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Robert Hatch

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Citizen
Committee

Proposal for state designation of
THE POTANO PADDLING TRAIL

from Alachua Conservation Trust, Inc.

October, 2008

Summary: The Potano Paddling Trail will provide a variety of experiences for the paddling enthusiast in north central Florida. The trail alternates between narrow creeks and open water, and passes through hydric hammocks, cypress sloughs, wet prairie and march habitats.

Wildlife is abundant, including large populations of wading birds, raptors, and migratory birds. Reptiles and amphibians, and a variety of mammals are in large numbers, in part due to tens of thousands of acres of protected land. Flowering plants can be found in profusion along the banks of the trail, including wild azalea along Hatchett Creek, American lotus in Newnans Lake, pickerel weed and blue flag iris along Prairie Creek, and lizard tail and buttonbush along Camps Canal.

A number of public parks with water access, parking, and public restrooms make trips of varying lengths convenient. During times of low water, some portions of the trail can be challenging, and may require portages.

Trail name: The Potano were the native Americans that inhabited Alachua County at the time of first European contact, in the mid-1500s. They spoke Timucua, a language that was well documented by the Spanish missionaries. The Potano occupied hardwood hammocks, with village sites on high ground, near streams or sinkholes. The village clusters tend to fall along lines, which may represent hammock boundaries or the path of trails. The Potano were agricultural, with crops including corn, beans, and squash, and they cultivated tobacco. They also relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild crops, especially coontie and hickory nuts. Many of the large and well designed canoes found in Newnans Lake have been dated to the time of the Potano and their direct ancestors.

Trail Phases: The Potano Paddling Trail will be opened in two phases. Phase 1, to be designated and opened in early 2009, consists of Hatchett Creek, Newnans Lake, Prairie Creek, and the northern half of Camps Canal. This trail is mostly accessible right now, and only requires minimal clearing of snags and marking to make it functional. Phase 2 consists of the southern half of Camps Canal, River Styx, Orange Lake, Cross Creek, and Lochloosa Lake. This section of the paddling trail will require significant work to make the entire length functional, and state designation of this section will be sought in the future. In both sections, there may be the need to mark certain portions of the creek system (Hatchett Creek and River Styx) as "difficult, requiring portage" during low water times. Signage and clearly marked gauge posts at trailheads will make it obvious to the trail user what conditions to expect. Marked portage trails will be included, and these might consist of boardwalks in the future if funding is available.

- 5) Gauging stations – In cooperation with SJRWMD, gauging poles visible to the public will be installed by ACT at appropriate access locations, by March, 2009
- 6) Information kiosks – ACT will install information kiosks at Phase 1 access points showing a detailed map of the paddling trail and providing other pertinent information, by April, 2009
- 7) Website – In cooperation with OGT, a website for the Potano Paddling Trail, with high resolution maps, will be online by April, 2009. Included on the website will be a downloadable, print-friendly map, which will also be available at kiosks and other locations.
- 8) Signage – ACT will request FDOT and Alachua County Public Works to place brown directional signs on public highways indicating the paddling trail access points.
- 9) Ongoing maintenance – ACT will run crews the entire length of the paddling trail once per quarter, and after major storm events, to provide routine maintenance.
- 10) Reporting – ACT will provide an annual report on the condition, usage, and management issues regarding the Potano Paddling Trail to all cooperating agencies.

Plan (for Phase 2 trail):

The primary issue for the Phase 2 trail is to determine the feasibility of various routes through River Styx. This includes whether a portage trail would be used during low water periods, and if so, where and how to build it. This will require significant consultation with agencies including the SJRWMD and Alachua County. A recommendation on Phase 2 will be developed by November, 2009.

Application: A full application for Designation of a Florida Paddling Trail is being completed by ACT, and will be available at: www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org. ACT will solicit public comments and will make them available as part of the application record.

For more information:

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Attachments:

- Maps of proposed Potano Paddling Trail
- Paddle Trail designation factsheet

Designation of Florida State Paddling Trails

The mission of the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails is to create a network of greenways and trails throughout Florida, connecting one end of the state to the other. "Paddling trails" are one type of trail designation by the State.

The purpose of the paddling trail designation program is to:

- Further the goals and objectives of the Florida Greenways and Trails System;
- Ensure an inclusive and interconnected system of greenways and trails;
- Encourage voluntary partnerships in conservation, development, management, and coordination of the system's many components;
- Provide recognition for individual pieces of the system and those partners involved;
- Raise public awareness of the conservation and recreation benefits of the system.

Process for Designation:

1. The project sponsor, Alachua Conservation Trust, Inc. (ACT) submits an application for designation to the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT). The deadline for the application is November 5, 2008.
2. OGT staff will evaluate the application for completeness and to ensure designation criteria are satisfied and then develop a Designation Agreement.
3. OGT will transmit the application and proposed Designation Agreement to the Florida Greenways and Trails Council. The Council meets four times a year to consider the applications, and the public will be invited to comment on the application. The next meeting is December 4, 2008. The Council will recommend approval or disapproval of the Designation Application to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection.
4. The DEP Secretary will consider the recommendation of the Florida Greenways and Trails Council and public comments prior to making the final determination to approve a proposed designation agreement. Official designation into the Florida Greenways and Trails System will become effective through the signing of a "Designation Agreement" by the DEP Secretary, the landowner(s), land managers(s) and other parties, as appropriate.
5. DEP will monitor the designated components of the system by requiring reports to document that the natural, recreational, cultural, or historic resources identified in the Designation Agreement are being maintained. Local, regional, state, or federal agencies can certify that those resources identified in the Designation Agreement are being maintained by signing a Resource Certification.

Primary incentives for designating a project into the statewide system:

- Designation brings public recognition to local and regional greenway and trail projects.
- As resources allow, DEP may enter into management, patrol, and protection agreements, and into leases if so stipulated in the Designation Agreement. DEP will also identify sources of

RESOLUTION 08-_____

A RESOLUTION OF THE GAINESVILLE CITY COMMISSION IN SUPPORT OF STATE DESIGNATION OF "THE POTANO PADDLING TRAIL" BY THE FLORIDA OFFICE OF GREENWAYS AND TRAILS.

WHEREAS, eastern Alachua County contains a large, connected system of water bodies, with diverse habitat and valuable natural resources that provide significant recreational potential; and,

WHEREAS, Alachua Conservation Trust, Inc. is a not-for-profit charitable land trust with the mission to protect the natural, historical, scenic, and recreational resources in and around Alachua County; and,

WHEREAS, the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails designates official state paddling trails to encourage voluntary partnerships in conservation, development, management, and coordination of the state trail system, and such official designation provides benefits, including:

- public recognition of trail projects;
- the potential to enter into management, patrol, and protection agreements with FDEP;
- sources of funding for management and restoration needs;
- liability protection for private landowners;
- additional consideration in certain public land acquisition and grant programs, such as the Florida Communities Trust Land Acquisition Program, the Recreational Trails Grant Program, and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program.

WHEREAS, the City of Gainesville has policies in its comprehensive plan that are consistent with the State of Florida Comprehensive Plan, and the Strategic Regional Policy Plan adopted by the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council to coordinate with non-profit organizations and other governmental agencies in the provision of resource-based recreation; and,

WHEREAS, designation of a state paddling trail does not create for or bestow upon local or state government any additional authority or obligation to limit watercraft types or boat speeds, or to regulate land uses adjacent to paddling trails, or to limit hunting, fishing, or other legal recreational activities;

WHEREAS, the City of Gainesville is not being asked to modify its budget to accommodate any expenses associated with designation of the State Paddling Trail;

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF GAINESVILLE COMMISSION THAT:

1. The City of Gainesville supports the designation of "The Potano Paddling Trail" (Phase 1) as a Florida State Paddling Trail, and joins Alachua Conservation Trust in seeking the designation of the paddling trail, as illustrated on the accompanying map.