

Florida Conservation and Scouting Effort Final Summary

American Perimeter Trail

April 2023



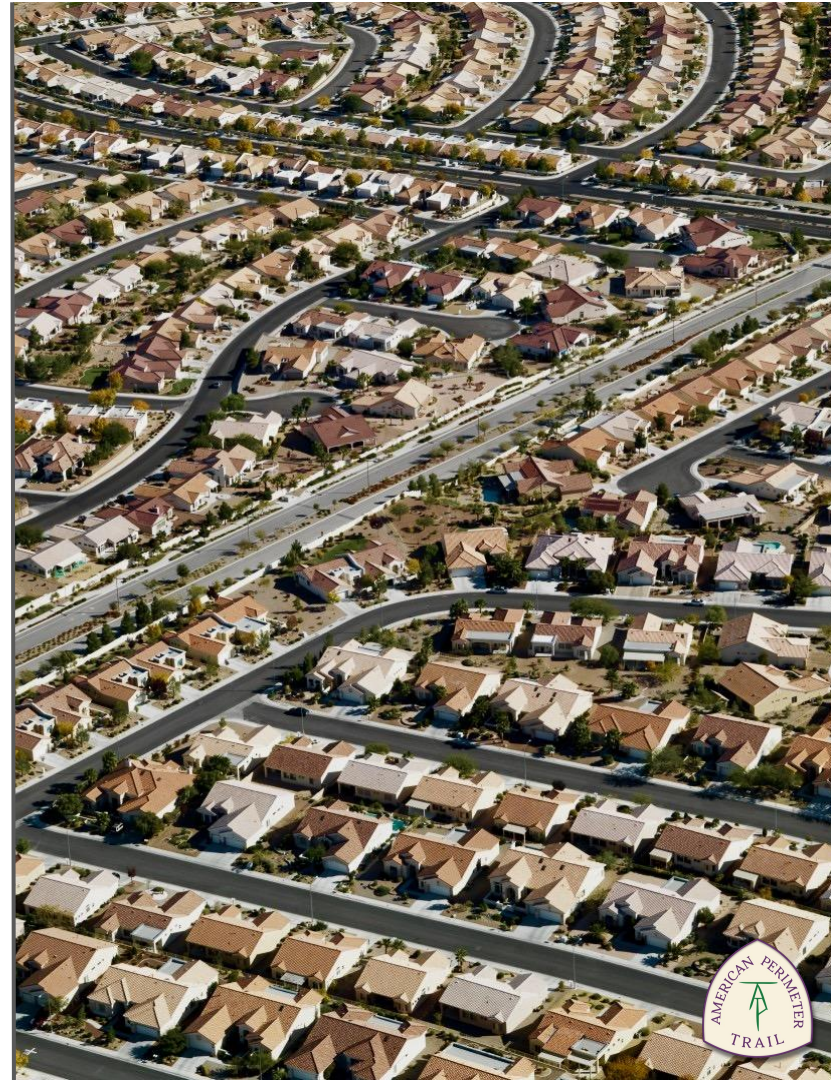
Scouting Trip: By the Numbers

- **Total miles scouted: 1200**
- **Outdoor recreationalists met: 50**
 - On-trail backpackers and hikers: 5
 - Off-trail backpackers and hikers: 25
 - Hunters and other outdoor recreationalists: 20
- **Connections with conservationists and decision-makers: 7**
- **Florida locals and community members: 200+**



Understanding Florida

- Florida is currently the **fastest growing population** of any state in the union. (Source: US Census Bureau)
- Florida is a “**battleground state**” for **conservation**, with dozens of organizational factions working both for and against each other across the region
- Florida's greatest threats to its natural environment are **continuous draining of wetlands, saltwater intrusion, water quality, and depletion of the Floridian Aquifer.**
- Florida is one of the most biodiverse states. It has 4,368 known animal species, 3,038 vascular plant species and 269 endemic species. Unfortunately Florida nears the top list of states with the most species at risk of extinction.
- **26.4%** of Florida is public land ranking it 14th in the nation.
- **Nearly half** of Florida is covered in woodlands.
- Florida has **1,800 miles of coastline only second to Alaska**



Understanding the Locals

APT interviewed locals throughout Florida about which conservation measures they would most like to see taken up in their communities.

Three key themes emerged from these conversations:

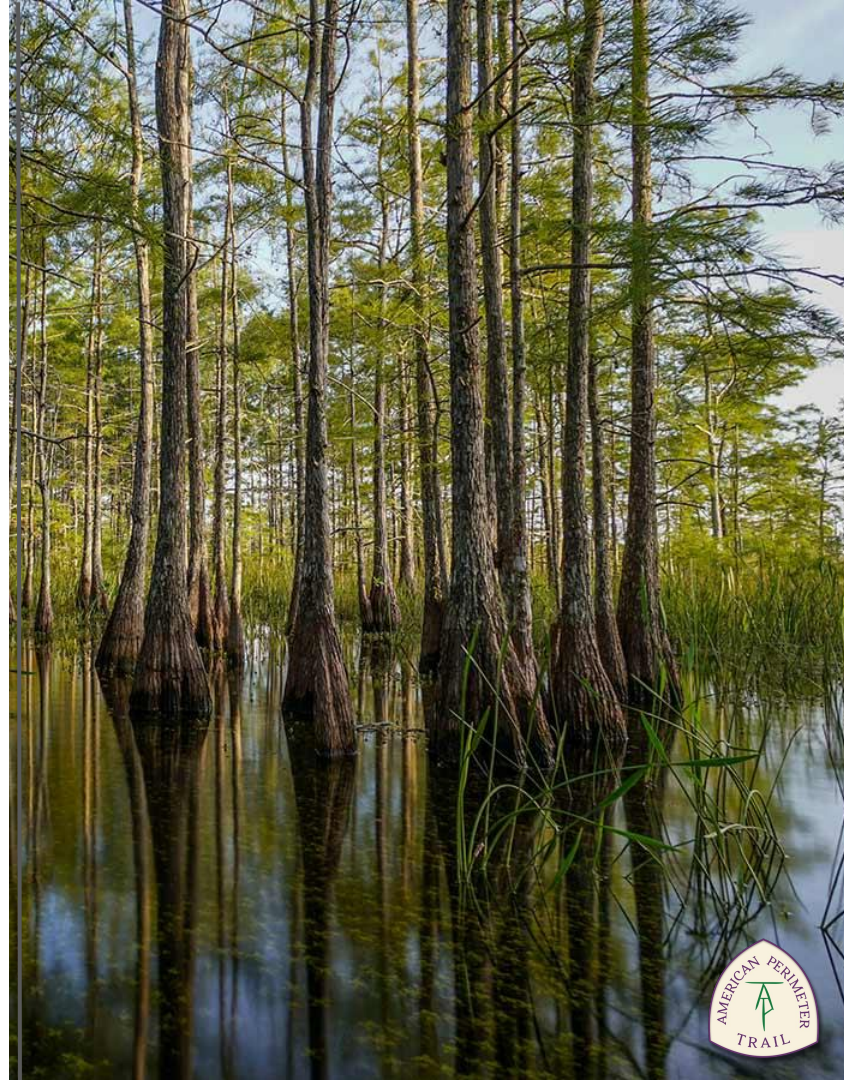
- **Suburban sprawl communities** desire access to more outdoor recreation opportunities, such as those proposed by the APT
- Flora and fauna require **more unpaved ecosystems** that could be attained through proposed design of the American Perimeter Trail
- Gray defunct enterprises and **gray spaces** should be secured by the state for such purposes.



Detailed Overview:

Big Cypress

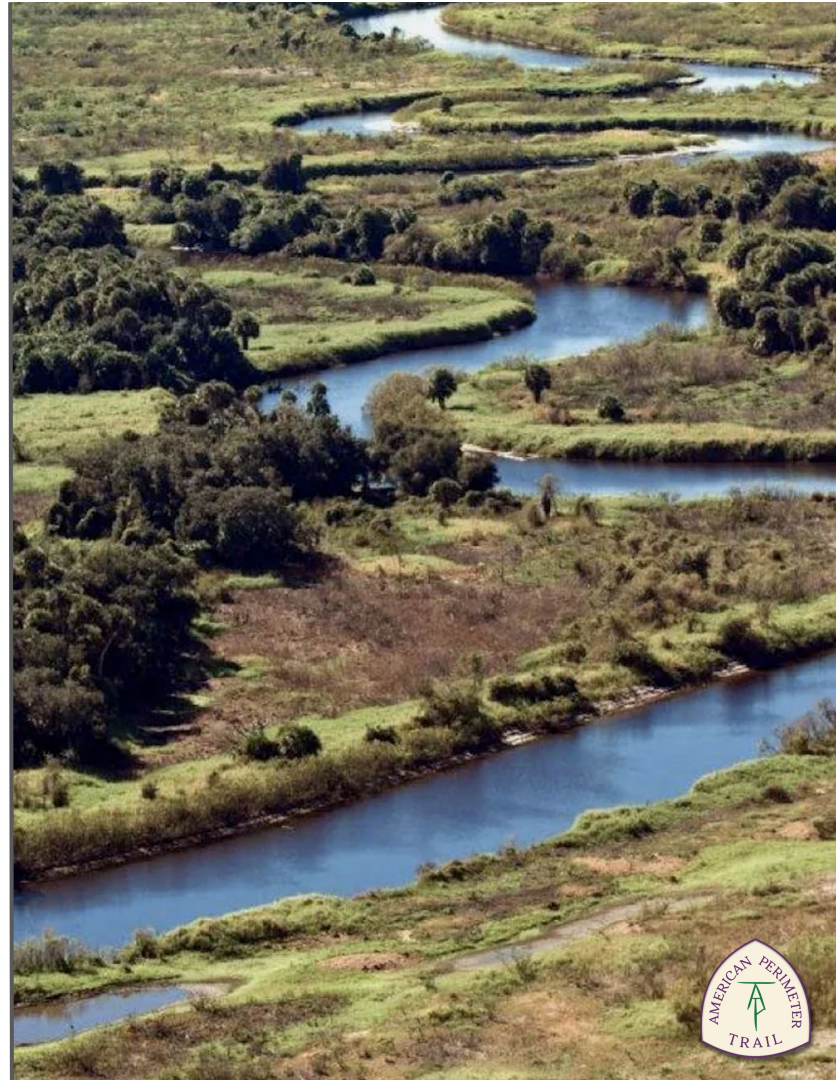
- Big Cypress is the first National Preserve, created in 1974. Today, the National Parks Conservation Association is publicly calling on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to use its Clean Water Act powers (section 404c) to protect Big Cypress National Preserve, part of America's Everglades, from damage caused by oil drilling.
- The Florida Trail goes directly through "Big Sugar" (U.S. Sugar Corp) operations north of Big Cypress. There is very little opportunity for conservation corridors in this area due to the highly cultivated private land. It does not provide applicative camping and clean water.
- Rue has scouted a route west of Big Cypress for the American Perimeter Trail. This route is in alignment with the APTC's mission and vision and additionally provides new conservation projects. Remains outside of Reservations and U.S. Sugar Corp holdings in the effort to create more single track footbeds.
- This new route could rejoin a trail following the Westside of Lake Okeechobee.



Detailed Overview:

Kissimmee River Basin

- In the 1960s, Congress tasked the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to cut and dredge the Kissimmee River into a 30-foot deep straightaway called the C-38 canal. This initiative drained the three mile wide flood plain of The Kissimmee River. Though the project achieved flood reduction benefits, it harmed the river-floodplain ecosystem.
- The “Lakeland” of Central Florida is quickly being inundated with residential developments and retail precincts. APT would like to see additional scouting specifically targeting the region of Lake Apopka and Harris. Due west is Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area, Homosassa Wildlife Management Area, and Goethe State Forest. This deviates from the FT route, which is accomplished through the popular Ocala Wildlife Management Area, and in doing so puts new conservation prospects on the table.
- The Kissimmee River Restoration Project is an excellent option for a partner to reclaim this once wildland area. A trail should be considered within the area already in the process of restoration. The Florida Trail route is undeveloped and relies on paved roads.



Detailed Overview:

Western Shore

- With the help of a Cartographer and a Geographer, APT is working on creating a map to highlight the areas of interest as far as Florida's western shore. Upon observations and research of the Gulf Coast it is APT's opinion that the Florida APT should travel in proximity to this coast line.
- A great challenge remains in finding dry ground as footpath for recreationalist and wildlife alike. In partnering with Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation, The APTC is laying the groundwork for a trail to be built in this region.
- The southern end of this proposed section would begin at The Rainbow River Corridor. From here it utilizes mostly a coastal route heading north west to The Appalachian National Forest.
- More scouting will need to be done on this coastal proposed route. This could be accomplished by The APTC and it's partners designing, scribing, mapping, and traveling a proposed APT route. This is the same process that has been used to test proof of concept throughout the APT route.



Detailed Overview:

Panhandle Gulf Shore

- Florida Forever replaces Preservation 2000, the largest public land acquisition program of its kind in the United States with approximately 10 million acres managed for conservation in Florida. More than 2.5 million acres were purchased under the Florida Forever and Preservation 2000 programs.
- The Forever Florida 2022 plan lays out a comprehensive approach to land acquisition within the Panhandle's Gulf Shore. Three of the main targets for preservation are lands around Rainbow River, the Apalachicola River, and Dickerson Bay.
- The region stretching from the southern end of the Rainbow River to The Apalachicola River are under consideration for the APT and overlap with plans the APT has for Alabama
- The APT is actively in touch with Alabama Trails Hiking Society and has a route awaiting review from the Society. A key contact for this initiative is The Pinhoti Trail Alliance of Alabama and Georgia.



A photograph of an alligator swimming in a body of water, partially obscured by green and yellowish-brown foliage in the foreground. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

Thank you for your support!

General Information: info@americanperimetertrail.org

Development & Partnerships Contact: partnerships@americanperimetertrail.org

