

# **The Ridge Scenic Highway**

## **Annual Report**

### **September 26, 2006**

#### **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.**

Since designation, little if any changes have occurred to the intrinsic resource listed and described in the corridor management Plan (CMP).
- 2. What, if any, intrinsic resources have been degraded or altered?**

Since designation, little if any changes have occurred to the intrinsic resource listed and described in the corridor management Plan (CMP). However, it should be noted that prior to the designation in the fall of 2004, three (3) hurricanes directly hit the Ridge communities. While the Ridge is many miles from the coast, winds were recorded in excess of 125mph near Lake Wales during Hurricane Charley. Nearly all of the trees along the highway in the downtown areas were damaged or destroyed. There was also a substantial amount of roof and water damage to some of the historic structures along the corridor. The Lake Wailes Trail (Lake Wales) and Lake Marie Trail (Dundee) were flooded as a result of the heavy rain. The Lake Wailes Trail has since been relocated in a section to avoid the high water. The gardens at Historic Bok Sanctuary, which sit a top Iron Mountain at nearly 300 feet above sea level, were heavily damaged. Much of the vegetation has recovered or been replanted and although there was damage, the views from the summit area are much more extensive than before the storms. While there was a substantial amount of damage on the Ridge, in the two

years since the storms most of the vegetation has recovered and many of the structures damaged from the storms have been repaired.

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

The City of Lake Wales has started construction on the first phase of the Lake Wales Trail. The trail will be constructed using \$695,000 in transportation enhancement funds from the Florida Department of Transportation. The trail will be a 12 foot wide multi-use trail and will extend from 4<sup>th</sup> Street to 1,000 feet east of Tower Boulevard. The city is still seeking additional construction funds for the remainder of the trail which will connect it to the Ridge Scenic Highway.

The Florida Historical Commission has recommended \$350,000 in funding for the restoration of the 1919 Lake Wales High School which is two blocks east of the Ridge Scenic Highway. The grant is contingent on the approval of the Florida Legislature in early 2007.

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. An additional 700 acres could be targeted for preservation in a second phase, but no funding is available for that acquisition.

The State of Florida has purchased endangered Lake Wales Ridge scrub habitat along the Ridge Scenic Highway just northeast of its junction with US 27. The acquisition adds to lands already acquired for conservation and recreation purposes. This purchase now creates 1.4 miles of contiguous natural lands adjacent to the scenic highway on the southern end of the corridor.

The City of Frostproof has applied for transportation enhancement funds for sidewalks and landscaping along scenic highway in the northern town limits near their school complex.

In May of 2006, the Nature Conservancy announced the acquisition of an additional 36 acres to the 4,833 acre Tiger Creek Preserve.

**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. 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.

The CME has been working closely with the Polk County Long Range Planning Division in developing policies and regulations in support of the Ridge Scenic Highway. This effort includes a great amount of public involvement and working closely with land owners. 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; Native landscaping that include plants found on the Lake Wales Ridge is encouraged; Clustering developments

so that a scenic view is not obstructed is also being considered; Allow the ability for developers to provide and construct road side parks along the scenic highway at the scenic viewpoints identified in the Designation Application. If provided, these amenities would be considered as an incentive to developers who wish to get additional densities. At this point, these plans are draft and are a work in progress. It is anticipated that Polk County will be taking action on these plans by the Summer of 2007.

Similar regulations are being considered by other municipalities along the corridor.

### **Corridor Conditions – Photographs**



**Figure 1. Bok Tower as seen from the Windy Hill Viewpoint**



**Figure 2. Lake Moody Viewpoint**



**Figure 3. Spook Hill**



**Figure 4. Crooked Lake Prairie**



**Figure 5. Downtown Lake Wales**



**Figure 6. Babson Park Marker**



**Figure 7. Downtown Frostproof Mural**



**Figure 8. Top of Bok Tower - Elevation 505'**

### **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. The CME have participated in numerous public meetings and made presentations at the requests of local governments and community groups.

**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.

**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.

**Increase Education and Publicize Corridor Story:** The CME has developed a PowerPoint presentation and video to promote the scenic highway and to educate the public. 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.

**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.

**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.

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?**  
NA (first year)
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 comments 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 also discussed developing a 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 issues 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 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.

### **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.

**13. Has funding been a problem?**

No. The CME has not requested/applied for specific funding as of yet.

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

NA

**15. Are funding sources being pursued?**

No.

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

NA

**17. How will the funding be used?**

NA

**Measuring success**

**18. Traffic Counts Along the Corridor**

Site 2005 AADT

0064 - 2600  
5038 - 6900  
5039 - 3700  
0049 - 2900  
0122 - 7200  
0018 - 4900  
5122 - 5100  
5123 - 7800  
5124 - 10600  
0047 - 13400  
5212 - 10100  
0048 - 8200  
0071 - 7100  
0092 - 6100  
5030 - 8500  
5031 - 8600  
0046 - 8200  
5049 - 11800  
0039 - 12300

*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

### 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 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  
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. Views extend for many miles.

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.

**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.

**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.

**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 its 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 2007. 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.**

NA

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

NA

### **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.**

NA