

Introduction

The map of potential multiuse trails in Florida looks like a foot inside a fishnet. A web of bike paths and trails encases the state, running from Pensacola to Key West, Jacksonville to Miami, Daytona Beach to Tampa.

The map is the dream world/game plan of the Florida's Office of Greenways and Trails. It identifies what Florida could be—a state linked from one end to the other by bike paths. This book is a guide to what already is—more than 750 miles of paved bike paths on the ground.

Since the first edition of *Florida's Paved Bike Trails* came out, Florida has added more than 200 miles of multiuse asphalt and concrete paths. Another 500 miles are in the works. The Future Bike Paths table in the back of this book (see “On the Way”) is a partial list of those projects—it would take another book to list all the bike paths being built or planned by counties and cities throughout Florida. Lee County alone has plans for 17 new paved bike trails totaling 160 miles.

The Greenways and Trails' master plan places an emphasis on linking bike paths between cities and counties. That's what happened when the Lake Minneola Scenic Trail joined the South Lake Trail that was linked to the West Orange Trail in Central Florida to form one continuous 32-mile trail across two counties. It's what's happening on the West Coast, where plans are under way to link the 41-mile Suncoast Trail to the 7.8-mile Upper Tampa Bay Trail.

So it's not so far-fetched to imagine what some envision as a “Green Necklace” of interconnected bike paths forming a 500-mile loop through Central and North Florida.

In the few years between editions of this book, paved bike paths have gone from a NIMBY (not in my back yard) to an amenity.

A survey by the National Association of Homebuilders found that recreational trails are the number one amenity that homeowners want—above golf courses and community swimming pools. Homeowners who once fought to keep bike paths out of their backyards are now counting on them to add value to their property.

The growing network of paved bike trails provides a safe recreational alternative for cyclists—especially families with young children—to Florida’s congested streets and highways. But the longer bike paths also prove popular with serious cyclists who like to ride fast and far. A round-trip on the Suncoast Trail is 82 miles. To the end of the Withlacoochee State Trail and back is 92 miles.

Although this book is aimed at cyclists, it also serves as a resource for rollerbladers, joggers, and walkers. Most of the trails include parking, water, restrooms, and benches. Many intersect parks, playgrounds, and schools. The shortest trail in this book is a little less than 3 miles. The longest is 46 miles. Excluded are bike paths built in subdivisions primarily for the use of their residents.

For those who would rather ride in the road, the paved bike paths provide places to park, fill up the water bottles, and empty the bladder.

The beauty of Florida is the variety of its terrain and its year-round recreational climate. The state’s bike paths offer easy access to Florida’s beaches, woods, meadows, lakes, rivers, subdivisions, museums, restaurants, shops, and attractions.

Let this book be your guide to the expanding network of paved bike trails in Florida.

How to Use This Book

This guide will give you a description of what to expect along the bike path. You don't need a cyclometer to use this book, but it helps. Some paved bike paths have mile markers along the way, some don't. Use the description of the bike path to determine where you are and how far you have gone.

The "Something you should know" section at the end of each narrative will give you an idea of future plans for the bike path and a historical perspective of the area through which the bike path crosses.

The list of future bike paths at the end of the book includes trails that are under construction or well into the planning stage. The length is given for the whole trail, but some paths are built in segments that may be in use before the entire project is completed. For the status of future bike paths, get in touch with the agencies listed in the back of the book (see "Contacts") and the county or city recreation and public works departments.