



IN REPLY REFER TO:
L7617 (BICY-S)

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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



November 7, 2013

Dear Friends:

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to implement a plan to enhance wetlands in a 325-acre portion of Copeland Prairie in Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida (see enclosed location map), that if implemented would reverse much of the adverse hydrologic and ecological impact caused by construction of road-related infrastructure in the last century. This project is required by state and federal permits as mitigation for wetland impacts from stabilization of off-road vehicle (ORV) trails elsewhere in the Preserve. The restoration would be accomplished through the following objectives:

- Restoring freshwater flow into wetlands to more closely approximate the hydrologic regime prior to infrastructure construction;
- Decreasing the extent of saltwater intrusion into freshwater areas; and
- Restoring wetland habitat that existed prior to hydrologic alteration.

This plan is needed to restore natural sheet flow hydrology once prevalent in the Copeland Prairie wetlands. This area is part of a larger area of formerly uninterrupted wetlands now partitioned by roads, levees, and canals, which tend to diminish the prevalence and duration of surface water on the landscape. The primary purpose of this road-affiliated drainage infrastructure, which predates the establishment of the Preserve, was to dewater surrounding wetlands for eventual land development. Elevated roadbeds act as low-level dams that block regional sheet flow, and adjacent borrow canals channel that water away. The result is a net loss of fresh water to tide via the canals and shortening of water duration in adjacent wetlands and in the shallow aquifer, thereby increasing the area's susceptibility to drought, destructive wildfires, coastal saltwater intrusion, and invasive exotic vegetation. Since the 1980s the NPS has occasionally added retrofits to this road drainage infrastructure in attempts to lessen its overall drainage effects; however, these fixes have been mostly local-scale and incomplete. Many problem areas in the Preserve, such as Copeland Prairie, still persist.

The plan would consist of three actions (see enclosed site map). Action 1 would remove 6.76 miles (12.29 acres) of abandoned farm roads that currently impede sheet flow. Action 2 would rehabilitate two culverts under Birdon Road to facilitate water flow into the site. Action 3 would add three canal plugs to the Birdon Canal to prevent loss of water to tide and to eliminate saltwater intrusion. These actions plus the application of prescribed fire are expected to return the site to the wet prairie habitat that existed prior to disturbance.



The plan will be accompanied by an environmental assessment (EA) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The EA will analyze the environmental impacts of two alternatives, the no action alternative and the preferred alternative, consisting of the three actions described above. As part of the scoping process, we are asking for your comments as to issues, impact topics, and alternatives that you would like to see addressed in the EA, as well as any other comments you may have. We will consider your comments and prepare a draft EA for public review, anticipated in early 2014.

We welcome your initial comments during the scoping period of this project. The comment period closes on December 7, 2013. Please submit your comments online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> or mail to Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve, 33100 Tamiami Trail East, Ochopee, FL 34141-1000. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you have questions concerning this proposal, please contact Damon Doumlele, 239-695-1158, damon_doumlele@nps.gov.

Sincerely,

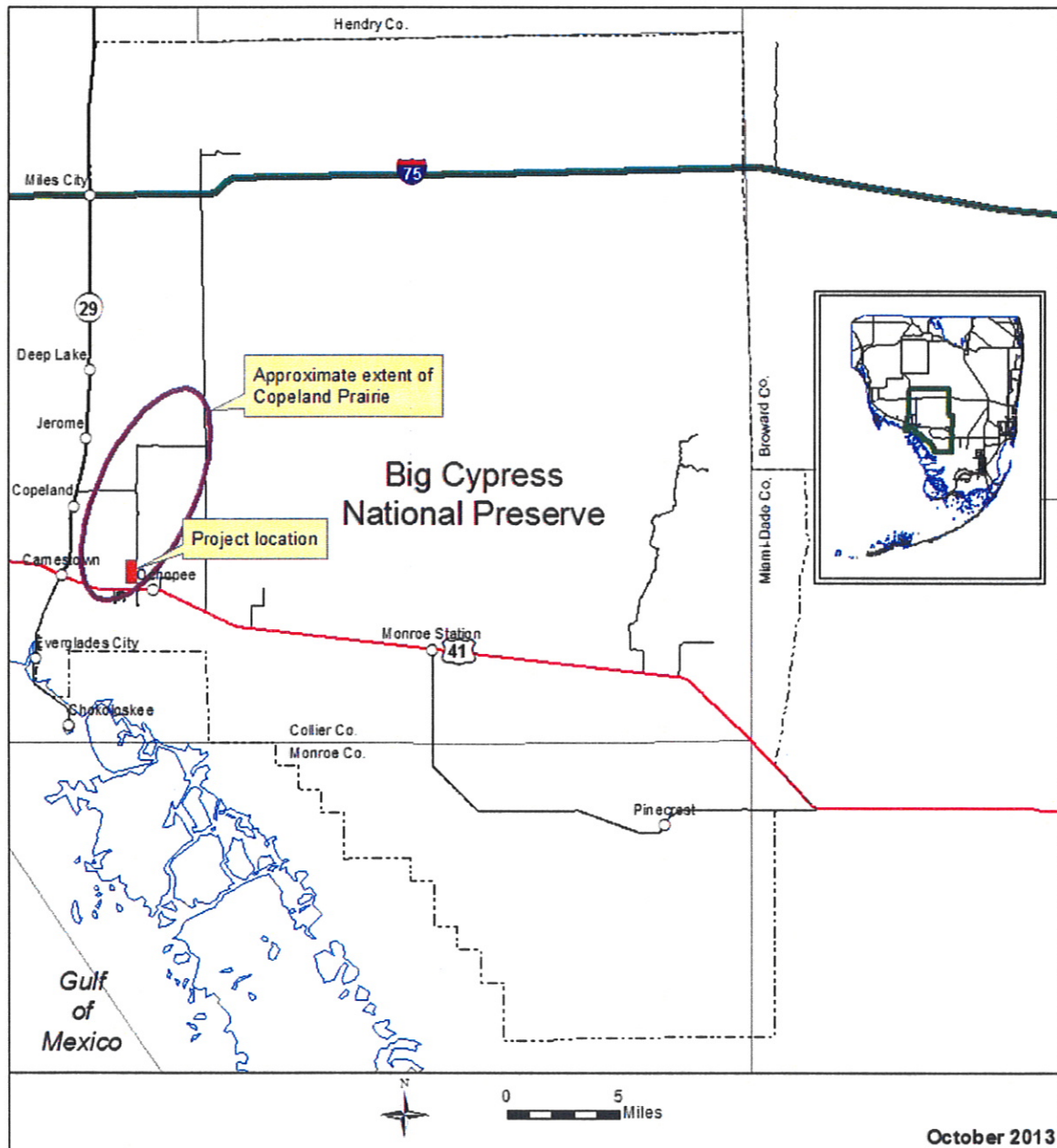
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pedro Ramos', with a stylized, overlapping loop at the end.

Pedro Ramos
Superintendent

Enclosures

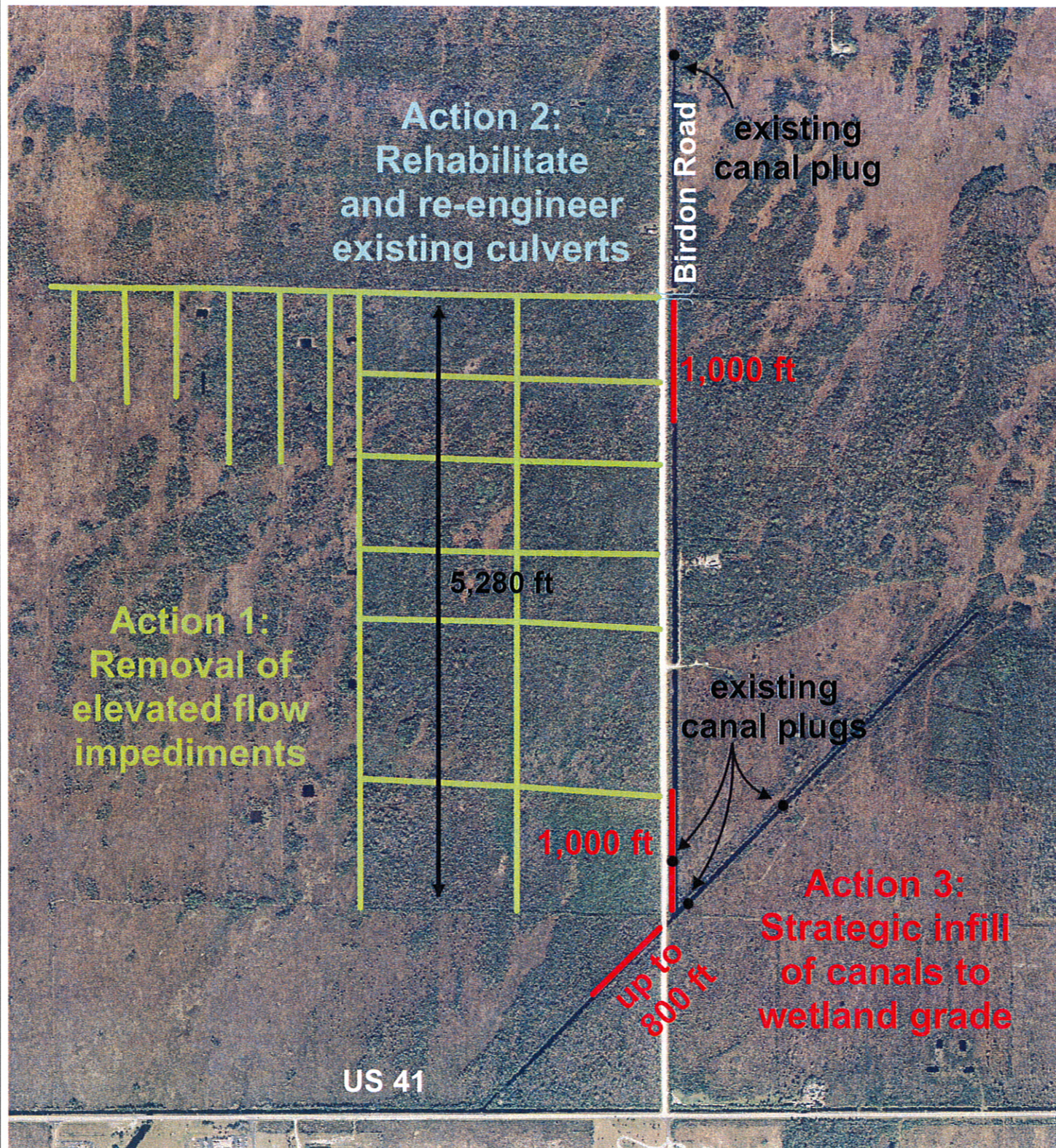


Copeland Prairie Mitigation Location Map





Copeland Prairie Mitigation Site Map



0 1,000 2,000 Feet

