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**DEP CELEBRATES FEBRUARY AS FLORIDA HIKING TRAILS MONTH
AND THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT**

-- 4,000 miles of trails statewide offer scenic route to a healthy lifestyle--

TALLAHASSEE – Recognizing February as Florida Hiking Trails Month, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is joining the Florida Trail Association to encourage Floridians to take advantage of Florida’s extensive trail system and celebrate the 40th anniversary of the National Trails System Act.

“February is a great time for Floridians to promote environmental stewardship and adopt a healthy lifestyle by exploring the more than 4,000 miles of trails Florida has to offer,” said DEP’s Office of Greenways & Trails Director Jena B. Brooks. “We are proud to celebrate Florida’s Hiking Trails Month and the 40th anniversary of an important milestone in the preservation of natural lands and resources.”

The National Trails System Act was first signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968 to promote preservation of the Nation’s open-air, outdoor and historic resources for public enjoyment. The idea was to create scenic, historic and recreation trails that would share the experiences of the Nation’s native people and pioneers and prevent history from being paved over. Today, the National Trail System boasts more than 40,000 miles of trails, including the Florida National Scenic Trail, one of eight congressionally-designated scenic trails in the United States.

“This legislation created the pathway for the national trails program which now consists of eight National Scenic Trails, 13 National Historic Trails and approximately one-thousand National Recreational Trails,” explained Florida Trail Association Executive Director Deborah Stewart-Kent. “This year we also celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Florida Trail’s designation as a National Scenic Trail.”

The Florida National Scenic Trail is the largest in the state and will ultimately extend 1,400 miles from the Gulf Islands National Seashore in the Panhandle to the Florida Keys. This national treasure includes loop and linear trails on public lands throughout Florida. The sections are built and maintained by volunteers from the Florida Trail Association, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, and include state greenways and trails such as the Cross Florida Greenway and the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail.

Initiated by the Florida Trail Association, Florida Hiking Trails Month emphasizes fun and fitness along scenic and diverse trails, including paved rail-trails, urban trails through cityscapes and wilderness trails through Florida’s award-winning state parks. Florida’s trails are a match for any fitness plan and are perfect for walking, biking, hiking or riding.

The Office of Greenways & Trails (OGT) manages eight state trails, including the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, Florida's longest green corridor stretching 110 miles from the St. Johns River near Palatka to the Gulf of Mexico. DEP, through OGT, also maintains five rail-trails, which are railroad tracks restored and converted to recreational trails for hiking, biking and skating. Through *Florida Forever*, the state's premier land acquisition program, \$4.5 million dollars is spent annually to purchase land for future trail areas and build and maintain Florida's greenways and trails.

The DEP Office of Greenways & Trails supports Florida Hiking Trails Month with the following events:

February 14— Students from Sabal Palm Elementary School will hike on the Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic State Railroad Trail

February 16—Blackwater Heritage Trail Citizen Support Organization will host Children's Mardi Gras Walk on the Blackwater Heritage State Trail in Milton. The event will feature a family walk and costume contest.

February 23—The Florida Greenways and Trails foundation, Inc. will host Ride-Roll-Run relay on the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway. Teams consisting of an equestrian, a biker and a hiker will compete in a relay competition along the Greenway.

For more information about Florida trails and events, visit www.floridagreenwaysandtrails.com or call 1-877-822-5208. For information about the Florida National Scenic Trail and the Florida Trail Association, visit www.florida-trail.org.