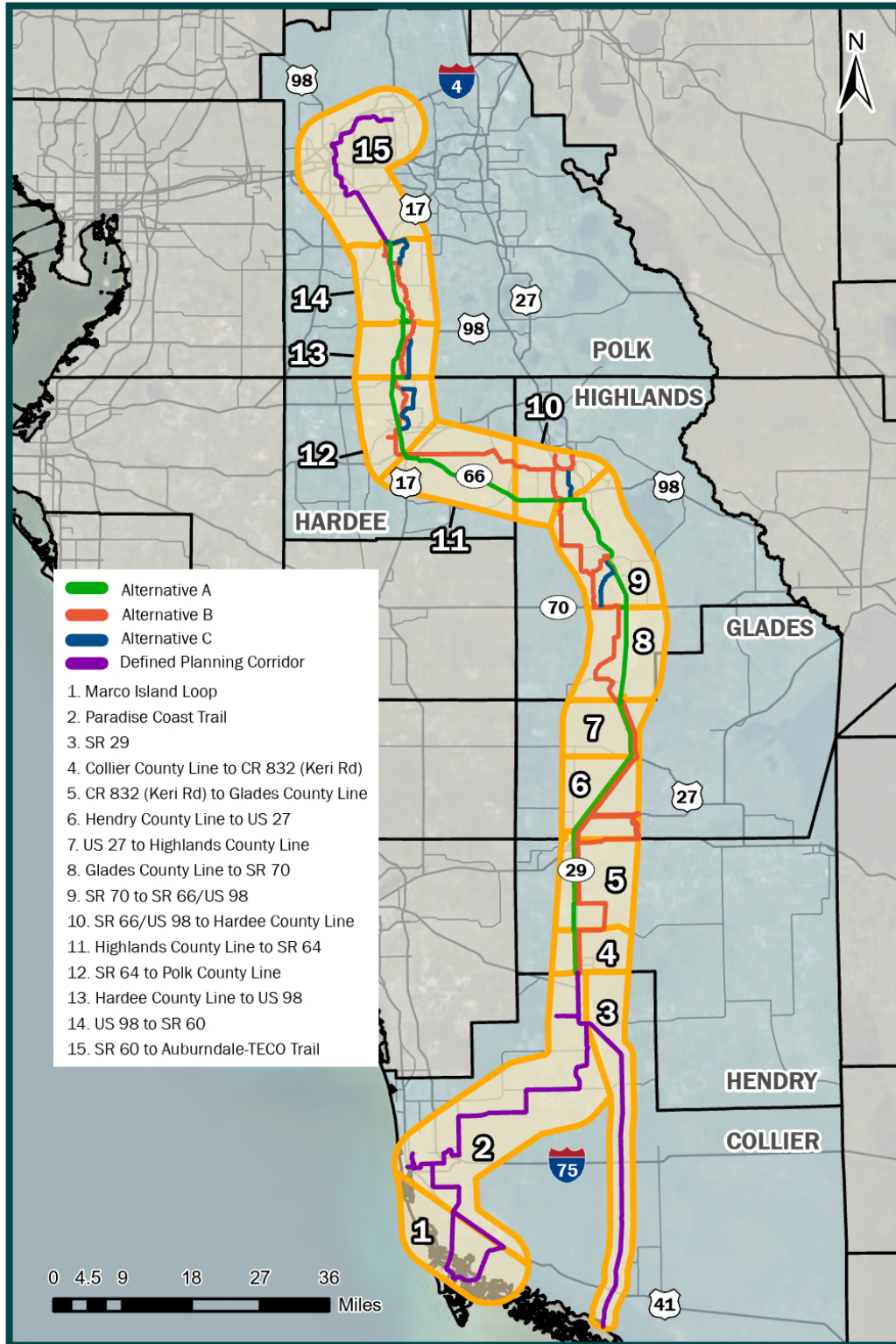
The next phase of work, *Project Development & Environment Studies for the Collier to Polk Regionally Significant Trail Corridor (FM# 453914-1)*, is already funded in Fiscal Year 2024/25 through the SUN Trail Program.

As the Master Plan was being completed, District One was developing the approach to coordinate implementation of the PD&E Study phase across the entire corridor. To support this effort, a preliminary work plan was developed to initially categorize corridor segments ([Figure 18](#)) by Timeline Tiers that propose the order they would move forward (Table 1). This high-level tiering considers factors such as geographic spread, prior studies, Trail Town candidate locations, leveraging existing trails, and estimated level of involvement for environment and right-of-way. The intent is to provide preliminary information to support implementation planning for the overall project. As each segment moves forward, more detailed evaluation will help to provide further understanding and is expected to result in refinement of this information.



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Figure 18. Collier to Polk Regional Trail Segmentation



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Table 1. Collier to Polk Regional Trail Preliminary Work Plan

Segment and Alternative		Description	Approximate Mileage	Trail Town or Candidates	Programmed FDOT Trail Project	Other Programmed FDOT Roadway Project with Potential Shared Use Path	Includes or Connects to Existing Trail	Estimated ROW Need	Environmental Considerations	Potential Timeline Tier*	
Collier											
1	Marco Island Loop	Defined Planning Corridor	18.6	Marco Island	No	No	Yes	Medium	Per MIL Study	TIER 1	
2	Paradise Coast Trail	Defined Planning Corridor	75.2	Immokalee	No	417878-4: Trail in Typ Sec (Part of SR 29)	Yes	Medium	Per PCT Study	TIER 1	
3	SR 29	Defined Planning Corridor	42.4	Everglades City	No	417878-4: Trail in Typ Sec (Part of SR 29)	No	Low	High	TIER 3	
Hendry											
4	Collier CL	CR 832 (Keri Rd)	A	SR 29	5.5		No	No	Minor	Low	TIER 2
			B	Matches A	5.5		No	No	Minor	Low	
5	CR 832 (Keri Rd)	Glades CL	A	SR 29	13.0	LaBelle	No	417878-8: Trail in Typ Sec (Part of SR 29)	Low	Low	TIER 1
			B	Around Spirit of the Wild	28.5		No		Low	Medium	
Glades											
6	Hendry CL	US 27	A	SR 29	12.5		No	No	Minor	Low	TIER 2
			B	SR 78 to Ortona	22.5		No	No	Low	Medium	
7	US 27	Highlands CL	A	US 27	8.2		No	No	Minor	Low	TIER 3
			B	US 27 and CR 17	8.2		NO	No	Low	Medium	
Highlands											
8	Glades CL	SR 70	A	US 27	12.7		No	No	Minor	Medium	TIER 3
			B	Old State Road 8	16.4		No	No	High	High	
			C	Matches B	16.4		No	No	High	High	
9	SR 70	SR 66 / US 98	A	US 27	18.6	Lake Placid	No	No	Low	Medium	TIER 1
			B	Henscratch Road & Placid Lakes Boulevard	26.5		No	414506-3: 10 ft' Path (SR 70)	Low	High	
			C	Placid View Drive	28.4		No		Medium	High	
10	SR 66 / US 98	Hardee CL	A	SR 66	7.3	Sebring	No	No	Minor	Medium	TIER 2
			B	Hammock Road & Lakewood Road	16.6		No	No	Medium	High	
			C	Sparta Road	15.7		No	No	Medium	High	
Hardee											
11	Highlands CL	SR 64	A	SR 66	16.1	Zolfo Springs	No	No	Low	Low	TIER 2
			B	Steve Roberts Special	15.6		No	No	High	High	
			C	Matches B	15.6		No	No	High	High	
12	SR 64	Polk CL	A	US 17	10.5	Bowling Green Wauchula	No	No	Low	Low	TIER 1
			B	Peace River & Heard Bridge Rd	14.3		No	No	High	High	
			C	County Road 664A & Peace River	21.6		No	No	High	High	
Polk											
13	Hardee CL	US 98	A	US 17	8.8	Fort Meade	No	No	Low	Low	TIER 1
			B	Peace River	10.4		No	No	High	High	
			C	Mount Pisgah Road	11.9		No	No	High	High	
14	US 98	SR 60	A	US 17	11.0	Bartow	No	No	Medium	Low	TIER 2
			B	Downtown Bartow & Ridge Line	17.0		No	No	Medium	High	
			C	SR 60 & Peace River	22.9		No	No	High	High	
15	SR 60	Auburndale-TECO Trail	Defined Planning Corridor	28.4		440603-1 - Fort Fraser Trail Extension, 440272-1 - Fort Fraser Trail Bridge - SR 60, 453404-1 - Glendale Street Trail	430185-2 MFF SR 33 Project (Partial)	Yes	Medium	Medium	TIER 1

***Potential Timeline Tier**

TIER 1 - First Set of Segments to Start - Proceed upon completion of PD&Es; contingent upon funding availability

TIER 2 - Second Set of Segments

TIER 3 - Third Set of Segments

Potential Timeline Tier generally considers: geographic spread, prior studies, Trail Town candidate locations, leveraging existing trails, and estimated level of involvement for environment and right-of-way.



For purposes of the Work Plan, individual counties were divided into at least two segments to provide another level of detail. Within Collier, these segments are currently divided up by the three planning components: Paradise Coast Trail, Marco Island Loop Trail, and SR 29 corridor. See [Figure 18](#) for a map of the segmentation across the Regional Trail. In addition to this Work Plan, preliminary estimated schedules were created to provide an initial framework for how the respective segments might be implemented. See [Appendix L](#). These schedules are illustrative and are subject to change. The actual timeline for each segment will be based upon funding availability and other factors determined during the project development process.

Guiding Principles for Consistency: The Collier to Polk Regional Trail is an extensive project that crosses through six counties and may traverse as many as 15 different communities. Depending upon which combination of alternatives is pursued, the total corridor may range from just less than 300 to more than 350 miles in length. Following standards established through SUN Trail Program Guidance, the FDOT Design Manual, the Florida Greenbook, and other applicable sources will help define a consistent method for trail design. Nonetheless, it is critical to ensure consistency to support decision making regarding the location and overall intent of this regionally significant trail as it progresses.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: *Apply the Guiding Principles throughout implementation and development of the trail to ensure continued alignment with the original vision and a consistent direction moving forward:*

- » **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

Project Coordination: At the outset of this Master Plan, the partnership of FDOT District One and the three regional M/TPOs defined clear support for the project and facilitated the entire corridor being designated by the FGTC as a Priority Land Trail. By extension, this established a continuous SUN Trail Network from Collier to Polk. These agencies partnered again during Master Plan development when the FGTC was conducting its first ever ranking of Regionally Significant Trails. The joint effort led to the newly defined Collier to Polk Regional Trail being ranked 5th out of 14 regional systems statewide. These efforts set the tone for strong regional collaboration and an effective partnership for the trail.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: *District One, MPOs, and local governments partner and coordinate to ensure that appropriate updates are made to applicable plans and programs (e.g., Long Range Transportation Plans, Lists of Priority Projects, Transportation Improvement Programs) to reflect the evolving work plan for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail.*



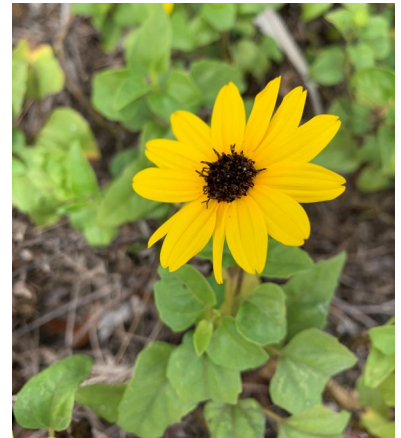
Collier to Polk Regional Trail Alliance: In June of 2024, as the Master Plan was being completed, the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails coordinated the introductory meeting for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Alliance. This group is modeled after the alliance for the Florida Coast to Coast Trail (the state’s highest ranked Regionally Significant Trail). The Collier to Polk Regional Trail Alliance will bring together FDEP, FDOT, M/TPOs, local agencies, and other stakeholders through a forum to discuss corridor-wide issues and status.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: *As District One leads the effort to coordinate project development for the multi-use trail, leverage the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Alliance as the parallel mechanism to focus on issues such as:*

- › Corridor-wide signage and wayfinding
- › The approach to including wayside areas, trailheads, and amenities
- › Best practices and information-sharing regarding the approach to trail management and maintenance
- › Partnering to pursue funding for the trail

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Funding: Whether local or regional in scale, trails are partnership projects. A major regional trail like Collier to Polk is expected to be designed and developed through a series of different funding sources that are sought and administered by a partnership of agencies. For example, while SUN Trail funding will be pursued to the extent possible for the Collier to Polk Regional Trail, completion of the project will happen through a combination of federal, state, and local sources that can be used to fund trails. While FDOT will champion the regional trail as a whole, local agencies may manage and/or fund the development of some phases or segments of the trail.



As the Work Plan evolves and project needs are more fully defined, FDOT, M/TPOs, and local agencies will coordinate to identify the appropriate approach for given segments. Some segments may not require new “standalone” trail funding. For example, the typical section for certain segments of SR 29 where it is being widened incorporates a shared use path. If constructed with a shared use path, these segments can serve as components of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail.

Four of the six Collier to Polk Regional Trail counties (Hendry, Glades, Highlands, and Hardee) are located within a state designated Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO). RAOs are defined as rural communities or regions that have been adversely affected by extraordinary economic events or natural disasters. This designation establishes these areas as priorities for Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) agencies and allows for the waiver of criteria for any economic development incentive. For example, under FDEP’s new trail management grant program, TRAIL-GO (described further below), RAO local governments will not have to provide cost-share like non-RAO local governments will.

The Office of Greenways and Trails is an excellent resource for information and links to funding sources and grant programs for trails. Visit the [OGT Grants Web Page](#).

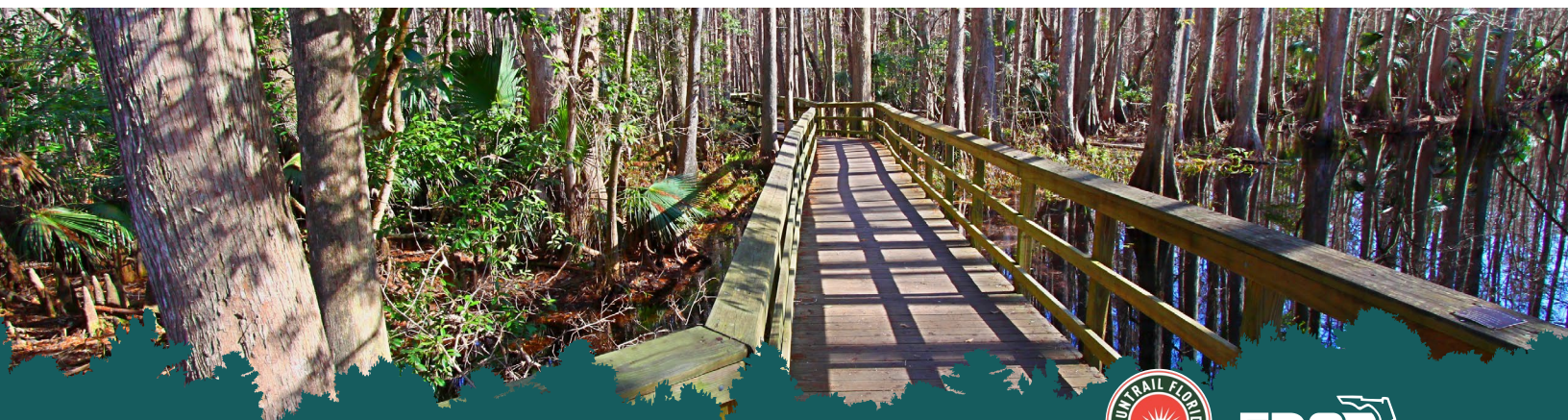
Trail Management and Maintenance: FDOT provides support for long-term trail maintenance needs such as future repaving, but the agency does not provide day to day management of trails. While the specific approach to governance across the entire trail has not been finalized, District One has committed to coordinate with partner agencies to determine the approach to comprehensive trail management and maintenance. As project segments move forward, it will be critical to identify the agencies that will serve as managers.



There are multiple strategies that can be applied to support agencies that are managing trails. For example, friends and citizen support groups can provide meaningful assistance through volunteer support and have been instrumental to the successful management of many trails. Through recently enacted legislation (2024-58, Laws of Florida), the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails has launched *TRAIL-GO, a new local trail management grant program*. TRAIL-GO provides grants to local governments for the operation and maintenance of trails located within the Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS). The entire Collier to Polk Regional Trail is within the FGTS. For more information visit the [TRAIL-GO web page](#).

Trailheads and Amenities: It is important to emphasize that SUN Trail funding is for trail development and does not include amenities such as trailheads, parking areas, and restrooms. In addition, FDOT does not oversee development of these types of facilities, regardless of the funding source. Trailheads and amenities for a comprehensive trail experience are generally pursued by local partners.

A long-distance trail like Collier to Polk requires a comprehensive view for locating certain types of facilities at intervals that will provide a complete trail experience. One of the reasons this Master Plan focuses so heavily on pursuing connections to existing parks and recreation areas is because of the role they can play to provide user amenities. Maximizing these connections ultimately reduces the need for local agencies to provide new facilities by leveraging these locations for adjoining trail segments.



COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Areas between towns or where no parks or managed areas exist could be long stretches without appropriate places for rest. It will be important to consider what types of facilities could be developed along these areas to serve trail user needs. One can think of these facilities in a tier of classifications ranging from minimally developed unpaved parking areas with directional signage to highly developed facilities that might provide paved parking, restrooms, an informational kiosk, and picnic tables. Locating a covered bench along the trail in strategic locations is also a simple way to improve the trail experience.



Maximizing Connections: As highlighted in the opening of [Chapter 6](#), the Collier to Polk Regional Trail will make connection to other regional systems like the *Florida Coast to Coast Trail* and *Florida Gulf Coast Trail*. Beyond these connections, it will be important to make connections to other regional and local trails. For example, in Polk County, emphasis is on connecting to the *Old Dixie Trail* and *Heartland Regional Trail* systems. Another local example includes a connection to Lake Hancock and the Circle B Bar Reserve, a prime natural destination.



It can also be important to promote connections to other thematic “trails” that weave together various sites. These are sometimes also called driving trails, but they are tied together by related sites and locations. Examples include:



Great Florida Birding Trail – The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail is a network of more than 500 wildlife viewing sites across the state. Many sites along and near the Collier to Polk Regional Trail are part of this trail.

Florida Fishing Trail – The Florida Fishing Trail is a series of waterbodies in Hardee County. FWC, the Mosaic Company, and Hardee County collaborated to create this area that provides recreational fishing opportunities.

Florida Heritage Trails – The Florida Department of State’s Florida Heritage Trail Series includes the Native American Heritage Trail, Black Heritage Trail, Seminole War Heritage Trail, and World War II Heritage Trail. Many sites along and near the Collier to Polk Regional Trail are part of these heritage trails.

A Spine Trail System: One of the most frequent discussion points throughout development of the Collier to Polk Regional Trail Master Plan was how the overall trail can strike the balance of being a paved multi-use trail that is intended to connect areas that might not be deemed environmentally suitable for siting a paved facility. This comes full circle to the initial *Regional Multi-use Trail Corridor State of Practice Scan* which highlights the importance of considering a regional trail’s broader opportunities for interpretation and experience.

It will be critical to consider how the Collier to Polk Regional Trail can serve as a paved spine trail system from which connections are made to natural surface trails and pathways that cross or could traverse conservation lands and wildlife corridor areas. Each of the managed areas provides excellent opportunity for interpretive nature-based experiences. Even where the spine trail does not cross through these lands, it will be important to promote these areas within a broader geographic zone.

COLLIER TO POLK TRAIL MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan closes with the example of Big Cypress National Preserve. Where the SR 29 trail segment is proposed along the western edge of this large managed area, the trail is intended to be developed within road right-of-way. During coordination as part of Master Plan development, the Preserve's Superintendent was supportive of the trail and suggested examples of strategic locations along SR 29 where trail users could learn more about the Preserve through potential interpretive kiosks and access to unpaved trail segments. A notable example is Deep Lake with an entry point from SR 29 which provides access to an unpaved loop trail. As described by the National Park Service:

The Deep Lake area of Big Cypress is a unique spot in the South Florida ecology. As one of only five naturally occurring sinkhole lakes in South Florida, it is truly a rare gem. The hike to this tranquil spot not only offers a one-mile round-trip stroll through sub-tropical beauty and diversified habitats, but also history. This area was some of the first property Barron Gift Collier purchased within the vicinity of the county that would soon bear his name. This high, dry parcel of the Preserve rewards any visitor equipped with an old pair of tennis shoes and a walking stick with an exceptional experience.



Image Source: National Park Service

It is opportunities like these that will ultimately help to create the complete Collier to Polk Regional Trail experience even beyond the paved pathway.



Financial Project Identification (FPID) No. 449504-1

