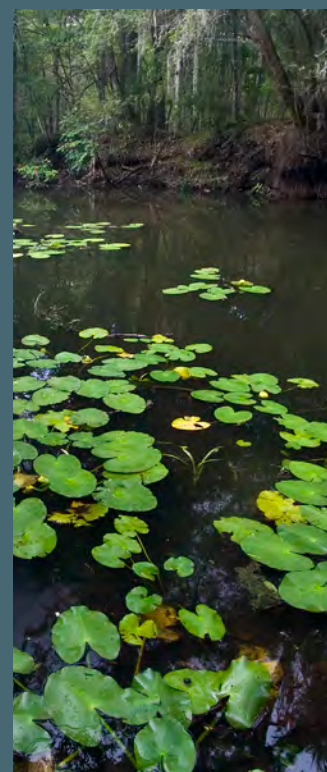


# THE FLORIDA PANHANDLE REGIONAL RECREATION ECONOMY

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR LONG-TERM RESILIENCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY



FINAL SUMMIT REPORT

2021

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*Report developed by Skeo Solutions for U.S. EPA Region 4 with support from the Superfund Redevelopment Program.*

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# INTRODUCTION

Coastal and inland communities in the Florida Panhandle have a long history of independence and self-sufficiency. These communities are now faced with the daunting task of recovering from the impacts of Hurricane Michael, a Category 5 hurricane that made landfall in October 2018. Storm surges across the Panhandle coast and extremely high wind speeds devastated communities in the region.

In addition to rebuilding lost structures, these communities are working diligently to rebuild more resilient economies and infrastructure. Fallen timber uprooted storm, drinking and wastewater infrastructure and stripped the landscape of an important natural stormwater management system: trees. This significant loss of vegetation combined with a naturally high water table presents new challenges to manage flooding during future storm events. Economically, the Panhandle communities were just beginning to recover from the 2008 recession which had significantly impacted the timber and tourism economies. The physical destruction of Hurricane Michael left tax revenues and local government resources decimated.

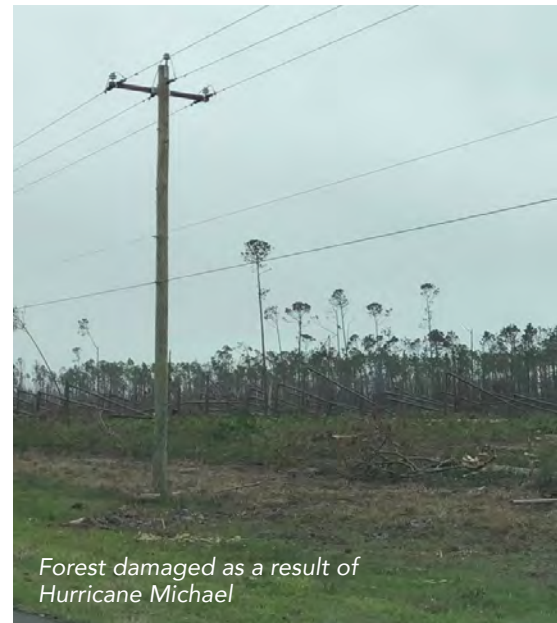
To support recovery from Hurricane Michael, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided support to six cities in the Florida Panhandle with a technical assistance effort called the Recovery and Resiliency Partnership Project (R2P2). R2P2 supported FEMA's Disaster Recovery in Florida with an Integrated Recovery Coordination (IRC) field operations team that brought together regional, state, and federal agencies to support coastal and inland communities in recovery from Hurricane Michael. Participating cities include Mexico Beach, Parker, Springfield, Marianna, Chattahoochee and Quincy.

The R2P2 includes a unique and holistic focus on recovery strategies that also improve resiliency and strengthen local economies by leveraging existing natural assets. The R2P2 team worked closely with each city to develop designs for more resilient streets, parks and stormwater infrastructure that could also improve local economies by attracting visitors to downtowns and local recreational assets. For more information on the design concepts, please visit the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com](http://r2p2.skeo.com).

The R2P2 support culminated in a regional summit to engage city leadership along with regional, state and national partners in a discussion about how to promote the regional recreation economy to support both physical and economic recovery in the region. This report summarizes the priorities developed throughout the R2P2 technical assistance and summit to grow the regional recreation economy for the Florida Panhandle.



*Structures damaged in Mexico Beach as a result of Hurricane Michael*



*Forest damaged as a result of Hurricane Michael*



*The R2P2 team in Marianna*



## Recreation Economy

### CONTEXT

Outdoor recreation is a thriving economy for the state of Florida with recreation activities generating an estimated \$145 billion, including 1.2 million jobs, according to the 2019 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The top 4 industries impacted by resident and visitor recreational spending include restaurant, transportation and accommodations, gear and equipment, and fees. The Panhandle area is designated as the Northwest Planning Region, one of 8 regions in the 2019 SCORP and generates \$7.5 billion in outdoor recreation-based spending.




### ASSETS

According to a 2017 economic impact study, the Northwest Planning Region is the most sparsely populated but:

- Receives **10%** of Florida's out-of-state visitors
- Ranks **2nd** in the state for acres of recreational land and water
- Ranks **2nd** in the state for available boat ramps and paddling trails

### GAPS

SCORP identified that many recreation facilities are desired by both Northwest Region residents and statewide tourists. However, the Northwest Planning Region is ranked as one of the lowest service levels in the state for:

-  Hiking trails
-  Paved/unpaved biking trails
-  Camping and picnicking facilities.

### INVESTMENTS

Investing in trails and recreational infrastructure could significantly increase local jobs and revenue for the Florida Panhandle region. Trails could also expand recreation dollars to inland communities with recreation connections to the inland lakes, rivers and state preserves throughout the Panhandle region.



Apalachicola National Forest



# REGIONAL RECREATION ECONOMY SUMMIT

A key priority of the R2P2 effort is to build local capacity and cross-sector partnerships to support long-term economic recovery and resilience in the Florida Panhandle. To support this goal, R2P2 convened a three-day, virtual summit on October 6-8, 2020 to identify strategies and partnerships to support the recreational economy in the region. Building on the six city-scale R2P2 efforts, the summit convened over 135 federal, state, regional and local participants to identify a strategy and specific activities to grow the regional recreation economy. In celebration of the significant natural assets and potential connectivity in the Florida Panhandle, the summit focused on the following themes.

- Economic Benefits of a Regional Recreational Economy
- Landscape and Watershed Resiliency
- Historical and Cultural Resources

The summit provided an opportunity to share recreational opportunities that connect the cities, identify additional partners and resources that can support the recreational infrastructure, and showcase capacity building opportunities that could support a collaborative regional recreation economy perspective. Goals of the summit include:

- A shared strategy for a regional recreation alliance
- Prioritize recreation-related economic opportunities that enhance connectivity across the landscape and provide ecological and cultural benefits
- Identify opportunities for potential funding and investment
- Support long-term sustainability and recovery in the Florida Panhandle

The following sections describe the vision, action plan goals and implementation opportunities identified by summit participants to build the regional recreation economy.



*“WONDERFUL SUMMIT – GOOD IDEAS – GREAT SYNERGY – AND I CAN SEE A PATH FORWARD THAT COULD BENEFIT THE LOCAL RECREATIONAL-RELATED ECONOMY THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE NORTHWEST FLORIDA REGION.”*

## Summit Sessions and Themes



### ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF A REGIONAL RECREATIONAL ECONOMY

- Power of Collaboration
- Recreation Connections with Downtown Economic Development
- Resilient Infrastructure and Communities
- Private Sector Funding and Opportunity Zones
- Leveraging Philanthropic Resources



### LANDSCAPE AND WATERSHED RESILIENCY

- Landscape Connectivity to Build Capacity
- Stormwater Management
- Forest, Riparian and Estuary Protection
- Military Mission: Sentinel Landscapes
- Ecosystem Protection: Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy
- Recreational Hiking, Biking, Greenway and Paddle Trails



### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Regional Heritage to Build Capacity
- Historical and Archaeological Resources
- Cultural Strength of Communities
- National Scenic Trails Connecting Sites
- Priority Landscape Conservation
- Historic and Cultural Trails Linking Cities

# ACTION PLAN

The Florida Panhandle Regional Recreation Economy Summit resulted in agreement to support a shared vision and set of priorities to grow the regional recreation economy. Summit participants developed a regional vision (highlighted below) through an iterative process starting with R2P2 city visions, stakeholder suggestions via surveys, evolving into key themes for the summit and resulting in a final action plan of the following goals and implementation opportunities outlined on the following pages.

## TRAILS

1. Develop the regional trail system.

## LAND

2. Restore and protect landscapes.

## WATER

3. Enhance rivers, lakes and bays.

## CULTURE

4. Celebrate cultural resources.

## ECONOMIC

5. Support cities in recovery.

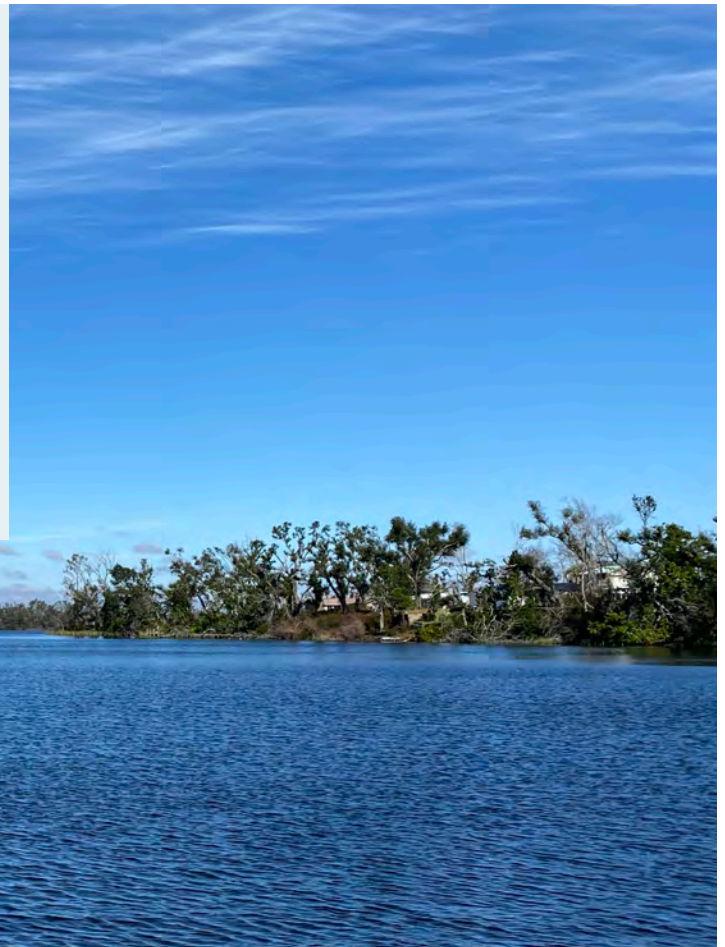
## EXPLORE

6. Promote regional recreation.

Participants agreed that the summit themes of cultural heritage, environmental health and the local economy are interconnected and interdependent across the six goals. To achieve these goals, summit participants identified a set of key implementation opportunities described in the following pages that provide necessary resources and assistance for the Panhandle to move from recovery to resilience.

## VISION STATEMENT

*The communities of the Florida Panhandle region enjoy a vibrant and resilient quality of life and a thriving recreation economy by working together to enhance and promote a sustainable recreational network of celebrated cultural and natural resources.*



Martin Lake, Bay County



# ACTION PLAN TO SUPPORT THE REGIONAL RECREATION ECONOMY

GOAL	IMPLEMENTATION OPPORTUNITIES
 <b>TRAILS</b> <b>1. Develop the regional trail system.</b>	<p>Support development of the Florida National Scenic Trail between the Apalachicola National Forest and the Econfina Creek Water Management Area (connecting Torreya State Park, Three Rivers State Park, the Apalachee Wildlife Management Area as well as the cities of Marianna and Chattahoochee.</p>
	<p>Support development of the Chattahoochee to Bristol (C2B) Trail along the eastern bank of the Apalachicola River.</p>
	<p>Support development of the Old Spanish Trail and other elements of the trail network (including tying into the North Star Legacy Communities) to connect Marianna, Chattahoochee and Quincy by integrating the five individual county assessments.</p>
	<p>Support development of amenities along the Apalachicola Blueway Paddle Trail.</p>
 <b>LAND</b> <b>2. Restore and protect landscapes.</b>	<p>Support the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape designation for capacity support to promote conservation and increase recreation access in areas surrounding military installations.</p>
 <b>WATER</b> <b>3. Enhance rivers, lakes and bays.</b>	<p>Support the National Estuary Program (NEP) designation for St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays.</p>
	<p>Support Parker, Springfield and Mexico Beach in developing a stormwater management district to provide recreation and flood management.</p>
	<p>Support Apalachicola NEP designation.</p>
 <b>CULTURE</b> <b>4. Celebrate cultural resources.</b>	<p>Support the development of the Florida Panhandle National Heritage Area designation.</p>
	<p>Promote North Star Black Heritage Region’s Legacy Communities Trail System by supporting Legacy Community sites and trail connections across Northwest Florida.</p>
 <b>ECONOMIC</b> <b>5. Support cities in recovery.</b>	<p>Support the recreation economy business sector.</p>
	<p>Support grant funding applications and management for R2P2 streets, parks and infrastructure projects.</p>
 <b>EXPLORE</b> <b>6. Promote regional recreation.</b>	<p>Support and coordinate regional recreation promotional efforts.</p>
	<p>Develop an online tool to integrate initiatives and support implementation.</p>

# IMPLEMENTATION OPPORTUNITIES

This section describes some of the key initiatives that could support the action plan goals and provide capacity, resources and momentum for growing the regional recreation economy.



## TRAILS

### 1. Develop the regional trail system.

#### FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL ALTERNATIVE ROUTE DEVELOPMENT

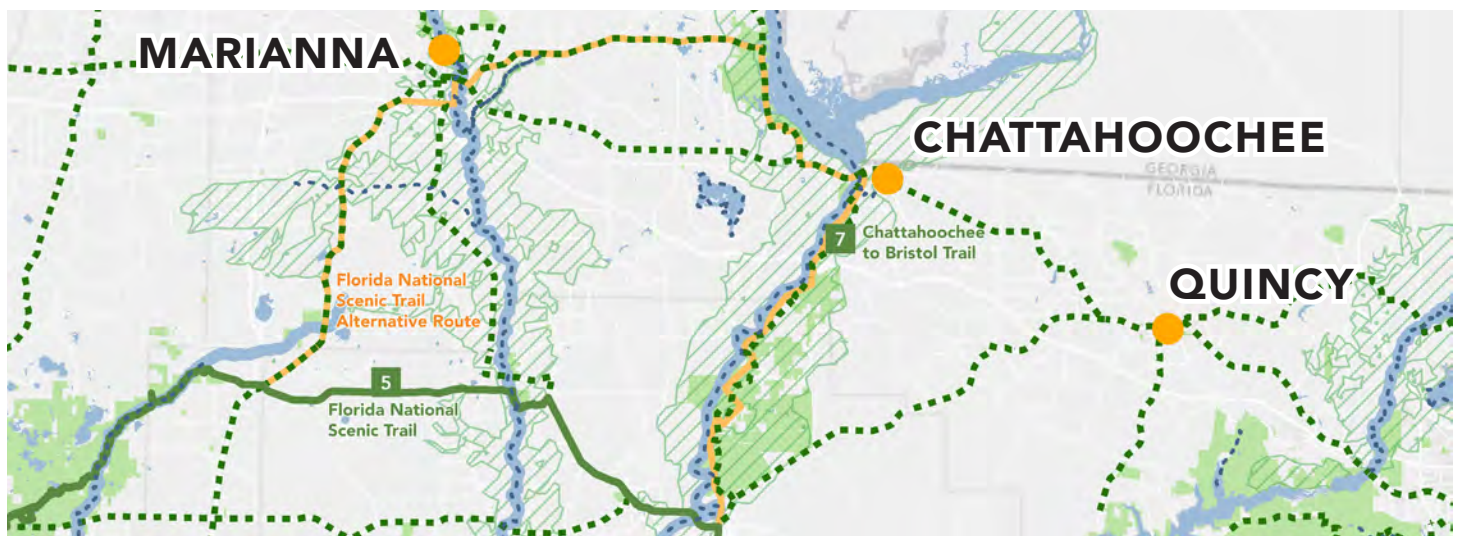
The Florida National Scenic Trail traverses 1,500 miles from the Big Cypress National Preserve in South Florida to the Gulf Island National Seashore in the western Panhandle. However, an additional 300 miles of the Florida National Scenic Trail are in the planning phase to connect the Apalachicola National Forest to the Econfina Creek Water Management Area.

The Florida National Scenic Trail has a major opportunity to enhance the Panhandle route of the trail that mainly runs along state highways. This section is currently a road walk and does not meet the scenic and safety goals of the Florida National Scenic Trail. The U.S. Forest Service contracted with the Florida Planning and Development Lab at Florida State University to identify an alternative route to the existing trail. The Lab recommended a route that passes through Torreya State Park, Three Rivers State Park and Apalachee Wildlife Management Area as well as the Cities of Chattahoochee and Marianna. The alternative route would provide the most recreational opportunities through a variety of cultural landscapes, communities and public lands.

#### CHATTAHOOCHEE TO BRISTOL (C2B) TRAIL

The Apalachee Regional Planning Council received a Community Planning Technical Assistance Grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to evaluate the feasibility of a trail along the eastern bank of the Apalachicola River between Chattahoochee and Bristol. The feasibility study documents proposed routes and potential access points for the C2B Trail. Development of the C2B Trail could drive renewed interest in the Florida National Scenic Trail and connect additional recreational opportunities, cultural as well as historical sites and new downtown community links to recreational hikers and further enhance the regional economy.

Over the course of the study, local stakeholders identified that recreational, historical and cultural assets could be more effectively utilized by improving regional connectivity. They shared their support for a regional trail that could tie together underutilized assets and position communities as vibrant centers for tourism. Of the stakeholders engaged, Explore Northwest Florida (then Riverway South), Apalachicola Riverkeeper and Chattahoochee Main Street expressed interest in championing the implementation of the C2B Trail.







**LAND**

**2. Restore and protect landscapes.**

**THE SENTINEL LANDSCAPES PARTNERSHIP**

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments and nongovernmental organizations that works to strengthen military readiness, sustain agricultural productivity, conserve natural resources and increase access to recreation in areas surrounding military installations. The Partnership coordinates funding and assistance programs to achieve mutual benefits at the landscape scale for national defense, local economies and conservation.

Supporting the development of a Sentinel Landscape in Northwest Florida could provide valuable regional capacity support in protecting critical landscapes for habitat as well as sustaining longleaf pine forests and other agricultural resources.

Eglin Air Force Base is nominating the Florida Panhandle for federal designation as the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape. A Sentinel Landscapes designation provides greater access to funding and voluntary federal assistance for projects that conserve watersheds and wildlife habitat, protect agricultural lands, provide community recreation opportunities and support the missions of Northwest Florida’s military installations. The pre-proposal application for designation of the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape will be submitted by March 29, 2021. If invited to submit a full proposal, the full proposal will be submitted in August 2021 with three to five Sentinel Landscape designations approved in December.

**SOUTHEAST CONSERVATION ADAPTATION STRATEGY (SECAS)**

SECAS is a regional conservation initiative working towards a connected network of lands and waters across the Southeast and Caribbean. SECAS develops the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, a regional plan that identifies priority areas for conservation based on data and partner input. The Blueprint stitches together smaller subregional plans into one consistent map, incorporating the best available information about key species, ecosystems and future threats. The Blueprint identifies several areas in the Florida Panhandle that are critical to regional ecosystem health, function and connectivity.

SECAS supports organizations in leveraging the Blueprint and other complementary data to strengthen funding applications and bring in new funding. SECAS develops maps and narratives that communicate an area’s conservation value and its connections to regional or national priorities. The Blueprint has helped bring in more than \$31 million in conservation funding to protect and restore almost 70,000 acres.



## WATER

### 3. Enhance rivers, lakes and bays.

## ESTUARY PROGRAMS

National Estuary Programs (NEPs) are a non-regulatory EPA program that restores waters, habitats and living resources of estuaries of national significance. EPA provides funding and technical assistance to 28 NEPs. Florida has 4 NEPs which include Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon, Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay. Bay County, the Nature Conservancy and Florida State University (FSU), Panama City are establishing the St. Andrew/St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program, modeled after the NEP.



## CULTURE

### 4. Celebrate cultural resources.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are regions designated by Congress as nationally important landscapes because of their “distinctive natural, cultural, and historic resources that, when linked together, tell a unique story about our country.”

Northwest Florida stakeholders are undergoing a process to potentially designate the Florida Panhandle as a NHA. Following designation, a public-private partnership of citizens, community organizations, local/state/federal governments, non-profits and businesses manages the NHA. Together, this public-private partnership leverages funds and long-term support for projects. NHAs receive funding and technical assistance from NPS towards capacity building, planning, and project implementation. NHAs can receive up to \$700,000 from annual Congressional appropriations.

## NORTH STAR BLACK HERITAGE REGION’S LEGACY COMMUNITIES TRAIL SYSTEM

Legacy Communities are African American communities that formed on plantations in Jackson, Gadsden, Leon, Jefferson and Madison counties and expanded shortly after emancipation. After emancipation, previously enslaved African Americans and freedmen formalized these tight-knit, self-sufficient communities, which acted as hubs of economic activity and social support in a region and nation that actively sought to dismantle their prosperity. Today, Legacy Communities still serve as important social and economic hubs. However, faced with enduring disinvestment and out-migration, Legacy Communities are at risk to be lost forever.

Beginning in Jackson County, the North Star Legacy Communities Initiative seeks to recognize, preserve, and spur economic resiliency through tourism. The North Star Black Heritage Region’s Legacy Communities Trail System builds infrastructure to position Legacy Communities as visitor destinations by connecting community cultural and historic assets to existing trails and attractions.





## ECONOMIC

5. Support cities in recovery.

### OPPORTUNITY ZONES

Opportunity Zones are one tool to encourage private sector investment in the regional recreation economy through lodging, restaurants or gear outfitters, which are currently limited in the region. OZs are state-designated, economically distressed census tracts. New long-term investments in OZs are eligible for tax incentives, including deferral and/or reduction of capital gains taxes for long-term investments.

OZs can help bring a regional vision to life by attracting private investment to the regional recreation economy. OZs, layered with other investment tools, can make financing specific projects more viable.



## EXPLORE

6. Promote regional recreation.

### EXPLORE NORTHWEST FLORIDA 2020-2025 FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Explore Northwest Florida is a regional marketing organization, dedicated to promoting the Apalachicola and Choctawhatchee River Basins as premier destinations for nature-based tourism. Explore Northwest Florida leverages local contributions, grant funding and in-kind services to market the region's unique resources. In its 2020-2025 Five Year Strategic Plan, Explore Northwest Florida set forth several implementation strategies, including:

- Increase promotional avenues through digital marketing and printed material distribution.
- Partner with the region's member Tourist Development Councils on co-op marketing initiatives.
- Create regional and local itineraries.
- Continue to update and keep current the mapped assets.
- Determine the gaps in tourism infrastructure.



*"File:Joseph W. Russ Jr. House  
02.jpg" by Michael Rivera is  
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# REGIONAL RECREATION NETWORK

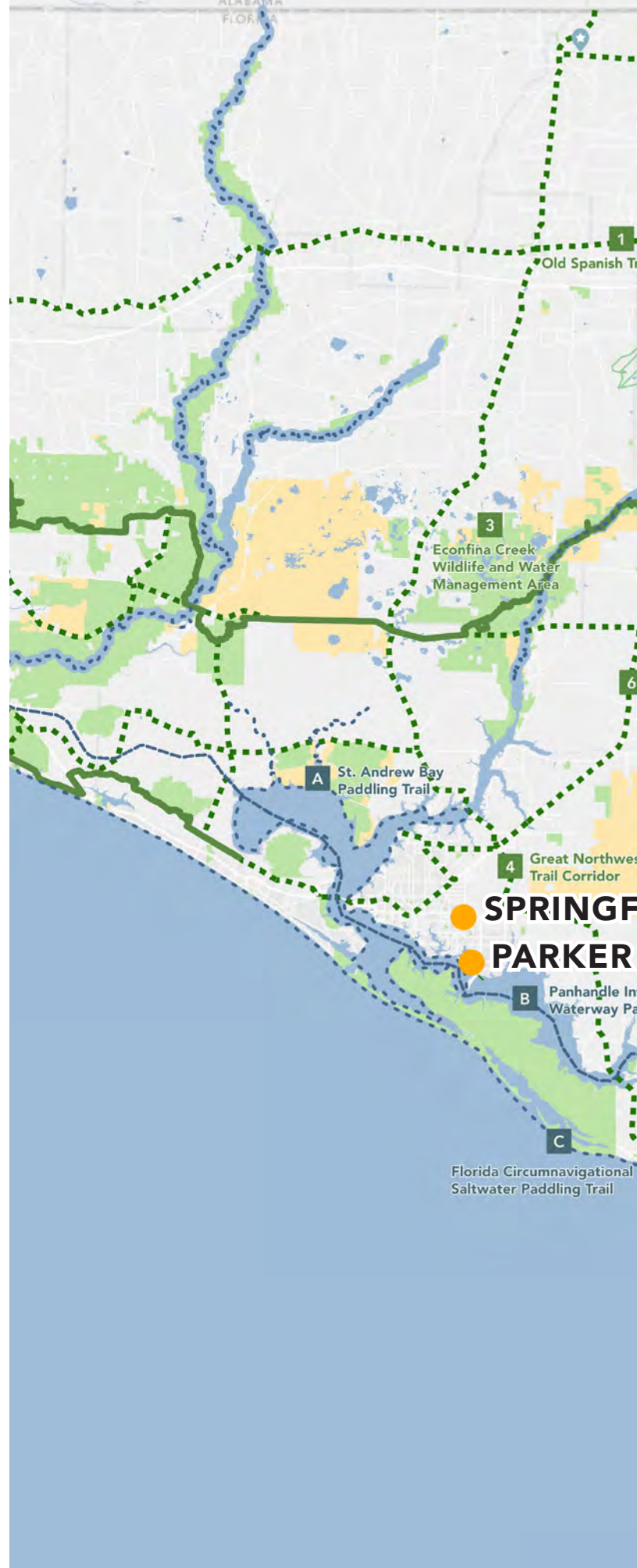
This map illustrates the abundant land and water resources along with current and potential trails that create the Florida Panhandle regional recreation network described in more detail the following pages.

## LAND NETWORKS

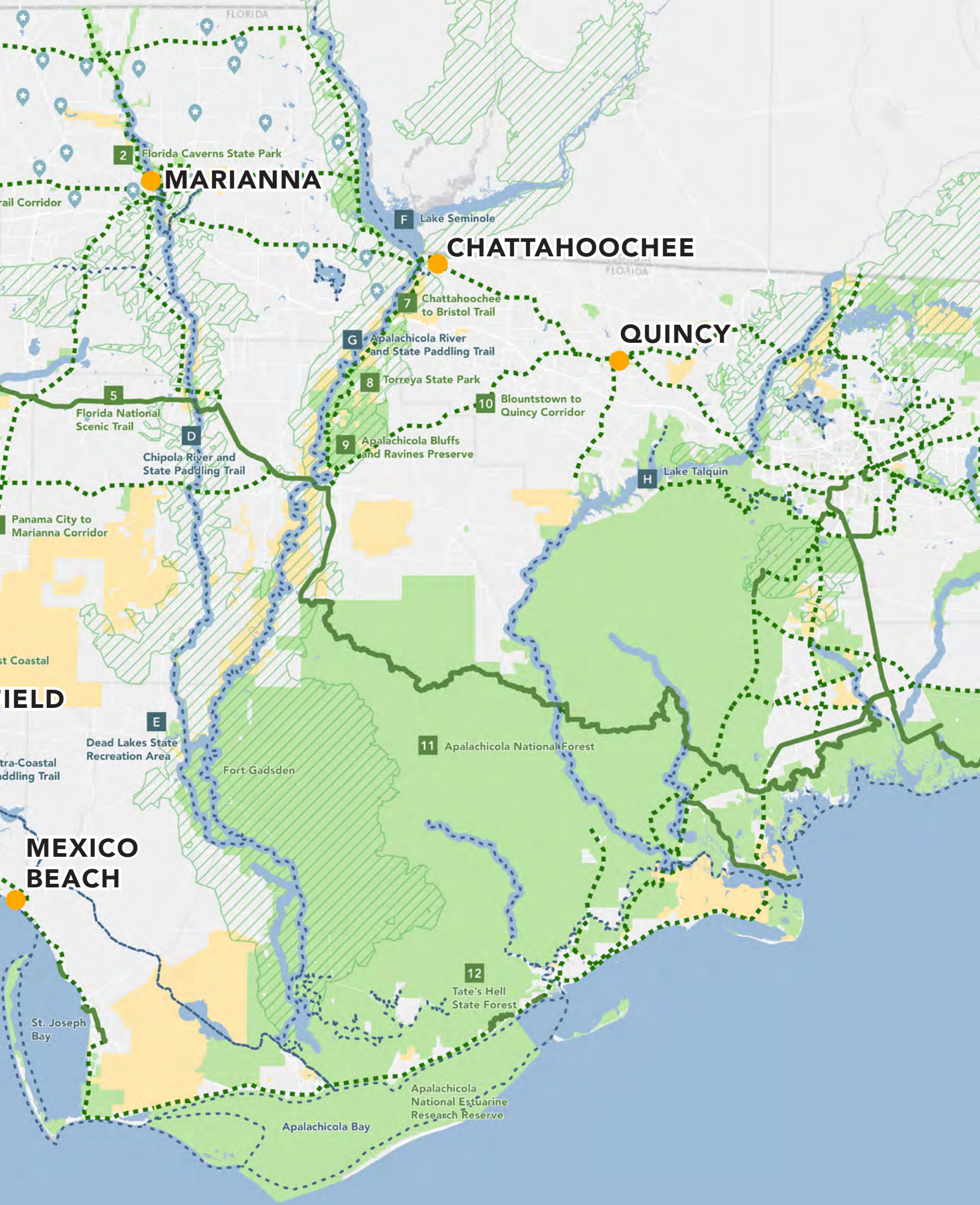
- 1 Old Spanish Trail Corridor
- 2 Florida Caverns State Park
- 3 Econfinia Creek Wildlife and Water Management Area
- 4 Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor
- 5 Florida National Scenic Trail
- 6 Panama City to Marianna Corridor
- 7 Chattahoochee to Bristol Trail
- 8 Torreya State Park
- 9 Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve
- 10 Blountstown to Quincy Corridor
- 11 Apalachicola National Forest
- 12 Tate's Hell State Forest

## WATER NETWORKS

- A St. Andrews Bay Paddling Trail
- B Panhandle Intra-Coastal Waterway Paddling Trail
- C Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail
- D Chipola River and State Paddling Trail
- E Dead Lakes State Recreation Area
- F Lake Seminole
- G Apalachicola River and State Paddling Trail
- H Lake Talquin









# REGIONAL RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Florida Panhandle has approximately 2.4 million acres of recreation lands and water (ranked second in the state), including a significant share of federally- and state-owned recreation land. This rich landscape of unique ecological, cultural and historic assets is the foundation for a vibrant regional recreation economy with strategic investments in access and amenities. According to the Northwest Planning Region Report, “the region is most well-known for its abundant white sand beaches, freshwater springs and numerous river systems ideal for water-based activities such as cave diving and paddling.” This section highlights some of the significant natural assets along with current and potential trails that form a robust regional recreation network (illustrated in the map on pages 10-11).

## LAND NETWORKS

### 1 Old Spanish Trail Corridor

The Old Spanish Trail follows a historic east-west road, built in the 1920s as a tourist route that begins in St. Augustine, Florida. The Old Spanish Trail Corridor is a planned regional priority trail that travels along the path of the Old Spanish Trail from Pensacola to St. Augustine. Upon completion, the trail will connect Marianna, Chattahoochee and Quincy. The trail corridor will connect community cultural and historical resources through hiking and biking connections across much of the northern Panhandle.



Florida Caverns State Park (“Florida Caverns” by MyFWC Florida Fish and Wildlife is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.

### 2 Florida Caverns State Park

Florida Caverns State Park is the only state park where visitors can experience guided cave tours. Limestone formations in the caverns are over 30 million years old and provide habitats for rare species, such as the endangered gray bat.



### 3 Econfina Creek Wildlife and Water Management Area

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The Econfina Creek Wildlife and Water Management Area includes spring-fed streams, sandy hills and limestone bluffs. These unique upland and wetland habitats support several birds of prey, such as bald eagles, hawks, kestrels and osprey. The Econfina Creek Wildlife and Water Management Area is also a popular location for paddling, swimming, tubing and hiking. Eighteen miles of the Florida National Scenic Trail are within the Econfina Creek Wildlife and Water Management Area. The area is managed by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Northwest Florida Water Management District.

### 4 Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor

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Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor is a planned regional priority trail that traces U.S. 98 from Pensacola and upon completion, will travel north of Parker, through Springfield and connect to Mexico Beach. Segments of the planned Gulf Coast Parkway will run parallel to the Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor.

### 5 Florida National Scenic Trail

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The Florida National Scenic Trail traverses 1,500 miles from the Big Cypress National Preserve in South Florida to the Gulf Island National Seashore in the western Panhandle.

### 6 Panama City to Marianna Corridor

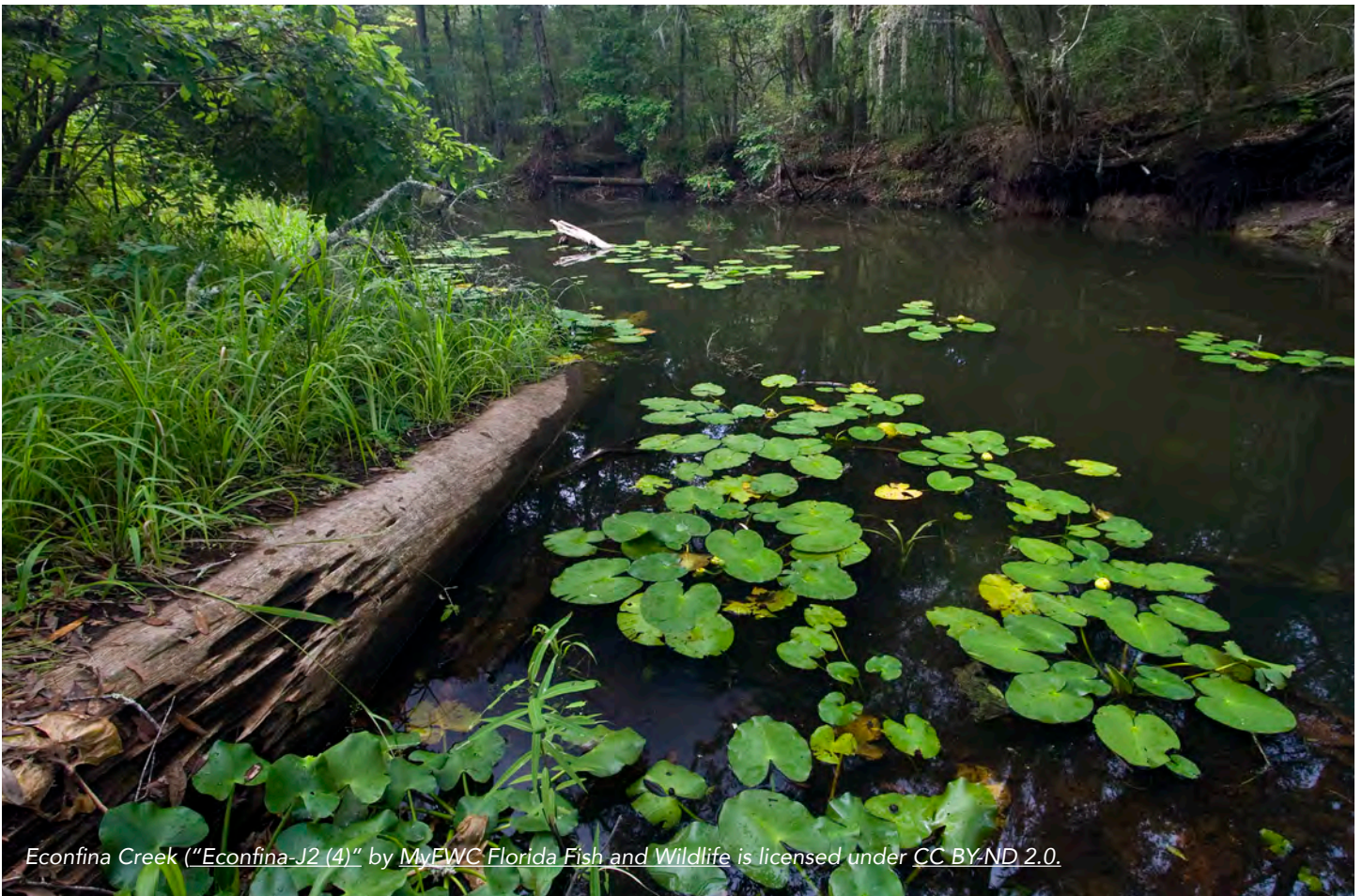
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The Panama City to Marianna Corridor is a proposed regional priority trail along State Road 75 that would connect coastal and inland communities with a multi-model transportation route.

### 7 Chattahoochee to Bristol Trail

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The Chattahoochee to Bristol Trail is a proposed opportunity land trail that connects Chattahoochee and Bristol and parallels the Apalachicola River corridor. The corridor along the Apalachicola River to the Apalachicola National Forest is recognized by the Southeast Conservation Blueprint as having high conservation value, or an important area for ecosystem health, function, and connectivity.



Econfina Creek ("Econfina-J2 (4)" by MyEWC Florida Fish and Wildlife is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.



## 8 Torrey State Park

Located on the bluffs along the Apalachicola River, the Torrey State Park is home to the nearly extinct Torrey Tree. One of the oldest known tree species, there are currently only about 200 Torrey trees in existence today in the Apalachicola River Valley. This is less than one percent of its former historic population.

## 9 Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve

Managed by The Nature Conservancy, the Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve protects rare steephead ravine habitats south of Torrey State Park. The Garden of Eden trail attracts hundreds of visitors, including from outside of the state, to the preserve. The trail begins in the longleaf pine sandhills, traverses along the tops of steephead ravines and ends at a viewpoint at Alum Bluff.

## 10 Quincy to Blountstown Corridor

The Quincy to Blountstown Corridor is a proposed opportunity trail that branches off U.S. 90 and follows S.R. 12 south to the Apalachicola Bluffs Ravines Preserve and the Florida National Scenic Trail.



*Florida National Scenic Trail*



*Torrey State Park (Pam Myers, EPA)*



## 11 Apalachicola National Forest

Apalachicola National Forest is the largest forest in the state and provides a diverse range of recreational opportunities, including boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, camping, horseback riding and off-roading (ATV).

Considered part of the Prospect Bluff Historic Sites, Fort Gadsden was one of two successive forts used during the War of 1812 and the First Seminole War. After the British withdrew from northern Florida in 1815, African Americans and Seminole Indians held the fort under the British flag and developed agricultural communities around it. In 1816, General Andrew Jackson saw the fort as a threat to slaveholders and ordered its destruction, which left more than 300 men, women and children dead. Two years later, following Jackson's orders, Lieutenant James Gadsden built a new fort, known as Fort Gadsden, on the site of the massacre. It is now a historic interpretive area within the Apalachicola National Forest.

## 12 Tate's Hell State Forest

Immediately south of the Apalachicola National Forest, Tate's Hell State Forest covers over 200,000 acres between the Apalachicola and Ochlockonee Rivers. It is home to unique, rare species, such as the bald eagle, the Florida black bear and the dwarf cypress. Tate's Hell State Forest offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including camping, fishing, boating, hiking and wildlife viewing. Tate's Hell State Forest is also in a segment of the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail.



Apalachicola National Forest





*"Wildlife Viewing from a Kayak" by MyFWC Florida Fish and Wildlife is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.*

## WATER NETWORKS

### **A** St. Andrew Bay Paddling Trail

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The St. Andrew Bay Paddling Trail is a kayaking trail that traces the outline of the bay.

### **B** Panhandle Intra Coastal Waterway Paddling Trail

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The Panhandle Intra Coastal Waterway Paddling Trail branches off from the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail near Destin and travels across St. Andrew Bay until it meets the Apalachicola River.

### **C** Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

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The Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail is a 1,515-mile sea kayaking trail that begins in the Gulf of Mexico at Pensacola, traces the coast around the state and ends near the Florida-Georgia state line in the Atlantic Ocean. The trail travels through every coastal habitat in the state.

### **D** Chipola River and State Paddling Trail

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The Chipola River, a tributary of the Apalachicola River, is fed by over sixty freshwater springs, including Jackson Blue Springs. Jackson Blue Springs also supplies water to the Merritt's Millpond, a reservoir located about five miles east of Marianna. Merritt's Millpond is a popular fishing spot and holds the state record for redear sunfish. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection designated the Chipola River as an "Outstanding Florida Water."

### **E** Dead Lakes State Recreation Area

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Dead Lakes State Recreation Area features a 6,700-acre lake and hundreds of cypress trees on the Chipola River. It is well-known for fishing and boating opportunities.



## **F** Lake Seminole

Located on the statelines between Florida, Georgia and Alabama, Lake Seminole is a reservoir created by the construction of the Jim Woodruff Dam. Lake Seminole is popular for fishing. The waters of Lake Seminole inundate or surround several historic sites, including Creek and Seminole villages, Spanish missions, military forts and shipwrecks.

## **G** Apalachicola River

The Apalachicola River is well-known for its recreational and ecological significance. The Apalachicola River provides habitats for several rare plants and animals that do not occur elsewhere in the state, including the rare *Torreya* tree species. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection designated the Apalachicola River as an "Outstanding Florida Water" and a high priority under the Florida Forever Priority List.

## **H** Lake Talquin

Lake Talquin is designated as a state park, state forest and an "Outstanding Florida Water." The reservoir hosts over 100 bird species, including bald eagles and osprey. Lake Talquin is also well-known for fishing from the lakeshore or by motorized or non-motorized boat. The Big Bend Scenic Byway, a designated Florida Scenic Highway, also traverses Lake Talquin State Forest.



*Shape note singers in Campbellton, Jackson County*

## CULTURAL RESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS

### **North Star Black Heritage Region's Legacy Communities Trail System**

Legacy Communities are African American communities that formed on plantations in Jackson, Gadsden, Leon, Jefferson, and Madison counties and expanded shortly after emancipation. After emancipation, previously enslaved African Americans and freedmen gained some flexibility to formalize these tight-knit, self-sufficient communities, which acted as hubs of economic activity and social support in a region and nation that actively sought to dismantle their prosperity. Barred from full participation in the regional economy, Legacy Community residents established their own stores and developed their own methods to produce staple foods. Relationships between communities also strengthened trade and access to different crops. Legacy Communities fostered relationships across multiple generations, anchored in entrepreneurship, Black churches, schools and voluntary associations. The North Star Black Heritage Region's Legacy Communities Trail System celebrates Legacy Communities' resiliency in the face of enormous challenges and isolation.

### **Chattahoochee Landing Mounds**

Native peoples built the Chattahoochee Landing Mounds about 1,000 years ago for residential uses. Parts of the mounds are still visible at River Landing Park.

### **Gadsden Arts Center and Museum**

The Gadsden Arts Center and Museum, located in downtown Quincy, is one of two nationally accredited art museums in north-central Florida. It offers changing fine art exhibitions, which attract visitors and patrons across the state each year. The Gadsden Arts Center and Museum showcases art both national in scope and regional in focus. Current and past exhibitions have celebrated natural spaces and landscapes.

# CITY ASSETS AND CONNECTIONS

## CHATTAHOOCHEE

Chattahoochee is located within Gadsden County near several regional recreational assets, such as Lake Seminole and the Apalachicola River. As such, the city currently offers a range of recreational and cultural assets and plans to position them as future regional destinations. River Landing Park, a large waterfront park on the Apalachicola River, includes features of ecological and environmental significance including Native American mounds, historic battle sites and a World War II era bridge. Chattahoochee plans to develop a new mountain bike park to draw in regional visitors.

Chattahoochee is situated at the crossroads of several regional trails, including U.S. 90 Trail Corridor/Old Spanish Trail Corridor, the Chattahoochee to Bristol Trail and the Apalachicola Blueway. The city plans to create connections between its downtown, where vibrant arts and cultural events are held, to proposed regional trail opportunities.

For more information on the design concepts, please visit the Chattahoochee page on the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com/chattahoochee](https://r2p2.skeo.com/chattahoochee)



Gadsden County Courthouse

## MARIANNA

Marianna is connecting natural areas with walking and biking trails that support local stormwater management for neighborhoods while supporting expanded recreation opportunities and natural resource projects for the Chipola River. Marianna is located in Jackson County along the western banks of the Chipola River. The Chipola River supports the state designated Chipola River State Paddling Trail, which begins at Florida Caverns State Park, just north of the city. A network of regional trails links Marianna to many more natural, historic and recreational assets. The city plans to create multimodal paths that connect community amenities and downtown businesses to broader regional recreation opportunities. Potential bike/pedestrian connections tie into multiple regional greenways, including the Old Spanish Trail, the Chipola River Corridor and Panama City to Marianna Corridor.

For more information on the design concepts, please visit the Marianna page on the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com/marianna](https://r2p2.skeo.com/marianna)



Illustration of the proposed mountain bike park gateway and River Landing Park trailhead in Chattahoochee





**Legend**

- R2P2 Communities
- Parks or Conservation Areas
- Existing Trails
- - - State Designated Priority or Opportunity Land Trails
- - - State Designated Priority or Opportunity Paddling Trails
- Florida Forever Board of Trustees Projects
- Southeast Conservation Blueprint Corridors
- ★ North Star Legacy Communities

## QUINCY

Quincy is located in Gadsden County, approximately 25 miles west of Tallahassee in an area rich in history, arts and culture. The city’s downtown is centered around the Courthouse Square and anchored by several historic buildings. The downtown area hosts a thriving arts community, anchored by the Quincy Music Theatre and Gadsden Arts Center. The Gadsden Arts Center offers year-round art exhibitions and programs that attract visitors from across the state. Two outdoor murals also provide distinctive artwork downtown, the first of which celebrates the economic, social and philanthropic benefits the Coca-Cola corporation brought to the city and the second honors the contributions of African American doctors to the county.

Regionally, Quincy is situated within reach of several Florida land trails. The city plans to establish new trails and scenic drives that connect to the regional trail network. Upon completion, the proposed Tanyard Creek Greenway will link to the Old Spanish Trail and provide recreational opportunities for both nearby residents and regional visitors. Another proposed greenway along Pat Thomas Parkway links Quincy to the Lake Talquin Trail, which connects to Lake Talquin State Forest.

For more information on the design concepts, please visit the Quincy page on the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com/quincy](http://r2p2.skeo.com/quincy)



*"Keepers of the Hippocratic Oath" mural in Quincy*





## PARKER

Parker offers 12 miles of coastline along St. Andrews Bay. The city plans to leverage this recreational asset by increasing waterfront access and provide paddle trail connections to regional amenities and services. A network of regional trails link Parker to many natural and recreational assets.

Regional paddling trails pass along Parker’s coastline and connect to statewide recreation opportunities. The Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail is an existing sea kayaking trail that traces the coast around the state and connects Parker to a statewide recreation attraction. St. Andrew Bay Paddling Trail is a proposed trail that traces the outline of the bay and passes through Parker.

Proposed regional land trails connect Parker to inland amenities. The Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor is a planned regional priority trail that traces U.S. 98 from Pensacola and upon completion, will travel north of Parker, through Springfield and connect to Mexico Beach. Segments of the in-construction Gulf Coast Parkway will run parallel to the Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor. Panama City to Marianna Corridor is a proposed regional priority trail along State Road 75 that would connect Parker and Springfield along the coast to Marianna, Chattahoochee and Quincy further inland. West Bay Parkway Trail Corridor is a proposed regional opportunity trail that begins near Point Washington State Forest and follows West Highway 388 (Don Johnson Memorial Highway).

For more information on the design concepts, please visit the Parker page on the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com/parker](http://r2p2.skeo.com/parker)



## SPRINGFIELD

Regionally, Springfield is located within reach of paddle trails and a proposed network of land trails. The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program developed design concepts for several city parks and an 11-mile regional greenway for Springfield and Callaway, which connects to the proposed Great Northwest Coastal Trail. The Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor travels from Pensacola through Destin to Panama City and St. Marks along the Apalachee Bay. Upon completion, this trail will link to several additional regional land trails such as the Panama City to Marianna Corridor and West Bay Parkway Trail Corridor.

Citywide connections that tie into the regional trail network can connect Springfield to additional recreation opportunities both on the coast and further inland. Springfield is pursuing road, bike and pedestrian improvements and park connectivity to enhance stormwater management and links within the city and into Parker.

For more information on the design concepts, please visit the Springfield page on the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com/springfield](https://r2p2.skeo.com/springfield)

## MEXICO BEACH

Located 20 miles east of Panama City on Florida's Unforgettable Gulf Coast, the small coastal community of Mexico Beach combines the natural beauty of the land and the sea. Mexico Beach is rich in natural diversity including bald eagles, osprey, herons, egrets, pelicans, five species of turtles, dolphins and rich tidepools. Proposed City-wide blue and green trails connect the famous city Pier with Canal Park, Municipal Park, Parker Park, Under the Palms Park and a series of wetland parks. Located mid-way between St. Andrew Bay and the Apalachicola River, Mexico Beach connects to surrounding land and seascapes via the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail and the Panhandle Intra Coastal Waterway Paddling Trail with potential to connect via land trail to the Panama City to Marianna Corridor.

For more information on the design concepts, please visit the Mexico Beach page on the R2P2 website: [r2p2.skeo.com/mexico-beach](https://r2p2.skeo.com/mexico-beach)



Tyndall Air Force Base



Proposed concept plan for 8th Street Canal

# BUILDING RECREATION ECONOMIES - CASE STUDIES FROM THE SOUTHEAST

This section includes case study examples from similar regions that highlight the benefits of investing in outdoor recreational infrastructure to support the regional economy.

## WEST ORANGE TRAIL

Development of the 22-mile long, multi-use West Orange Trail sparked downtown revitalization in Winter Garden, Florida. With a combination of state and federal funds, the Orange County Parks and Recreation Department constructed the initial trail segment in 1994. Subsequent phases routed the West Orange Trail through the center of Winter Garden's downtown. While extending the trail, the city of Winter Garden also invested in pedestrian infrastructure to position the downtown as a destination for pedestrians and bicyclists. The West Orange Trail attracts pedestrians and bicyclists and facilitated new commercial development. A 2010 study found that the West Orange Trail received over 880,000 visitors in a year, supported 61 jobs, and contributed an estimated economic impact of \$5 million.

While most of West Orange Trail users surveyed reside in Orange County, almost 40% of trail users surveyed were from other counties, outside the region or the state. 25.5% of gross sales revenue from downtown businesses surveyed was directly attributed to trail users. The city's downtown area is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

In February 2020, Winter Garden became the tenth community designated as a Trail Town by the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails. There are two planned extensions that will add another 14 miles to the West Orange Trail. The West Orange Trail will eventually link the Florida Coast to the Coast Connector Trail, a paved trail that upon completion, will connect communities between St. Petersburg and Titusville.



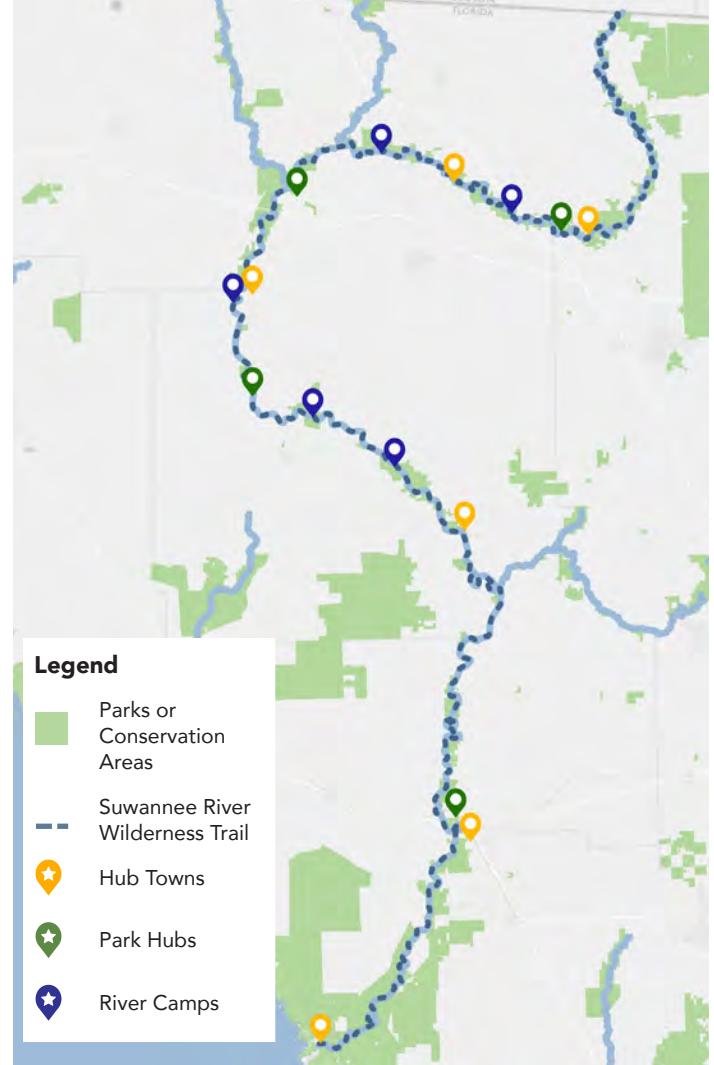


## SUWANNEE RIVER WILDERNESS TRAIL

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is a network of public and private recreation amenities, extending about 200 miles along the Suwannee River. The trail was established by a partnership that brought together the Suwannee River Water Management District, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, eight counties, multiple cities and local businesses. Through \$10 million in state funding, the partnership coordinated efforts to enhance recreational opportunities on or near the Suwannee River.

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail includes a system of hubs and river camps that provide lodging or rest stops at one-day intervals along the river. Hubs are parks or towns from which visitors can access the river and other recreational opportunities. Hubs also serve as base camps where visitors can restock on supplies or attend special events. Park hubs include eight state parks, two county parks and a private park. From north to south, hub towns on the river include White Springs, Suwannee Springs, Ellaville, Dowling Park, Branford, Fanning Springs and Suwannee.

In addition to campgrounds at park hubs, five river camps provide overnight accommodations at no charge to visitors. River camps are camping platforms located about 10 miles between hubs on conservation areas. Each river camp fits up to eight people and has restrooms, an electrical outlet, a water spigot, a fire ring and a picnic table.



By connecting recreational facilities, service providers and land managers, the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail offers a wide range of recreational opportunities, lodging choices and trip lengths. There are places to paddle, hike, road or mountain bike, ride horses, view wildlife and attend cultural events throughout the river. Visitors can easily access information about these different opportunities through online guides, interactive maps and a list of local outfitters. The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail also connects to other regional or statewide trails, including the Florida National Scenic Trail, with new links planned. In October 2020, the U.S. Forest Service approved a reroute of the Florida National Scenic Trail, which will add another connection to the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail.

Since development began in 2005, the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail strengthened the regional recreational economy. Parks saw increased visitation, which resulted in economic benefit through visitor expenditures, sales tax revenue and jobs.



## ROANOKE RIVER PADDLE TRAIL

The Roanoke River Paddle Trail travels over 200 miles and includes 16 camping platforms. There are more than 56,000 acres protected in public and private nature preserves along the river corridor. The trail was established by a multi-county partnership to leverage the Roanoke River as a destination for outdoor recreation and a driver for regional economic growth. Through the non-profit Roanoke River Partners, the counties of Bertie, Halifax, Martin, Northampton, and Washington developed the Roanoke Paddle Trail through public private partnerships. The Roanoke River Partners signed a lease agreement with the property owners, which includes an initial lease fee and revenue sharing.

The Roanoke River Paddle Trail also links historic communities along the Roanoke River. In 2007, with assistance from the Conservation Fund, the Roanoke River Partners purchased the former Hamilton Rosenwald School, which provided public education for African Americans in the early 1900s. The organization preserved the school as a community center, now known as the Rosenwald River Center. The Roanoke River Partners also collaborated with the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom to highlight Roanoke River's role in the Underground Railroad through community programming.

Over 5,000 paddlers, both locals and tourists, visit the Roanoke River Paddle Trail a year. This visitor traffic supported new recreation-based businesses such as river outfitters and guides. A 2016 study found that the trail contributes over \$550,000 to regional economic growth every year. The study estimated that for every dollar spent as a result of the trail, \$1.64 is generated in the regional economy. The study concludes that this economic impact is driven by two primary activities: the operational spending of the Roanoke River Partners organization and spending by trail users on groceries, equipment, lodging and other needs.





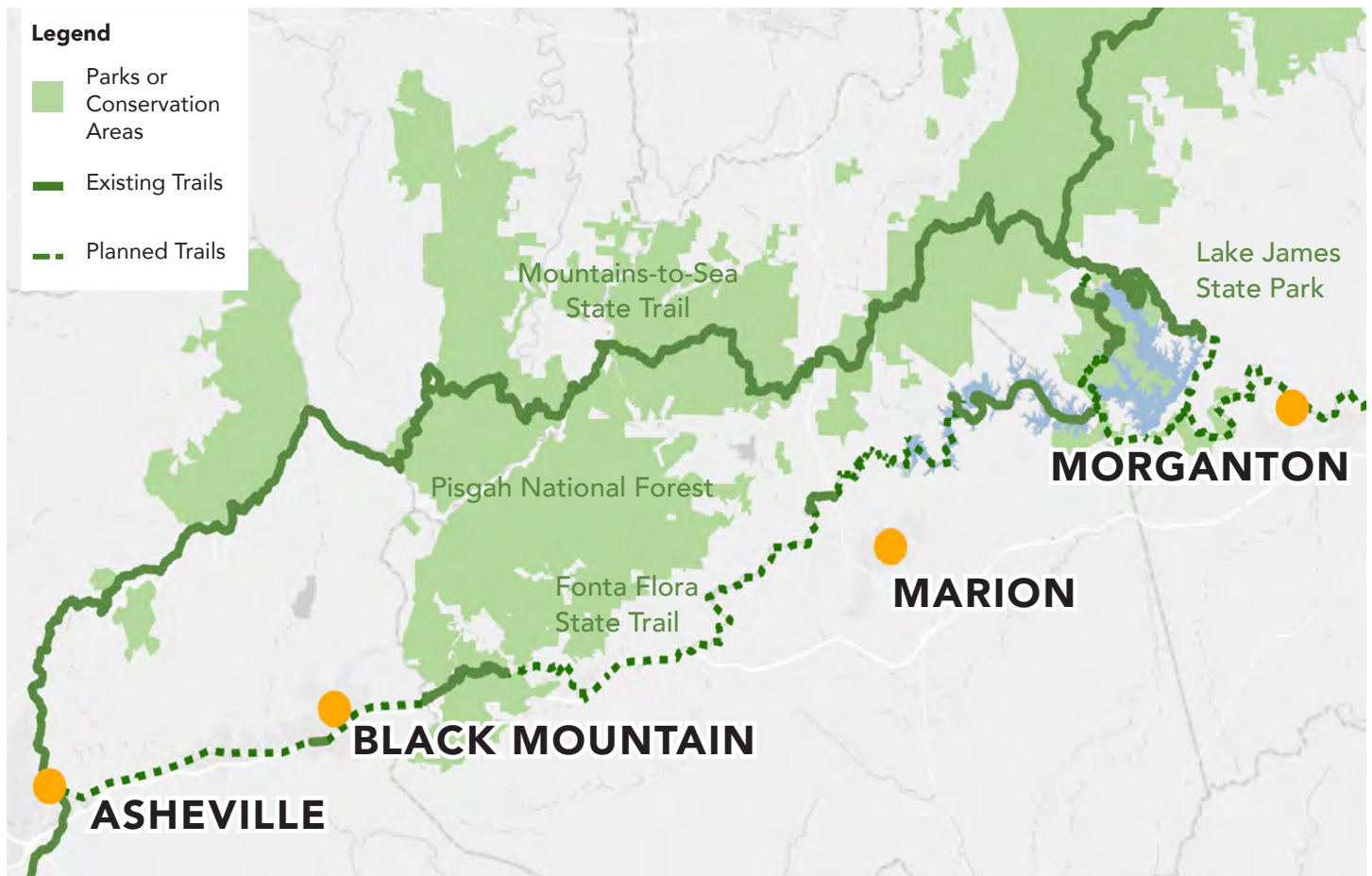
## FONTA FLORA STATE TRAIL

The Fonta Flora State Trail is a cross-county, multi-use trail, named after a settlement of African-American sharecroppers, whose homes were flooded by Southern Power Company (predecessor to Duke Energy) when the Catawba River was dammed to create Lake James. Upon completion, the Fonta Flora State Trail will extend from Morganton to Asheville, connecting Lake James, part of Pisgah National Forest and Fonta Flora County Park in Burke County. The trail also links to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, a 330-mile corridor across Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, and the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, a 1175-mile proposed trail from Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks with 600 miles of the trail currently complete.

Three segments of the Fonta Flora State Trail, totaling 74 miles of the 100-mile proposed trail, have been completed, including a loop around Lake James and two segments that connect Lake James to downtown Marion and Morganton. Completed segments were built through partnerships between local, state, federal and private entities. As part of a federal relicensing agreement, Duke Energy contributed funds and leased land to the county for the Lake James loop.

To connect the Lake James loop to the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, the county partnered with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) to construct a connector trail on NCWRC-managed game lands. The Marion segment received funding from the FHWA's Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and the state Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. Remaining trail sections will be built as funding is secured. The Foothills Conservancy, a non-profit land trust, partners with NC State Parks to purchase lands for the trail and holds those lands until funding is available for NC State Parks to acquire them. The Foothills Conservancy also negotiates with private landowners to allow public use for the Fonta Flora State Trail.

The Fonta Flora State Trail has helped position rural communities in western North Carolina as outdoor recreation destinations.





*"Kayaking Together" by MyFWC Florida Fish and Wildlife is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.*

## THE FLORIDA CIRCUMNAVIGATIONAL SALTWATER PADDLING TRAIL

The Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail is a statewide, 1,515-mile sea kayaking trail. It spans both remote and urbanized coastlines. It links 20 national parks, seashores, wildlife refuges and marine sanctuaries, 37 Florida aquatic preserves and 47 Florida state parks. It also connects to the states of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia through the Southeast Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail.

In 2004, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Greenways and Trails began to develop the trail, modeling it after the existing Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission had mapped and established the first 105-mile segment of the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail earlier that year.

In 2005, the legislature designated the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail as part of the Florida Greenways and Trails System. The Office of Greenways and Trails hired Doug Alderson, now with the Apalachicola Riverkeepers, to scout the trail route. Completed in 2007, the route incorporates existing multiple local and regional trails. The Office of Greenways and Trails continues to manage the trail by developing a trail guide and trip planning resources, in coordination with governmental agencies, counties, municipalities, local businesses and volunteer organizations. The trail guide identifies locations where paddlers can stop for lodging, food and supplies.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The R2P2 effort would not have been possible without the dedication of the FEMA Integrated Recovery Coordination Team, along with the expertise and perspectives of all the local, regional, state, federal and non-governmental partners.

## CITY

City of Chattahoochee  
 City of Marianna  
 City of Mexico Beach  
 City of Parker  
 City of Quincy  
 City of Springfield  
 Mexico Beach Community Development Council  
 Quincy Main Street  
 Main Street Marianna  
 Chattahoochee Main Street

## INTEGRATED RECOVERY COORDINATION TEAM

National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation  
 Federal Emergency Management Agency  
 Environmental Protection Agency  
 Army Corps of Engineers  
 Department of Interior  
 Department of Health and Human Services  
 Housing and Urban Development  
 Department of Agriculture, Rural Development  
 Economic Development Administration

## COUNTY

Bay County Board of County Commissioners  
 Gadsden County  
 Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners  
 Gulf County Board of County Commissioners  
 Gulf County Chamber of Commerce  
 Jackson County Chamber of Commerce  
 Jackson County Economic Development Committee  
 Jackson County Tourist Development Council  
 Washington County Tourist Development Council

## REGIONAL

Apalachee Regional Planning Council  
 Emerald Coast Regional Council  
 Riparian County Stakeholder Coalition  
 Tallahassee Community College  
 Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University  
 Florida State University  
 Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy

## ADDITIONAL FEDERAL

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve  
 EPA Environmental Finance Center, UNC School of Government  
 Federal Highway Administration  
 Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program  
 National Park Service  
 Fish and Wildlife Service  
 Forest Service  
 U.S. White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council

## STATE

Florida Division of Emergency Management  
 Florida Department of Economic Opportunity  
 Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
 Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission  
 Florida Department of Transportation  
 Northwest Florida Water Management District  
 Florida Forest Service

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL

Apalachicola Riverkeeper  
 Defenders of Wildlife  
 Creative Applications for Sustainable Technology  
 Enterprise Florida, Inc. (EFI)  
 Explore Northwest Florida  
 Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation  
 Florida Chamber Foundation  
 Florida Panhandle Natural and Cultural Resources Association  
 Gadsden Arts Center & Museum  
 Pensacola Habitat for Humanity  
 Space Coast Health Foundation  
 Tetra Tech, Inc.  
 Texas A&M AgriLife  
 The Nature Conservancy  
 Trust for Public Land  
 VISIT FLORIDA

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE R2P2 AND REGIONAL RECREATION ECONOMY SUMMIT,** contact Rick Durbrow, Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 at [durbrow.rick@epa.gov](mailto:durbrow.rick@epa.gov) or 404-562-8286.

### R2P2 PARTICIPATING CITIES



### R2P2 PARTNER AGENCIES



