

Raising the Trout Creek Bridge

By Leigh Brooks, South Florida Water Management District

With any luck, the Trout Creek Bridge at Lower Hillsborough Wilderness Park will be in place before summer starts.

It's amazing how long well-intentioned projects can take to materialize, and even more amazing that the volunteers steadily cranked this project along, never losing momentum.

With each step forward the carpet seemed to unroll ahead of us so we could never reach the end!

The project began about three years ago with an opportunity for a grant to pay for a bike/ped bridge to connect the Flatwoods and Trout Creek bicycle areas.

The Wilderness Trails Association (WTA), the volunteer group that maintains the off-road trails in the park, is not incorporated and so could not apply for the grant.

But most WTA members are also members of the SWAMP Club, so SWAMP took care of the details. The group was awarded \$12,000 by the National Recreational Trails Funding Program. Big coup!

Next was getting approval from Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), the landowner. That done, District engineers needed to review the final bridge design. Prefabbed bridge, okay, no problem. Time to get permits. Dam! We need a structural engineer to sign and seal the foundation plans. But who can pay?

This is when the partnerships kicked in

high gear. SWFWMD agreed to pay for a consulting engineer, but oops! No one had thought much about the foundation for the bridge. The engineer needed the soil tested to determine the foundation design. More money.

About this time a deep wrinkle surfaced. A major water pipeline was being planned through the property. The alignment and construction would impact the trails in the Trout Creek area. Surveyors were already marking trees to be removed. Tampa Bay Water was doing soil sampling along the alignment, and agreed to do our sample and soil analysis.

Sigh of relief. The permits were approved. We knew not to get too excited though. The foundation was going to cost a hefty sum that no one had budgeted. Now where to go for money? SWAMP already got one extension from the grantor due to project delays. There is a deadline to complete the project or else lose the \$12,000. It is also important that the bridge be in place before the pipeline work begins since part of the trail will need to be rerouted during construction.

Ah-ha! Tampa Bay Water to the rescue again, with a verbal commitment to pay for the foundation and informational signage to the tune of \$20,000.

Now what? How to funnel the money since the WTA doesn't have a bank account? In steps Friends of the Parks, a non-profit group that raises money for all Hillsborough County Parks and that already had a sub-account for the WTA.

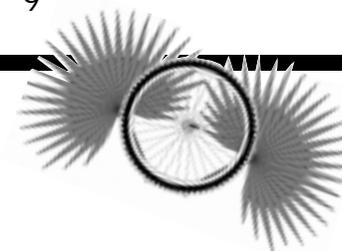
A Memorandum of Understanding regarding disbursement of funds awaits to be signed and, if all goes according to plan, construction can proceed in February.

No accolades are enough for the volunteers who have worked many, many hours to attend countless meetings, do research, and make presentations. A very special thank you to Jonathan Noll, WTA Chair, and Wes Eubank, SWAMP President. Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation rangers Joe Humble and [FBA president] Tina Russo have been instrumental in the project. Thanks also to SWFWMD and Tampa Bay Water for providing funding and staff support to raise this bridge. We're planning on having a terrific opening celebration, so stay tuned for details.

For more information, call or e-mail me at 800-423-1476 x4472
leigh.brooks@swfwmd.state.fl.us

Mountain Biking Gains Three Converts

By Perry Cargal



While Summer vacationing in Colorado our family was spending a few days at Winter Park Ski Lodge.

Marilyn, my wife, our daughter Carie and I were exploring the area, viewing Rocky Mountain Natl. Park, rafting the Colorado River, and looking for fun things to do.

We noticed mountain bikes being carried up to the top of the mountain by the ski lifts. Carie suggested we try that too. Having never ridden a bike with gears or hand brakes we had to think about that for a minute, but decided, why not, we are always looking for a new adventure.

We rented bikes and after a few minutes of instruction rode around the parking lot to familiarize ourselves with all those levers and buttons.

Soon we learned all about operating a

mountain bike and headed for the top on the ski lift. Upon arrival at the top we took a few laps around the roads on top of the hill until we felt we were ready for the ride down.

The next hour and a half or so was the most fun I could imagine on a bicycle. It reminded me of my racing years on a motocross motorcycle, even though this one was people powered. After lunch at the lodge we just had to make another trip back up the hill and another great ride down.

At the end of the day we decided we had to add mountain bikes to our collection of toys. We still enjoy our bike rides as much today as we did on that first day, almost ten years ago.

We have seen many great areas on bike trails that we would have never been able to see if we had not discovered mountain bikes.



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Mail your prints (color OK) to FBA, P.O. Box 1547, Orlando, FL 32802

Year-end Panhandle-to-Keys Workshops Start Bicycle Advocacy Efforts Spinning

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ceived pro-automobile bias on the committee.”

Pinellas County

On the heels of the Broward County workshop came Bike Action Pinellas on November 20. Organized locally by Susan Dutil, the event drew approximately 22 people.

Brian Smith, director of the Pinellas MPO, recounted some of Pinellas County's early history with bicycle advocacy efforts leading to the development of the Pinellas Trail, which has become a pride and joy of the region. Also presenting was Frank Miller, who told the story of how a small

Key West

Wrapping up the 1999 workshops was Bike Action Key West on December 4. The workshop was held in conjunction with a public input meeting on the Overseas Heritage Trail. Approximately 20 people attended.

Guest presentations on the Overseas Heritage Trail project (see our story this issue) set the stage for a lively discussion on the difficulties of being a bicyclist or pedestrian in an island paradise dominated by motor vehicles.

Bicyclists are already a common sight in downtown Key West. Bicycle parking, however, is not.

The Broward County Bike Action 2000 group.



CycleMobility: Cyclists' Advocate in South Florida

By David Marshall

CycleMobility is a small bicycling advocacy group located in South Florida. It was organized in 1993-94 by myself and William Carroll, each of us a dedicated bicycle commuter, to promote bicycling as a safe alternative to driving.

Carroll moved to the Washington, DC, area in early 1996, but I am still active as current president of the group, which works on cycling issues in South Florida.

Since its inception, the group has worked on a variety of projects, most notably a joint effort with the South Broward Wheelers bicycle club to organize a Bicycle Safety Ride in June 1996 in memory of hit-and-run victim Michael Collins, who was struck and killed while riding his bicycle home from work that April.

The proceeds of the ride were donated to the local chapter of the National Safe Kids Coalition.

CycleMobility's most persistent problem has been "building its membership to a level

that permits sustained advocacy.”

We were delighted when we learned that FBA planned to offer a Bike Action 2000 workshop in Broward County together with the local BAC.

The workshop was just what we needed to re-energize the group and locate additional activists interested in cycling issues.

As a result of the workshop, CycleMobility re-organized and is now planning its activities for the year 2000.

On the top of its agenda is the development of numbered bike routes in the City of Fort Lauderdale. The intent is to identify routes that can help cyclists navigate around the city conveniently, in many cases on low-traffic roads little used by motorists. In addition, the group is working to obtain representation on the local Community Involvement Roundtable (the citizens' committee which provides input to the Broward County

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Bicyclists are already a common sight in downtown Key West. Bicycle parking, however, is not.

group of citizen advocates came together to save the Gandy Bridge from destruction and convert it into "the world's longest over water recreation trail." (You can read Frank's story in the Fall/Winter 1999 *Messenger* and also on the FBA Web site at www.floridabicycle.org.)

Ken Nosworthy from FDOT District 7 also made a brief appearance to give his impassioned plea for more citizen advocates.

Duly inspired, two of the participants, Kimberly Cooper and Patricia Emser agreed to co-plan a follow up meeting in January for all those interested in forming a local advocacy group. At least 10 people in attendance expressed interest.

Agreeing to be a leader of a citizen advocacy group that would encompass Key West as well as several of the keys to the north was Elisabeth Collins. At least eight of the other attendees expressed strong interest in planning a follow up meeting with Elisabeth to establish a local group.

Jim Malcolm, bicycle/pedestrian coordinator for the City of Key West was the local workshop organizer.

Jim impressed us with his bicycle powered "choo choo train" float filled with candy that he powered through the streets of Key West for the annual Holiday Parade the evening after the workshop. The energy and creativity of our bicycle/pedestrian coordinators seems to hold no bounds!

WOW Trails! Aims for Bike-able Northwest Florida

By Steve Medina

This past summer a coalition was formed to work for recreation trails and other bicycle and pedestrian improvements in Okaloosa and Walton Counties. WOW Trails!, which stands for Wonderful Okaloosa-Walton Trails! emphasizes the wonderful opportunity we have to make a lasting contribution, if, that is, we can only work TOGETHER.

Admittedly, Northwest Florida is not known for its progressive thinking on issues like bicycle accessibility and safety. However, it is becoming more and more clear to area residents and businesses alike that we have a lot to gain from a bike-friendly locale.

Many now realize that investing in bicycle and pedestrian features is not only good for our quality of life but also good for the economy.

Yet, we needed a way to bridge traditional social, geographic, and group boundaries to work TOGETHER to make these benefits a reality. We have a lot of variety in our area, such as "north county-south county" differences, that, while sometimes interesting, can also sometimes cause us to not speak up for the common good.

In essence, we realized that if we don't work together for these issues, they would not make it on the local political radar screens.

In getting together, we realized that we did not need a group that would seek to replace existing organizations, but rather a grass-roots coordinating tool that emphasized timely positive action.

Hence, WOW Trails! is emerging as a truly *broad-based, non-traditional, volunteer, working* coalition of people, groups and businesses.

Right away we started to work on ensuring that opportunities were not missed to promote our goal of a bike-able and walk-able Northwest Florida. Our choice of projects, one more rural and the other highly urban, illustrates the breadth of our coalition.

Our first main project has been pursuing a "rails to trail" recreation path from Crestview in northern Okaloosa County to Alabama. The 20-mile plus trail, to be known as the Yellow River Railroad Trail, would go along an abandoned railroad corri-

dor in rolling hillside country, travel through small towns and historic areas, and end near Florida's highest point in Walton County.

We wanted to ensure that county comprehensive plan language continued to support the trail. We also wanted to persuade affected municipalities to pass supportive resolutions. We quickly achieved both of these goals.

We also wanted to make sure that the Florida Department of Transportation, which holds title over much of the right-of-way, began to plan for the trail. FDOT has made a positive stride in this direction. We also are collecting hundreds of signatures supportive of the trail. Early next year we expect to develop a specific plan for pursuing design, fund-raising, and implementation

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WOW Trails

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goals.

Our second main project has been to seek bicycle-pedestrian improvements in the high-density, coastal U.S. 98 corridor of Destin. We call this project, not surprisingly, our Destin 98 Project.

Destin is home to some of world's prettiest beaches, and a highly popular destination for tourists, who are currently forced to use their cars too much on over-stressed local roads.

So far our main actions on this project have been to appear at public meetings sponsored by, and write detailed comment letters to, FDOT. FDOT has recently responded indicating a serious commitment to needed improvements.

Of perhaps greatest immediate importance to bicyclists, FDOT has agreed, as part of a resurfacing project, to use "re-striping" to widen the curb/outside through lanes in a large stretch of narrow urban roadway.

While we see this as merely an interim step until standard bike lanes can be provided, FDOT is making a positive step for bike safety. In future U.S. 98 four-laning east from Destin, FDOT has committed to providing full accommodations for bicycles.

We are also promoting the extension of an existing coastal bike path in south Walton County to Destin.

We look forward to continuing to work for bike improvements in our diverse area.

Environmental attorney Steve Medina is coordinator of WOW Trails!, P.O. Box 247, Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32549-0247, (850) 664-7856, Fax (850) 664-0774, <medina-pa.earthlink.net>

CycleMobility

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Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO) to redress a perceived pro-automobile bias on the committee.

Moreover, several members are working on special projects, including a web site (still under construction) and a legislative initiative to ensure that motorists who strike and kill bicyclists and pedestrians face penalties in most cases.

CycleMobility organizers claim that top lessons learned in the last five years are to (1) identify a core constituency and (2) focus on achievable, local projects.

"When CycleMobility first started, we attempted to respond to issues throughout South Florida," said vice president Whitney Turner. "This meant that our members were stretched too thin—from Monroe County to Palm Beach—and we

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Central Florida Bicycle Advocates Cranked Out a Busy First Year *By Lyndy Lyle*

Since our initial workshop last spring, Central Florida Bicycle Advocates (formerly Bike Action Orlando) has been extremely busy. Monthly meetings are uniting area cyclists who are willing to devote their time and energy to safer cycling in our area.

Our backgrounds vary greatly, among us are parents wanting more and safer bike trails and commuters wanting a safer route to and from work. Some have backgrounds in advocacy and want to share those ideas; others are recreational cyclists who ride for social, fitness or stress-relief reasons, and

several members are "bike cops."

Together we have great ideas and plans to improve our community and its roads.

We have campaigned for bike lanes on several roads, are inviting homeowners to a spring meeting to unite our efforts to slow traffic on a major thoroughfare and plan to "take a politician for a ride...a bike ride." We are working to make sure a safe overpass will be built over Rouse road east of the Little Econ Trail.

We notify each other via e-mail about meetings and other cycling issues that need our input. Currently, we are working on by-

laws by which we will operate and guidelines that must be used when using our name at community meetings or in letters that will impact the entire group.

Letterhead is being created along with basic letters that are being approved for use if something needs to be sent out on short notice to make our opinion known.

We are still in our infant stage right now, just crawling along, but I see a shiny tricycle for our group in the very near future!

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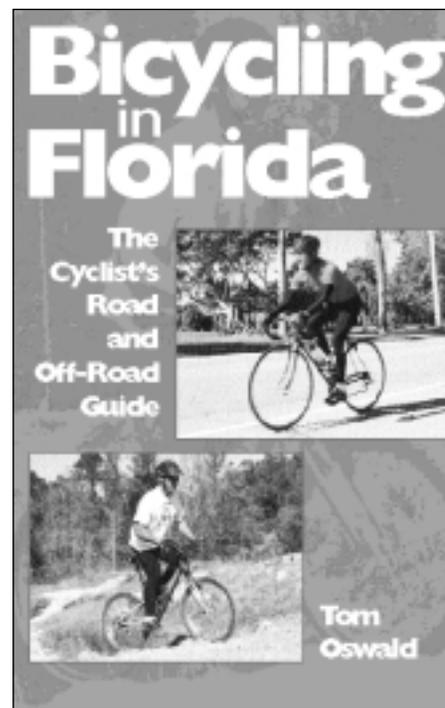
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Turning a Vision into Reality

By Trish Stratton

For many years, Monroe County has held a vision for a continuous recreational trail along US 1 that traverses the length of the Florida Keys and provides

alternative transportation and recreational opportunities for citizens and visitors to the islands.

The trail could be designed to incorporate historic features such as Henry Flagler's Old Keys Bridges and significant environmental elements that are unique to the Florida Keys. The trail could also act as an economic stimulus for adjacent businesses such as marinas, motels, and restaurants that provide services to trail users. The Overseas Heritage Trail was aptly named to capture the history and magnitude of the project.

To begin this massive effort, the county committed funds for a variety of local trail projects. County representatives also reached out to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) for several million dollars in enhancement funding for trail projects in local communities. In 1996, a Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan was undertaken to inventory existing conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists, identify local facility needs, and to develop a bicycle and pedestrian system plan that would include the Overseas Heritage Trail as a major artery.

As interest in a continuous trail grew, FDOT continued to fund the development of Monroe County trail projects, and other



agencies such as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the National Park Service began to view the project as part of Florida's statewide greenway system. The Monroe County Commission recognized the need for an integrated plan to address the design, development, and maintenance of a large-scale trail project that would meet the needs of the citizens and build upon existing efforts.

Michael Design Associates, a trail planning firm noted for its experience with regionally-significant projects, was retained by the county in 1999 to complete a Master Plan for the Overseas Heritage Trail. The

Master Planning process will last approximately one year and will incorporate community preferences with sound design standards and a commitment to maintaining the environmental integrity of the landscape. The final Trail Master Plan will provide recommendations for the design, construction, and management of the Overseas Heritage Trail. It will be used by Monroe County and its planning partners to provide a unified vision and common goals in the development of a valuable environmental and economic resource.

CycleMobility

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could not effectively focus on issues where we could make an impact."

Travel time to meetings was just too long. Members would not travel from Palm Beach to South Dade for meetings unless they could see a direct benefit for their own area.

Too often, the benefit of a particular project was far from the members' own location, and participation suffered as a result.

To address these difficulties, CycleMobility has narrowed its focus to the eastern section of Broward County, and Fort Lauderdale in particular, in the last year.

In 1999, members have attended various planning sessions for SR 84, SR A1A, Las Olas, and Dixie Highway, and have focused on ensuring that the bicycling perspective is

heard in these sessions. The result has been planning documents that explicitly recognize the needs of cyclists in these projects.

This year CycleMobility intends to focus on establishing bicycle routes in Fort Lauderdale, intending to start small and expand once it has demonstrated success in a particular area.

The second lesson CycleMobility is still attempting to learn is to communicate with members and the interested public.

CycleMobility would like to duplicate the success of organizations, such as the FBA or the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, which are effectively communicating with their members. CycleMobility is addressing this area with an e-mail distribution list and with

its web site (still under construction), but it continues to be a struggle.

Advice for other cycling advocates? PERSISTENCE PAYS. An Ottawa (Canada) commuting cyclist told me one time, "Just keep pedaling and you'll get there." Sometimes it seems like it takes forever to make progress, but you will have an impact if you keep at it. After all, no one is going to do it for you.