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Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc. is dedicated to preserving and enhancing Florida's scenic heritage. But it needs your support. This newsletter comes to you free whether you are a member or not. But we hope you will join us to work together to keep Florida the scenic place it is. Joining is easy and rewarding.

[Join Here](#)



### Florida News:

William Jonson, President of Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc. has authored a letter to the Florida Department of Transportation that should be read by any citizen or official concerned over the actions of FDOT to allow billboard companies to replace non-conforming signs with new modern billboards. [Click here for the letter.](#)

Florida highways are at the extremes. This Scenic Watch highlights the good and the bad. Local citizens work hard to preserve and protect highways, earning national recognition for their efforts. While the billboard companies are granted rights to mar our major thoroughfares in perpetuity. Shouldn't our state be as concerned about making our heavily traveled highways as scenic as its citizens are?

## Billboards

### Concerns raised in billboard removal

**Officials from both the city and county are worried the state's program violates federal law.**

By [Christopher Curry](#)  
Staff writer

Published: Saturday, October 31, 2009 at 6:01 a.m.  
Last Modified: Friday, October 30, 2009 at 9:52 p.m.

Skeptical Alachua County and Gainesville officials have both sent letters to the Florida Department of Transportation questioning if the state's proposed billboard removal program to beautify the Interstate 75 corridor violates federal law.

Specifically, the county and city argue that the state would violate the Federal Highway Beautification Act by allowing billboard companies to rebuild brand-new, modern billboards at the spot where old signs are taken down. That exchange is proposed as an incentive for companies to remove additional billboards at other locations along I-75.

"When FDOT decided to fund a program for billboard removal to address FHA (Federal Highway Administration) concerns, the program should have been structured solely to remove billboards and

not allow enhancements to existing billboards," Gainesville officials stated in their letter.

Gainesville and Alachua County both prohibit the construction of new billboards and each government expressed a concern that the state program could pre-empt those local ordinances in spite of statements from DOT officials that it would not.

The state's program still needs federal approval, and John Garner, director of right-of-way for DOT, said local governments that ban new billboards could choose not to participate.

Garner said the DOT plan would not allow billboards at any new locations but companies could be allowed to rebuild "non-conforming" signs if they tear down non-conforming billboards at other locations.

"If they have a sign they want to enhance, in exchange for being allowed to rebuild it, we would say give up signs here, here and here," Garner said.

He said there are two categories on non-conforming signs - those erected in zoning districts where billboards are not allowed and those within 1,500 feet of one another.

The Alachua County Commission's letter requested the state base its program on one in place in South Carolina, where "tri-vision" billboards - mechanical signs that rotate advertisements - are banned and a 30-foot height limit is in place. The county also wants a sunset provision added, requiring that any new billboards put up under the exchange program come down in 40 years.

Connected to this DOT sign reduction project is a DOT plan to spend \$15 million over five years buying up and taking down billboards along the I-75 corridor from the Georgia state line to the Florida Turnpike in the Sumter County city of Wildwood.

County Commission Chairman Mike Byerly said county officials are concerned the programs will not result in a significant reduction in the number of billboards along I-75, but will result instead in large payouts to billboard companies, who will then also be allowed to replace dilapidated signs they would otherwise not be able to rebuild with brand-new steel signs.

Because of those worries, the county has urged DOT to maximize the purchasing power of the \$15 million by basing purchase prices on what billboard owners value signs at on tax returns, instead of any appraisal method that results in a higher value.

"How many (billboards) it buys depends on how much you pay for each one," County Attorney Dave Wagner said.

The county also wants the state to place a priority on buying up billboards in areas - like Alachua County and Gainesville - where the local governments have prohibited the construction of new billboards.

Garner said courts have ruled that the state is not allowed to base purchase prices on taxable value. Instead, the market value - or an estimate of what the owner could make selling a billboard - needs to be taken into account.

"The appraisal process on billboards is always controversial," Garner said. "There are those, such as Alachua County, who think signs should be valued as they are declared on their taxes. The courts say we must look at all values."

County and city officials also noted that there is a history of DOT running afoul of federal regulations when it comes to billboards.

The letter from Gainesville revisited the state's decision to allow billboard companies to rebuild nearly 200 of the non-conforming billboards that were destroyed by the hurricanes of 2004.

"In the 44 years since the HBA's (Highway Beautification Act) passage, those nonconforming signs were intended to be removed over time by natural attrition, which is what should have occurred in

2004," the city stated in its letter to DOT.

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## Scenic Things to Do

### Scenic travel calendars

The Sun-Centinel publishes monthly travel calendars of interesting things to do in Florida. Some of you sent your own calendars to be included. Time and space prevents researching every city so if you would make sure your local events are included in the Sun-Centinel calendars then the rest of the state will know about them. Here are links to the upcoming August events:

[North Florida & the Panhandle Travel Calendar for November](#)

[South Florida Travel Calendar for November](#)

[Central Florida Travel Calendar for November](#)

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## Scenic Highways

### Marion roadways recognized as National Scenic Byways

By Michael Oppermann  
Correspondent

Published: Monday, October 19, 2009 at 6:30 a.m.

Last Modified: Monday, October 19, 2009 at 12:30 p.m.

OCALA NATIONAL FOREST - The culmination of a five-year project by a local community organization will be celebrated Saturday to mark federal recognition of the natural and historic significance of the region's roadways.



Two sand hill cranes stand together along State Road 40 near County Road 315 on Tuesday.  
Lee Ferinden

Byway celebration

OCALA NATIONAL FOREST - The Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway was named a National Scenic Byway last week. A local grassroots organization that worked to achieve the designation, as well as state recognition, is holding a celebration from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 24, at Camp Ocala. The free event includes exhibits, speakers, bluegrass music, lunch, horse rides, kayaking, forest and lake tours, and more.

The camp is located on State Road 19 four miles south of SR 40. For more information, visit Web site [www.floridablackbearsenicbyway.org](http://www.floridablackbearsenicbyway.org).

More Photos:

- [Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway](#)

The Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway includes the stretch of State Road 40 from Ocala to Ormond Beach and SR 19 from Altoona to Palatka, totaling 126 miles across Marion, Lake, Volusia and Putnam counties.

On Friday, the roadways were named a National Scenic Byway.

The byway already had received Florida Scenic Byway status.

The Florida Department of Transportation's Environmental Management Office describes the state's scenic highway program as a grassroots effort to heighten awareness of cultural, historical, archeological, recreational, natural and scenic resources along roads.

The program involves formation of private advocacy groups to develop regional plans to showcase and protect community resources, promote tourism and educate the public.

Jim Thorsen is chairman of the ribbon cutting celebration to be held Saturday and an at-large member of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Corridor Management Entity.

"There are a little over 1,000 miles of scenic byways in Florida. We're one of the only ones in Central Florida," he said.

Work on attaining scenic byway status for roads within the Ocala National Forest began in 2004, when a small group of volunteers began working with FDOT to meet requirements set by the Florida Scenic Highway Program.

"We had to do a lot of the work ourselves," said Monso Tatum, vice chairman of the Corridor Management Entity.

[more...](#)

### **Florida's Overseas Highway recognized as an 'All-American Road'**



KEY LARGO, Fla. (AP) — The Overseas Highway, which stretches over 127 miles in the [Florida Keys](#), has been named an All-American Road.

Completed in 1938, the Overseas Highway incorporates 42 bridges over the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, Florida Bay and the [Gulf of Mexico](#). The All-American Road designation is the highest recognition possible under the National Scenic Byways program.

Only 30 other U.S. roadways have earned the prestigious title. Keys officials expect the accolade will lead to increased tourism and additional highway funding.

"The All-American Road designation will bring status to us with international and domestic visitors, so

that they know driving U.S. 1 from [Key Largo](#) to Key West is a one-of-a-kind driving experience," said Judy Hull, president of the Florida Keys Scenic Corridor Alliance, which spearheaded a multiyear effort to achieve the distinction. "It should help us with tourism and future highway grant funding."

The Overseas Highway follows a trail originally blazed in 1912 when [Standard Oil](#) millionaire [Henry Flagler](#) completed the extension of his Florida East Coast Railroad from Miami to Key West. Construction of the highway began after the railroad ceased operating following a 1935 hurricane.

In 1982, 37 of the original bridges including the Seven Mile Bridge were replaced with wider spans. Most of the historic bridges still stand alongside the newer ones and now serve as fishing piers for anglers.

Along with the Overseas Highway, officials announced four other All-American Roads. They are Historic Route 66 in Arizona, Maine's Acadia All-American Road Trenton Extension, the [Harriet Tubman](#) Underground Railroad Byway in Maryland and Michigan's Woodward Avenue (M-1) Automotive Heritage Trail.

Three other Florida roads were recognized as new National Scenic Byways, including the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway in the state's north central region, the Ormond Scenic Loop & Trail in the central east part of the state and the Big Bend Scenic Byway in the Panhandle.

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor