



Public Scoping Notice - May 2014

REPLACEMENT OF A COMMUNICATIONS TOWER IN EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The National Park Service (NPS), in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), is beginning an environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed replacement of an NPS owned radio tower at the Dr. Bill Robertson Research Center within Everglades National Park. Verizon Wireless Personal Communications, LP (Verizon Wireless) has applied for a Right-of-Way Permit to replace the existing 250 foot, guyed radio tower (currently supporting NPS radio repeaters) with a self-supporting wireless telecommunications tower of the same height, and to install a pre-fabricated equipment shed, fenced compound and possible access drive. The NPS is required by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and NPS Management Policies to consider applications for installation of wireless telecommunications facilities (WTF) on NPS lands.

This notice begins the EA process by requesting your comments on the scope of the analysis that will be conducted. Input is being sought from interested parties to identify the issues, impact topics, and range of the alternatives to be analyzed in the EA. The EA will evaluate the potential impacts on the physical and human environment that could result from the proposed action and alternatives to that action. **Scoping comments are requested by June 3, 2014. See details on how to comment on page 4.**

BACKGROUND

The Robertson Research Center is an established telecommunications site for Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks. Construction of a 250-foot lattice tower, repeater building and stand-by electric source was completed in 1981. The Rohn model 65 G tower is supported on a caisson foundation with three sets of guy wires extending out 200 feet from the base and anchored by concrete piles. The tower has three park owned, 100 watt radio repeaters and one ten watt repeater which support fire management, flight following, research telemetry and law enforcement/ park operations. A Florida Power and Light antenna and repeater is located at the site but has not been operated for 12 years. This repeater station has operated continuously since November 1981. The Robertson Center site also includes a one-story research building and the park's fire cache.

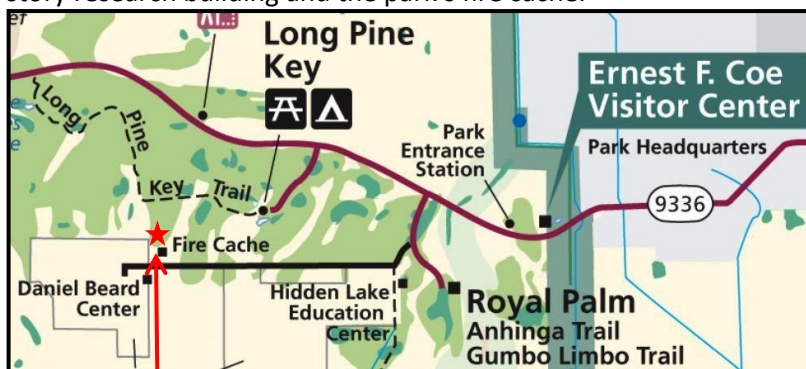


Figure 1. Radio Tower Site

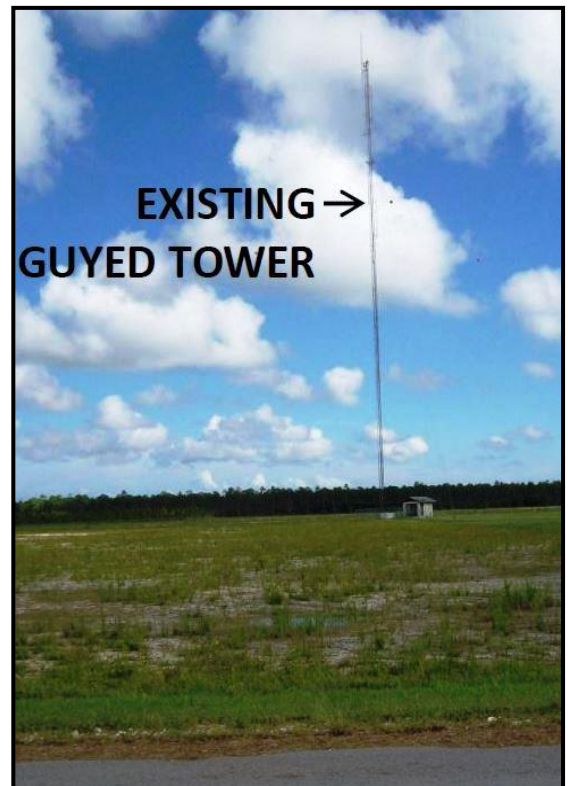


Figure 2. Existing 250' NPS Radio Tower

The park was contacted by SBA Network Services on behalf of Verizon Wireless in April 2009 to inquire about co-locating cellular telecommunications equipment on the park owned tower. The purpose for expanding their coverage area was to comply with federal regulations for providing customers with access to the 911 emergency calling network. Verizon Wireless arranged for a structural analysis of the tower to determine its condition and whether it could support additional equipment. The consulting engineering company, Morrison Hershfield, completed an evaluation of the tower to determine compliance with Revision G (Florida Building Code) for 146 miles per hour winds in 3 second gusts. The results of the analysis concluded the tower was already over-stressed 191 % without the addition of new equipment.

Based on the structural evaluation, the park could not consider co-location and needed to determine a path forward to replace the tower to continue to support park operations. Discussions continued with Verizon Wireless over the next four years until an application was submitted to replace the NPS owned radio transmission facility with a Verizon owned facility. The initial application was received in June 2010 and returned for a number of revisions. The revised application was determined to be complete on July 18, 2013. The Verizon application, construction drawings, and the Structural Evaluation of the existing tower are available for review on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website. See access information on page 4.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is issuance of a right-of-way permit by the NPS to Verizon Wireless that would allow (1) removal and replacement of the existing NPS 250' guyed radio tower with a 250' self-support telecommunications tower (no guy wires), and (2) installation of an equipment shelter, emergency backup generator, diesel fuel tank , 80' x 80' equipment compound and possible access drive. The existing radio tower currently supports NPS communications equipment. The replacement tower would support NPS communications equipment, U.S. Geological Survey equipment, Verizon Wireless cellular telephone equipment and potential colocation of three other carriers' telecommunications equipment. Verizon would replace the tower at no direct cost to the NPS and would own the tower and be responsible for its maintenance

NEED FOR ACTION

The NPS must formally consider the Verizon Wireless application for a right-of-way permit as required by NPS Director's Order 53, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and other pertinent legislation and regulations. Right of Way permits will only be issued for requests for which there is no practicable alternative and will not result in derogation of the resources, values and purposes for which the park was established.

The Verizon Wireless application states that the proposed WTF are needed to comply with federally mandated E-911 emergency requirements and would provide convenience and safety to Verizon Wireless subscribers and park visitors. In the event of a natural disaster or safety issue, all wireless subscribers in the coverage area, regardless of whose service they use, would be able to make a 911 emergency call on the Verizon system. The application also states that the proposed WTF are needed to provide wireless communications service along the Main Park Road (State Road 9336) from the Ernest F. Coe



Figure 3. Photo simulation of proposed 250' self-support tower

Visitor Center to the Nine Mile Pond visitor area. This 27 mile stretch of highway currently has limited to no cellular phone service.

The NPS has a separate and urgent need to replace the existing, deteriorating radio tower in order to maintain all existing NPS/agency communications facilities on the current radio tower. The existing tower is beyond repair and must be replaced.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

The EA will evaluate potential environmental impacts that could result from the proposed action and alternatives to that action. Alternatives considered must include alternative WTF locations inside and outside the park as well as alternative technologies (e.g. tower structure and height, antennas, use of micro-sites). Preliminary alternatives include:

Alternative A: No Action

The no action alternative would be the continuation of existing conditions for the Bill Robertson Research Center and for wireless communications services in the park. The NPS would not issue a right-of-way permit to Verizon to construct a wireless telecommunications tower and associated facilities on NPS lands. Current uses and management of the Robertson Center site would continue.

The existing NPS radio tower would remain in place and the radio system would continue to provide wireless communications for park staff throughout the park. Reliable telephone service throughout the park would be limited to existing telephone lines. Cellular telephone service within the park would not be expanded and sections of the Main Park Road would remain without cellular service. The NPS would need to replace its deteriorating tower in the near future to avoid potential safety issues and the loss of the park's communication facilities that could result from failure of the existing tower.

Alternative B. Issue Permit for Replacement of Communications Tower

The NPS would issue a right-of-way permit to Verizon Wireless to construct, operate and maintain a wireless telecommunications tower and support structures at the Robertson Research Center. Verizon Wireless would remove the existing NPS 250' guyed radio tower, construct a 250' self-supporting telecommunications tower, and install a pre-fabricated equipment shelter, emergency backup generator, diesel fuel tank, 80' x 80' fenced equipment compound and possible access drive. The proposed access drive may not be needed if the NPS would allow access over the existing drive leading to the NPS offices at the Robertson Center. During construction, an additional 100' x 100' parcel would be used as an equipment staging area. The proposed antenna type and configuration would provide 4G LTE data services for Verizon subscribers. NPS and other agency equipment would be transferred from the existing tower to the new tower. The tower replacement would be at no direct cost to the NPS. Verizon Wireless would maintain ownership and long term maintenance of the tower with the NPS use of the tower in compliance with the right of way permit.

The purpose of the unmanned facility would be to provide year-round service to the area, 24 hours per day, except during brief maintenance intervals. The tower and antennas would provide wireless communication and 4G LTE data services along a portion of the Main Park Road (State Road 9336) from the Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center to nearly Nine Mile Pond that currently lacks cellular service. The tower would also provide cellular coverage to the Bill Robertson and Dan Beard Research Centers, Long Pine Key Campground, the Everglades Boy Scout Camp, and to some remote areas within the park.

IMPACT TOPICS

Potential impact topics to be addressed include but are not limited to:

- ♦ Human health and safety
- ♦ Park management and operations
- ♦ Wildlife and Protected Species
- ♦ Wilderness Character
- ♦ Visitor use and experience
- ♦ Wetlands and vegetation
- ♦ Cultural Resources
- ♦ Soundscapes and scenery

HOW TO COMMENT

The NPS invites the public, agencies and other interested parties to identify issues, impact topics and potential alternatives to be considered in the EA. You may submit comments directly online at the following link <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/EVER>. Select "Replacement of a Communications Tower in Everglades National Park" in the "Open for Comment" box. The Verizon Right-of-Way Application can be viewed by clicking on "Document List" in the Project Links column. You may also comment via mail to:

**National Park Service
Attention: Brien Culhane
Everglades National Park
40001 State Road 9336,
Homestead FL 33034**

Comments must be received or postmarked by June 3, 2014.

All comments submitted will be considered in preparing the EA. Once the EA is completed, it will be made available for public review for 30 days.

Before including an address, phone number, email 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. Although 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.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Steps	Planning Activity	Dates	Public/Agency Involvement Opportunities
1	Scoping: Identify planning issues and opportunities (30-day public comment period)	May - June 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review Scoping Notice• Submit written comments by June 3, 2014
2	Prepare Environmental Assessment	June – July 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agency and tribal consultations
3	Public comment on the Environmental Assessment (30-day public comment period)	August 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the Environmental Assessment and provide comments to the National Park Service• Attend public meeting
4	Federal decision anticipated	September 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review NPS decision