

The Ridge Scenic Highway
Annual Report
October 1, 2007



Corridor Information

Road: State Road 17 (Scenic Highway)
Limits: US 27 to US 17/92
Centerline Miles: 38.7
Scenic Highway Name: *The Ridge Scenic Highway*
Location: Polk County
Date of Designation: February 2005

CME Contact Information

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Corridor Conditions

1. **Discuss the condition of the intrinsic resources and any changes in the corridor since designation. If necessary, provide photographs or other graphical representation of the resources.**

As discussed in last years report, citrus groves continue to be removed as property is transitioning to residential. This is most noticeable north of State Road 60. In regards to the other intrinsic resources listed in the Corridor Management Plan, little if any changes have occurred since the last annual report. See Corridor Photos.

2. **What, if any, intrinsic resources have been degraded or altered?**

Over the last year, little if any changes have occurred to the intrinsic resource listed and described in the corridor management Plan (CMP). Since the submittal of our last annual report nearly all of the hurricane damage that was referenced in the report has been repaired or replaced. It is becoming noticeable along portions of the Scenic Highway that some of the orange groves have not been maintained and the some of the trees are dying as a result. This could be a result of the increased cost associated with maintaining and protecting trees

from diseases such as Citrus Canker and Citrus Greening, as well as numerous property transfers along the corridor in the last several years, i.e., property once owned by citrus growers is now owned by developers.

3. **Identify and discuss enhancement projects that have been initiated or completed.**

Earlier this year the City of Lake Wales completed construction on the first phase of the Lake Wales Trail. The trail was constructed using \$695,000 in transportation enhancement funds from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Due to construction cost increases, these funds were only enough to complete a portion of the trail. In 2007 the City received funding through the State Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) in the amount of \$200,000 to extend the trail east to CR 17B (Buck Moore Road). Additionally, OGT has purchased an additional section of the same CSX Rail that will eventually extend the trail to the west and State Road 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway). Currently, there are no funds for construction of this section of trail.

The Florida Historical Commission has recommended \$350,000 in funding for the restoration of the 1919 Lake Wales High School in Lake Wales which is two blocks east of the Ridge Scenic Highway. This funding was approved earlier this year by the Florida Legislature.

The City of Lake Wales has received \$50,000 from the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP). These funds will be used for improvements to the Lake Wales Boat Ramp and improvements to the shoreline restoration.

In 2005, the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) awarded a \$6.5 Million grant to Green Horizon Land Trust in Lake Wales to negotiate with the owners of 1,000 acres around the 157-acre sanctuary, known as Historic Bok Sanctuary, to preserve land around the sanctuary from development. On June 29, 2007, Florida Communities Trust (FCT) announced that Green Horizon Land Trust (GHLT) completed the first in a series of land acquisitions adjacent to Historic Bok Sanctuary (HBS) totaling 220 acres. FCT awarded \$1,993,768 to the GHLT to purchase two parcels that will help create an agricultural and natural lands buffer zone around the Sanctuary to preserve the cultural landscape of a Florida treasure and National Historic Landmark located in Lake Wales. The Sanctuary is pursuing additional acquisitions and conservation easements that will help to buffer the Sanctuary and preserve the dramatic views from the summit of Iron Mountain.

In 2007 the unincorporated community of Babson Park applied for two (2) grants which were endorsed by the Ridge Scenic Highway CME. The community has applied for \$700,000 from the FDOT through the Safe Routes to Schools grant program. The application has requested funding to construct a sidewalk through downtown Babson Park that will provide a safe facility for school children walking to Babson Park Elementary School. The FDOT just recently announced that the project will be awarded funding. In addition, the community has submitted a \$28,967 grant request to the Florida Wildflower Council for native landscaping improvements at the town entrance signs on State Road 17, as well as, the Hillcrest Heights Town Square which is adjacent to State Road 17. Landscaping plants will include Native wildflowers, grasses, shrubs and trees. This application was also endorsed by the CME. FDOT and the Florida Wildflower Council will be announcing project awards later this year.

In 2007 the Village of Highland Park was awarded \$50,000 for improvements to the Lake Amoret Nature Park (just east of the scenic highway) through the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP). This request was also endorsed by the CME. The Village has also submitted a \$16,265 grant request to the Florida Wildflower Council for native landscaping at the Lake Amoret Nature Park.

In Dundee, the Town has recently completed a Lake Marie Park Plan. The plan consists of improvements, new construction, and conservation areas to the lakeside park immediately

adjacent to the Scenic Highway. The total cost for the 5 year project (2007-2014) is estimated to be \$761,000 and will include park equipment, amphitheater, picnic pavilions, restrooms, boardwalk, 2 scenic pull-offs, a bridge to cross the lake, and many other features. The Town has identified the following sources of funding for the project: general fund monies, grant monies, and assistance from the Polk County Trustees work crew. Construction is scheduled to begin by December of 2007.

Also in Dundee, the Town has begun implementation of a lakes management program for the lakes within the Town Limits that include: Ada, Annie, Crystal, Dell, Josephine, Marie, Menzie, Ruth, and Trask. Many of these lakes are within view, or close proximity, of the Scenic Highway. These lakes also are going to be improved with enhanced park/recreation areas with connections to a network of multi-use trails. Projects that are currently funded in the capital improvement plan for 2007-2011 is Lake Ruth with estimated \$247,000.00 in new restrooms, playground equipment, renovated parking area, walk path, and purchase and installation of 18 hole frisbee golf. Lake Menzie is in the capital plan for 2007-2008 with estimated \$34,000.00 for construction of restroom facility and replacement of park, fitness station, and trail signage.

While some of these enhancements are subject to grant availability, over \$5M is being requested for enhancement and protection of the intrinsic resources along the Ridge Scenic Highway.

4. Describe plans for future development in the corridor and how this issue will be addressed.

This is the CME's number one Action Plan priority since designation in February 2005, to work with local governments in developing comprehensive plan policies and corresponding land development regulations that truly protect and enhance the corridor, as required in FDOT's Scenic Highway Manual. Currently, much of the land along the corridor is undeveloped, however, very little of this land is publicly-owned adjacent to the scenic highway, so there is no guarantee that the scenic views will remain.

The City of Haines City has implemented Comprehensive Plan and Code amendments for a planned commerce and industrial park in an area along scenic highway and SR 544 in the south section of the City. Included in the Plan are provisions for land use, landscaping, buffering, set-backs, access to SR 17, building height requirements, signage and architectural requirements. These requirements are more stringent than in other areas of the City.

In Dundee, the Town has established an "Area of Concern" policy provision for the development of any parcel of property that fronts the Scenic Highway within the Town Limits. This policy identifies the area as one of significant concern for the preservation of the corridor and keeping in compliance w/the vision of the Scenic Highway. This tool allows the planning department to require the possible development of any affected properties to come before the Town Council for review versus keeping some of these projects within the review and approval process at staff level. It also gives the Town the authority to impose greater landscaping and buffering requirements. The policy is a temporary tool to use while the establishment of a LDR guideline is developed at the county level which is hoped to be a format for municipalities to also adopt and utilize.

The CME has been working closely with the Polk County and the County's Long Range Planning Division in developing policies and regulations in support of the Ridge Scenic Highway. The Long Range Planning Division has organized a Scenic Highway Focus Group comprised of various interests along the corridor that have been developing proposed changes to the Polk County Comprehensive Plan. The Focus Group has been meeting regularly since the summer of 2006 and its membership includes: Representatives of the

citrus industry; Polk County Farm Bureau; Land owners along the scenic highway; CME Members; and representatives from the municipalities.

Some examples of the type of regulations being considered by Polk County include: Additional setbacks and right-of-way donations for new developments along scenic highway; Additional landscaping and buffering along the corridor is also being considered; A multi-use trail adjacent to the Scenic Highway; Encouraging more open space be set-aside near Scenic Highway – especially in areas with prominent views; Specific regulations are also being considered for walls, lighting, fencing, building height, and signage; Native landscaping that include plants found on the Lake Wales Ridge; Clustering developments so that a scenic view is not obstructed; and Provide an option for developers to construct road side parks, or pull-offs, along the scenic highway at the scenic viewpoints identified in the Designation Application. At this point, these plans are draft and are considered a work in progress. Two (2) public workshops were held to solicit public comment in January 2006 and May 2007 on the proposed regulations and incentives that have been prepared by the Focus Group. Both workshops were well attended with 230 attendees at the January meeting. The Polk County Board of County Commissioners had a favorable response when they were provided with a status report earlier this year. It is anticipated that Polk County will be taking action on these plans in the summer of 2008. The Draft Comprehensive Plan Policies and other information regarding the Ridge Scenic Highway can be found on the County's website at: http://www.polk-county.net/county_offices/long_range_planning/roads.aspx.

One of the goals of the Long Range Planning Division, the Scenic Highway Focus Group and Ridge CME is to present this information to the various municipalities along the scenic highway in an effort to foster consistency between jurisdictions in adopting policies and regulation that protect the scenic highway as similar regulation are being considered by some of the municipalities.

Corridor Conditions – Photographs



Figure 1. Bok Tower and Crooked Lake as seen from the Windy Hill Viewpoint



Figure 2. SR 17 curve near Highland Park



Figure 3. Crooked Lake Prairie



Figure 6. Village of Highland Park



Figure 4. Fall Color – Tiger Creek Preserve



Figure 7. New development - open space/landscape buffer adjacent to SR 17



Figure 5. Reedy Creek Bluffs – Lake Wales Ridge State Forest



Figure 8. Recently planted citrus grove – near Lake Easy



Figure 9. New development along SR 17 – North Lake Wales



Figure 11. Cleared grove – land for sale, near Babson Park



Figure 10. Cleared grove and new development along SR 17 – Dundee



Figure 12. Residential development along SR 17 - Dundee

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

5. Mention how effective the goals, objectives and strategies have been in accomplishing the Corridor Vision.

The goals, objectives and strategies contained in the CME's Designation Application have been used by the CME as a guide in the CME's efforts to implement the Action Plan. Many of the Action Plan items have been completed or initiated by the CME.

6. Which goals and objectives have been met thus far and how were they accomplished?

Since designation, the CME has completed and/or started to implement the following goals and strategies from the Designation Application:

Increase Community Support and Participation: The CME includes several elected officials, planners and other local government staff represented on the CME. The CME holds monthly meetings which are open to the public. CME members have participated in numerous public meetings and made presentations at the requests of local governments and

community groups. The CME has discussed involving the local chambers of commerce to help promote the businesses and activities in the corridor's downtown areas.

Increase Resource Protection, Maintenance, Preservation and Enhancement: The CME has added several members that specialize in conservation and preservation of the environment. The CME and its local governments have supported the acquisition of environmental lands along and near scenic highway. The CME have participated in meetings with Polk County and land owners in efforts to develop innovative methods to protect environmentally sensitive lands and citrus lands on the Ridge. The CME has held a celebration event in 2005 which highlighted the intrinsic resources along the scenic highway and brought public awareness to the CME and the Ridge Scenic Highway. The CME has been involved in efforts being lead by Polk County to protect the scenic viewpoints along the highway. These efforts include providing incentives to developers for setting aside land and constructing roadside parks at these viewpoints. In return, developers/land owners may receive additional density credits for providing such amenities. The CME has also encouraged additional setbacks and buffering for new developments along scenic highway. A multi-use trail is also being considered adjacent to scenic highway in areas where right-of-way widths allow.

The CME has discussed a roadside park and pull-off in the vicinity of Windy Hill (the highest point on the Scenic Highway at over 300' elevation). The CME should meet with Polk County Leisure Services and City of Frostproof to investigate the feasibility of purchasing land for such a park. Nearly all of the land on Windy Hill is undeveloped citrus groves. The CME should develop a plan to implement this goal while the opportunity still exists. The CME should request that this park be included as part of the Polk County Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Increase Transportation and Safety: The FDOT has added bicycle facilities (paved shoulders & bicycle lanes) and sidewalks along portions of scenic highway as FDOT resurfaces SR 17. This is a result of efforts by the Polk Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), CME members and local governments. The Polk County 2030 Transportation Improvement Plan (TRIP) includes bicycle and pedestrian facilities in its plan for SR 17. The TRIP also includes several multi-use trails per the Designation Application. As mentioned earlier, the County is considering a requirement that new developments provide a multi-use trail adjacent to the Scenic Highway. The Polk TPO is currently preparing a detailed transportation plan for the areas along and east of the Scenic Highway to provide additional roads and new road connections in an effort to alleviate future traffic congestion on the Scenic Highway.

The FDOT has added paved shoulders to nearly all of Scenic Highway which provide a safe facility for bicyclists. The CME is considering requesting bicycle sharing roadway signage to enhance bicycle safety as well.

In Babson Park, the community has submitted a safe path to school grant for a sidewalk in Babson Park. This grant will benefit not only the area school children but the university students and residents who walk along the Scenic Highway to community resources and businesses. FDOT has also added a solar beacon crosswalk sign at the elementary school zone that has made the area significantly safer for pedestrians and motorists alike.

The Lake Wales Trail has been partially completed. Additional funds have been committed to extend the trail (see question 3).

Increase Education and Publicize Corridor Story: The CME has developed a PowerPoint presentation and video that showcase the corridor with a display of beautiful images and compelling language about the project and its significance. The CME has started preparing a corridor brochure to promote awareness of the Ridge Scenic Highway.

The CME includes elected officials on its Board and includes all of the city governments in mailings. The CME membership/ mailing list is updated regularly. The CME meetings are open to the public.

Area organizations aware of the efforts of the CME have joined in to beautify and promote the economic benefits the highway offers by working together to enhance the tourist experience in their communities.

In September of 2007, at the annual conference of the Florida American Planning Association (FAPA), a day long tour of the Ridge Scenic Highway and its intrinsic resources was offered to members of the conference. The tour was organized by local FAPA members and members of the CME. The tour was well attended by planners from throughout Florida. In addition to touring the Scenic Highway, planners discussed the process of designating the highway, and development policies that are being considered by local governments to protect and enhance the corridor. Also, at the 2007 FAPA Conference, the CME's Chairperson – Mimi Reid-Hardman was nominated and presented with an award for Outstanding Public Service for her efforts in implementing the vision of the Ridge Scenic Highway, historic preservation, recreation, and comprehensive community planning in Lake Wales and Polk County. The Lake Wales News was also awarded with the Media Appreciation Award by FAPA for their balanced, thorough, and informative coverage of the CME and the Scenic Highway Focus Group's effort in developing policies and regulations that will protect and enhance the Scenic Highway.

Pursue Sustainable Agriculture and Ecotourism: The CME has added an agriculture position on its Board and has invited representatives from the industry to regular CME meetings. The CME has promoted ecotourism as a major asset of the Ridge. One of our CME members serves on Visit Florida's Cultural Heritage/Rural Tourism Committee with a special interest in promoting tourism along the corridor. The CME is currently preparing a corridor brochure to promote the facilities along the corridor – including ecotourism.

As mentioned in Question 3, the Babson Park Visioning Group has applied for a grant from the Florida Wildflower Foundation to beautify a public common in the Town of Hillcrest Heights along Scenic Highway. This community is committed to restoring and enriching this area to a more native state with wildflowers and native plants. The benefit of this Scenic Sandhill Project is it will expand an existing outdoor classroom by providing an understanding of the ecosystems with personal experience for the students. Travelers too, will be exposed to the beauty Florida's natural environments provide as they travel along the highway. Encouraging ecotourism, continually exposing new visitors, and educating our youth is necessary to sustain Florida's natural heritage, a vital role for this scenic highway.

Provide Adequate Administration: The CME has a central location for information on the scenic highway - Lake Wales Depot Museum & Cultural Center. Mailing lists are maintained and updated regularly. Action Plan items are reviewed and prioritized at meetings regularly. The CME has filled all of its regular and at-large board positions.

7. Which goals (unlikely in the first year), objectives and strategies have been or need to be modified in order to attain the Corridor Vision?

At this point no modifications are being suggested. This issue may be best addressed as part of the Corridor Management Plan update in 2009/10.

8. What new ordinances, policies and/or regulations have been issued as a result of the scenic highway?

See Question 4.

9. Are there proposed ordinances/regulations that may aid goals?

See Question 4.

Community Participation Program

10. Discuss the effectiveness of the Community Participation Program to date.

The CME has been very active in engaging local governments and increasing public awareness. The CME schedules meetings at a different location every month and provides opportunity for the public to comment on the CME's plans and programs. The CME's prepared a video with assistance from the FDOT which has been aired on Polk County's Government Television. The group is well covered by the local newspapers which have published numerous articles about the efforts of the CME.

The largest effort the CME has done to get the message out about the Ridge Scenic Highway was the 2005 Scenic Highway Celebration Event which includes over 50 public events over a period of four (4) days in nine (9) different communities. Many of these events were held at many of the intrinsic resources that make the Ridge Scenic Highway so special.

The CME has prepared a PowerPoint presentation and made numerous presentations to local governments, civic groups, and other community organizations.

The CME would like to include information about the Ridge Scenic Highway on a website. The CME has started preparing a corridor brochure as well.

11. Provide a synopsis of major issues discussed at public meetings held in the past year and elaborate on any critical issues that have arisen during these forums and how they were dealt with or will be addressed.

Since the Ridge Scenic Highway was designated, development related issues along the corridor have been the major topics brought up by CME members, as well as public participants. The CME has sponsored a planning forum to discuss these issues with local governments and to research methods that support growth while maintaining the aesthetics of the corridor. As a result of the CME's efforts, local governments are currently working on development regulations that help to protect the scenic highway.

Some of the other items discussed at the CME's meetings have included unique signage for the corridor, a Ridge Scenic Highway website, roadside pull-offs/parks and additional planning/engineering studies that focus on some of the specific items contained in the Action Plan.

The CME, some local governments (particularly Polk County) and the Scenic Highway designation process have been criticized for not involving large land owners and developers in the process early on. This is one of the primary reasons the Scenic Highway Focus Group was created – to involve these groups, especially as it relates to development regulations. FDOT may want to consider amending the Scenic Highway Manual to include a discussion on the importance of including all possible stakeholders in the designation process – not just the advocates. Particularly for corridors like the Ridge that transverse large amounts of private undeveloped areas. This became apparent to the Ridge CME and local governments when comprehensive plan amendments and land development regulation were initially considered.

Funding

12. Describe corridor funding needs, acquisitions and expenditures.

The CME has been able to carry out the administration activities (meeting locations, public notices, meeting materials, copies, postage, etc.) without a budget. The group has been able to utilize volunteerism and other in-kind services from its members to its advantage.

In implementing the Action Plan, the CME will continue to research grant opportunities. Grants that require a local match may not be feasible in the short term due to the current fiscal situation in many of the municipalities/jurisdictions that comprise the CME. The CME would appreciate advisement and assistance from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) in determining appropriate sources for funding enhancements referenced in the Action Plan.

The CME anticipates the need for assistance from the FDOT as it prepares the update to its Corridor Management Plan (due 2010). Additionally, the CME has discussed various small scale studies/plans that evaluate the feasibility of Action Plan items.

13. Has funding been a problem?

Yes. It seems that most of the grants that are available require local matching funds. Based on the actions taken by the Florida Legislature and Governor earlier this year, the climate is poor for matching local government funds, as they have had to cut funding to meet their budget needs. As mentioned earlier, the CME would like to study further some of the items contained in the action plan, but the lack of local funding has hindered their ability to do so.

14. If so, how will the CME attempt to resolve this issue?

Additional guidance is needed from the FDOT. Particularly for funding and grants that do not require a local match. Without a dedicated funding source, the CME and many of the Action Plan items (particularly construction items) are subject to grant availability and local governments willing to support (contribute funding). The CME will continue to be an advocate for the corridor and promote the projects that support the vision, goals and objectives of the Scenic Highway.

15. Are funding sources being pursued?

Yes. Several grant requests were mentioned in Question 3.

16. If so, when does the CME anticipate receiving them?

Fall/Winter of 2007.

17. How will the funding be used?

See Question 3.

Measuring success

18. Traffic Counts Along the Corridor

FDOT Site Location	2005 AADT	2006 AADT	Percent Change
0064 SW of Livingston Lake Rd	2,600	2,400	-8%
5038 S of CR 630 (Frostproof)	6,900	8,100	+17%
5039 N of CR 630 (Frostproof)	3,700	3,600	-3%
0049 N of McCloud Road (Frostproof)	2,900	3,900	+34%
0122 NW of Libby Rd (Babson Park)	7,200	7,300	+1%
0018 S of Bellview Drive (Lake Wales)	4,900	4,900	0%

5122 SE of Polk Ave. (Lake Wales)	5,100	5,100	0%
5123 NW of Polk Ave. (Lake Wales)	7,800	7,400	-5%
5124 N of Central Ave (Lake Wales)	10,600	11,200	+6%
0047 S of Mtn. Lake Cut-Off	13,400	14,800	+10%
5212 S of Chalet Suzanne Rd	10,100	10,500	+4%
0048 S of Waverly Road	8,200	8,700	+6%
0071 N of Waverly Road	7,100	8,200	+15%
0092 NW of Lk Mabel Lp Rd (Dundee)	6,100	7,900	+30%
5030 E of Center Street (Dundee)	8,500	10,100	+19%
5031 N of Main Street (Dundee)	8,600	9,100	+6%
0046 S of SR 544 (Haines City)	8,200	8,800	+7%
5049 N of SR 544 (Haines City)	11,800	12,600	+7%
0039 S of US 17/92 (Haines City)	12,300	13,300	+8%

This information was obtained from the Florida Department of Transportation.

19. Corridor Resources

Historical Resources

There are 19 historic sites and structures within a mile of SR 17.

Downtown Haines City Commercial District – contains 25 buildings 20 of historic interest.

Chalet Suzanne – On National Register of Historic Places. Includes inn, restaurant, shops, airstrip, soup cannery, gardens museum, citrus groves and vineyard.

Mountain Lake Historic District – Gated community of 101 buildings, 65 of historical interest.

North Avenue Historic District – in Lake Wales 12 contributing structures.

Lake Wales Historic Residential District – 206 historic buildings. On National Register of Historic Places.

Lake Wales Commercial District – 16 historic buildings. On National Register of Historic Places.

Haines City Heritage Museum – History Museum

Dundee Depot Museum – History Museum

Lake Wales Depot Museum – History Museum

Frostproof Historical Museum and Library

Historic Bok Sanctuary - Pinewood Estate - World-renowned Carillon & Majestic Belltower and historic Olmsted-designed Gardens

Cultural Resources

There are 24 churches and 30 government facilities located along SR 17.

Community Events and Festivals:

Lake Wales Pioneer Days – annual event

Lake Wales Art Show – annual event

Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social – Lake of the Hills Annual Event

Haines City Heritage Days – annual event

International Carillon Festival – annual event held at Historic Bok Sanctuary

Landmark Baptist College – Haines City

Haines City Community Theatre

Haines City Community Center

Haines City Civic Center

Dundee Community Center

Dundee Chamber of Commerce

The Museum at Chalet Suzanne

Historic Bok Sanctuary

Lake Wales Little Theatre
Lake Wales Art Center
Lake Wales Model Railroad Club
Lake Wales Museum and Cultural Center
Highland Park Club
Webber International University
Babson Park Woman's Club
Frostproof Art League and gallery
Frostproof Chamber of Commerce
Frostproof Depot
Frostproof Historical Museum and Library

Recreational Resources

Haines City Railroad Park – Community Park in Downtown
Lake Eva Park – Haines City
Yale Field – Haines City
Lake Hamilton Park – Across from the town hall
Merrill Street Park – Athletic park in Dundee
Lake Marie Trail – Bike/Ped trail in Dundee
Lake Marie Park – Dundee
Lake Menzie Fitness Trail – Dundee
Johnson Park – Dundee
East Central Park – Polk County
Hardman Recreational and Cultural Complex – includes a trailhead for the Lake Wales Trail (Lake Wales)
Lake Wailes Park – Trail and lake access
Crystal Lake Park – Lake Wales
Carson Park – Hillcrest Heights/Babson Park
Crooked Lake Park – Hillcrest Heights (Private)
Friendship Park – Frostproof
Frostproof Sports Complex
Fewox Park – Neighborhood park in Frostproof
Henderson Field – Baseball fields in Frostproof
Lake Reedy Park – Frostproof
Lake Reedy Boardwalk – Frostproof
Frostproof Football Field
Wall Street Park – Frostproof
Clinch lake Park – Frostproof
Gymnasium – Frostproof
Lake Livingston Boat Ramp – South of Frostproof access via SR 17
Pine Ridge Nature Trail – Hiking trail at Historic Bok Sanctuary
Lake Wailes Trail – Multi-use trail in Lake Wales
Lake Wales Trail – Multi-use trail with trailhead on SR 17
Tiger Creek Preserve Hiking Trails
Ridge Aububon Nature Trail – Hiking Trail
Crooked Lake Sandhill – Hiking Trails
Crooked Lake Prairie – Hiking Trails
Hickory Lake Scrub – Hiking Trails

Lake Access:
Lake Eva
Lake Easy
Lake Annie
Lake Pierce
Lake Marion

Lake Wailes
Crooked Lake
Little Crooked Lake
Lake Walk-in-the-Water
Lake Arbuckle
Lake Clinch
Lake Reedy
Lake Livingston

Natural Resources

Highland Park – Designated bird/wildlife sanctuary.
Historic Bok Sanctuary – Botanical gardens, endangered plant garden and nursery.
Pine Ridge Preserve – Endangered sandhill ecosystem with hiking trails and expansive views of the Ridge.
Ridge Audubon Center – 4 Acre sandhill site with interpretive center and hiking trails.
Crooked Lake Sandhill – 25 acre endangered sandhill/scrub ecosystem.
Crooked Lake – designated Outstanding Florida Water.
Crooked Lake Prairie – Lake Wales Ridge endangered scrub ecosystem
Peace Creek Canal System.
Tiger Creek Preserve – 4800 acres
Hickory Lake Scrub – 57 acre scrub preserve.
Sun Ray Scrub – State-owned scrub northeast of US 27.
Lake Wales Ridge State Forest
Lake Kissimmee State Park

Scenic Resources/Vistas

Lake Gordon – Lake Hamilton
Lake Marie – Dundee
Views of Bok Tower – Lake of the Hills/Dundee/Lake Easy
Windy Hill – Highest point on SR 17 at over 300' above sea level. Points as far away as Lakeland, Highlands County and Osceola County can be seen.
Lake Moody – Excellent views north and south of the lake.
Murals – Downtown Lake Wales and Frostproof.
SR 544 @ SR 17 – Excellent south views of the Ridge and Bok Tower.
Historic Bok Sanctuary/Pine Ridge Preserve – Outstanding views from the top of Iron Mountain and Knoll Hill.

20. Marketing and Promotional Efforts

The CME, with assistance from the FDOT, has prepared a corridor video that highlights the Ridge Scenic Highway. This video has been shown on Polk County Government Television and to local governments and community groups.

The CME has submitted numerous press releases and there have been many newspaper articles in the Ledger, NewsChief, Lake Wales News and Orlando Sentinel.

On 10/29/05 we had the Celebration event with over 50 separate events along the Ridge to celebrate the designation of the corridor.

A corridor brochure has been discussed and is something the CME would like to pursue.

21. Lodging Facilities

There are 9 hotels located along the corridor. All are small/local establishments.

22. Food Facilities

There are approximately 20 restaurants and eateries. The majority are small local establishments.

23. Chambers of Commerce

Haines City Chamber
P.O. Box 986
Haines City, Florida 33845
(863) 422-3751

Dundee Chamber
310 Main Street
Dundee, Florida.
(863) 439-3261

Lake Wales Chamber
340 W. Central Avenue
P.O. Box 191
Lake Wales, FL 33859
Phone (863) 676-3445

Frostproof Chamber
118 E Wall St
Frostproof, FL 33843
Phone: (863) 635-9112

24. Private Development

Over the past year there has been a significant amount of single family home construction along State Road 17, not unlike most of central Florida. Most of this growth has occurred in the northern portion of the corridor. Particularly in north Lake Wales near the eagle Ridge Mall, south and east portions of Dundee and south and east Haines City. The region's close proximity to major urban areas (Lakeland, Winter Haven and Orlando), relatively low cost of living, along with a large amount of available developable land have fueled the housing boom in this area. Many of the municipalities along the corridor have annexed large areas along scenic highway and have extended utilities and other services to serve this growth. While much of the land south of State Road 60 is still used as agriculture (Citrus), the spread of Citrus canker along the Ridge in 2004 and 2005, have enabled developers to purchase land along State Road 17 much cheaper than along the Florida's coast. Based on these actions, it is expected that there will be a steady transition of agricultural land to residential developments along State Road 17.

25. Demographic Changes

There has not been a discernable difference in the areas demographics over the past year.

26. Property Value Changes

Based on the type of developments that are currently under construction, along with the desire for land and other factors mentioned in question 24, land values have increased significantly in 2005/06. In some areas, by as much as four or five times over a two or three year period. Over the last year these values have maintained or decreased slightly. In 2007, land for sale signs are a common site along the 38 mile corridor. For instance there are currently fifteen properties for sale (an acre or more in size) along a four mile portion of Scenic Highway between Babson Park and Highland Park.

27. Changes in Tourist Traffic

While this corridor continues to be a popular “scenic” alternative to US 27, especially for motorcyclists and bicycle groups, traffic volumes do not seem to indicate an increase in tourist traffic due to the designation of the corridor. Due to construction on nearby US 27, portions of Scenic Highway are being used as an alternate. This might explain the significant increases in traffic volumes at some locations along the corridor.

28. Other Comments on Measuring Success

NA

Local Government Comprehensive Plan (LGCP) Relationship

29. Discuss how effective the integration of the CMP into the local government comprehensive plans has been.

At this point, LGCPs have not been amended to incorporate the Ridge Scenic Highway. However, this is the CME’s number one Action Plan priority since designation in February 2005, to work with local governments in developing comprehensive plan policies and corresponding land development regulations that truly protect and enhance the corridor. Unlike many of the other scenic highways in Florida, the Ridge Scenic Highway contains numerous areas with dramatic vistas and views due the relatively high elevations on the Lake Wales Ridge. The views along the Ridge Scenic Highway are considered one it’s most significant intrinsic resources. As mentioned earlier, much of the land along the corridor is currently undeveloped, however, very little of this land is public-owned adjacent to the scenic highway, so there is no guarantee that the views will remain. It is the goal of the Ridge Scenic Highway CME and many of its member local governments to include much more than what is suggested in the Florida Scenic Highway Manual.

30. Discuss any actions that are underway or are needed to maintain consistency with the LGCP and other plans.

For these policies and regulations to be successful, the local governments need to work closely with property owners and other stakeholders. The Polk County Long Range Planning Division has taken the lead in developing policies and regulations in support of the Ridge Scenic Highway and has formed a focus group comprised of landowners, agriculture and business representatives, citizens, and other stakeholders from along the corridor, as well as CME members. This group has been meeting since May of 2006 and anticipates the County Commission taking action on these policies by the summer of 2008. Considering the length of the corridor (38.7 miles) and number of jurisdictions along the corridor (8), these efforts have been time consuming and challenging.

Problem Areas

31. Describe any problems that have arisen regarding the corridor.

As mentioned earlier, due to the lack of input from large land owners and developers in the development of the CMP, there was a lot of public opposition to the proposed comprehensive plan policies that were being considered due to the designation of the highway.

A related issue is educating the public about the corridor. Unless you are a land owner along Scenic Highway, a frequent attendee of municipal or county meetings, or a member of any of the participating agencies affiliated w/the Corridor Membership, you more than likely know very little if anything about the corridor, it's goals/vision, or the plan for it's preservation and development of attributes. While the CME had a very successful corridor celebration event in 2005, that was covered well by local media and attended by many, a continuing effort is needed on the part of the CME to promote the corridor.

32. Describe present and future actions to resolve these issues.

Over the last year, a Scenic Highway Focus Group has been formed specifically for the purpose of developing comprehensive plan policies and land development regulations that protect and enhance the qualities of the Scenic Highway. Additionally, the Focus Group and CME will be presenting their work to the municipalities along the corridor in an attempt to establish consistency between jurisdictions along the corridor.

The CME has diversified its membership by adding citrus representatives, realtors and developers to the CME Board and included many additional representatives to the mailing list.

In terms of promoting the corridor, The CME should consider sponsoring an educational campaign focusing first on government bodies from elected officials to municipal management to staff, then Chambers of Commerce to business owners, and on down to citizens needs to be planned for and implemented. The spread via word of mouth as a result of this campaign would be invaluable. This could be accomplished by establishing mobile workshops/presentations local governments, Chamber of Commerce member meetings, and local meetings of organized clubs and citizens to ensure the promotion and prosperity of the Scenic Highway. Development of a corridor brochure and website will aid this effort as well.

Other Issues

33. Describe how well the CME has operated

The CME has held regular meetings every month since the corridor's designation in February of 2005. In general, participation has been consistent. The CME is made up of a cross section of various interests. The CME Board is comprised of 17 members. In addition to the 11 positions which represent local governments, five (5) at-large positions were created to diversify the CME membership that include Agriculture, Tourism, Cultural, Historical, Commercial/Developer and Environmental interests. The CME has several subcommittees that have met on an ad hoc basis to resolve various issues and carry out the Action Plan items. The subcommittees provide reports to the CME at their regular meetings. The CME holds regular meetings each month which are noticed a week prior to the meeting. The meetings are recorded and minutes are prepared. There is an opportunity for the public to participate and offer comments. In an effort to foster participation from all of its members/jurisdictions, the CME rotates the meeting locations every month.

34. Describe how partnering and coordination efforts have worked.

There is excellent coordination on the CME. The CME and its members work very closely with the local governments and the FDOT in implementing the Action Plan items. Regular CME meetings, subcommittee meetings and other meetings relevant to the CME's efforts are usually well attended. The CME feels that this is direct indicator of the level of coordination that exists with the group. The celebration events that were held in October 2005 to celebrate the designation of the Ridge Scenic Highway is a good example of the level of coordination and partnering that exists on the CME. The celebration activities included over 50 events that extended over a period of four (4) days in nine (9) different communities. Many of the administrative duties (meeting packets, agenda preparation, minutes, etc.) are shared by members. The CME has a speaker's bureau and has made numerous presentations to other committees, community groups and local governments. These presentations are usually attended by more than one member. The CME has been able to carry out all of these activities without a budget. The group has been able to utilize volunteerism and other in-kind services from its members to its advantage.

35. Provide discussion of any other issues the CME feels are relevant to the corridor's success.

Continued involvement by all of the jurisdictions and various stakeholders is very important to maintaining success. Funding for improvements/enhancements along the corridor is very important as well.