

Section 2.0

Introduction

Trails contribute to a community by providing people of all ages with an attractive, safe, and accessible place for recreation and transportation. Trails enhance property values and contribute to the community's economy while encouraging the use of non-motorized transportation. Trails can be used as a local connection for neighborhoods and as a regional connection between cities and counties.

The primary focus of the Lake County Trails Master Plan is to enhance the existing trail facilities while identifying the community's needs and priorities for the development of a comprehensive and interconnected trail network. The Master Plan will serve as a guide to the locations, design, prioritization, implementation, and maintenance of a comprehensive trail network within Lake County.

2.1 Relationship to Comprehensive Plan

Lake County is one of the fastest growing counties in the country with an estimated 2006 population of 291,000 and a projected increase to nearly 345,600 by the year 2025. With this population expansion, Lake County faces many challenges including the provision of recreational and transportation services, conservation of open areas and greenways, protection of the natural environment, and fostering economic development.

Lake County Comprehensive Plan

The Adopted (2004) Lake County Comprehensive Plan defines a future vision and shows a connection between the use of land and resources in different geographic areas, physical infrastructure of the built environment, and the process of governing. Ultimately, because it is comprehensive, it guides decisions to protect natural resources, ensure efficient expenditure of public funds, and promote the health, safety, convenience, and general welfare of the public. The Lake County Trails Master Plan is consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. This includes conservation, economic development, parks and recreation, and transportation. The following sections describe the Trail Master Plan's support of the Lake County Comp Plan.

Conservation

Lake County's environmental ecosystems and land ownership patterns provide a complex natural setting. The Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide a framework for the ongoing monitoring, management, and use of the County's natural resources. Two conservation goals are recognized in the Conservation Element of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan for their importance to multi-use trails.

Goal 1: The Recreation and Open Space Element is dependent upon the Conservation Element to provide guidelines for the establishment of open space corridors, to assist in the nature education programs, to encourage compatible land uses adjacent to managed natural areas, and in giving indications of which environmentally sensitive areas are suitable for acquisition and development for recreational and open space purposes.

Goal 2: The County shall strive to preserve, properly manage and, where possible, enhance the quantity, quality, and function of its natural resources and natural environment for existing and future generations.



The Lake County Trails Master Plan is consistent with promoting the establishment of open space corridors. It is compatible with the recreation use with parks and open space areas. Impacts to the natural environment will be utilized during the prioritization process and avoided, minimized, and mitigated during the design and construction process.

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Relationship to Comprehensive Plan Continued

Economic Development

Lake County places high importance on quality development within the region. Thoughtful land use decisions, comprehensive transportation planning, and sensitive environmental controls combined with the economic development opportunities should aid in the enhancement of the quality of life for residents and communities.

Goal 3: Among the factors that influence livability are the County’s ability to provide employment opportunities, healthy businesses that provide goods and services, quality of public services, the area’s natural beauty, good schools, strong neighborhoods, and efficient traffic circulation.

The Lake County Trails Master Plan is consistent with improving the quality of life for the residents and visitors. Properly designed and located trails and trailheads can serve as a catalyst for quality development. Property values tend to be higher when adjacent to parks and trails.

Parks and Recreation

The Parks and Recreation Element of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to facilitate the development and management of facilities for a recreation system that includes environmental lands, trails, and other recreational opportunities that meet the diverse needs of a growing community.

The Lake County Trails Master Plan is consistent with and supports the following objectives and policies in the Parks and Recreation Element of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan.

Objective 3.1 Trails and Greenways: Lake County shall foster the development of a comprehensive greenway, blueway, trail, equestrian, and bikeway system that provides for the protection of natural resources, scenic value, eco-tourism, and resource oriented recreation.

Policy 3.1.1 Trails Program: Lake County shall continue working towards implementing its trails program by coordinating with federal, state, regional, and local public agencies and private organizations.

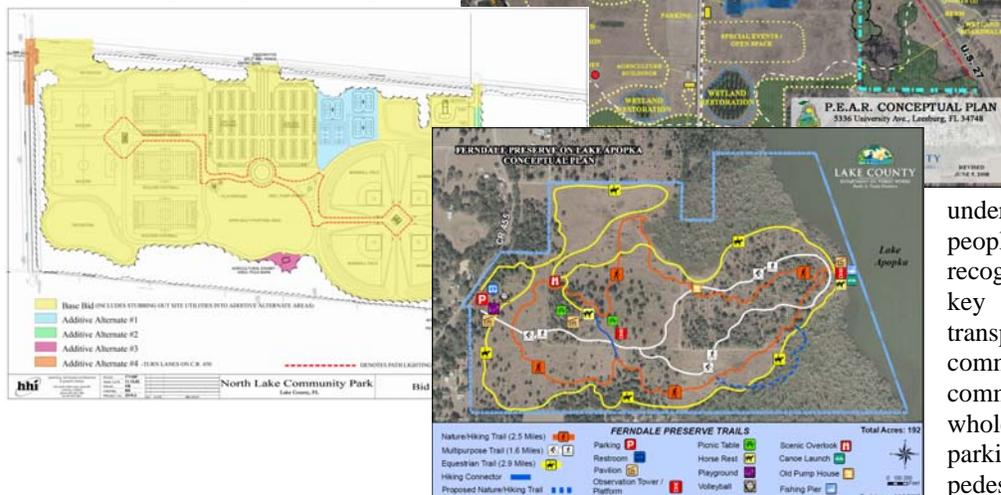
Policy 3.1.2 Greenways and Blueways: Lake County shall coordinate the establishment of greenways and blueways with its trails and bikeways program to help connect natural resources and parks to the trail system.

Policy 3.1.3 Guidelines for Trail Development: Lake County shall adopt as a guideline the Florida Bicycle Facilities Planning and Design Handbook by FDOT and the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails Reference and Resource Guide. These documents shall be used in the planning and development of trails.

Policy 3.1.4 Maintenance and Operation Standards: Maintenance and operation standards shall be developed and approved prior to new trail design and development.

Transportation

The Transportation Element of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan understands the importance of moving people and goods in a community. While recognizing automobile transportation is a key component of Lake County’s transportation system, the Element comments on the need to look at the community transportation system as a whole and includes automobile circulation, parking, mass transit, rail, bikeways, and pedestrian facilities.



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Relationship to Comprehensive Plan Continued

The Lake County Trails Master Plan is consistent with and supports the following objectives and policies in the Transportation Element of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan.

Goal 4: Prepare a plan that emphasizes more efficient use of the existing transportation system and contributes to the wider national objectives of energy conservation, improved air quality, and increased social and environmental amenity.

Goal 5: To facilitate a balanced multi-modal transportation system that encourages increased mobility options and provides for efficient transportation alternatives while minimizing environmental impacts.

Objective 5.1 Bicycle and Pedestrian Accessibility:

Policy 5.1.1 Rails to Trails: Lake County shall coordinate with government agencies and private organizations involved in the acquisition and development of a trails system utilizing abandoned railroad right-of-way where feasible.

Policy 5.1.2 Bicycle and Recreational Trail Planning and Coordination: Lake County shall fund and construct a countywide network of pedestrian, bicycle, recreational, and equestrian trails. The County will coordinate with the Lake-Sumter MPO, FDOT, municipalities, and other appropriate agencies to study and implement options for coordinated provision of a bike trail network.

The Lake County Trails Master Plan will be a major component of the multi-modal transportation system. It will provide alternative transportation corridors for bicyclists, pedestrians, and other off-street, non-motorized connections while reducing the demand for automobile travel.

2.2 Trails Master Plan Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the Master Plan is to facilitate the development and management of a comprehensive network of multi-use trails by providing detailed maps of current and future trail locations, offering an implementation plan to guide prioritization and

selection of trail projects, suggesting recommendations for policy changes, and developing an operation and maintenance program for the preservation of existing and proposed trails.



Goal 6: Provide a long-term vision for the need, location, and design standards of multi-use trails within the County.

Objective 6.1: Establish a shared-use trail hierarchy and designate all shared-use trails included in the Lake County Trails Master Plan as one of the following: Connector Trail, Local Trail, Minor Trail, or Regional Trail.

Objective 6.2: Develop and implement design standards and landscaping guidelines for each trail category. These design standards and landscaping guidelines are provided in Section 4.0 of this document.

Objective 6.3: Develop a detailed location map and GIS database that depicts a comprehensive trail network. This detailed location map will show connections to community and agency trail networks within Lake County as well as connections to the major trails of adjacent counties.

Objective 6.4: The location of Lake County trails will take into consideration residential, commercial, and employment areas, educational centers, cultural and recreational resources, and other areas of interest.

Objective 6.5: Utilize the recommended guidelines in the SCORP to maintain a minimum level of service on trail facilities.

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Trails Master Plan Goals and Objectives Continued

Goal 7: Develop evaluation criteria and elements of importance to provide a framework for funding prioritization of trail projects within the County.

Objective 7.1: The funding of trails will be prioritized based upon:

Trail Value – Trail system connectivity, recreational connectivity, transportation alternatives and connectivity, scenic or experience value, and the impact to the natural environment.

Stakeholder Involvement – Stakeholder input obtained from public meetings, information gathered from local municipalities, surveys, and the Lake-Sumter MPO BPAC.

Right-of-Way Availability – Seek opportunities through easements, dedications, public or private reservations, joint-use agreements, and other possible methods.

Local Municipality Support – The adoption of a trail element within the local comprehensive plan, the active preservation of right-of-way in support of a trail, and the availability of funding through the agencies involved.

This framework is detailed in Section 5.0 of this report. Based on this framework, shared-use trails were prioritized and an implementation plan was developed.

Goal 8: Provide recommendations for amendments to the Goals, Policies, and Priorities of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan.

Objective 8.1: Recommend Lake County adopt the Master Plan as part of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan.

Objective 8.2: Recommend that Lake County adopt a minimum LOS of one mile of regional or minor shared-use trail per 5,000 Lake County residents and one linear mile of hiking/nature trails per 6,750 Lake County residents. Recommend this level of service be calculated based on the number of miles of trails and the number of residents of the entire county

regardless of jurisdiction or funding participation.

Objective 8.3: Recommend exploration of potential dedicated funding sources for design and construction of shared-use trails as part of the implementation of the Lake County Trails Network.

Goal 9: Provide an approach that seeks to maximize the efficient use of available federal, state, local, and private funding opportunities.

Objective 9.1: Identify and develop a strategy to secure potential grant programs and opportunities through federal and state funding sources. (These were explored and the results are summarized in Section 6.0 of this report.)

Objective 9.2: Investigate alternative funding sources and relationships through public and private ventures. (These are included in Section 6.0 of this report.)

Objective 9.3: Provide framework for priorities and annual updates to Lake County's Five-Year Work Program.

Goal 10: Develop an Operations and Maintenance Program for existing and proposed trails.

Objective 10.1: Establish routine and major maintenance guidelines for staffing and lifecycle costs for incorporation into trail development decisions. (These are included in Section 8.0 of this report.)

Objective 10.2: Provide benchmark evaluation of existing trails with respect to safety, connectivity, equestrian use, signing, access, and trailheads. (This analysis is included in Section 5.0 of this report.)