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## 260 MILE, 5-COUNTY LOOP

# River-to-Sea trail gets state funding boost

### Trail through Volusia, Flagler ranked 1st in Florida

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Volusia officials went to Tallahassee for a state trails ranking Thursday and scored a first place for the River-to-Sea Loop Trail.

"It's so exciting," said former County Councilwoman Pat Northey, who prodded officials and trails enthusiasts across the region to send letters of support. When the state Greenways and Trails Council sat down to business on Thursday, 83 letters had been written on behalf of the River-to-Sea Loop trail.



Cyclists ride the River to Sea Loop trail in Edgewater Friday morning April 1, 2016. The trail received a number one ranking in the state for funding. News-Journal/JIM TILLER

When complete, the planned trail will traverse 260 miles and five counties: Flagler, Volusia, Putnam, Brevard and St. Johns.

The Council ranked the Loop trail first among seven regional trail system projects in Florida that have been recommended for the Florida Department of Transportation's Shared Use Non-motorized Trail funding. The ranking gives the trail top priority for funding from the department's \$25 million annual appropriation for SUN Trail funding.

Northey admitted she was surprised by the 1st place. "I was hopeful for 2 or 3," she said. "Now we are in the money."

Colleen Shannon, biking at Lake Beresford Park on Friday morning, said she was delighted to learn about Volusia County's trails system from a friend when she recently moved to DeLand.

"I didn't take the bike out because I don't like riding on the road," Shannon said.

To learn the trail network is now in line for money to help get it completed "is fantastic," she said.

County Councilman Pat Patterson, chairman of the local transportation planning organization, said it's "wonderful" news for the region. Patterson was among those who wrote letters of support, joking Friday that he had no choice. "If I hadn't done it," he said, "Pat Northey would have burned my house down."

About 150 miles of the trail are in Volusia and Flagler counties. The River to Sea TPO and its partnering governments have worked to complete or set aside funding for about 109 miles of the loop trail, working to join sections to complete a continuous trail, Patterson wrote.

His goal is to “hurry up and get this done,” he said. “There’s a lot of interest out there. I’m seeing more and more people out there wanting additional trails and wanting to get the rest of the trails completed.”

Given the growing number of people who are traveling to use trails, Patterson, Northey and others say the trail system will support economic development and tourism, especially given its proximity to so many parks, the beach and other tourist attractions.

The additional state support will help encourage local governments to complete their local projects that would complete the regional network, Patterson said.

The city of New Smyrna Beach is among the cities working to help piece together sections of the trail.

“It is no small feat that this regional trail was ranked #1 yesterday over many other great trails projects,” the city’s leisure services director, Nancy Maddox, wrote in a Friday morning email to Tim Baylie, Volusia County’s director of parks, recreation and culture.

“This is huge,” Maddox said Friday afternoon. “It’s just amazing that we were ranked No. 1.”

“I think the potential is huge,” she said. “This could really put Volusia County, and all the counties involved, on the map.”

The trail also links with several other planned trails systems, including the 2,900-mile East Coast Greenway between Calais, Maine and Key West, and the Palatka to St. Augustine Rail Trail.

For more information visit the [Facebook page](#) for the Loop trail or for more about the larger trails network visit, [Greenway.org](#) .

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