

Backcountry Access Plan

Fall 2013

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Cypress National Preserve
Florida



Scoping Newsletter

Dear Friends of Big Cypress National Preserve,

The National Park Service (NPS), in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), plans to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) in association with the preparation of a backcountry access plan for Big Cypress National Preserve.

The purpose of this plan is to provide off-road vehicle (ORV) secondary trails, nonmotorized trails, and a camping management approach that protects the Preserve's natural and cultural resources while providing for public enjoyment. The plan will also establish a permanent route for the Florida National Scenic Trail and other hiking opportunities. While this plan will be rooted in the 2000 Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan and 2011 General Management Plan / Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan for the Addition (Addition GMP), there is a need to further clarify the Preserve's management approach as related to secondary trails, camping, and other backcountry opportunities.

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 Big Cypress National Preserve, and your input is invaluable.

The National Park Service expects issues other than those discussed in this newsletter to be identified during the scoping

process. Various ways to address these will be developed during the "Alternatives" stage of the planning process. Public scoping comments will help develop alternatives that will then be fully analyzed in the EIS.

There is an opportunity for you to comment on the project via the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy>

The public comment period is open from November 19, 2013 until May 11, 2014.

The NPS will hold public scoping workshops in spring 2014 to receive input to inform the development of draft alternatives. Open house-style public meetings on draft alternatives and visitor use will also be held in summer 2014. Specific dates, times, and locations will be announced in local media and on the Internet at; www.parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy.

These meetings will provide information on the planning process and opportunity to interact with staff, ask questions, and submit comments and suggestions.

We look forward to receiving your input on this important project.

Sincerely,

Pedro Ramos
Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve





WHY IS THIS PLAN NEEDED?

A backcountry access plan is needed in Big Cypress National Preserve to:

- Protect the resources (e.g., habitat, wildlife, protected species) while providing for sustainable use of the Preserve in accordance with its enabling legislation.
- Establish a secondary ORV trail network in the original Preserve that provides reasonable access to destinations suitable for activities such as, but not limited to, camping, photography, hiking, picnicking, etc., while protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Preserve.
- Establish a permanent route for the Florida National Scenic Trail and other hiking opportunities.
- Establish a management approach for backcountry camping in the Preserve as it relates to ORV use, hunting, hiking, and other activities.
- Clarify definitions of key terms (e.g., secondary trails, destinations, etc.) within the 2000 Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan and 2011 General Management Plan / Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan for the Addition. These clarified definitions would apply henceforth to both the original Preserve and the Addition.



Photo credit: Elam Stoltzfus



WHAT IS THE DRAFT PURPOSE OF THE PLAN?

To develop a backcountry access plan for Big Cypress National Preserve that provides for ORV secondary trails, nonmotorized trails, and a camping management approach that protects the Preserve's natural and cultural resources while providing for public enjoyment. The plan will be in accordance with the Preserve's enabling legislation, NPS policy, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

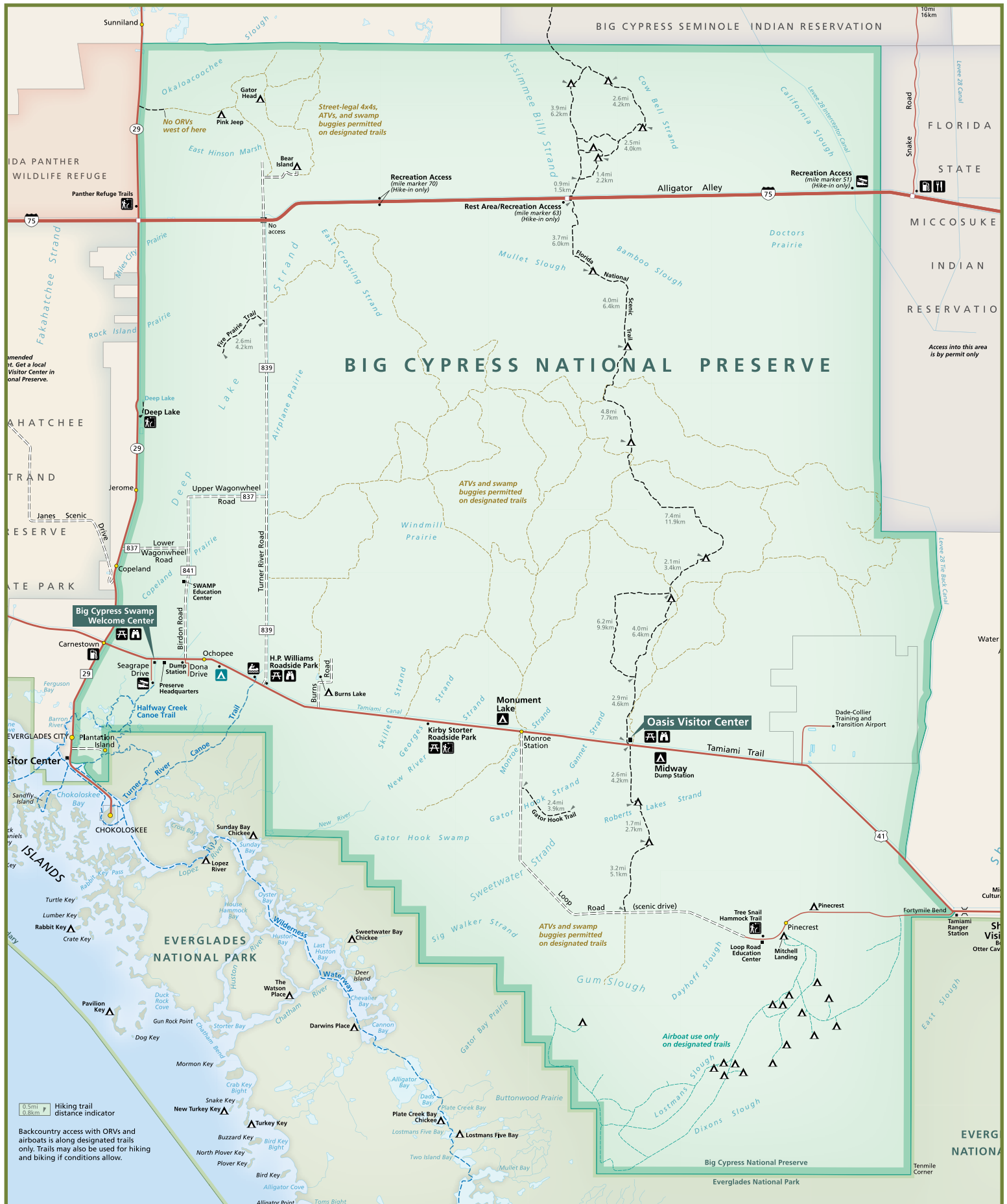


WHAT ARE THE DRAFT OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN?

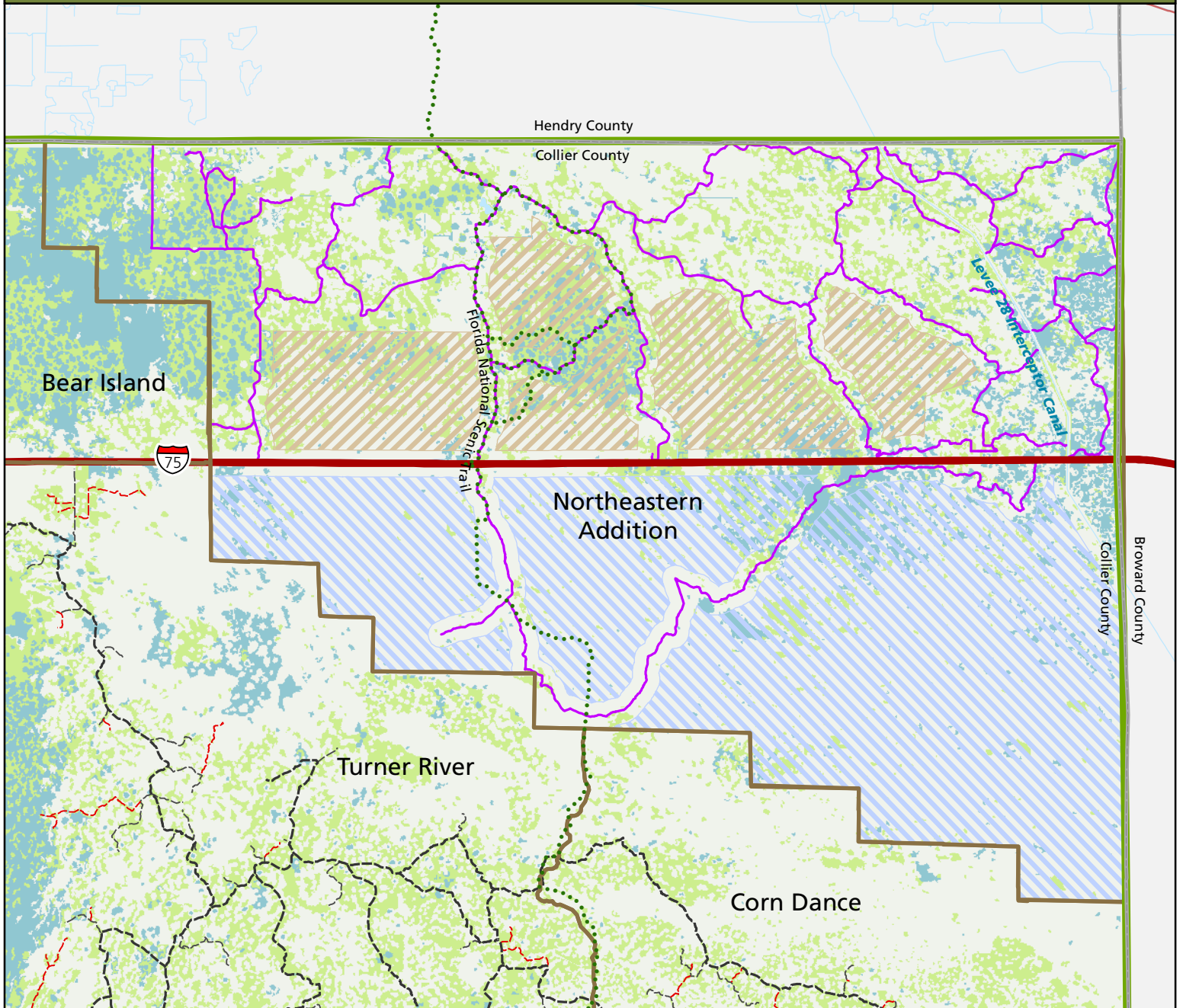


- Evaluate the suitability of all secondary ORV trails and nonmotorized trails in the original Preserve.
- Re-route the Florida National Scenic Trail within the Preserve, in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service.
- Evaluate and establish guidance to manage camping within the entire Preserve, specifically as it relates to ORVs, hiking, and other uses.
- Clarify definitions of key terms to create more certainty in planning and management efforts. These clarified definitions would apply to the whole Preserve.
- With respect to trails and camping areas Preserve-wide, evaluate and refine indicators and standards from previous plans to ensure that monitoring and other commitments are informative and financially sustainable.
- Develop a range of alternatives for secondary trails and camping in the original Preserve.
- Complete NEPA analysis on a range of alternatives for secondary ORV trails, nonmotorized trails, and camping.





NORTHEASTERN ADDITION ORV TRAILS



LEGEND

- Primary Trails
- Secondary Trails
- Closed Secondary Trails as of 6/3/13
- Addition Trails
- Florida National Scenic Trail
- County Boundary
- Waterways
- Waterbodies
- Eligible Wilderness
- Proposed Wilderness
- Management Units
- Preserve Boundary
- Marsh and Wet Prairie
- Hammocks and Pinelands
- Cypress and Other Vegetation

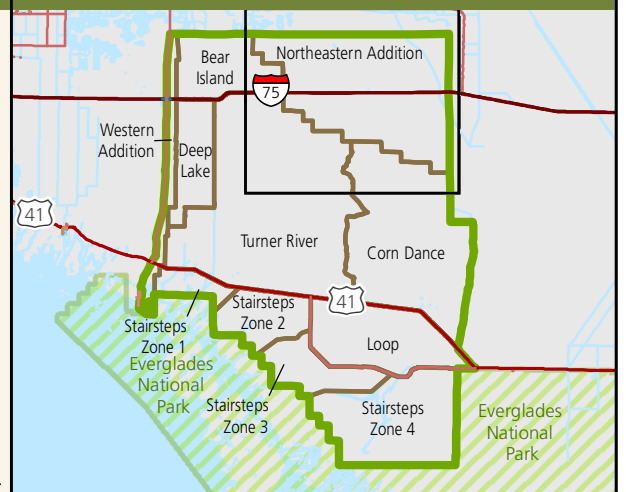


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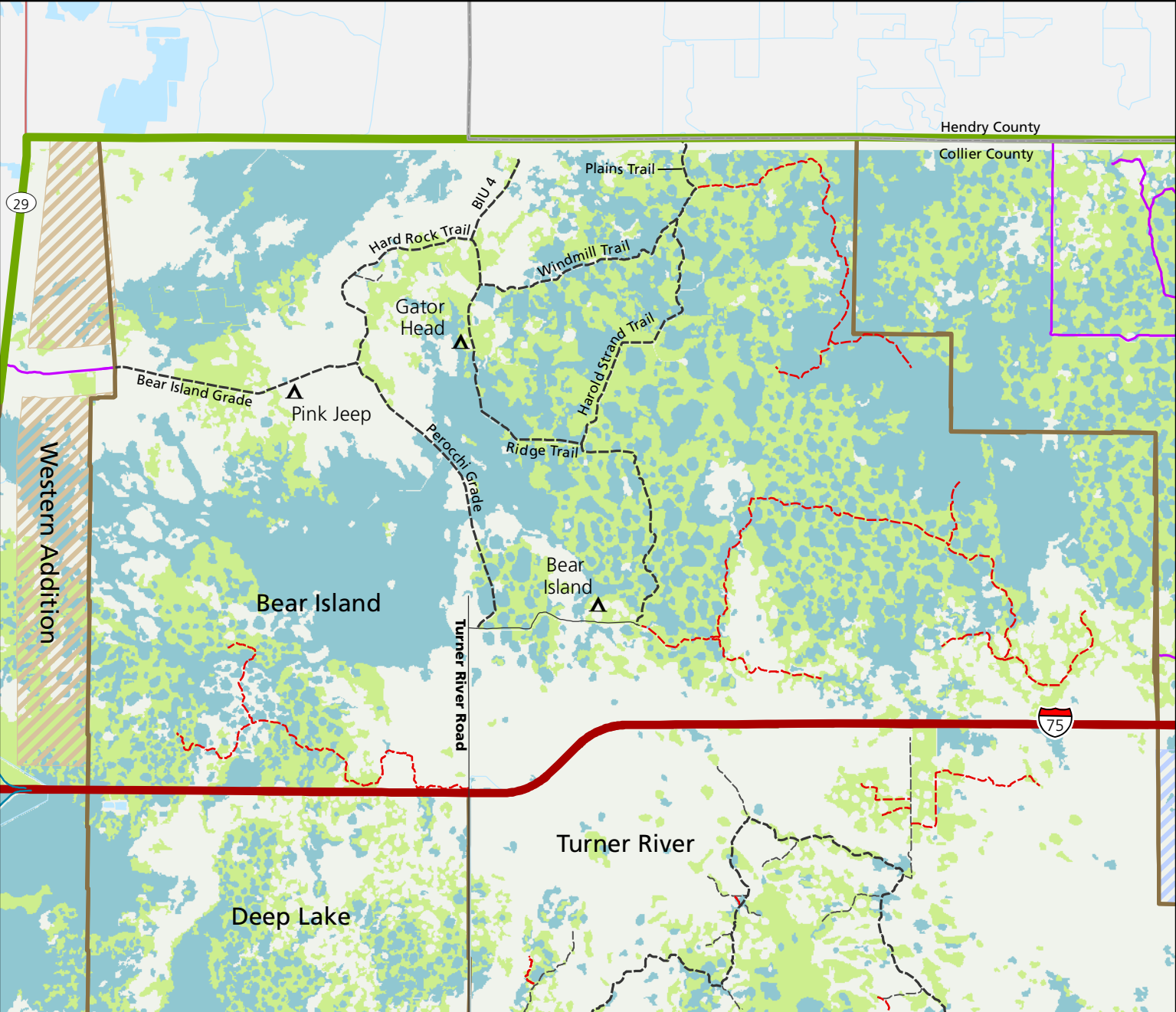
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November 2013

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PRESERVE OVERVIEW



BEAR ISLAND ORV TRAILS



LEGEND

- ▲ Campground
- Primary Trails
- Secondary Trails
- Closed Secondary Trails as of 6/3/2013
- Addition Trails
- Florida National Scenic Trail
- ~~~~~ Waterways
- ~~~~~ Waterbodies
- Eligible Wilderness
- Proposed Wilderness
- Management Units
- Preserve Boundary
- Marsh and Wet Prairie
- Hammocks and Pinelands
- Cypress and Other Vegetation

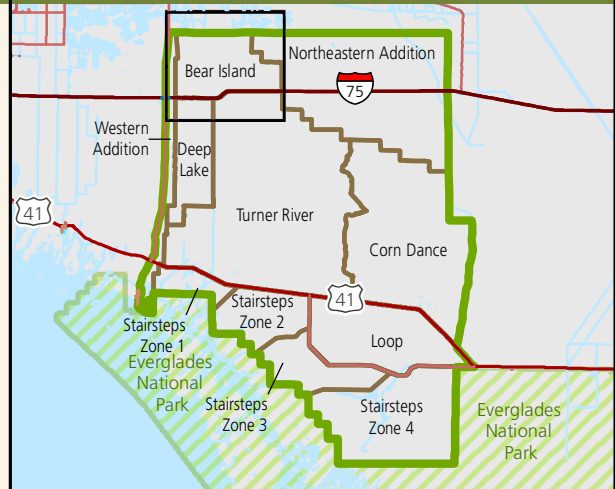


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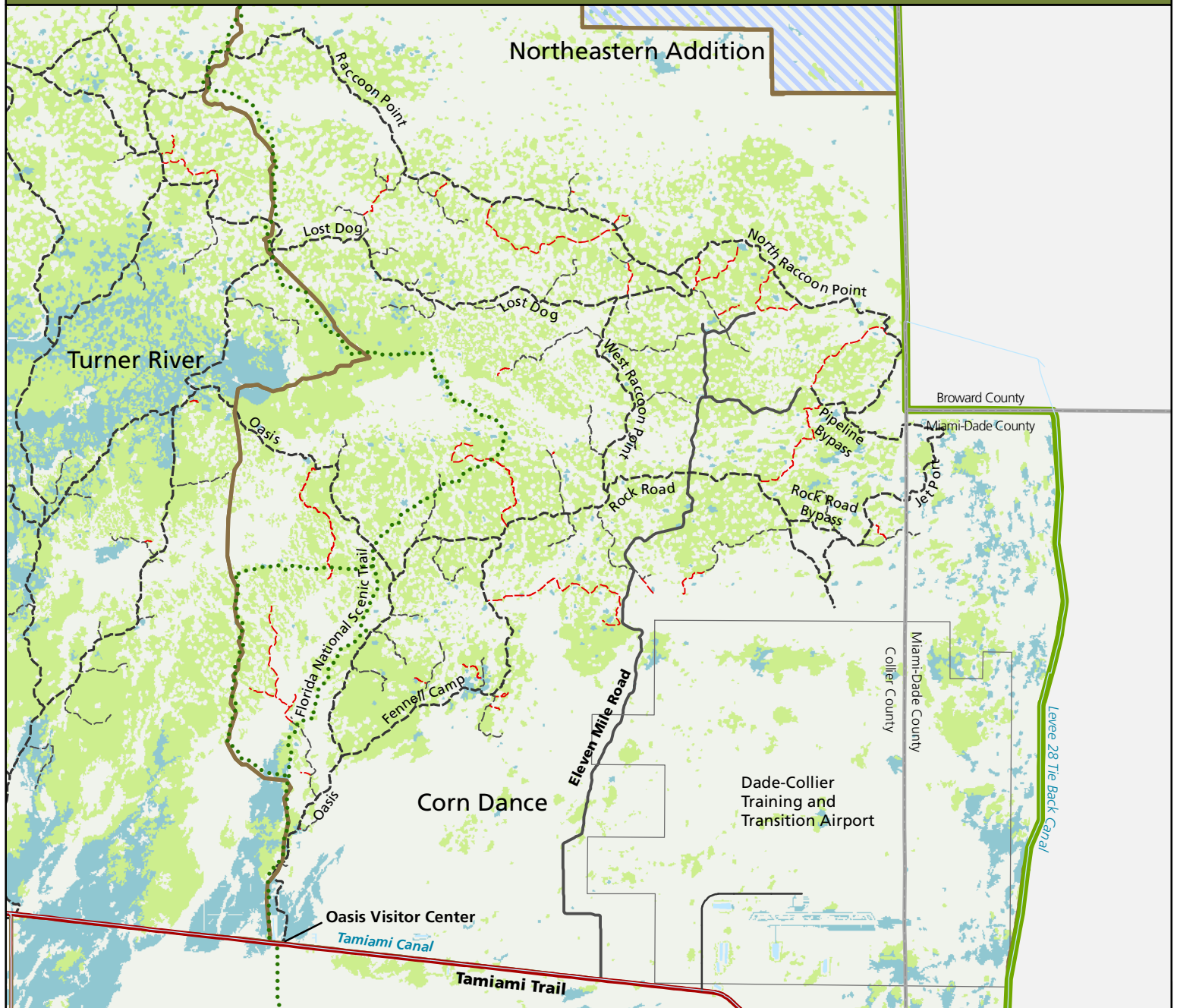
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PRESERVE OVERVIEW



CORN DANCE UNIT ORV TRAILS



LEGEND

- Primary Trails
- Secondary Trails
- Closed Secondary Trails as of 6/3/2013
- Florida National Scenic Trail
- Eleven Mile Road
- County Boundary
- ~~~~~ Waterways
- ~~~~~ Waterbodies
- Eligible Wilderness
- Proposed Wilderness
- Management Units
- Preserve Boundary
- Marsh and Wet Prairie
- Hammocks and Pinelands
- Cypress and Other Vegetation

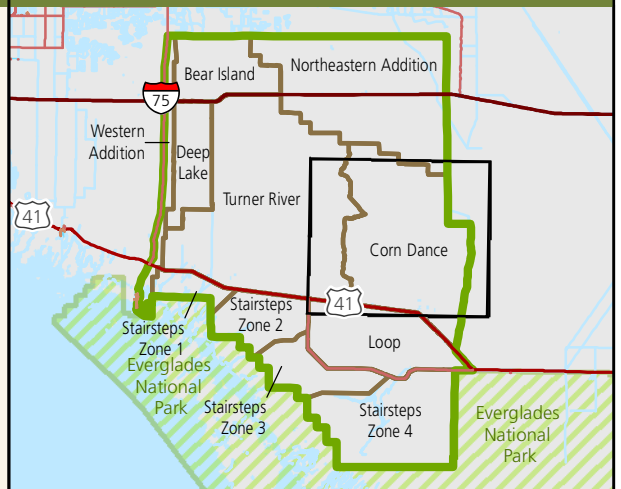


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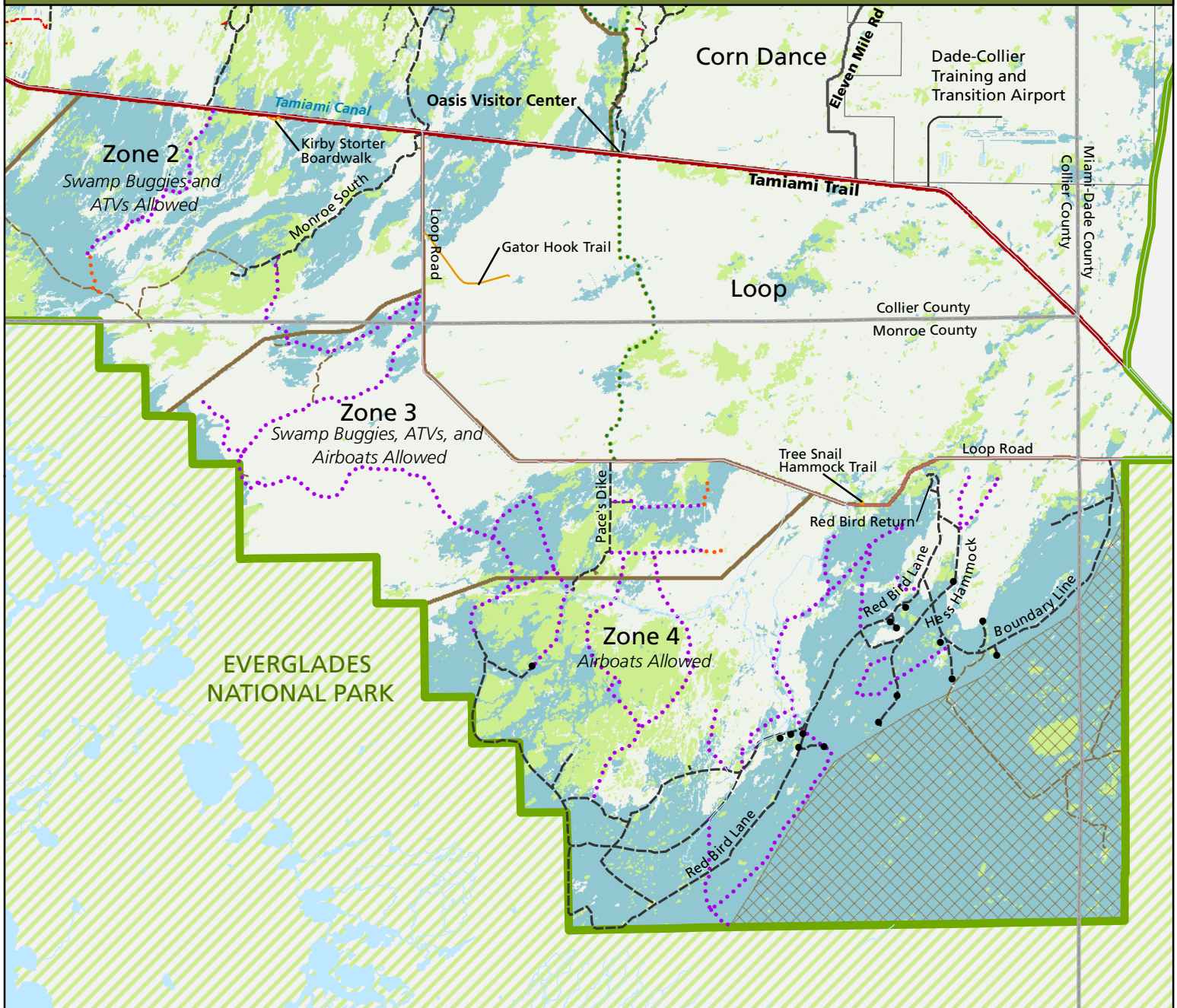
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PRESERVE OVERVIEW



STAIRSTEPS UNIT ORV TRAILS



LEGEND

- Campsite
- Primary Trails
- Secondary Trails
- Closed Secondary Trails as of 6/3/2013
- Landowner Trails
- Recommended Primary Trails
- Recommended Secondary Trails
- Hiking Trails
- Florida National Scenic Trail
- Eleven Mile Road
- County Boundary
- Waterways
- Waterbodies
- Stairsteps Closure Area
- Management Units
- Preserve Boundary
- Marsh and Wet Prairie
- Hammocks and Pinelands
- Cypress and Other Vegetation

North

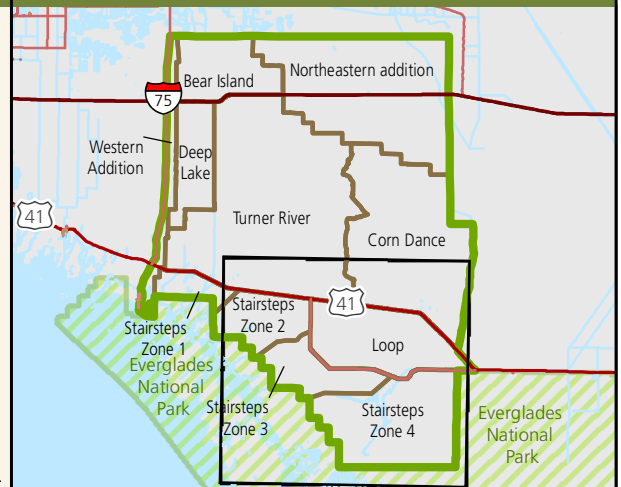


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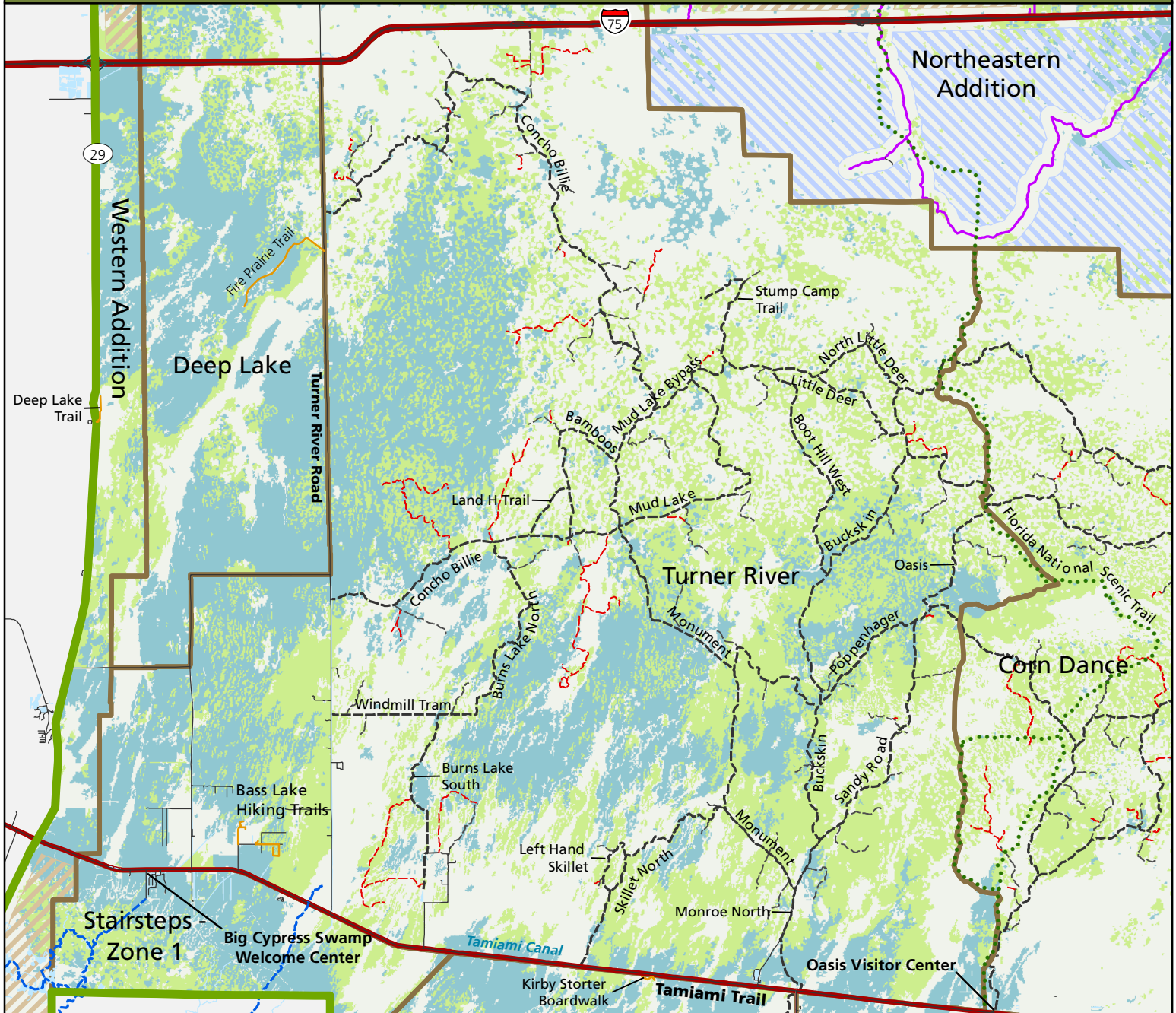
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PRESERVE OVERVIEW



TURNER RIVER UNIT ORV TRAILS

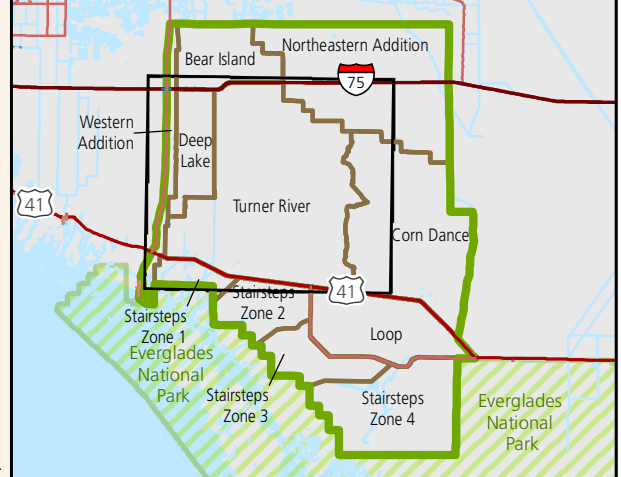


LEGEND

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| ----- Primary Trails | Waterbodies |
| ----- Secondary Trails | Eligible Wilderness |
| ----- Closed Secondary Trails as of 6/3/2013 | Proposed Wilderness |
| ----- Addition Trails | Management Units |
| ----- Hiking Trails | Preserve Boundary |
| ----- Canoe and Watercraft Trails | Marsh and Wet Prairie |
| ----- Florida National Scenic Trail | Hammocks and Pinelands |
| ----- Waterways | Cypress and Other Vegetation |



PRESERVE OVERVIEW



WHAT'S NEXT?

After public scoping ends, NPS management will analyze ideas and concerns submitted by the public, traditionally associated tribes, and affected agencies. Comments will be carefully considered as topics to be addressed in the Backcountry Access Plan.

The National Park Service expects issues other than those listed in this newsletter to be identified during the scoping process. Various ways to address these issues and manage

the Preserve's backcountry will be developed during the "Alternatives" stage of the planning process. Public scoping comments will help develop alternatives that will then be fully analyzed in the EIS. Analysis of alternatives will disclose anticipated impacts to Preserve resources and visitor experience. All alternatives analyzed in the EIS need to meet plan goals and objectives. Please see the Planning Schedule and opportunities to provide input on page 15.





PURPOSE OF AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE

Enabling Legislation

Big Cypress National Preserve was created by Congress on October 11, 1974 (PL 93-440), as one of the first national Preserves in the national park system, with 582,000 acres. The Big Cypress National Preserve Addition Act (PL 100-301) was passed on April 29, 1988, authorizing the addition of 147,000 acres to the Preserve. The enabling legislation (PL 93-440, as amended by PL 100-301) states:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That (a) in order to assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed in the State of Florida and to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof, the Big Cypress National Preserve is hereby established.

Section 10 of the enabling legislation (PL 93- 440, as amended by PL 100-301) states:

The Secretary and other involved Federal agencies shall cooperate with the State of Florida to establish recreational access points and roads, rest and recreation areas, wildlife protection, hunting, fishing, frogging and other traditional opportunities in conjunction with the creation of the Addition and in the construction of Interstate Highway 74 (75 [ed.]). Three of such access points shall be located within the Preserve (including the Addition).

PURPOSE STATEMENTS



Purpose statements are based on the Preserve's enabling legislation, legislative history, and NPS policies. The statements reaffirm the reasons for which the Preserve was set aside as a unit of the national park system and provide the foundation for Preserve management and use.

The purpose of Big Cypress National Preserve, as stated in the enabling legislation,

... is to assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed in the State of Florida and to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof.



Photo credit: Richard Eskin



SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Significance statements capture the essence of the Preserve's importance to our country's natural and cultural heritage. Significance statements do not inventory Preserve resources; rather, they describe the Preserve's distinctiveness and help to place the Preserve within its regional, national, and international contexts.

Significance statements answer questions such as: "Why are the Preserve's resources distinctive?" and "What do they contribute to our natural/cultural heritage?" Defining the Preserve's significance helps managers make decisions that preserve the resources and values necessary to accomplish the purpose of the Preserve.

The significance of Big Cypress National Preserve, as stated in the Addition GMP is as follows:

Big Cypress National Preserve, including the Addition, contains vestiges of primitive southwest Florida. It is

significant as a unit of the national park system because it

- is a large wetland mosaic that supports a vast remnant of vegetation types found only in this mix of upland and wetland environments
- contains the largest strands of dwarf cypress in North America
- is habitat for the Florida panther and other animal and plant species that receive special protection or are recognized by the State of Florida, the U.S. government, or the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
- provides opportunities for the public to pursue recreational activities in a subtropical environment
- is home to the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and Seminole Tribe of Florida and sustains resources that are important to their cultures
- is a watershed that is an important component to the survival of the greater Everglades ecosystem





Photo credit: Ralph Arwood

Big Cypress National Preserve Backcountry Access Plan Planning Schedule and Opportunities to Provide Input

WE ARE HERE	Planning Phase	Tentative Time Frame	Opportunities for Public Input
	Public Scoping and consultations	Fall 2013-Spring 2014	Review information provided in this newsletter, attend a public scoping workshop and submit your comments online at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy
	Develop Draft Alternatives	Summer 2014	Stay up-to-date on the planning process by visiting the website (http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy) or provide your e-mail address for updates
	Public Meeting and Comments on Draft Alternatives	Late Summer 2014	Review the preliminary alternatives, attend a public meeting, and/or submit your comments online
	Prepare Draft Plan/EIS	Fall 2014 – Spring 2015	Stay up-to-date on the planning process by visiting the website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy
	Public Meeting and Comments on Draft Plan/EIS	Summer 2015	Review the draft plan/EIS, attend a public meeting, and/or submit your comments online
	Prepare Final Plan/EIS	Winter – Spring 2015–16	Stay up-to-date on the planning process by visiting the website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy
	Distribute Final Plan/EIS	Spring 2016	

Thank you for your interest in Big Cypress National Preserve!