



Big Cypress National Preserve

Public Meetings

Collier County

August 30, 2011

5:00 pm – 7:30 pm

Edison State College
7007 Lely Cultural Parkway
Naples, Florida 34113

Broward County

August 31, 2011

5:00 pm – 7:30 pm

Hyatt Regency Bonaventure
250 Racquet Club Road
Weston, Florida 33326

To comment on the project via the NPS website:

1. Go to:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>
2. Click on Big Cypress National Preserve
3. Click on the "Open for Comment" link on the left
4. Select the document to review and comment
5. Click on "Comment on Document"
6. Respond to the questions provided or provide other comments you may have on the project

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS), in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), plans to conduct an Environmental Assessment in association with the preparation of a Hunting Management Plan for the Big Cypress National Preserve (including the Addition).

The purpose of this newsletter is not only to provide you with information about the project, but also to ask for your help. This project is very important to the Big Cypress National Preserve, and your input is invaluable. We are seeking your input on the draft purpose, need, objectives, and alternatives developed for this project, which will be included in the Hunting Management Plan / Environmental Assessment (EA).

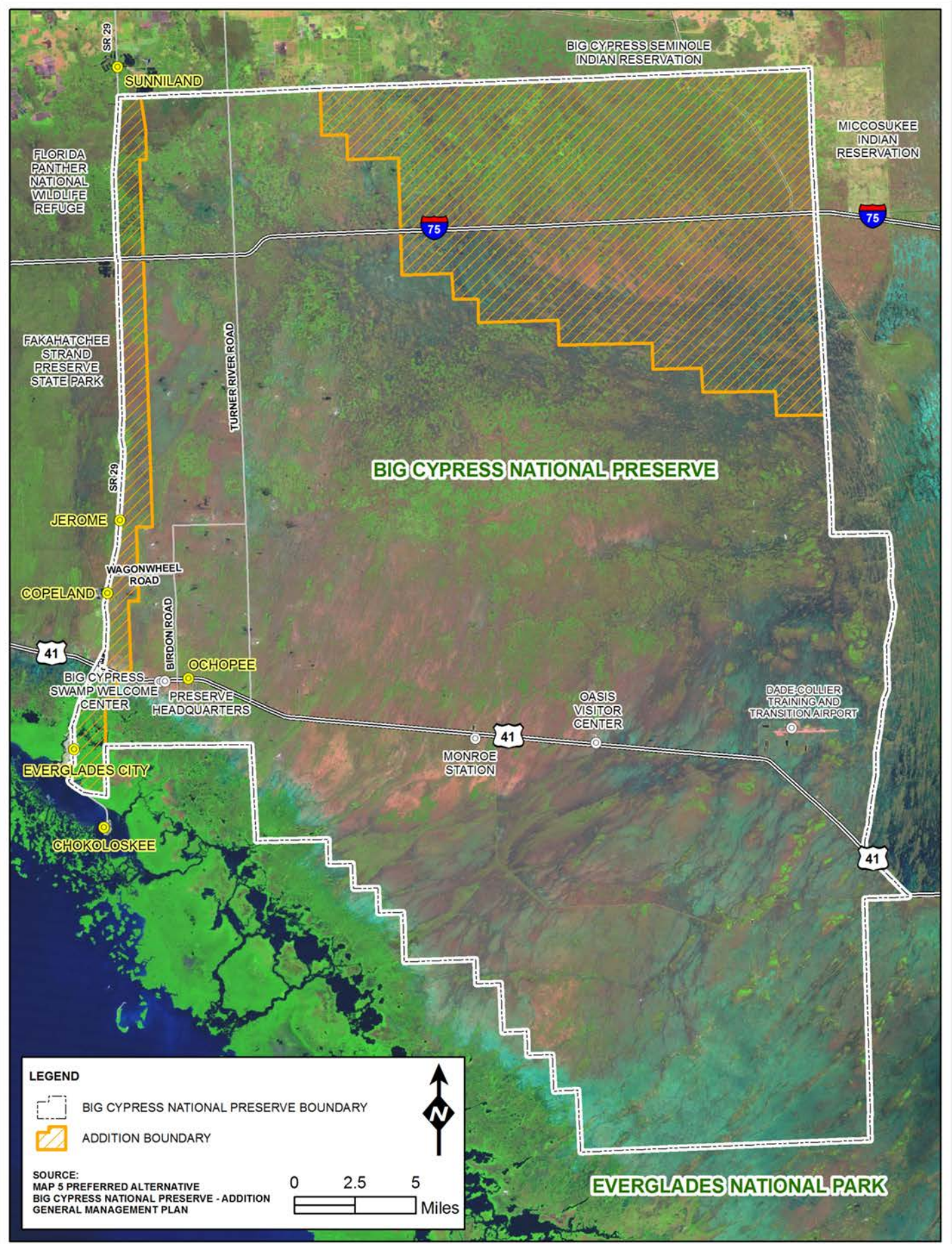
The NPS has planned two public meetings during this early stage of project development. The first hour of these meetings will be an open house and NPS staff will be available to discuss the project, answer questions, and record comments about the project. At 6:00 pm, there will be a brief presentation on the project, followed by additional opportunities for the public to provide input on the project.

Additionally, there is an opportunity for the public to comment on the project via the attached comment form provided at the end of this newsletter or via the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. The public comment period is open from August 8th until September 16th.

We look forward to seeing you at the public meetings and hearing your input on this important project.

Sincerely,

**Pedro Ramos
Superintendent
Big Cypress National Preserve**



Project Location Map – Big Cypress National Preserve

Project Background

Big Cypress National Preserve is one of 394 units of the national park system administered by the NPS, U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). Big Cypress National Preserve was created by Congress on October 11, 1974 (PL 93-440) as one of the first two national preserves in the National Park System, with 582,000 acres. The Big Cypress National Preserve Addition Act (PL 100-301) was subsequently passed on April 29, 1988, authorizing the addition of 146,000 acres to Big Cypress National Preserve, including 128,000 acres northeast of the original Big Cypress National Preserve boundary and approximately 18,000 acres along the western Big Cypress National Preserve boundary. Most of the acquisition of the Addition was completed in 1996, and the *Big Cypress National Preserve – Addition Final General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* was completed in 2010.

The enabling legislation for Big Cypress National Preserve states in part that:

“The Secretary shall permit hunting, fishing, and trapping on lands and water under his jurisdiction within the Preserve and the Addition in accordance with the applicable laws of the United States and the State of Florida, except that he may designate zones where and periods when no hunting, fishing, trapping, or entry may be permitted for reasons of public safety, administration, floral and faunal protection and management, or public use and enjoyment.”

In accordance with the enabling legislation for Big Cypress National Preserve, and implemented through the Preserve General Management Plan (GMP), hunting is currently permitted within the original boundaries of Big Cypress National Preserve and is managed cooperatively by the NPS and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. However, the Addition has been closed to hunting since acquisition, which is inconsistent with the enabling legislation for Big Cypress National Preserve. Subsequent to completion of the Addition GMP, advice was sought about the need for a Hunting Management Plan from the DOI regional solicitor in Atlanta, and the solicitor responded that actions and decisions by the NPS to manage hunting constitute a federal action and NEPA compliance would be needed.

Proposed Project Timeline

Milestone	Date
Public Scoping Comment Period	August 8 – September 16, 2011
Public Meeting – Collier County	August 30, 2011
Public Meeting – Broward County	August 31, 2011
Public Draft EA	February 2012
Draft EA Public Comment Period	February – March 2012
Draft EA Public Comment Workshops	Late-February 2012
Decision Document	Late-March/Early-April 2012

Proposed Purpose and Need

Draft Purpose: *To develop a hunting management plan for the Big Cypress National Preserve / Wildlife Management Area, that allows the superintendent of the Preserve to provide for hunting opportunities in the Preserve in a manner that is in the best interest of the Preserve's resources (e.g., habitat, wildlife, protected species) and the visiting public, while meeting the requirements set forth by the National Park Service, the Preserve's enabling legislation, the National Park Service/Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Cooperative Partnership Agreement, and all federal, state, and local laws and regulations.*

Draft Need: *A hunting management plan is needed for the Big Cypress National Preserve / Wildlife Management Area:*

- *To provide clear and informational guidance for safe and responsible hunting within the Preserve to the visiting public*
- *To provide for a visitor use experience that complies with the enabling legislation for the Preserve*
- *To protect the resources (e.g., habitat, wildlife, protected species) present in the Preserve*
 - *To provide a framework for hunting management within the Preserve that meets the requirements set forth by the National Park Service, the Preserve's enabling legislation, the National Park Service/Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Cooperative Partnership Agreement, and all federal, state, and local laws*
- *To provide consistency between National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regulations*

Proposed Objectives

Draft Objectives:

1. *Provide guidelines for hunting within the Big Cypress National Preserve / Wildlife Management Area that satisfy all National Park Service regulations, the Preserve's enabling legislation, the National Park Service/Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Cooperative Partnership Agreement, and all federal, state, and local laws and regulations.*
2. *Provide a programmatic framework for facilitating agency communications and goal-setting that provides guidance over a number of years.*
3. *Utilize science-based resource management (e.g., habitat, wildlife, and protected species) for adaptive decision-making for:*
 - *The National Park Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to collaborate and cooperate on the rule-making process regarding hunting*
 - *The National Park Service to take action independently for resource protection or public safety in certain cases (i.e., high water events, fires, threatened and endangered species issues), which may have an effect on hunting within the Preserve*
4. *Provide the public with clear and understandable information regarding:*
 - *Hunting management within the Preserve*
 - *Safe and responsible hunting practices*
5. *Provide for a positive visitor use experience for hunters and non-hunters.*
6. *Provide an array of access options to allow for a diversity of hunting opportunities within the framework of existing regulations and funding.*

Proposed Project Alternatives

Draft Alternative #1

No-Action – Apply Current Joint NPS/FWC Management to the Addition

Under this alternative, the current process utilized to manage hunting within the original Preserve boundaries would be applied to the Addition. Current hunting management would continue within the original Preserve boundaries. Existing regulations employing the current communications, coordination, and regulation modification process would be implemented throughout the Preserve. This alternative could trigger the National Environmental Policy Act process for changes in hunting management protocol within the Preserve.

Draft Alternative #2

No Hunting in the Addition

Under this alternative, there would continue to be no hunting in the Addition. Current hunting management would continue within the original Preserve boundaries, using the existing regulations and employing the current communications, coordination, and regulation modification process between National Park Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. This alternative could trigger the National Environmental Policy Act process for changes in hunting management protocol within the Preserve.

Draft Alternative #3

New Joint NPS/USFWS/FWC Adaptive Management Strategy

Under this alternative, an adaptive management strategy would be utilized. A clear decision-making and communications framework would be established between the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to manage hunting in the Preserve. Wildlife Management Area regulations would be reviewed at least annually through the decision-making framework established in the National Park Service/ Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Cooperative Partnership Agreement that would provide:

- *A process by which the elements of the hunting regulations could be modified, which includes public participation*
- *A communications protocol to change regulations*

This alternative would allow for changes in hunting management protocol within the Preserve without triggering the National Environmental Policy Act process.





Big Cypress National Preserve Hunting Management Plan / Environmental Assessment (EA)

Comment Form

Comments can be submitted at the public meeting or by mail using this form (return address at the end of the form) or via the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website at www.parkplanning.nps.gov.

Comments must be postmarked or submitted no later than September 16, 2011.

1. Do you feel that the draft purpose, need, and objectives adequately express the goals of the Hunting Management Plan / EA?

2. Do you have any additional alternatives in mind that would better address the draft purpose, need, and objectives of the Hunting Management Plan / EA?

3. Describe any issues or concerns you feel should be addressed in the Hunting Management Plan/EA.

4. Do you have any other comments related to the Hunting Management Plan / EA?

[illegible]

Please return this form to:

Superintendent
Big Cypress National Preserve
33100 Tamiami Trail East
Ochopee, Florida 34141-1000

***Thank you for your participation in the NPS Big Cypress National Preserve
Hunting Management Plan / EA!***

*Please note that names and addresses of people who comment become part of the public record. If you wish to withhold your name and or address from the public record for this project, you must state your request prominently at the beginning of your comments and NPS will honor your request to the extent allowable by law. We will make all submissions from organizations, businesses and individuals who identify themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses available for public inspection in their entirety.