

Governor, Cabinet Approve Longest Trail Corridor Purchase Ever by the State of **Florida**

*--Acquisition will preserve approximately 51 miles of trail corridor in Brevard and Volusia
County--*

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist and the Florida Cabinet today voted to acquire approximately 671 acres within the East Central Regional Rail-Trail (ECRRT) Project in Brevard and Volusia County. Purchased with *Florida Forever* money allocated to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Office of Greenways and Trails, the property is strategically located on the northeast side of one of the most heavily populated and highly visited regions of Florida, the Orlando metro area. The approximately 51-mile trail purchase from the Florida East Coast Railway L.L.C. is the longest of its kind for the state of Florida, exceeding the 46-mile Palatka to Lake Butler Rail-Trail acquired by the DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails in 2001.

"This vote is another example of the state's dedication to preserving land and creating new opportunities for outdoor recreation," said DEP Deputy Secretary Bob Ballard. "The opportunity to purchase an intact 51-mile long corridor for trail development in such an urbanized area is a rare and exciting occasion, and we appreciate the hard work of all our partners and the local stakeholders that helped make this possible."

For trail users interested in conservation land destinations, the ECRRT corridor lies within close proximity to the Merritt National Wildlife Refuge, Gemini Springs Park, Chain of Lakes Park, Lake Monroe Conservation Area and *Florida Forever* project lands for Indian River Lagoon Blueway, Wekiva-Ocala Greenway and the Volusia Conservation Corridor. In addition, the corridor provides a foundation for connecting three of Florida's most popular tourist

destinations, the greater Orlando area, the Kennedy Space Center and Daytona's beaches. Ultimately, the ECRRT will connect two major long-distance trail initiatives, the 3,000-mile East Coast Greenway along the Atlantic Coast and the planned 480-mile Central Florida Loop.

Brevard and Volusia Counties will be the long term managers of the property and have committed to funding development of the project, including adding future improvements such as paving and establishing trailheads and waysides. Proposed trail uses include cycling, hiking, running, skating, equestrian and wildlife viewing.

BACKGROUND

Florida is home to more than 4,000 miles of trails throughout the state. DEP's Office of Greenways & Trails manages eight state trails, in addition to the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway. The Greenway is Florida's longest green corridor stretching 110 miles from the St. Johns River near Palatka to the Gulf of Mexico near Inglis. Of the eight state trails, six are rail-trails, which are railroad corridors converted to recreational trails for hiking, biking, skating and equestrian activities. Through *Florida Forever*, the state's premier land acquisition program, \$4.5 million is allocated annually to purchase and preserve land for Florida's greenways and trails.

Along with DEP's network of greenways and trails, the Department also manages Florida's award-winning state park system. The first two-time Gold Medal winner honoring the nation's best state park service, Florida's state park system is one of the largest in the country with 160 parks spanning almost 700,000 acres and 100 miles of sandy white beach. Last fiscal year, DEP's Florida Park Service welcomed more than 19.5 million visitors, setting a new attendance record.

The 10-year, \$3 billion *Florida Forever* program established by the Florida Legislature in 1999 conserves environmentally sensitive land, restores waterways and preserves important cultural and historical resources. With more than two million acres of land conserved through *Florida Forever* and its predecessor, Preservation 2000, the state is increasing public access to recreation lands, connecting communities with green space and expanding natural corridors to safeguard wildlife.

For more information on Florida's greenways and trails, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt.

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