

Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) Purpose

This data layer was created by the University of Florida Center for Landscape Conservation Planning to provide an ecological component to the Statewide Greenways System plan developed by the Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT). The FEGN guides OGT ecological greenway conservation efforts, and promotes public awareness of the need for and benefits of a statewide ecological greenways network. It is also used as the primary data layer to inform the Florida Forever and other state and regional land acquisition programs regarding the location of the most important wildlife and ecological corridors and large, intact landscapes in the state. The FEGN identifies areas of opportunity for protecting a statewide network of ecological hubs and linkages designed to maintain large landscape-scale ecological functions including focal species habitat and ecosystem services throughout the state.

Inclusion in the FEGN means the area is either part of a large landscape-scale “hub”, or an ecological corridor connecting two or more hubs. Hubs indicate core landscapes that are large enough to maintain populations of wide-ranging or fragmentation-sensitive species including black bear or panther and areas that are more likely to support functional ecosystem services. Highest priorities indicate the most significant hubs and corridors in relation to completing a functionally connected statewide ecological network, but all priority levels have conservation value.

FEGN Priorities 1, 2, and 3 are the most important for protecting a functionally connected statewide network of public and private conservation lands, and these three priority levels (P1, P2, and P3) are now called the Florida Wildlife Corridor as per the Florida Wildlife Corridor legislation passed and signed into law by the Florida Legislature and Governor in 2021, which makes protection of these wildlife and ecological hubs and corridors a high priority as part of a strategic plan for Florida’s future. To accomplish this goal, we need robust state, federal, and local conservation land protection program funding for Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, Natural Resources Conservation Service easements and incentives, federal Land and Waters Conservation Fund, payments for ecosystem services, etc.

Limitations

Mapped corridors represent opportunity areas within which a linkage could be maintained; not all of the area identified in a corridor is necessarily required in order to protect a functional linkage. There are specific wildlife corridor design criteria that should be consulted during the process of designing functional corridors to facilitate protection of habitat, wildlife movement, and ecosystem services. The FEGN boundaries are general and based on land cover and related habitat and other ecological priority data and not parcels, so designing land

protection projects based on private ownerships of willing landowners must necessarily involve comparisons with the FEGN model result boundaries along with functional design decisions that determine how much land is needed in what configuration to ensure protection of all or part of a functional corridor represented by a proposed land protection project. Therefore, a land ownership does not necessarily need to be entirely within the FEGN to potentially be significant for large landscape and corridor conservation. It is also possible that land adjacent or near an FEGN boundary could also be part of a functional landscape/corridor protection project based on project site design and plans.

Not all local or regional (multi-county) potential corridors are identified in the FEGN, as this model has a statewide to regional focus. Local identification of potentially important ecological/wildlife corridors should also include identification of local and regional riparian (stream) networks, contiguous swaths of natural and semi-natural land between existing conservation lands, or other known wildlife or ecological corridors that may not all be included within the FEGN. However, based on the limitations discussed above, the FEGN is intended to identify and represent the most important statewide to regional corridors throughout Florida.

Private lands identified in the FEGN may be good candidates for voluntary land acquisition programs, other public and private conservation programs, mitigation or conservation banks, or for use of innovative land planning such as conservation design, rural clustering, conservation easements, transfer of development rights, all of which seek to conserve significant natural resources. FEGN priorities represent important ecological stewardship opportunities for Florida but are not intended as an additional encumbrance on landowners other than such protections as may already be afforded by federal, state, or local laws.

The FEGN was created using input data consistent with 1:5,000 to 1:64,000 map scale resolutions. Such data are of sufficient resolution for state and regional scale conservation planning. They are not appropriate for use in high accuracy mapping applications such as property parcel boundaries, local government comprehensive plans, zoning, DRI, site plans, environmental resource or other agency permitting, wetland delineations, or other uses requiring more specific and ground survey quality data, and the FEGN is not intended for any such uses.

The FEGN analysis, maps and data were developed for state and regional conservation planning purposes and are not intended, nor sufficient, to be the

basis for local government comprehensive plans, environmental resource or agency permitting decisions or any other form of regulatory decision-making.

These data are likely to be regularly updated and it is the responsibility of the user to obtain the most recent available version of the database.

Data should not be transferred to a third party, in data or map form, without noting these disclaimers and also citing the University of Florida Center for Landscape Conservation Planning as the source of these data, and the FEGN is not intended to be used for commercial purposes. In addition, we encourage all users to direct other interested parties to the Center for Landscape Conservation Planning website to download data versus sharing data directly.

Users also need to be aware that the FEGN is developed using multiple statewide land use / land cover data that were developed through the years 2010-2020. Therefore, users can expect that some more recent land use changes may not be reflected in the FEGN data layer. Furthermore, because of the scale issues discussed in above, developed land uses could also occur in areas identified in the FEGN due to associated spatial error with 1:5,000 to 1:64,000 scale data. Furthermore, narrow gaps such as roads in very narrow areas of developed lands (less than 120 meters in width) sometimes are incorporated into the FEGN through the modeling process to reflect potential landscape-scale ecological connectivity that potentially can cross roads and other narrow gaps. The user must recognize this when reviewing and using the FEGN data especially for any local to regional applications.

For more information

<http://conservation.dcp.ufl.edu/fejnproject/>