October is a great time to work and play outdoors. To honor the mild weather and the beginning of our cool weather season, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Greenways & Trails promotes October as Florida Greenways and Trails Month. This is the sixth year for the designation.

Greenways and Trails Month is celebrated with a proclamation from Governor Bush and a variety of activities scheduled around the state. The activities focus attention on Florida’s greenways and trails, involve residents in creating and using greenways and trails, and encourage partnerships that will enhance continued expansion of greenways and trails as new communities develop.

The goal of the program is to have each county in Florida host at least one Greenways and Trails Month event during October. Festivities include dedications or openings, educational exhibits or workshops, trail rides or races, trail blazing, birding, clean-ups, or any activity connected to greenways and trails.

Osceola County is participating in several ways. First, by offering free Woods Walks that introduce participants to local natural areas. Second by offering Great Outdoor Days Fest.

Woods Walks are guided walks on natural paths show residents some of the subtle connections of plants and animals, differences in soil types and how different creatures are involved in complicated food webs in our natural ecosystems.

Beautiful fall wildflowers are being pollinated by brilliant butterflies. Animal tracks and plant debris indicate activity when we are not looking. Feathers on the trail tell us of some aerial acrobatics and indicate a "snatch" where a hawk or owl had dinner on the wing earlier.

Activities that take residents outdoors, help create public awareness of Florida’s growing system of greenways and trails. Many residents don’t know that our network of trails is growing as new developments plan for greenway which are natural areas that connect diverse ecosystems. Recreational pathways, sometimes paved and sometimes natural, are being planned to allow residents to enjoy and learn about nature without having to drive out of the subdivision.

Greenways and Trails Month helps us create public awareness of the services offered by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Greenways & Trails. They will have a regional representative at Great Outdoor Days today to share information on hiking, biking, canoeing and kayaking as well as areas to go horseback riding. They help local governments and private businesses understand the benefits to the community of ecosystem connections and recreational pathways. They assist with regional planning for connections across jurisdictions. The West Orange Trail is a great example in Orange County of a trail that crosses many community boundaries.

The Office of Greenways and Trails also assists user groups in dealing with user conflicts. They have helped develop trails compatible for horses, cyclists and hikers. They assist local residents interested in trails for all terrain vehicles.

Natural areas are important for plants and wildlife as well as people. The Office of Greenways and Trails promotes trails for a diverse group of users including hikers, bicyclists, equestrians, pedestrians, and wildlife watchers. Getting outdoors is a great family activity. Trail use encourages healthy, active, outdoor recreation.

In addition, trails serve as an alternative to motorized vehicles on highways. Proper design is important for safe travel for both motorists and cyclists. The Office of Greenways and Trails can help local governments with design standards and ordinances to promote cycling trails and reduce vehicle traffic.

Great Outdoor Days and Farm City activities continue today at Osceola Heritage Park on Highway 192 and Bill...
Beck Boulevard between Kissimmee and St. Cloud. The event opens at 10 am with lots of free family fun and entertainment. There are outdoor concerts on the lawn during the day so bring blankets or lawn chairs. There will be lots of barbecue and other foods for sale on property.

Representatives of many different organizations that promote conservation and enjoyment of the outdoors will be on hand with free information and activities. The Florida Trail Association and the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails will have trail guides and Osceola County Parks and Recreation will have the new Osceola County Recreation guide to help you find all the parks and boat ramps in Osceola County. Anyone interested in ATV trails should stop by Osceola County Parks exhibit at Great Outdoor Days Fest and share contact information for future planning meetings. The Florida Bicycle Association will have info on safe cycling as a mode of transportation as well as recreation.

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