

Detailed Plan

Tomato Farms Restoration Project

Big Cypress
National Preserve



SUMMARY

In the late 1970s, 272 acres of cypress forests were cleared for agriculture, prior to the establishment of Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY). These farm fields were constructed with a system of perimeter dikes, perimeter ditches, and spreader swales. Vehicular access to the farms was by several unimproved roads or trails. The farm fields were abandoned prior to 1984 and have been fallow for several decades.

The proposed Tomato Farm Restoration Project will restore the native vegetation (predominantly cypress forest and marsh) and hydrology of approximately 272 acres of former agricultural lands by removing dikes, ditches, swales, invasive and nuisance plants and planting native trees.



April 1978



Photo Point Project by Tony Pernas

September 2020

Tomato Farm East

Tomato Farm Restoration Project

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PROJECT AREA

In total, the project will result in the removal and re-establishment to natural wetland grade of 18.25 miles of elevated berms and berm-adjacent ditches within a 272-acre area.

The earthwork necessary for bringing the berms and ditches back to natural grade will occur in an estimated 42 acres of the total 272-acre restoration area (i.e. the total area of the berms and ditches), or about 16 percent of the total area enclosed by the perimeter levees..

The project is spread across three subareas – Tomato Farm East, Tomato Farm Central and Tomato Farm West – located within 2 miles of each other along the north side of Bear Island Grade in Big Cypress National Preserve. The three subareas are as follows:



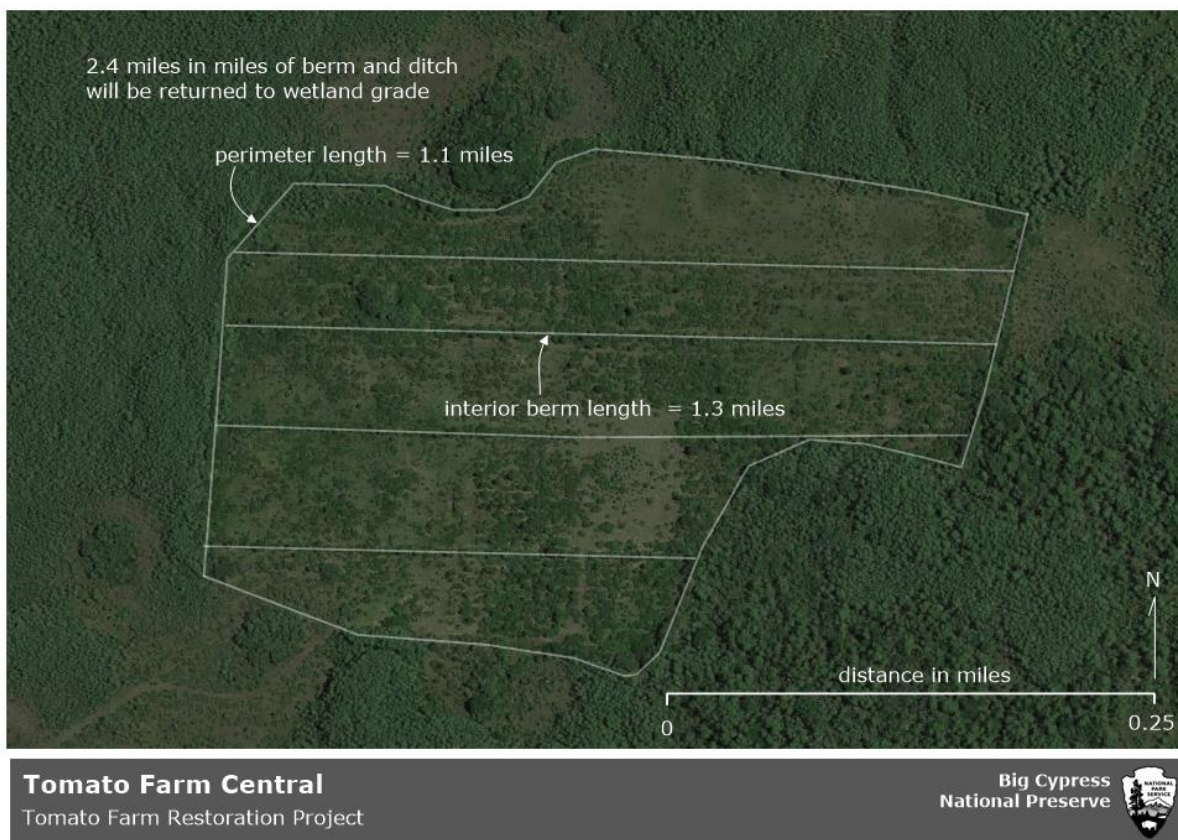
(1) Tomato Farm East

Tomato Farm East is surrounded by 2.8 miles of perimeter berm and contains 13.2 miles of interior berm for a total length of 16.0 miles. The perimeter berm contains a ditch (i.e. small canal) on its interior side. Interior berms have ditches on their southern side.



(2) Tomato Farm Central

Tomato Farm Central is surrounded by 1.1 miles of perimeter berm and contains 1.3 miles of interior berm for a total length of 2.4 miles. The perimeter berm contains a ditch (i.e. small canal) on its interior side. Interior berms have ditches on their southern side.



(3) Tomato Field West

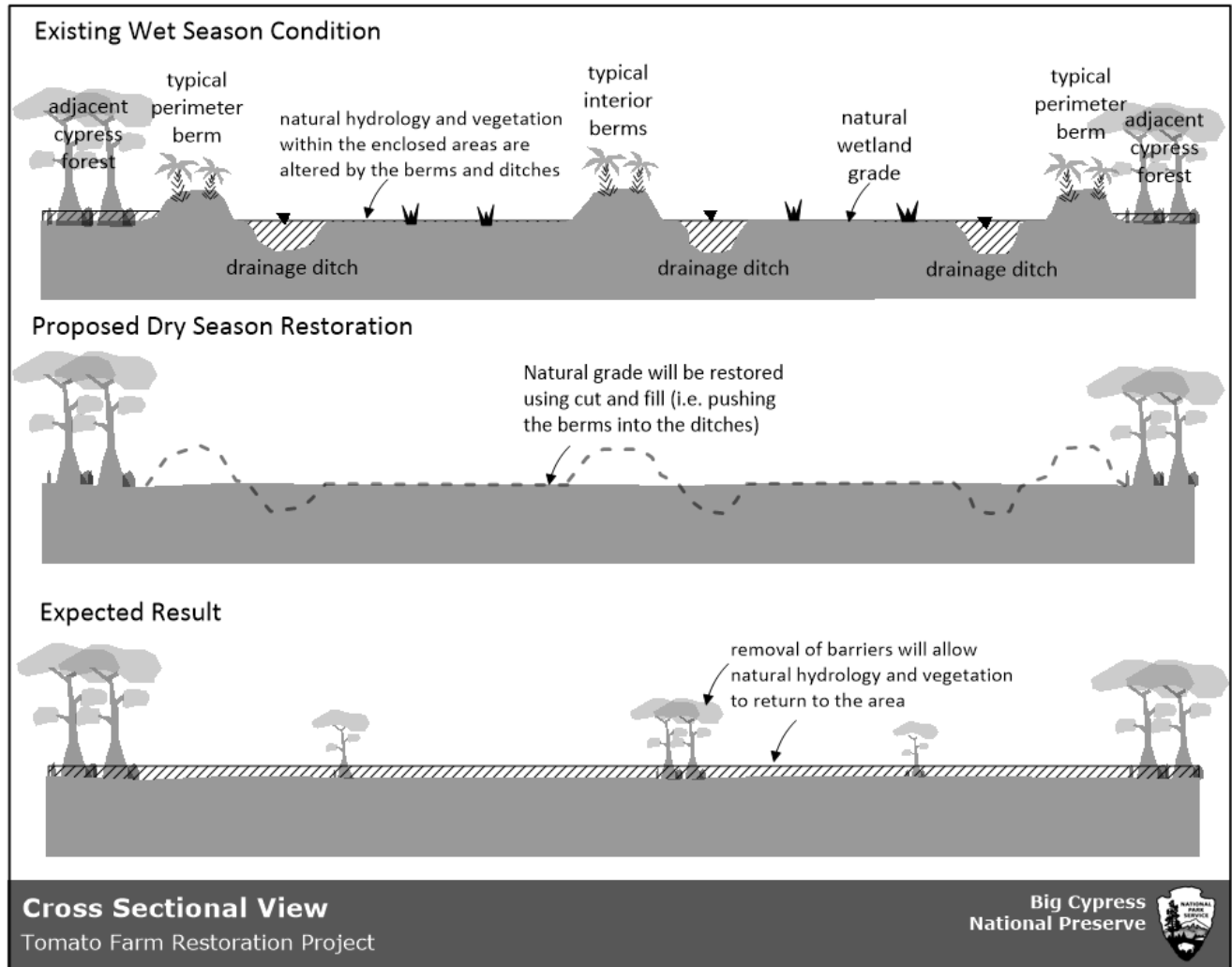
Tomato Farm West is surrounded by 2.7 miles of perimeter berm and does not contain any interior berm. The perimeter berm contains a ditch (i.e. small canal) on its interior side.



PROJECT METHODS

The method for removal will be cut and fill using excavators, and therefore will require no hauling of soil to or from the restoration area. All fill from the berms will be pushed into the adjacent ditches.

- Restoration activity would occur during the dry season.
- Degrading spoil banks will be accomplished using excavators or similar earthmoving equipment.
- Access to the restoration sites will be through designated access routes established by the NPS.
- Turbidity barriers will be used where appropriate to prevent offsite discharge of turbidity into any nearby open-water channels.



MONITORING AND INVASIVE PLANTS

A detailed monitoring plan has already been submitted. Monitoring will be focused on documenting the hydrologic and vegetative recovery, and ensuring it remains free of exotics. Invasive plants, non-native plants and nuisance vegetation (cattail etc.) will be treated after the completion of the hydrologic restoration.

Additionally, prescribed fire and mechanical clearing followed by selective herbicide applications will be used as a first step to offset and remove invasive species in this region of the Preserve in early 2021.

FLOODING ASSURANCE

The 272-acre restoration area is contained completely within and surrounded by NPS lands. The project can be expected to nominally improve drainage for upstream areas by opening up and allowing regional sheet flow within the 272-acre restoration area, and will have no affect on downstream lands.

MITIGATION ASSURANCE

The project is not being used as mitigation for any NPS proposed activities or actions, nor is it associated with another SFWMD or FDEP issued environmental resource permit (ERP). Rather, the 272-acre Tomato Farm Restoration Project fulfills the mitigation requirement for the Nobles Grade 3-D Seismic Survey conducted by Burnett Oil Company (BOCI). The mitigation requirement has already been vetted by applicable state (FDEP) and federal (NPS) review and permits.

ASSURANCE OF SPECIAL CONDITIONS

This detailed plan was submitted in response to a Request for Additional Information (RAI) by the SFWMD received by the Preserve on March 26, 2021. The Preserve requested permit approval for the project as a General Use Permit, application no. 210305-5528. Any and all special conditions noted in rule 62-330.631(3) will be recognized and applied during all project activities. SFWMD provided an Environmental Resource General Permit No 11-105129-P on May 7, 2021.