



FLORIDA SCENIC HIGHWAYS PROGRAM

A Program of the Florida Department of Transportation
2016 Annual Report

A MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Launched in July 1996, the **Florida Scenic Highways Program** celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2016. The Pensacola Scenic Bluffs Highway was the first scenic highway designated in 1998, and there are now 26 Florida Scenic Highways in 32 counties covering over 1,500 miles. Five Florida Scenic Highways are also National Scenic Byways, and one is an All-American Road.

Across the state, byway communities have invested in byway projects that enhance the visitor experience and improve local quality of life. Florida's scenic highways are being promoted as tourism destinations, and increased tourism is providing direct economic benefit to byway communities, including many rural areas. Included in this report are two case studies that illustrate how the positive, long-term impacts of scenic highway designation are becoming evident.

The Florida Department of Transportation is proud of the Program's first 20 years, and inspired by the dedication shown from Florida byway communities. We look forward to supporting the Program's continued success, and encourage you to experience real places and real stories on Florida's Scenic Highways.

Sincerely,

Jeff Caster, Program Coordinator
Florida Scenic Highways Program



floridascenichighways.com

A 20-Year Partnership



The **Florida Scenic Highways Program** and **Visit Florida** have been connected since both were launched in 1996. The **FSHP** was one of the first Visit Florida Partners, and Visit Florida holds a seat on the **FSHP** Scenic Highway Advisory Committee. Both organizations share common goals including increasing travel to emerging Florida destinations. In 2016, Visit Florida assigned a writer to work with scenic highway leaders and produce travel articles about each of the designated routes. These articles, along with beautiful photographs also commissioned by Visit Florida, are now featured prominently on the [Visit Florida website](#).

26th Scenic Highway Designated

The newest addition to the collection is the **A1A Ocean Islands Trail**, approximately 40 miles of SR A1A from Fernandina Beach south to Butler Boulevard in Jacksonville. Designated in July 2016, the **A1A Ocean Islands Trail** offers a front-row seat to Florida at its most authentic.





The Florida Department of Transportation was eager to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the **Florida Scenic Highways Program (FSHP)** in 2016, and recognize the communities that make the program such a success. In conjunction with the **FSHP**, the Department launched a year-long social media campaign and photo contest featuring the state's scenic highways. The byways were featured throughout the year on Facebook and Twitter, and special events along the routes were promoted. The campaign helped double the followers of the **FSHP** Facebook page.



The **20th Anniversary Florida Scenic Highways Photo Contest** sought submissions and recognized winners in four categories:

- **Wildlife**
- **Natural Beauty**
- **Recreation**
- **Byway Events**

All of the entries were stunning, and captured the beauty and spirit of the byways.

The Florida Park Service was also a photo contest sponsor, and provided Florida state park passes to winning photographers.

The twelve winning photos are featured in a 2017 **Florida Scenic Highways Program** calendar.



Impact of Scenic Highways: Taking the Long View

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the **Florida Scenic Highways Program** offers an opportunity to consider not just the annual accomplishments of the state's byways, but also their long-term impact. The case studies featured in this annual report illustrate the outcomes of years of dedication, commitment and hard work.

Communication is Key to Storm Recovery

The **A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway** was designated a **National Scenic Byway** in 2002, and is managed by the **Friends of A1A** byway organization. Since 2002, the group has worked to complete projects that protect the scenic quality of the corridor, enhance recreational resources, and improve the overall visitor experience. In 2016, a comprehensive wayfinding project was completed that included the installation of corridor-wide directional signage to key locations along the byway including historic and cultural sites, state and national parks, and local points of interest.



The Spoonbills & Sprockets jerseys are custom designed each year and continue to be highly sought after.

The **Friends of A1A's** annual **Spoonbills & Sprockets cycling tour** was the first major event scheduled to take place along the scenic highway just thirty days after the storm. The byway organization worked quickly with local officials to alter the course and avoided canceling the event.

These efforts helped provide the community with reassurance that the area was ready to welcome visitors.

A key element to the enduring success of the **Friends of A1A** is a commitment to stakeholder engagement and communication. The group maintains a presence in byway communities along the 72-mile route through numerous special events, social media, newsletters and email blasts. They boast a 6,000- member distribution list, the state's largest.

The importance of this rigorous communications strategy was demonstrated in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. State Road A1A was damaged extensively by the storm in several areas along the scenic highway, and the destruction received national media attention.



Although the weather was not picture perfect, the early drizzle did not dampen the spirits of cyclists.

According to Byway Administrator Danielle Anderson, “Hosting the event and communicating through the **Friends of A1A’s** established channels such as email, social media, print and radio let the public know that communities were returning to pre-storm activities, which benefited local businesses including retail, restaurant, hoteliers and attractions.” Utilizing its strong stakeholder communications network is one way the **Friends of A1A** supports the local economy.

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- Danielle Anderson, A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway Leader



Cyclists registered for Spoonbills & Sprockets saw images like this after Hurricane Matthew of the A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway, which is also the route for the cycling event.



The Show must go on: A1A Byway Leader Danielle Anderson encourages the cyclists along the Spoonbills & Sprockets route.



After Hurricane Matthew, the **Friends of A1A** used their extensive communication network to let cyclists registered for Spoonbills & Sprockets and others know that byway communities were still open for business.

Florida Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Department of Transportation made reopening A1A a priority, and two-way traffic was restored within a month.



Building a Greenspace Legacy



The **Green Mountain Scenic Byway** was designated a **Florida Scenic Highway** in 2004. Although the 45-mile route is located just northwest of Orlando, it feels a world away. In fact, when efforts began to designate the scenic highway, it was sometimes described as “the middle of nowhere.” Byway supporters knew this would not always be the case, though, and sought to use the corridor management planning process as an opportunity to preserve the area’s rural character, sense of place, and authenticity.



The Friends of Green Mountain byway organization has been actively preserving greenspace and expanding access to recreation along the byway since 2004.

Once the route was designated, the **Friends of Green Mountain** byway organization engaged in the local planning process and supported conservation efforts like the creation of the 192-acre Ferndale Preserve. When the pace and pressure of development diminished following the 2008 recession, the **Friends of Green Mountain** continued to identify partners and pursue its most ambitious project.

In October 2014, the **Green Mountain Scenic Overlook and Trailhead** opened to the public. The three-story structure is perched on a hillside overlooking Lake Apopka, one of the best birding sites in North America.

With an improved economy, development has returned to the **Green Mountain Scenic Byway’s** rolling hills, and a new primary north-south connector will soon terminate at the Overlook.

Housing developments on hold since the recession are now under construction, with some estimating 15,000 homes will be built. According to byway leader Greg Gensheimer, “It is possible that the Overlook, along with the nearby Ferndale Preserve, will soon be the last remaining greenspace in the area. More importantly, the Overlook will provide access to the 20,000 acres of the North Shore Restoration Area.”



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- Greg Gensheimer, Green Mountain Scenic Byway Leader



The Green Mountain Scenic Overlook is located on a hillside overlooking Lake Apopka, one of the best birding sites in North America.

In 2016, the last phase of the **Green Mountain Scenic Overlook and Trailhead** was completed. A two-and-a-half-mile trail was constructed to connect the Overlook to the Clay Island Trail, which is part of the larger **Lake Apopka Loop Trail**.

This final trail segment completes the trail from the Overlook in Lake County, to Magnolia Park in Orange County. As other parts of the County are developed, users of those rural areas are turning to the Overlook and trails.

Green Mountain byway supporters have remained committed to preserving the area's access to greenspace. In the twelve years since designation, they have made significant, lasting contributions that will forever impact the quality of life along the corridor.



The connector trail linking the Green Mountain Scenic Overlook to the Clay Island Trail and ultimately the Lake Apopka Loop Trail was completed and celebrated in 2016.



Visitors to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive on the Green Mountain Scenic Byway continue to increase. Several stunning submissions like this one to the FSHP photo contest also prove that it is a very popular location among wildlife photographers.



FLORIDA SCENIC HIGHWAYS COLLECTION

