

The Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST)

Quarterly Update August 2002
Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 2002

A partnering project brought to you by the...

- Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)
- United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)
- Florida Trail Association, Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST)
- and the many other county, city, nonprofit and citizen partners...

...who made this world-class trail possible!

Status of DOT Phase One Trail Development:

The Florida Department of Transportation selected a contractor to design and construct the first 28 miles of paved trail. Design will soon be underway and construction is anticipated to begin within three to six months. Phase One begins at Port Mayaca and proceeds north and west to the intersection of the dike and SR 78 just east of the Kissimmee River.

The LOST trail is expected to be one of the most popular multipurpose paved trails in the state, delighting pedestrian and wheeled users nationwide and from abroad. Local citizens will soon enjoy healthy, wholesome, family oriented recreation and receive the economic benefits of ecotourism.

Trail Improvements include an 11' wide asphalt trail along the top of the dike. At the request of the Florida Trail Association the paved surface will have a light color to reflect heat, there will be a three-foot plus grassed hiking tread adjacent to the paved trail, and the hiking tread will be installed on the lake-side of the asphalt tread. This new hiking tread will be a big improvement in comfort for hikers preferring to use a natural surface rather than the new asphalt tread. Currently the hiking tread along the majority of the dike is in the service road ruts which have "ankle biting" dips, loose rocks and clumps of vegetation.

DOT Phase Two proposals could be due as early as October. This phase will pave from north of Belle Glade, to the south and west toward Moore Haven. The number of miles to be paved will be determined by the amount of Phase One funds remaining and the Phase Two bid process.

Agency Highlight- USACE and the LOST Trail: A Rich Heritage

1700's: In the 1700's, various bands of Creek Indians from Georgia and Alabama migrated into Florida in search of new fields to plant corn, beans, and other important crops. Once in Florida, the various bands of Indians became known collectively as Seminoles, meaning "wild people" or "runaways."

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USACE and the LOST Trail: A Rich Heritage (continued...)

1800's: In the early 1800's, five thousand Seminoles lived in relative peace among the fertile fields and abundant woods of Florida. The Federal Armed Occupation Act brought new settlers into Florida in the 1840's. In 1847, two years after Florida was granted statehood, a plan was proposed to reclaim the Everglades and attract thousands of settlers. Initially the promoters of South Florida felt it was just a matter of dredging a few canals to drain off the excessive waters.

It would be 30 years before that plan would be put into effect. Hamilton Disston, known as the Drainage King, proved to be most successful at the time. Through his endeavors, the Kissimmee River was connected to the Gulf of Mexico using Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee River.

1900's: In the early 1900's, the State Legislature responded to public outcry by creating the Everglades Drainage District. The State's drainage commission coordinated the most active reclamation effort, completing more than half the excavation of the region. The system provided the groundwork for draining the northern and eastern parts of the Everglades. The newly drained area quickly became popular farm land. It was a time of great prosperity for the entire region. It would not last long.

The first of two devastating hurricanes hit in 1926, claiming over 800 lives. In 1928, a second hurricane swept through the area. Wind driven water off Lake Okeechobee and torrential rains overflowed the lakeshore and claimed over 2,400 lives. To prevent a reoccurrence of these disasters, the Florida State Legislature created the Okeechobee Flood Control District, which was authorized to cooperate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in flood control undertakings.

After a personal inspection of the area by President Herbert Hoover, the Corps drafted a new plan which provided for construction of floodway channels, control gates, and major levees along Lake Okeechobee's shores. A long term system was designed for flood control, water conservation, prevention of saltwater intrusion, and preservation of fish and wildlife populations. A new era had arrived for Lake Okeechobee, and this time it seemed as though technology would control its waters.

TODAY: Lake Okeechobee and the Okeechobee Waterway are part of a complex water management system known as the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project. The project covers 16,000 square miles starting just south of Orlando and extending southward through the Kissimmee River Basin to the Everglades National Park to Florida Bay. The business functions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers includes: 1) Flood Damage Reduction, 2) Navigation, 3) Environmental Stewardship, and 4) Recreation.

...End of August 2002 Update

If you would like to be added to the list to receive this quarterly update via email, send your request by email to rick.halvorsen@dep.state.fl.us or contact the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails at (850) 488-3701.

The next quarterly update will be distributed in October 2002