



Backcountry Access Plan/ Wilderness Study/ Environmental Impact Statement (BAP/WS/EIS)  
Preliminary Alternatives Newsletter

DEAR FRIENDS,

We have reached an important milestone in creating a shared vision for managing backcountry access and wilderness in Big Cypress National Preserve. This newsletter presents five preliminary alternatives that describe different ways of protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Preserve while providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy this special resource. In addition, we have included a special section dedicated to the wilderness study that is currently underway.

In the winter and spring of 2013/2014, we invited you to share your thoughts and ideas related to backcountry use in the Preserve during the scoping phase of this project. Many of you participated in one of our open house events in Broward and Collier Counties or submitted comments electronically and via letters and comment cards, and many of you expressed very specific ideas and concerns about backcountry use and the Preserve’s future. We thank you for your comments, as this scoping information was instrumental in helping the planning team develop a range of preliminary alternatives.

At this time, we want to share our progress with you and solicit your ideas on the draft alternatives before we proceed further. In developing these alternatives we sought to identify alternative approaches to management and operations within the Preserve that represent the diversity of suggestions received during the scoping process. Your review and comments on the five preliminary alternatives will assist us in honing and refining these options and will guide the development of a preferred alternative. In regards to the wilderness study, we’re seeking your input at this time to help us develop a range of alternatives for the wilderness

component of the plan. Wilderness alternatives will be presented for your review and comment in the draft BAP/WS/EIS. We invite you to join us at an open house event at in February 2016, where you will be able to learn about, discuss, and comment on the preliminary alternatives. It is important to note that a preferred alternative has not been identified, nor have the impacts of the preliminary alternatives been analyzed at this stage of the planning process. Once fully developed, one of these alternatives could be identified as the National Park Service preferred alternative, or a new alternative could emerge that combines elements from some or all of the preliminary alternatives.

As we move forward in exploring different ways to manage the Preserve for the future, I encourage you to stay connected and be an active participant in this important planning process. In this newsletter, you will find a number of ways to contact us and access information. With your continued interest and support, we will develop a plan that enhances your experience of Big Cypress while preserving its extraordinary natural and cultural heritage.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the development of the Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS. We hope to hear more from you soon!

*Tammy Whittington*

Tammy Whittington  
Superintendent  
Big Cypress National Preserve

HOW TO COMMENT

Big Cypress National Preserve is soliciting public feedback on the preliminary alternatives and the wilderness study from January 11, 2016, through March 11, 2016. During this period, the planning team encourages you to comment on the preliminary alternatives and the wilderness study to identify any issues or concerns. In particular, we seek your input on the specific management strategies presented in each alternative as well as ideas and concerns you would like us to consider as we proceed with the wilderness study. Please keep in mind when commenting that the unique content of comments received, rather than the number of times a similar comment was heard, is what will help refine the alternatives.

There are a number of ways to participate in this process and make your voice heard. You may submit your comments electronically at the National Park Service Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website (go to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap>). Once on the website, select “Open for Comment” to provide your thoughts on the preliminary alternatives and the wilderness study.

Comments may also be submitted in writing to the following address:

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

The Preserve will be accepting comments through March 11, 2016. Please submit all comments via the PEPC website, standard mail, or during the open house events.

YOU’RE INVITED

The National Park Service will be hosting an open house event on Wednesday, February 10, 2016 and Thursday, February 11, 2016. The purpose of the open house is to present the draft alternatives and receive public feedback. Please join us and share your ideas on the preliminary alternatives at the following locations:

Wednesday February 10, 2016 (5-7pm)  
Tree Tops Broward County Park 3900  
SW 100th Ave  
Davie, FL 33328  
(954-357-5130)

Thursday February 11, 2016 (5-7pm)  
Big Cypress Welcome Center  
33000 Tamiami Trail East  
Ochopee, FL 34141  
(239-695-4758)

WHAT IS PEPC?

Public involvement is a critical part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) project planning and development process. The National Park Service PEPC website is used to provide information and collect public input for many planning projects. Planning information, updates, meeting notices, and documents can all be found on a park’s PEPC site. When documents are open for public comment, comments from individuals, civic groups, public agencies, and governing bodies can be submitted on the site. PEPC allows National Park Service staff to gather and consider public comments in a cost-effective and timely manner. Comments are stored in a secure database as part of the official administrative record for the plan. Public comments and the names of those making comments may be released to the public at the end of the comment period in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

A specific PEPC site has been created for this planning effort. Check it out at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap>.





PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to develop a backcountry access plan for Big Cypress National Preserve that provides reasonable management guidelines for backcountry access and use, while protecting the Preserve’s natural and cultural resources and providing for public enjoyment. The project also includes a wilderness Study. The purpose of the Study is to determine which parts of the original Preserve, if any, should be proposed for wilderness designation by Congress. The plan and study will be developed in accordance with the Preserve’s enabling legislation, National Park Service policy, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

PLAN NEEDS

- A backcountry access plan is needed in Big Cypress National Preserve to:
- Protect the Preserve’s resources (e.g., habitat, wildlife, protected species) while providing for sustainable recreational backcountry use of the Preserve in accordance with its enabling legislation.
  - Evaluate potential alternatives for a secondary off-road vehicle (ORV) trail network in the original Preserve that provides reasonable access to backcountry destinations, while protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Preserve.
  - 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., trail network, primary trails, secondary trails, backcountry destinations) in the 2000 Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan and 2010 Addition General Management Plan / Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan. These clarified definitions would apply to the entire Preserve.

- A wilderness study is needed in Big Cypress National Preserve to:
- Determine which parts of the original Preserve, if any, should be proposed for wilderness designation by Congress.

PLAN OBJECTIVES

- The following objectives were developed to support the identified needs:
- Study areas determined eligible for wilderness designation in order to develop a possible wilderness designation proposal to Congress.
  - Based on an evaluation of substrate suitability, designate a system of secondary ORV trails in the original Preserve.
  - Evaluate the potential for additional primary trails in the original Preserve, in accordance with the total maximum allowable primary trail mileage set forth in previous plans.
  - Evaluate the potential for a primary trail connection between the original Preserve and the Addition.
  - Establish a permanent route for the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) within the Preserve, in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service.
  - Identify additional hiking opportunities throughout the Preserve.
  - Establish guidance to manage backcountry camping, specifically as it relates to motorized access, hiking, and other recreational uses.
  - Clarify definitions of key terms related to backcountry use to create more certainty in planning and management efforts. These clarified definitions would apply to the entire Preserve.
  - With respect to backcountry uses Preserve-wide, evaluate and refine indicators and thresholds from previous plans to ensure that monitoring and other commitments are informative, feasible to manage, and financially sustainable.
  - Complete NEPA analysis on a range of alternatives for wilderness designation, secondary trails, hiking trails, and backcountry recreational uses, including camping.

WHAT ARE ALTERNATIVES AND HOW ARE THEY DEVELOPED?

The National Park Service is required to examine a full range of reasonable alternatives when preparing an environmental impact statement. Reasonable alternatives propose different ways to fulfill the purpose and need of the plan while minimizing or mitigating for potential impacts to resources. Reasonable alternatives are also economically and technically feasible and evidence common sense.

The process being used to develop a range of preliminary alternatives for the Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS incorporates public input received during scoping and is based on guidelines set in the 2000 Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan for the original Preserve. During public scoping, the National Park Service received numerous correspondences from individuals and organizations expressing a wide range of ideas for future management, as well as specific suggestions for secondary ORV trails and hiking trails. Many of these ideas and suggestions have been used to help develop the range of preliminary alternatives presented in this newsletter.

THE PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

We have developed five preliminary alternatives that cover access to the backcountry portions of the Preserve and protect the Preserve’s fundamental resources and values. The alternatives presented here are conceptual in nature and will continue to be refined based on public input and ongoing field work at the Preserve, including work on the wilderness study. Please note that some possible ORV routes in the conceptual alternatives may be dropped from consideration if the wilderness study reveals them to be located in wilderness-eligible lands. It is also possible that a new alternative will be developed for the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS utilizing public comment from this review period, the results of ongoing field work, and elements from some or all of the preliminary alternatives.

The first alternative (Alternative 1) is the no-action alternative, which reflects a continuation of current management practices within the Preserve. The other four alternatives (Alternatives 2 through 5) constitute the action alternatives and were developed based on public and stakeholder input, as well as feedback

from all levels of the National Park Service. They are alternative approaches to management and operations within the Preserve and represent the diversity of suggestions received during the scoping process.

During the public scoping period, commenters provided suggestions for a number of specific trails and destinations that the National Park Service should consider during this planning effort. These suggestions ranged from favorite hiking and backpacking trails, to historic camps or areas of cultural or historic interest in the backcountry that commenters would like access restored to. Each of the 92 trail suggestions received during scoping along with over 240 historically used trails were reviewed by the planning team. Many of these trails were incorporated into alternative 5 based on a review of a number of factors including evidence of a previously used route, suitability of the destination for a variety of recreation opportunities including camping, and the suitability of the substrate along the suggested trail route.

While the action alternatives represent unique approaches to management of the Preserve, there are many strategies that do not vary by alternative. These strategies are considered “common to all” and ultimately serve to protect the resources and values of the Preserve. They are considered practical, common-sense approaches to Preserve management and are grounded in National Park Service policy and mandates and previously approved management plans. These are strategies that will help ensure that goals and desired future conditions are met and that the Preserve retains its special character.

Each action alternative includes specific adaptive strategies that would only be implemented when necessary to maintain desired resource conditions and visitor experience. Because resource conditions and visitor experience are so interrelated, a visitor use management framework is being developed as part of this plan. This framework includes the use of indicators and thresholds to track changes in resource and social conditions so that minimally acceptable conditions can be assessed. It also provides a sound methodology for establishing the kinds and amounts of visitor use that the Preserve can accommodate.



PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

In the winter and spring of 2013/2014, we received more than 200 correspondences during the initial public scoping period for the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS. Those comments were integral to the development of the preliminary alternatives presented in this newsletter. We invite you to review this newsletter and offer us your comments. Your input will be used to refine and finalize the range of alternatives that will be analyzed in the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS. In particular, we would appreciate your responses to the following questions. Please use question four to provide any additional input you might have:

1. Which strategies in the preliminary alternatives do you think best achieve the plan needs and objectives? What do you like best about these strategies?
2. Which strategies in the preliminary alternatives do you think would not achieve the plan needs and objectives? What do you not like about these strategies?
3. Are there other strategies that should be included in the preliminary alternatives that are not already presented? If so, which strategies and why should they be considered?
4. What other comments or suggestions do you have?

Regarding the wilderness study:

1. What can you tell us about the wilderness character in the areas currently being studied based on your experiences and observations?
2. What other places in the Preserve do you feel possess wilderness characteristics and should be further studied as a part of this effort?
3. What lands do you feel merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System?
4. What other comments or suggestions do you have?

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

To facilitate detailed review and comment on the trails and destinations contained within the preliminary alternatives, the planning team has also developed an interactive web-based map. Please visit <http://tinyurl.com/bicybap> and provide us with your thoughts, feedback, and experiences on individual trails and destinations for the planning team to consider as we continue to refine the alternatives.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS RELATED TO BACKCOUNTRY USE

Resources and Values	Management Objectives	Desired Future Conditions
Native Plants and Animals / Ecological Integrity		
Native Vegetative Communities and Habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Protect vegetation from disturbance outside of access points and designated trails.</li><li>Reduce the spread of invasive plants and animals.</li><li>Maintain a fire management regime that protects against undesirable wildfire.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Potential impacts to flora and fauna from backcountry use are minimized.</li><li>Campsites and trails are located in areas most resilient to potential adverse impacts.</li><li>Restoration of natural fire regimes to ecosystems.</li></ul>
Protected Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Protect and affirmatively restore federal and state listed species and their habitat.</li><li>Maintain the natural abundance and distribution of wildlife populations.</li><li>Reduce and manage potential wildlife stressors resulting from backcountry use.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trails avoid areas where their construction, maintenance, and use may have a detrimental effect on listed species or their habitat.</li><li>Detrimental effects on listed species and their habitat are avoided or minimized.</li></ul>
Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Reduce impacts resulting from backcountry use that adversely affect natural elevation, composition, and integrity of soils.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trails and backcountry destinations are designated in areas that offer the most suitable substrate or in areas of previous disturbance.</li></ul>
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Maintain air quality in the Preserve at a Class II level or better.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Air quality is not degraded by backcountry use.</li></ul>
Water Resources		
Water Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Minimize disruption of natural water flows in the Preserve and outflows to the surrounding watershed.</li><li>Maintain the water quality within the Preserve.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Disruption to natural hydrologic conditions from backcountry uses are avoided or minimized.</li></ul>
Cultural Resources		
Cultural Resources (Archeological Resources, Prehistoric/Historic Structures, Cultural Landscapes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Protect all known cultural resources on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Known archeological and cultural sites within the Preserve are protected from adverse impacts from backcountry uses.</li></ul>
Cultural Experiences		
Ethnographic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consult with the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida regarding usual and customary use and occupancy of Preserve lands. Protect Indian sacred sites within the Preserve.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The known Indian sacred sites are protected from impacts related to backcountry use.</li></ul>
Visitor and Public Enjoyment		
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide a range of resource-related recreational opportunities for visitors to explore the Preserve.</li><li>Maintain the scenic quality of the Preserve.</li><li>Manage adverse impacts of trails and their use on natural and cultural resources.</li><li>Provide for public safety and avoid or minimize safety hazards.</li><li>Maintain a fire management regime that allows for visitor access to backcountry.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The location of trails avoids or minimizes conflicts among backcountry users.</li><li>Trail use is managed at levels that avoid or minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources.</li><li>Trails provide visitor access to remote areas of the Preserve, which allows visitors to experience unconfined nature.</li><li>Trails are located to avoid known cultural resources and minimize impacts to natural resources.</li></ul>
Camping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide a range of backcountry camping opportunities and experiences.</li><li>Maintain the scenic quality of the Preserve.</li><li>Avoid and minimize adverse impacts of camping on natural and cultural resources.</li><li>Provide for public safety and avoid or minimize safety hazards.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The location and design of campsites minimizes impacts to natural resources and avoids known cultural resources.</li><li>Campsite use is managed at levels that do not cause unacceptable impacts to natural resources and visitor experiences.</li><li>Location of campsites protects the scenic qualities of the Preserve.</li><li>Conflicts between user groups are minimized.</li></ul>
Noise/Soundscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Impacts to the natural soundscape in the backcountry are avoided or minimized.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Noise conflicts between user groups are minimized.</li><li>Preserve visitors are provided opportunities to experience natural quiet.</li></ul>
Aesthetic/Scenic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Impacts to the aesthetic/scenic quality of the Preserve from the placement of trails and campsites are minimized.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trails and campsites are designed to protect the natural aesthetic values and scenic resources of the Preserve.</li></ul>
Wilderness Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ensure the protection of wilderness character within lands eligible for wilderness designation.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fundamental physical and biological processes, as well as individual species, features and plant and animal communities, function at natural levels of diversity and complexity with little human disturbance in lands eligible for wilderness designation.</li><li>Lands eligible for wilderness designation are free from non-recreational or research structures, installations, and developments. Use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, or mechanical transport is prohibited.</li><li>To the extent practicable, components or processes of ecological systems inside lands eligible for wilderness designation are not influenced by human activities or action.</li><li>Visitor use levels and agency-provided recreation facilities in lands eligible for wilderness designation are managed to ensure visitors are provided opportunities to experience solitude or primitive and unconfined nature.</li></ul>
Hunting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide access to a range of hunting opportunities and experiences.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Major game species in the Preserve are maintained at a level consistent with natural ecological processes.</li><li>Maintain a sustainable deer population in the Preserve, which ensures that the effects of hunting in the Preserve are beneficial, discountable, or insignificant to the Florida panther population, as specified in the 2014 Final Hunting Management Plan.</li></ul>



How Were the Alternatives Developed?

In developing the preliminary alternatives, we sought to develop a range of reasonable approaches to designating a secondary ORV trail system and camping management representative of the broad spectrum of suggestions and desires received during public scoping. To remain consistent with the trail identification methodology developed in the 2000 Recreational Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Management Plan, a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis of the type of substrate intersecting trail segment was used to identify the trails contained within each alternative. Substrate types and their associated resource sensitivity were originally categorized in the 2000 ORV Management Plan with regard to their respective ability to withstand ORV use. This hierarchy was further refined by Dr. James Burch in the 2011 “Vegetative Communities in Big Cypress National Preserve” report to provide consistency with the mapping of other public lands in Florida. The largest change was to reclassify some areas formerly known as marsh to prairie. Based on the approach used in the 2000 ORV Management Plan and experience and observations of Preserve staff, each substrate habitat type from the Burch report was assigned a relative suitability type of highly resilient, resilient, least resilient, or unsuitable for ORV traffic.

Habitat Type	Substrate Suitability	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5
Hydric Hammock	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Hydric Pine Flatwoods			X	X		X
Mesic Hammock			X	X	X	X
Mesic Pine Flatwoods			X	X	X	X
Disturbed Areas			X	X	X	X
Cypress Forest			X	X	X	X
Shrub Cypress	Resilient			X	X	X
Swamp Forest				X	X	X
Marsh	Least Resilient					X
Marl Prairie						X
Large, Contiguous Marl Prairie	Unsuitable					

Alternative 1 – No-Action Alternative

Alternative 1 – No-Action Alternative				
Primary ORV Trail Mileage*	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds	Designated Backcountry Campsites
278*	0	FNST: 37	2 (Bear Island)	25 (Note that there are currently 16 designated backcountry campsites in Zone 4 of the Stairsteps Unit and 9 along the Florida National Scenic Trail. These sites are retained across all alternatives)
		Other hiking and canoe trails: 41		
Key Strategies	<p>The No-Action Alternative represents the continuation of current management practices related to backcountry recreational access in the Preserve. In the original Preserve, the primary guiding management policies for backcountry recreational access were established in the General Management Plan / Final Environmental Impact Statement (1991) and the Final Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan / Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (2000). The policies in these documents and accompanying National Park Service policy documents (such as the 2006 NPS Management Policies), as well as any superseding policies enacted since approval of these documents, would serve as management guidance.</p> <p>This alternative would provide for the greatest degree of resource protection among the alternatives, since no secondary or new primary ORV trails would be opened. Accordingly, ORV backcountry recreation access opportunities would be limited. ORV and non-ORV user groups would share the same ORV trail network. Dispersed camping would continue to be permitted in most of the Preserve, with free backcountry camping permits required. Designated backcountry campgrounds would be limited to the two current campgrounds in the Bear Island Unit and camping areas along the FNST and in Zone 4 of the Stairsteps Unit. Additional designated backcountry camping areas would not be provided.</p> <p>Please note the following summary of the No-Action Alternative is only a subset of current management practices and is used to compare specific management strategies that are proposed in the action alternatives.</p>			
ORV Trails	<p>The primary ORV trail system would remain unchanged and no secondary ORV trails would be opened. Any previously opened secondary ORV trails would remain closed indefinitely or until a future planning and compliance effort (including NEPA compliance) determines otherwise. ORV trails would continue to serve as multi-use trails, allowing for a variety of user groups (ORV and non-ORV) to share trail use.</p>			
Non-motorized Trails	<p>There would be no changes to the current non-motorized trails. The 48 miles of hiking/canoeing trails would remain open and available to typical use, along with the current 37-mile route of the FNST. No reroute of the FNST would occur; therefore, sections of the FNST would continue to be closely aligned with the primary ORV trail network.</p>			
Camping	<p>Dispersed camping would continue to be allowed in all areas of the Preserve except the Bear Island Unit. Additionally, there would continue to be no group size limits for dispersed camping. The two backcountry campgrounds in the Bear Island Unit, the nine hike-in campsites along the FNST, and the 15 airboat campsites in the Stairsteps Unit would continue to be open. All backcountry camping would continue to require a free permit. No changes to the policies for disposal of human waste would occur.</p>			
Stay Limits	<p>This alternative would continue to allow for 10 to 14 consecutive-day stay limits for backcountry camping, with an ultimate limit not to exceed 30 days in a calendar year. Camping equipment could be left at backcountry campsites for the duration of the hunting season.</p>			
Closures and Adaptive Strategies	<p>The current 60-day annual ORV closure would remain in place.</p>			

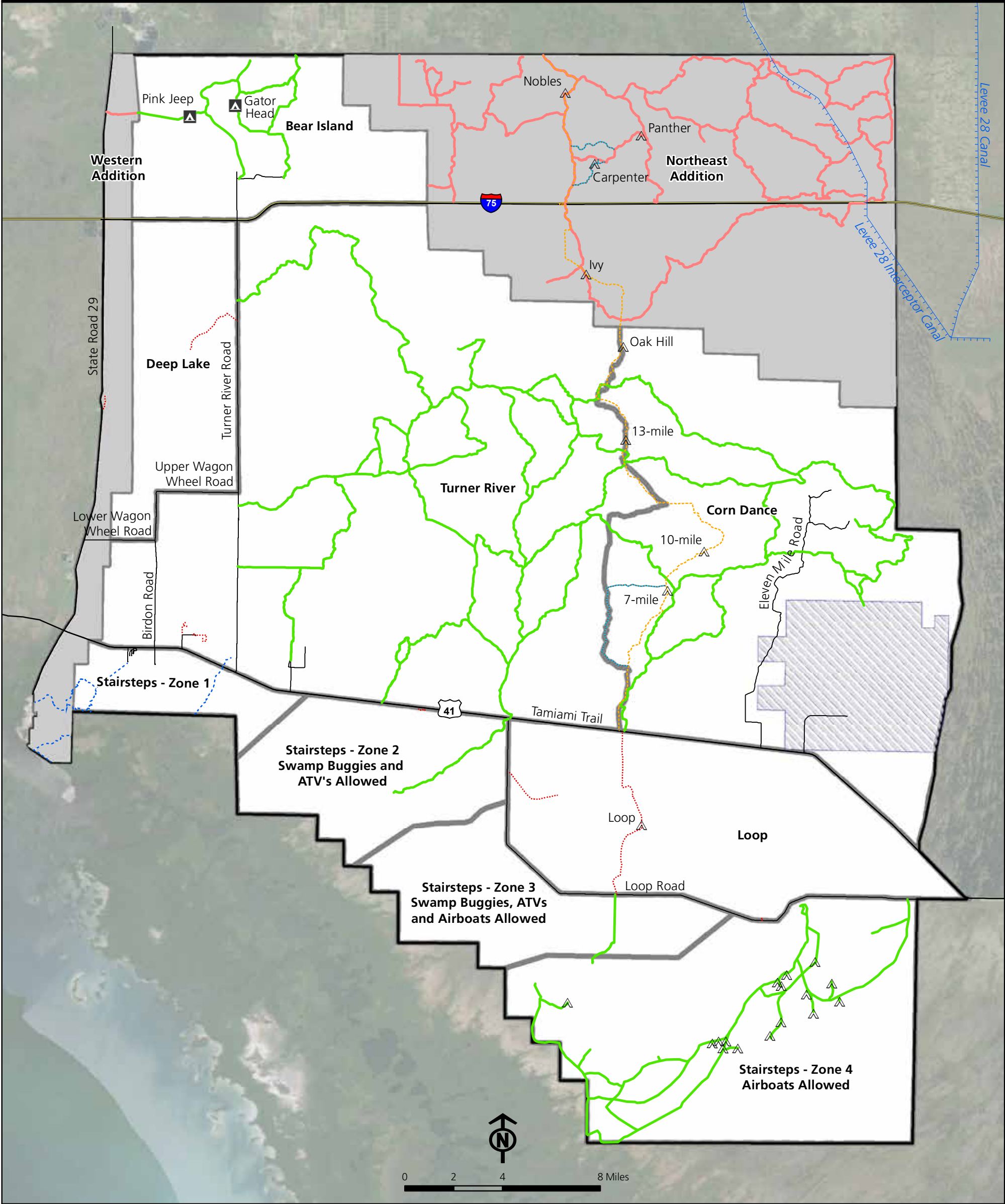
Unit	Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds	Backcountry Campsites
Turner River	125		10		
NE Addition	121 (conceptual)		18		4
Bear Island	21			2	
Deep Lake			3		
Western Addition	4 (conceptual)		6		
Loop			10		1
Corn Dance	65		22		4
SS Z1	0		8		
SS Z2	6				
SS Z3	3				
SS Z4	57				16

\*For ease of comparison between alternatives, the mileage total shown does not include conceptual trail mileage in the Northeast and Western Addition. No changes to the existing conceptual primary trail network in the addition are proposed in any of the alternatives.

# Big Cypress National Preserve

Backcountry Access Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement  
Alternative 1 - No Action

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Legend

- Backcountry Campground (2)
- Existing Backcountry Campsite (25)
- Interstate
- Road
- Canal
- Canoe Trail (14.80 mi)

## Hiking Trail

- Hiking Trail (15.80 mi)
- Blue Side Loop (10.51 mi)
- Florida National Scenic Trail (37.07 mi)

## ORV Trail

- Primary (277.59 mi)
- Conceptual Primary (124.62 mi)

- Jetport
- Addition
- Management Unit
- Preserve Boundary



Alternative 2

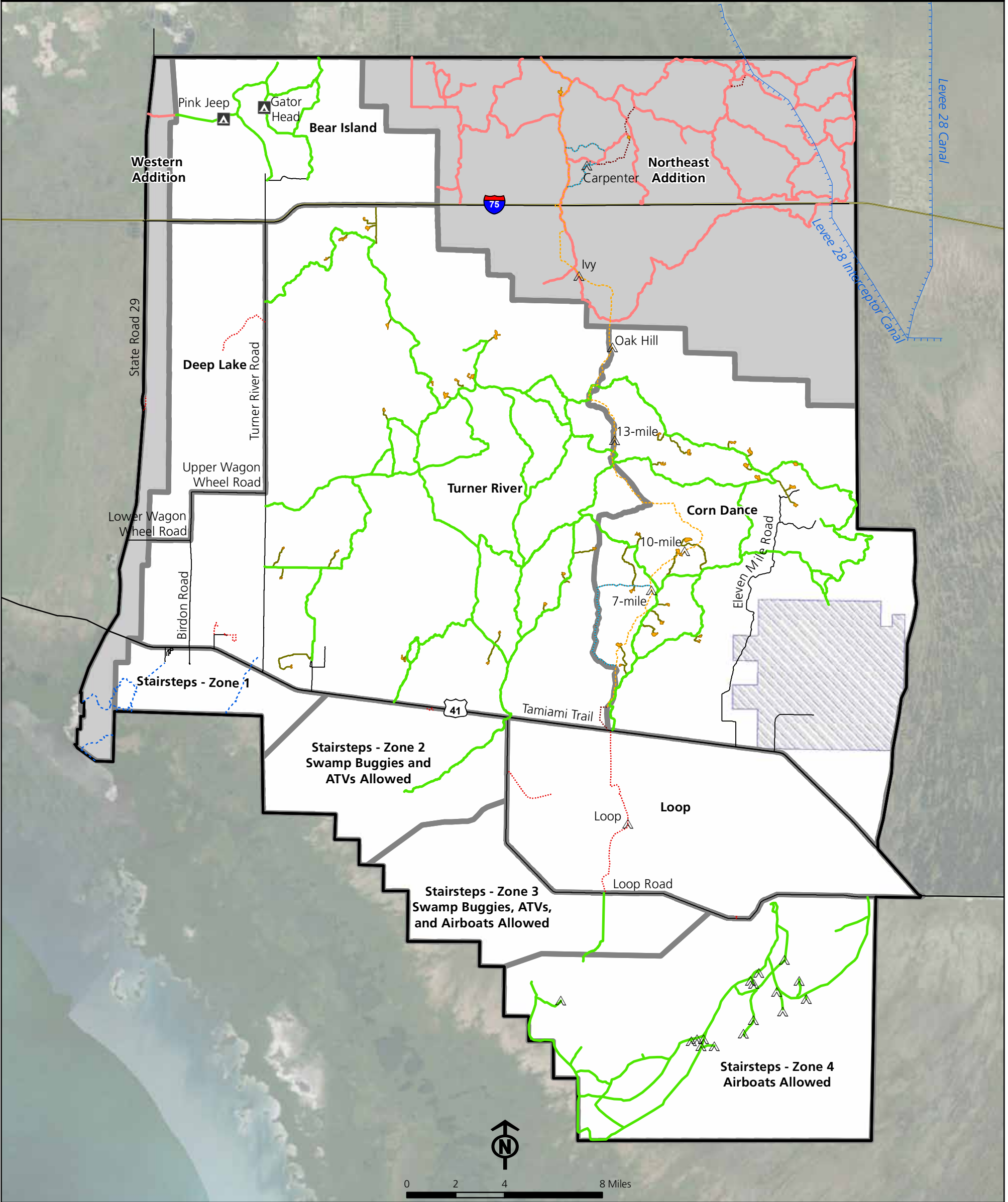


Alternative 2				
Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds	New Designated Backcountry Campsites
278	33	FNST: 42	2 (Bear Island)	46
		Other hiking and canoe trails: 41		
Strategy	By minimizing the footprint of the secondary ORV trail system and providing a means to monitor and distribute backcountry camping, Alternative 2 would provide a high degree of resource protection while still allowing visitors limited access to a number of designated backcountry campsites at the ends of secondary trails. Utilizing an on-line or in-person reservation system, visitors would be required to reserve a space at designated backcountry campsites and backcountry campgrounds. The details of the reservation system would be developed separately from this planning effort, with input from the public. The reservation system would better disperse camping use in the backcountry and provide visitors with more certainty in developing backcountry travel plans. The reservation system would allow Preserve managers to closely monitor and adaptively manage secondary trail and camping use within the backcountry.			
ORV Trails	The designated ORV secondary trail system would only include those trails that were previously open and that traverse highly resilient substrate types. Allowing trails in these substrate types would limit the number of habitat types visitors could experience by ORV but would generally ensure a more sustainable trail system and thus better conditions for ORV travel. Secondary trails that form loops would be closed in full or in part irrespective of substrate type.			
Hiking Trails	Several segments of the FNST would be re-aligned to improve the backcountry experience of hikers by separating ORV and hiking use. All other hiking opportunities would mirror the No-Action Alternative.			
Camping	<p>All dispersed camping would be discontinued. Camping opportunities would be provided at designated campsites at the ends of secondary trails, existing backcountry campsites in the Stairsteps Unit and along the FNST, as well as within the two backcountry campgrounds in the Bear Island Unit. Camping permits and reservations would be required and limitations on group size would be established. The details of the reservation system would be developed separately from this planning effort, with input from the public.</p> <p>In the Addition, backcountry campsites would be designated at Jones and Nobles Grades. These campsites would be minimally developed, similar to existing backcountry campsites along the Florida National Scenic Trail and those in Zone 4 of the Stairsteps Unit.</p> <p>To provide a greater degree of resource protection, visitors would be required to carry and use portable toilets and properly dispose of human waste outside of the Preserve. Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly educational materials would also be provided to visitors as they obtain backcountry and/ or camping permits. These portable toilet requirements and enhanced user education would be common to all the action alternatives (Alternatives 2 through 5).</p>			
Stay Limits	Stay limits would be established to help increase the campsite turnover rate and reduce the intensity of use at any given campsite. Camping or occupancy of a designated backcountry campsite or backcountry campground would be limited to 14 consecutive days. This stay limit would also apply to camping equipment. Camping within the Preserve by the same person or group could not occur again for 14 consecutive days thereafter and could not exceed 30 days in a calendar year.			
Closures and Adaptive Strategies	The current 60-day closure would remain in place. In addition, the conditions of trails and designated backcountry campsites would be monitored and correlated with the number of camping permits issued. Based on trends in visitor use and its effect on trail and resource conditions, resource protection closures and/or possible use limits would be adaptively established.			

Unit	Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds		Backcountry Campsites	
				Existing	Additional Campgrounds Proposed	Existing	Additional Campsites Proposed
Turner River	125	15	11				23
NE Addition			23			2	2
Bear Island	21		3	2			
Deep Lake							
Western Addition			6				
Loop			10			1	
Corn Dance	65	18	21			4	21
SS Z1			8				
SS Z2	6						
SS Z3	3						
SS Z4	57					16	







Legend

- Backcountry Campground (2)
- Existing Backcountry Campsite (23)
- New Alternative 2 Backcountry Campsite (46)
- Interstate
- Road
- Canal
- Canoe Trail (14.80 mi)

Hiking Trail

- Hiking Trail (15.80 mi)
- Blue Side Loop (10.51 mi)
- Florida National Scenic Trail (36.11 mi)
- New Florida National Scenic Trail Realignment (5.83 mi)

ORV Trail

- Primary (277.59 mi)
- Conceptual Primary (124.62 mi)
- Secondary (32.57 mi)

- Jetport
- Addition
- Management Unit
- Preserve Boundary

Alternative 3



Alternative 3				
Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds	New Designated Backcountry Campsites
278	94	FNST (realigned): 42	2 (Bear Island)	98
		Other hiking and canoe trails: 41		
Concept	Alternative 3 would increase ORV access while balancing impacts to resources. ORV users would have the option to access a broader range of areas as compared to Alternative 2 via trails traversing resilient as well as highly resilient substrate types. The reservation system described in Alternative 2 would also be implemented.			
ORV Trails	The designated ORV secondary trail system is further expanded in alternative three to include those trails that were previously open, and that traverse both resilient and highly resilient substrate types. As in Alternative 2, a portion or all of a secondary trail that forms loops would be closed irrespective of substrate type.			
Hiking Trails	Hiking trails would be the same as those included in Alternative 2.			
Camping	<p>Designated backcountry campsites would be established at the ends of secondary trails in addition to existing backcountry campsites in the Stairsteps Unit, along the FNST, and within the two backcountry campgrounds in the Bear Island Unit. As in Alternative 2, dispersed camping adjacent to ORV trails would be discontinued, but visitors would be provided expanded camping opportunities at the ends of the additional secondary trails and through the allowance of dispersed camping in more remote areas of the Preserve.</p> <p>To provide additional camping opportunities beyond designated backcountry campsites and campgrounds, walk-in dispersed camping would be permitted, but only in areas at least 1/4 mile from any designated campsite or ORV trail and ½ mile of any developed area or road. Dispersed camping would still be prohibited within the Bear Island Unit. These additional camping opportunities would minimize impact to Preserve resources while providing for greater dispersion of campers and increased opportunities to experience solitude in the backcountry.</p> <p>In the Addition, backcountry campsites would be designated at Jones and Nobles Grades. These campsites would be minimally developed, similar to existing backcountry campsites along the Florida National Scenic Trail and those in Zone 4 of the Stairsteps Unit.</p> <p>Visitors would be required to carry and use portable toilets and properly dispose of human waste outside of the Preserve. Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly educational materials would also be provided to visitors as they obtain backcountry and/or camping permits.</p>			
Stay Limits	Stay limits described in Alternative 2 would be the same in this alternative. Camping in the Preserve by the same person or group could not occur again for 14 consecutive days thereafter and could not exceed 30 days in a calendar year.			
Closures and Adaptive Strategies	Closures and adaptive strategies would remain the same as in Alternative 2.			

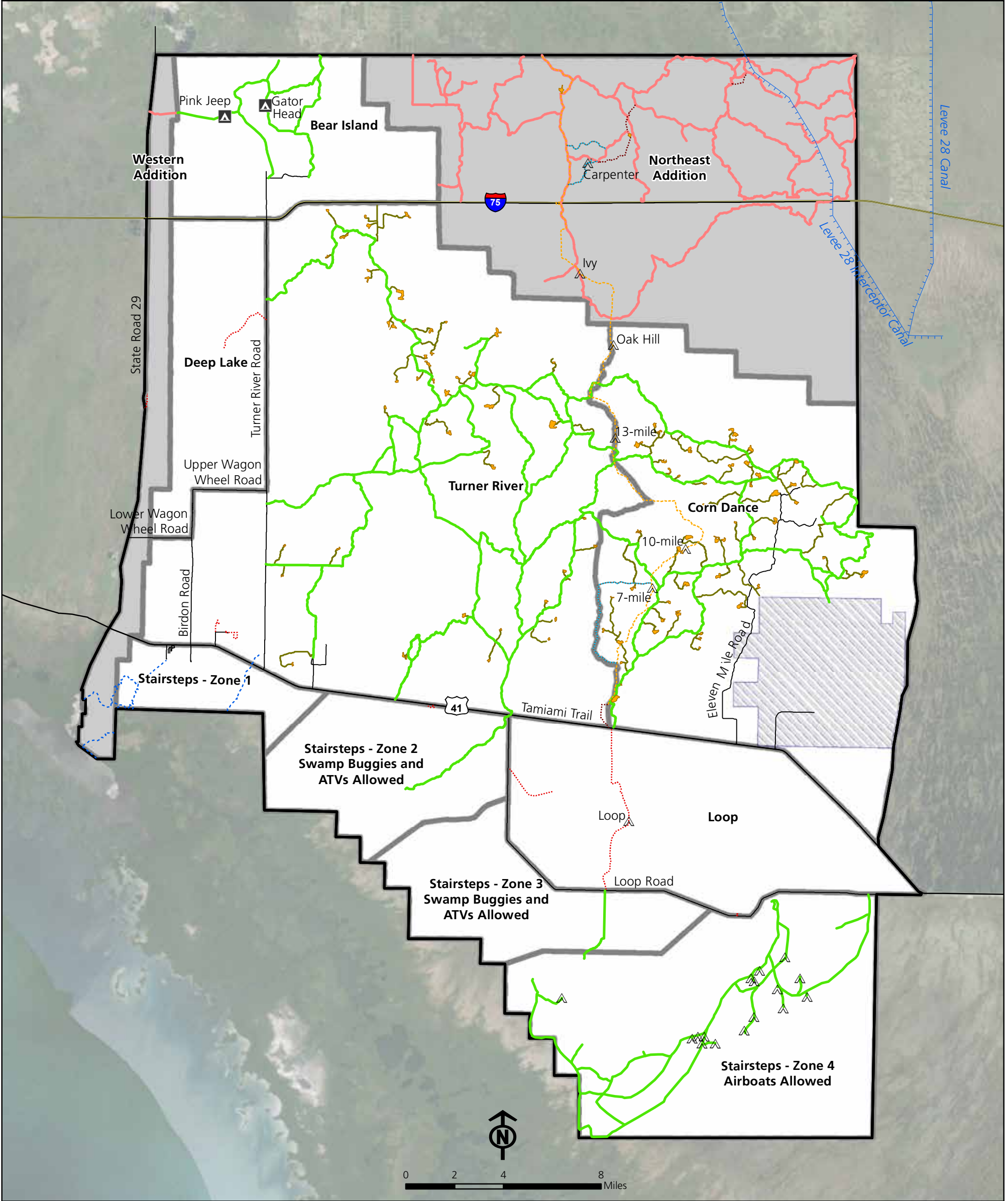
Unit	Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds		Backcountry Campsites	
				Existing	Additional Campgrounds Proposed	Existing	Additional Campsites Proposed
Turner River	125	36	11				46
NE Addition			23			2	2
Bear Island	21		3	2			
Deep Lake							
Western Addition			6				
Loop			10			1	
Corn Dance	65	58	21			4	50
SS Z1			8				
SS Z2	6						
SS Z3	3						
SS Z4	57					16	



Big Cypress National Preserve

Backcountry Access Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement  
Alternative 3

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Legend

- Backcountry Campground (2)
- Existing Backcountry Campsite (23)
- New Alternative 3 Backcountry Campsite (98)
- Interstate
- Road
- Canal
- Canoe Trail (14.80 mi)

Hiking Trail

- Hiking Trail (15.80 mi)
- Blue Side Loop (10.51 mi)
- Florida National Scenic Trail (36.11 mi)
- New Florida National Scenic Trail Realignment (5.83 mi)

ORV Trail

- Primary (277.59 mi)
- Conceptual Primary (124.62 mi)
- Secondary (93.58 mi)

- Jetport
- Addition
- Management Unit
- Preserve Boundary



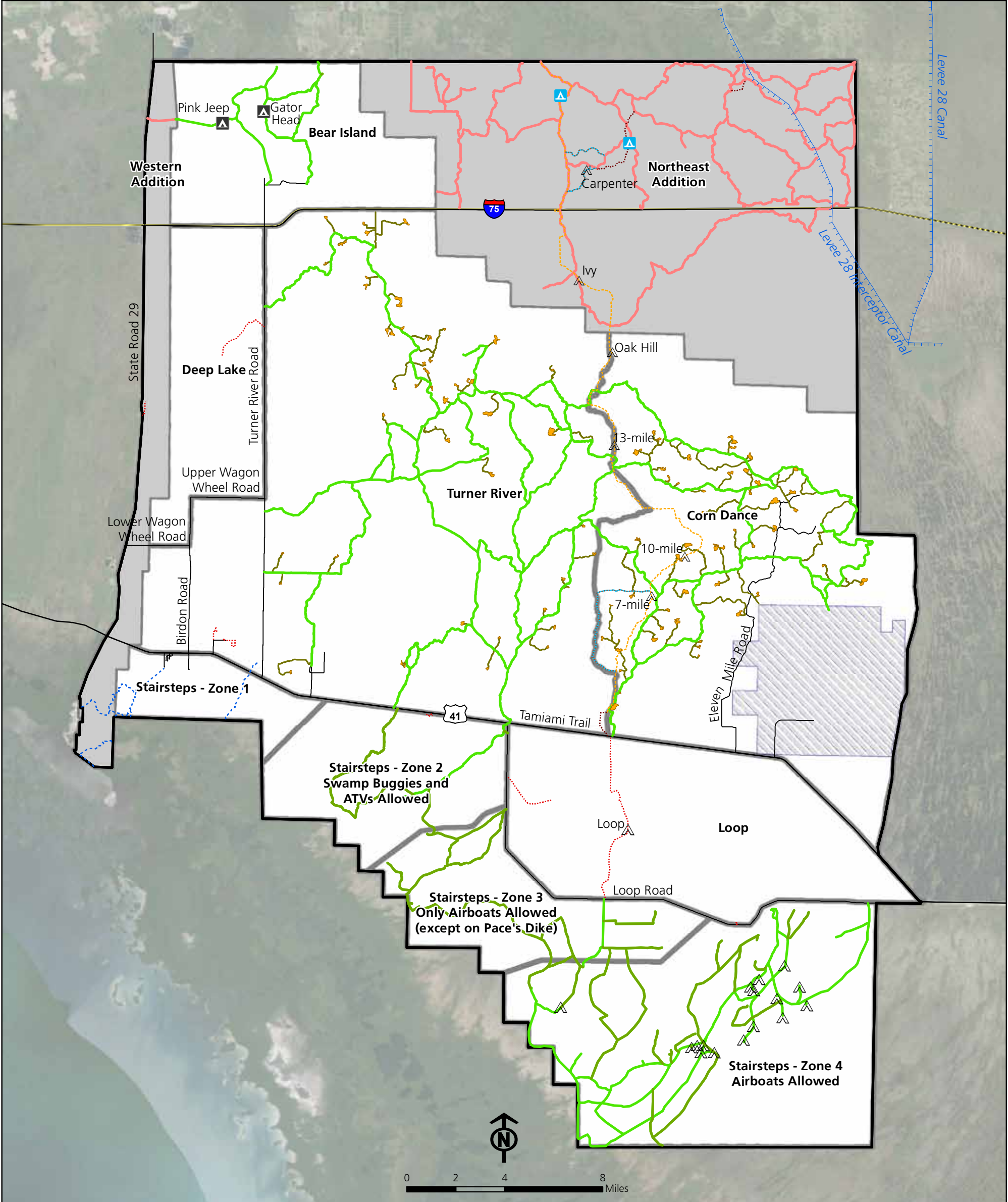
Alternative 4



Alternative 4				
Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds	New Designated Backcountry Campsites
364	93	FNST (realigned): 42	4 (2 in Bear Island and 2 in the Addition)	96
		Other hiking and canoe trails: 41		
Strategy	Alternative 4 expands ORV access by opening primary trails in the Stairsteps Unit as recommended by the Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Committee (ORVAC). The secondary trail system would remain the same as in Alternative 3. In the Addition, backcountry campgrounds similar to those in the Bear Island Unit would be developed at Jones and Nobles Grades. The annual 60-day closure would be removed, and targeted trail closures based on periodic monitoring of trail conditions and resource impacts would be implemented.			
ORV Trails	The secondary trail system would remain the same as in Alternative 3.			
Hiking Trails	The hiking/canoeing trail system would remain the same as in Alternative 2.			
Camping	<p>Although backcountry campsites would still be identified in association with designated secondary trails, visitors would be provided with expanded camping options through the allowance of walk-in dispersed camping at least 1/4 mile from any backcountry campsite or campground, or ½ mile of any developed area or road. Visitors would be permitted to camp anywhere along ORV trails as long as their ORVs remain on the designated trail and do not block travel. To minimize impacts on Preserve resources, backcountry users would be encouraged to camp in backcountry campgrounds, backcountry campsites, and previously used dispersed campsites as part of obtaining their backcountry permit prior to entering the backcountry. Dispersed camping would be prohibited within the Bear Island Unit.</p> <p>In the Addition, backcountry campgrounds would be developed at Jones and Nobles Grades. These developed campgrounds would be similar in character to the existing backcountry campgrounds within the Bear Island Unit.</p> <p>Camping opportunities would still be provided at the existing backcountry campsites in the Stairsteps Unit, along the FNST, and within the two back-country campgrounds in the Bear Island Unit.</p> <p>Visitors would be required to carry and use portable toilets and properly dispose of human waste outside of the Preserve. Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly educational materials would also be provided to visitors as they obtain backcountry permits.</p>			
Stay Limits	The stay limits for persons and equipment would remain the same as in Alternative 2.			
Closures and Adaptive Strategies	This alternative would remove the annual 60-day closure. Closures would instead be implemented where resource and trail conditions were observed to be at or near impact thresholds.			

Unit	Primary ORV Trail Mileage		Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds		Backcountry Campsites	
	Existing	Additional Trails Proposed			Existing	Additional Campgrounds Proposed	Existing	Additional Campsites Proposed
Turner River	125		36	11				46
NE Addition				23		2	2	
Bear Island	21			3	2			
Deep Lake								
Western Addition				6				
Loop				10			1	
Corn Dance	65		58	21			4	50
SS Z1				8				
SS Z2	6	13						
SS Z3	3	31						
SS Z4	57	42					16	





Legend

- New Alternative 4 Backcountry Campground (2)

Existing Backcountry Campground (2)

Existing Backcountry Campsite (23)

New Alternative 4 Backcountry Campsite (96)

Interstate

Road

Canal

Canoe Trail (14.80 mi)
- Hiking Trail

Hiking Trail (15.80 mi)

Blue Side Loop (10.51 mi)

Florida National Scenic Trail (36.11 mi)

New Florida National Scenic Trail Realignment (5.83 mi)

ORV Trail

Primary (277.59 mi)

New Alternative 4 Primary (86.15 mi)

Conceptual Primary (124.62 mi)

Secondary (93.38 mi)

Jetport

Addition

Management Unit

Preserve Boundary



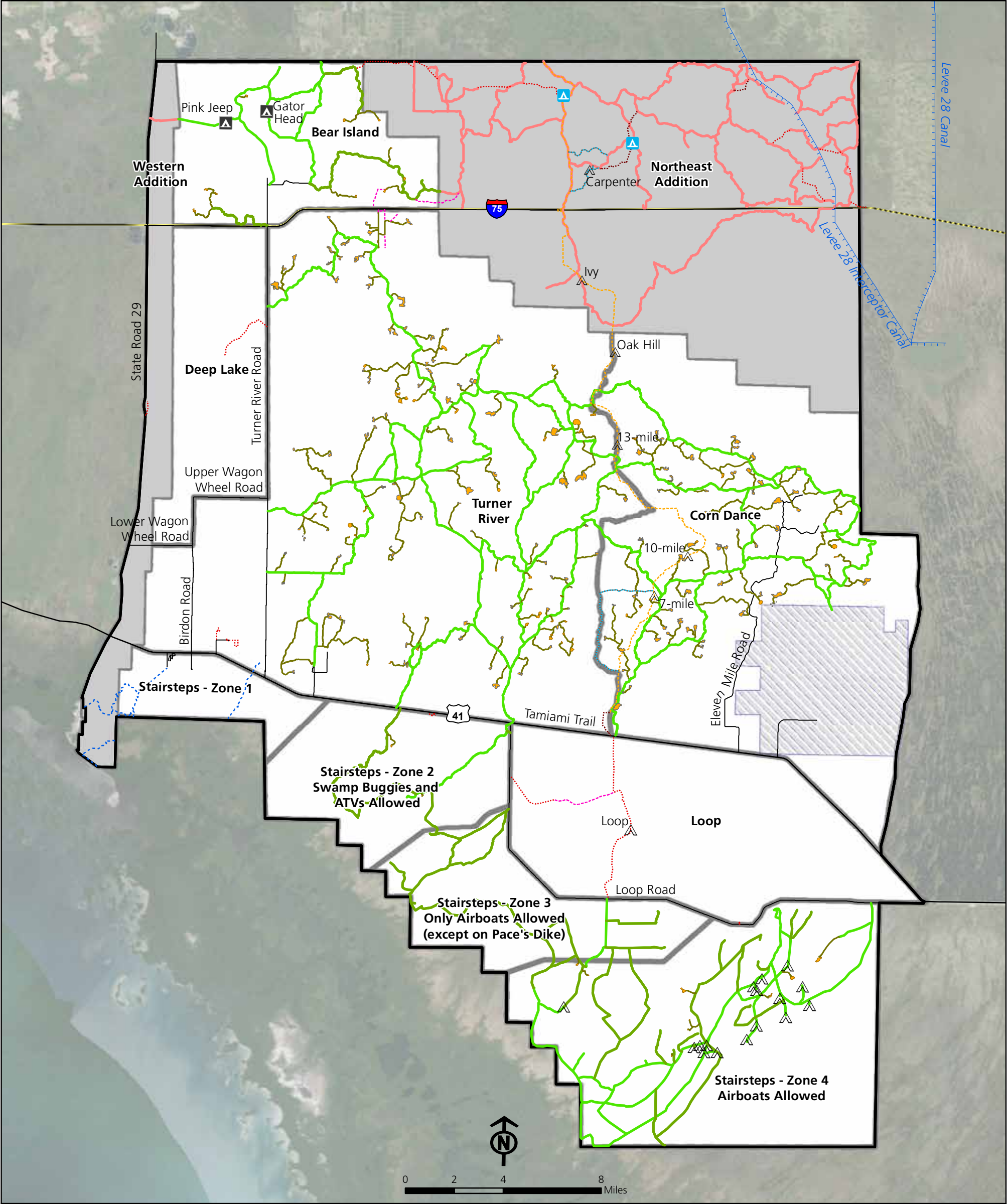
Alternative 5



Alternative 5				
Primary ORV Trail Mileage	Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds	New Designated Backcountry Campsites
380	192	FNST (re-aligned): 42	4 (2 in Bear Island and 2 in the Addition)	229
		Other hiking and canoe trails: 61		
Strategy	This alternative allows the greatest visitor access through expansion of both the ORV and the hiking trail systems, along with expanded opportunities for backcountry camping. In addition to all previously open secondary trails, several pre-existing historic and/or publicly recommended ORV and hiking trails would be opened to provide greater access to a variety of recreational opportunities.			
ORV Trails	Secondary ORV trails would be designated along pre-existing routes that traverse all substrate types except large, contiguous marl prairies. In addition to previously open secondary trails, several traditionally used trails and/or trails recommended by the public during the scoping phase of the plan would be designated as secondary trails. While segments of trail within this alternative may traverse small portions of marl prairie habitat, through monitoring and targeted trail closures, impacts to prairie vegetation would be minimized to the greatest extent possible.			
Hiking Trails	The hiking trail system would be expanded with the designation of additional hiking trails in the Loop Unit and a new hiking trail system traversing the Addition. To the greatest extent possible, hiking trails would be designated along previously disturbed routes and would minimize impacts to prairies.			
Camping	Camping would remain the same as Alternative 4.			
Stay Limits	The stay limits for persons and equipment would remain the same as in the No-Action Alternative.			
Closures and Adaptive Strategies	Closures and adaptive strategies would remain the same as in Alternative 4.			

Unit	Primary ORV Trail Mileage		Secondary ORV Trail Mileage	Non-motorized Trail Mileage	Backcountry Campgrounds		Backcountry Campsites	
	Existing	Additional Trails Proposed			Existing	Additional Campgrounds Proposed	Existing	Additional Campsites Proposed
Turner River	125		108	13				137
NE Addition				35		2	2	
Bear Island	21	16	8	3	2			10
Deep Lake				3				
Western Addition				6				
Loop				13			1	
Corn Dance	65		70	21			4	71
SS Z1				8				
SS Z2	6	13	1					2
SS Z3	3	31	1					
SS Z4	57	42	4				16	9





Legend

- New Alternative 5 Backcountry Campground (2)
- Existing Backcountry Campground (2)
- Existing Backcountry Campsite (23)
- New Alternative 5 Backcountry Campsite (229)
- Interstate
- Road
- Canal
- Canoe Trail (14.80 mi)

Hiking Trail

- Hiking Trail (15.80 mi)
- New Alternative 5 Hiking Trail (19.76 mi)
- Blue Side Loop (10.51 mi)
- Florida National Scenic Trail (36.11 mi)
- New Florida National Scenic Trail Realignment (5.83 mi)

ORV Trail

- Primary (277.59 mi)
- New Alternative 5 Primary (102.06 mi)
- Conceptual Primary (124.62 mi)
- Secondary (192.49 mi)

- Jetport
- Addition
- Management Unit
- Preserve Boundary



MANAGEMENT ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The following items are required to effectively manage and protect resources under all the previously described alternatives. They are listed separately to avoid redundancy. Many of these management strategies were presented in the 2000 ORV Management Plan and would apply to all the alternatives. Please note that a more comprehensive list of elements common to all alternatives will be included in the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS for review by the public.

- All ORVs would be required to abide by rules governing vehicle specifications and operation, designated trails, and permitting and licensing requirements.
- ORV users violating regulations would be subject to punishment, including fines and/or imprisonment.
- All backcountry users (including ORV users, hikers, campers, and boaters) would be required to obtain a free backcountry use permit for each trip, available online, from Preserve staff, and at designated locations throughout the Preserve.
- Temporal and spatial closures would be implemented as deemed necessary to ensure visitor safety and protection of Preserve resources.
- Education of and communication to all visitors, including ORV operators and hikers, would be ongoing and adaptable to changing management strategies.
- Visitors would be required to carry and use portable toilets and properly dispose of human waste outside of the Preserve.
- Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly educational materials would be provided to visitors as they obtain backcountry and/or camping permits.

Wilderness Study

WHAT IS WILDERNESS?

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System, a network of undeveloped, wild areas that receive the highest level of protection of any federal public lands. Congress defined “wilderness” as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” For Congress to designate an area as wilderness, an area must meet the criteria set forth in the Wilderness Act. Specifically, an area must:

- Be untrammelled (i.e., unmanipulated) by humans
- Be undeveloped and retain its primeval character, without permanent improvements or human habitation
- Appear generally to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of humans’ work substantially unnoticeable
- Be protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions
- Offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation
- Be a minimum size of 5,000 acres in size, or of sufficient size to be managed as wilderness

Areas that were grazed, logged, farmed, or mined but not extensively developed can be eligible for wilderness designation if the effects of these activities are substantially unnoticeable, or if their wilderness character could be maintained or restored through appropriate management.

Congress passed the Wilderness Act to ensure that “an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization” did not occupy and alter all available space in the United States, with no land left in a natural, unaltered condition. Once designated as wilderness, an area must be managed to preserve its wilderness character. To this end, the Wilderness Act identifies certain prohibited uses in wilderness, including construction of permanent and temporary roads (except where there is a pre-existing private right to do so) and the use of motorized tools and mechanized transport. Other uses, such as hunting, hiking, camping, and scientific research are allowed and encouraged.

WHY IS THE WILDERNESS STUDY BEING CONDUCTED?

By policy, all lands administered by the National Park Service must be evaluated to determine whether they are eligible for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Lands previously found ineligible because of nonconforming or incompatible uses must be re-evaluated if the nonconforming uses have been terminated or removed.

The National Park Service completed a wilderness study of the original Preserve in May 1980. This study concluded that, at that time, all of the Preserve was subject to uses that rendered it unsuitable for wilderness designation. Today, dispersed use of ORVs has been discontinued, numerous private inholdings have been acquired, and other nonconforming uses have been eliminated or dramatically scaled back. That being the case, a new wilderness eligibility assessment for the original Preserve was performed in 2014-15 as a threshold planning effort for the Backcountry Access Plan. This assessment was a general review of the original Preserve based primarily on aerial photography, geographic information system (GIS) data, and staff knowledge of the Preserve terrain. The assessment, approved June 18, 2015, found that of the 557,065 acres reviewed in the original Preserve, 188,323 acres meet the eligibility criteria found in the Wilderness Act (see map).

Now that the wilderness eligibility assessment has been completed, the National Park Service is required by policy to conduct a more in-depth review called a wilderness study. Please note that a wilderness study has previously been completed for the Big Cypress Addition. Per that study, the NPS has proposed that Congress designate approximately 47,192 acres of the Addition as wilderness.

INDICATORS, THRESHOLDS, AND MONITORING

Effective management at the Preserve requires qualitative and quantitative assessment of the impact of human activity. These evaluations are conducted using indicators, thresholds, and monitoring of Preserve resources. Indicators are measurable variables that are monitored to track changes to resource and social conditions caused by human activity. Thresholds are the minimum acceptable condition for the indicator variable and are established to align with desired future conditions. The adaptive management strategies are actions that would be taken to maintain desired future conditions over time. Monitoring would occur to determine if resource or social conditions are approaching the threshold, and adaptive management strategies would be implemented if the threshold is met, using a phased approach from least stringent actions (indirect actions) to most stringent actions.

Preserve staff would conduct regular evaluations through a feasible and achievable monitoring plan. Parameters used to evaluate trails and campsites would include rut depth, trail width, off-trail incidences, spatial disturbance, increase in the number or length of trails, and species disturbance. Alternatives 2 and 3 are designed to correlate visitor use to trail condition and would permit Preserve staff to adaptively assign use limits at or under sustainable levels. Alternatives 4 and 5 would rely strictly on targeted closure to allow for resource recovery.

THE WILDERNESS STUDY PROCESS AT BIG CYPRESS

A wilderness study is a public process undertaken to develop a wilderness proposal for eventual submission to Congress (only Congress can designate wilderness). As a first step, the wilderness study will look more closely at the original Preserve to confirm the locations of wilderness-eligible lands. This process can result in more or less land being found eligible than was identified in the eligibility assessment. It can also result in re-assessment of the wilderness eligibility of immediately adjacent areas in the Addition. All lands confirmed to be wilderness-eligible are “taken off the table” as possible sites for ORV trails or other nonconforming uses.

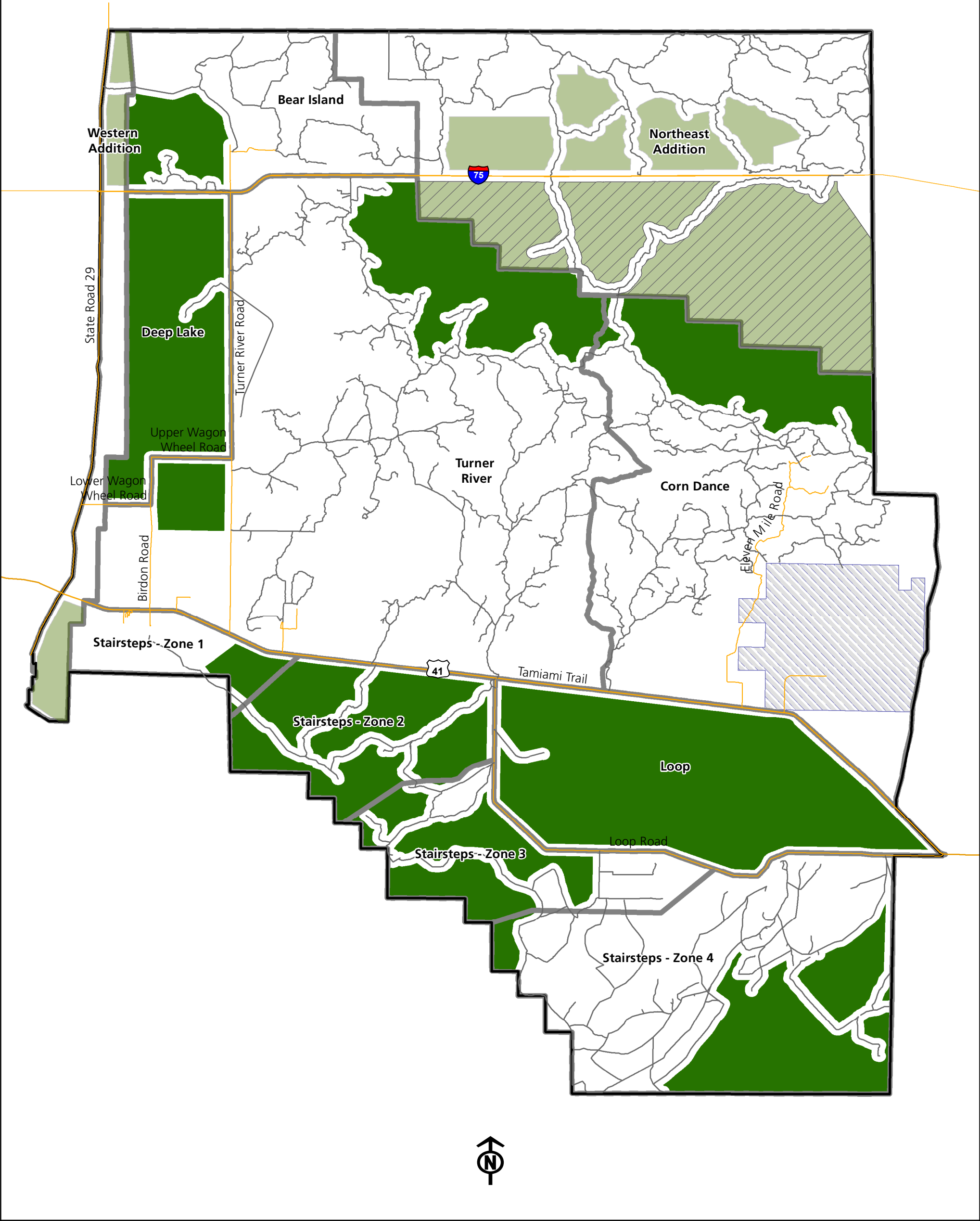
Once all wilderness-eligible lands have been identified, they will then be evaluated further to determine which areas ought to be proposed to Congress for designation as wilderness. Development of the wilderness proposal is the main work of the wilderness study. Before settling on a proposal, the National Park Service will first develop, using public input, a range of wilderness alternatives. Alternatives could range from no wilderness being proposed to all eligible areas being proposed. Alternatives could also include areas of “potential wilderness,” that is, areas that currently have non-conforming uses, but which could qualify for full wilderness designation as soon as those uses cease.

We are including the development of a wilderness study as part of the Backcountry Access Planning process we are currently conducting. The first opportunity for public input into the wilderness study comes during the “scoping” process, which is presently underway concurrent with the review of preliminary alternatives.

Following the scoping process for the wilderness study, the National Park Service will develop alternatives for the wilderness component of the plan. These alternatives will be presented to the public for review and comment along with the BAP/WS/EIS in the fall of 2016. Based on review of the comments received and other factors, the National Park Service will then develop a final wilderness proposal for the original Preserve.







Legend

- Trail
- Road
- Jetport
- Management Unit
- Preserve Boundary

Wilderness Categories

- Proposed
- Eligible (Original Preserve)
- Eligible (Addition)
- Ineligible (White Areas)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE  
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Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS Preliminary Alternatives Newsletter

NEXT STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning team will analyze your comments on the preliminary alternatives to determine necessary refinements and then evaluate the impacts of the alternatives before the preferred alternative is identified by the NPS Regional Director. This is the alternative that would best accomplish the purpose and need of the planning effort. The preferred alternative may be one of the alternatives or a combination of management strategies from the range of alternatives. Public comments on the specific management strategies within each alternative will help inform this decision.

After the identification of a preferred alternative, the range of alternatives will be presented in the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS for public review. Public comments on the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS will then be used for further refinements before it is finalized and approved.

The following table provides an updated planning schedule, including opportunities for public input.

PLANNING SCHEDULE

Milestone	Schedule	Public Input
Public scoping	April 2014	Thank you for your input! The public scoping report was released in August 2014 and is available at  <a href="http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicyscopingreport0814">http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicyscopingreport0814</a>
Analyze public comments and develop a range of preliminary alternatives	August 2014 – November 2015	
Public review of the range of preliminary alternatives	January 11, 2016 – March 11, 2016	Review the preliminary alternatives newsletter, attend the open house events on Wednesday 2/10 and Thursday 2/11 from 5 to 7 pm, and provide your comments at <a href="http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap">http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap</a>
Analyze public comments and prepare the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS	Spring/Summer 2016	
Public review of the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS and wilderness hearing	Fall 2016	Review the draft Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS, attend the open house and wilderness hearing, and provide your comments at <a href="http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap">http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap</a>
Prepare the final Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS	Spring 2017	Stay up-to-date on the planning process by visiting the website at: <a href="http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap">http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap</a>
Prepare the Record of Decision	August 2017	

Thank you for your interest in the Big Cypress National Preserve BAP/WS/EIS!