

History of the East Coast Greenway

The East Coast Greenway grew out of the East Coast Bicycle Conferences held bi-annually in the eighties to coordinate cycling advocacy in the northeastern states. It followed in the footsteps of the East Coast Bicycle Route, an on-road route mapped and signed to link east coast cities and youth hostels within the corridor.

Initially conceived as an off-road route connecting New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., the East Coast Greenway was launched in 1991 when nine cycling and trail enthusiasts met in New York City and formed the East Coast Greenway Alliance. The project quickly grew in scope, and the following summer this small group staged a month-long exploratory tour from Boston to Washington. Eventually the vision of the East Coast Greenway would encompass the entire East Coast, aiming to link 25 major cities in 15 states plus the District of Columbia.

Over the next decade, significant steps were taken to build the Alliance and begin the monumental task of creating the East Coast Greenway. The ECGA officially incorporated in 1995, hired its first executive director in 1996, and secured official 501(c)3 nonprofit status in 1997. The Alliance also worked diligently to define a projected spine route and form committees in each of the states along the ECG. The Greenway's first six trail segments were designated in 1996.

As the project gained momentum, so too did the Alliance's advocacy efforts. In 2000's East Coast Greenway WAVE, water from the Gulf of Mexico was relayed up the coast from Key West to the Canadian border and on to Saint John, New Brunswick for an international trail celebration there. Dozens of local events involving officials and numerous ECG supporters were held in towns and cities all along the coast. As the water traveled northward, so too did news of a trail that would one day transform the East Coast.

The following year, in 2001, the ECGA publicly designated Calais, Maine and Key West, Florida as the official gateways of the East Coast Greenway. This event linked the two cities via radio as the ECG's gateway markers were unveiled. The southern gateway marker is set in St. Croix granite from the Calais, Maine area. The stone is the same stone quarried for construction of the Calais branch of the Maine Central Railroad, the right of way that will one day become the northernmost section of the Greenway. Likewise, the northern gateway marker in Calais is set in Keys limestone, used in the construction of the Florida Overseas Railroad, now the site of the southernmost section of the ECG, the 106-mile Overseas Heritage Trail.



Miami.

Today the East Coast Greenway is roughly 20 percent complete, with trail segments designated in all but three of the states along the trail's corridor. Our 16 state committees are working harder than ever to move a significant portion of the trail off road by 2010. When complete, the East Coast Greenway will stretch over 2,950 miles and traverse an area inhabited by approximately 35 million people. It is, without question, one of the most ambitious trail projects in our nation's history. A true American legacy, the Greenway is already beginning to transform communities and lives all along the East Coast.

