

NAMI Southwest Florida

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**Southwest
Florida**

May 27, 2025

Acquisition and Restoration Council
C/o Hank Vinson
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Office of Environmental Services
3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 140
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Via Email only: hank.vinson@floridadep.gov

Dear Acquisition and Restoration Councilmembers:

I write to express NAMI Southwest Florida's support for the inclusion of the Bonita Estero Rail Trail (BERT) project onto the Florida Forever Program's Strategic Managed Area Lands List. BERT is an 11.4-mile underutilized rail corridor in Lee and Collier Counties intended to be converted into public trail as part of the statewide trails and greenway network. The corridor is a designated priority trail segment of the 2024-2028 Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan. Acquisition and management of the corridor as a public trail furthers Florida's statutory and programmatic goals of enhancing the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects contributing toward the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors.

The trail will provide a dedicated, safe and affordable transportation route in one of the deadliest areas of the country for cyclists and pedestrians. It will also allow those in the area who use bicycles as their main form of transportation, many of whom are our clients, to more easily, safely and quickly get access to local businesses and agencies. We also believe that exercise and spending time outdoors in nature is beneficial to one's mental and physical well-being.

We hope the Acquisition and Restoration Council will strongly consider including this project into the SMALL category of the Florida Forever Program.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vacharee Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vacharee" being more prominent than the last name "Howard".

Vacharee Howard
Executive Vice President

