



REVISED PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES FOR MARINE WATERS



Dear Friends,

As you may know, the National Park Service is developing a general management plan (GMP) for Everglades National Park and an accompanying wilderness study that is required for the East Everglades Expansion Area, which was added to the park in 1989. On behalf of our planning team, I'm pleased to provide an update on this planning effort. In May 2007, we published a newsletter that presented preliminary alternatives for the future management of the park, including various wilderness options for the East Everglades. We held public workshops and solicited public input about the alternatives between May and July 2007. We received comments from many of you; your feedback and ideas are proof of your deep interest in and concern for Everglades National Park. Based on this input, park managers decided that the best way to move forward with the planning process was to revise the preliminary alternatives for the park's marine waters, because these areas were the focus of strong public interest and concern. Your input has been instrumental so far, and we certainly hope you will stay involved throughout the planning process — as we sincerely value your input.

This newsletter presents four revised preliminary management alternatives **for the marine waters** of Everglades National Park (the elements of the alternatives published in the May 2007 newsletter for all other areas of the park remain valid and will be used in upcoming GMP steps). The revised marine alternatives have been crafted considering the comments and ideas we received and updated scientific information concerning the park's marine waters. (Please see the sections of this newsletter titled "What We Heard From You" and "Recent Research Studies" for more on these topics.)

We have opened another public comment period through May 15, 2009 to gather more input, and we have enclosed a mail-back form for your comments. You may also comment online by going to the Everglades National Park homepage (www.nps.gov/ever) and clicking on the "General Management Plan" link. We will hold public meetings in March and April (see information on the back page) where you can learn more about the alternatives and provide comments. The public meetings are not the only way to talk face-to-face, however — planning team members are available to meet with interested groups and organizations to provide more information and answer questions about the management alternatives, the planning process, and related topics. Please contact Fred Herling, Park Planner, at 305-242-7704 or fred_herling@nps.gov for more information.

We will use your responses to the ideas presented in this newsletter to help analyze the alternatives and develop the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative may incorporate elements of the various preliminary alternatives, as well as new ideas. Comments received by May 15, 2009 will be most helpful for this next phase of the planning process — analyzing the impacts of the alternatives, developing a preferred alternative, and preparing the Draft General Management Plan and accompanying environmental impact statement.

We look forward to hearing your ideas and opinions and working with you on this important step of the general management planning effort. Thank you for your continued participation and interest in shaping the future of Everglades National Park.

Sincerely,

Dan B. Kimball
Superintendent, Everglades National Park

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WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

In May 2007, we published a newsletter that presented four preliminary general management plan alternatives for Everglades National Park (alternatives A-D). In June and July 2007, we hosted seven public meetings to gather your opinions and ideas about the preliminary alternatives. More than 1,100 people attended the public meetings, and more than 1,000 written comments from individuals and organizations were received. We also met with a number of stakeholder groups and agencies to discuss the general management plan and gather input on the alternatives.

At the public meetings and on newsletter comment forms, the planning team asked which alternative would (a) best meet your vision for the national park, (b) provide opportunities for your desired experiences, (c) best protect the park’s natural resources, and (d) best protect the park’s cultural resources. We also asked for ideas about managing the areas you are concerned about or most familiar with. Examples of common comments received for support of each alternative are outlined below.



ALTERNATIVE	REASONS COMMONLY GIVEN FOR SUPPORTING EACH ALTERNATIVE
Alternative A (received the most comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “motorboats should not be excluded from any part of the park”• “current management is fine”• “management by water depth is not enforceable”• “allows shallow water fishing”• “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”
Alternative B	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “enhances opportunities for nonmotorized experiences”• “preserves natural integrity of park’s wilderness”
Alternative C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “offers different experiences for different people”• “don’t need large boats in the park — causes too much environmental damage”
Alternative D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “better protects the wildness of the Everglades”• “better integrated with other conservation areas”• “preserves larger areas for wildlife habitat”

In addition to comments received on those four alternatives, a group of Florida Keys citizens knowledgeable about the park jointly submitted a proposal for another alternative that they labeled “alternative E.” It focused on education and compliance, resource protection, access, and visitor experience, and included a mandatory boater education program, protection for seagrass and nesting/fledging birds, pole/troll and no-wake zones in selected areas, and more and better-marked channels for boater navigation.

Several months later another group based in the Florida Keys, also very familiar with the park, put forth an alternative that was based on managing Florida Bay based on water depth (similar to alternative D) to protect critical resources. Their proposal also included strong education and enforcement components, a 90-horsepower restriction for boats in the park, and expanded backcountry areas for paddling and fishing.

In general, there were strong concerns expressed about the possibility of boating restrictions intended to protect some of the natural resource values and wilderness for which Everglades National Park was established. The planning team heard the following recurring themes on this topic:

- Boater education is key to protecting resources.
- Better-marked “preferred” boat channels would help prevent

bottom damage from propellers.

- Little scientific evidence was presented to support boating restrictions.
- Preliminary alternatives appear to be an attack on motorboaters.
- Park should preserve opportunities to fish the flats of Florida Bay and Ten Thousand Islands backcountry.
- There should be enhanced recreational opportunities to experience the park’s vast, unique wilderness resources.

Recently completed steps related to these concerns and to the general management plan are as follows:

- Scientific studies have been conducted to gather information about boat use in the park, and about the extent, pattern, and trends of seagrass damage caused by motorboat propellers.
- Revised preliminary alternatives for marine areas of Everglades National Park have been developed based on the results of these studies, other knowledge available about the park, and public comments received to date. (Comments received from the public about the 2007 preliminary alternatives have been noted and will be further analyzed during the next steps in the planning process; see the “What’s Next?” section on page 14.)

RECENT RESEARCH STUDIES

PATTERNS OF PROPELLER SCARRING OF SEAGRASS IN FLORIDA BAY

Everglades National Park encompasses over 500,000 acres of marine environments. All of its marine waters were federally designated as submerged marine wilderness in 1978 (Public Law 95-625) and are part of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness. Florida Bay supports seagrass beds that provide important habitat for many species of fish and other marine animals. Florida Bay is heavily used by recreational boaters for, among other things, access to productive fishing areas. The bay is a complex system of mud banks, flats, and shallow basins, so boaters can easily damage the bay’s sensitive bottom resources. Boat propellers can churn up sediment and bury or scar seagrass. Damage to the park’s vast seagrass beds from motorboat propellers has been a problem for decades, but the extent and severity of the problem had not been well understood or described. During this planning process, the need to better understand seagrass scarring patterns and trends was identified.

To learn more about the problem of seagrass scarring by motorboat propellers and potential ways to address the problem, the park conducted a seagrass scarring mapping project. This study, using 2004 digital imagery that covered all of Florida Bay, found that Florida Bay seagrass scarring

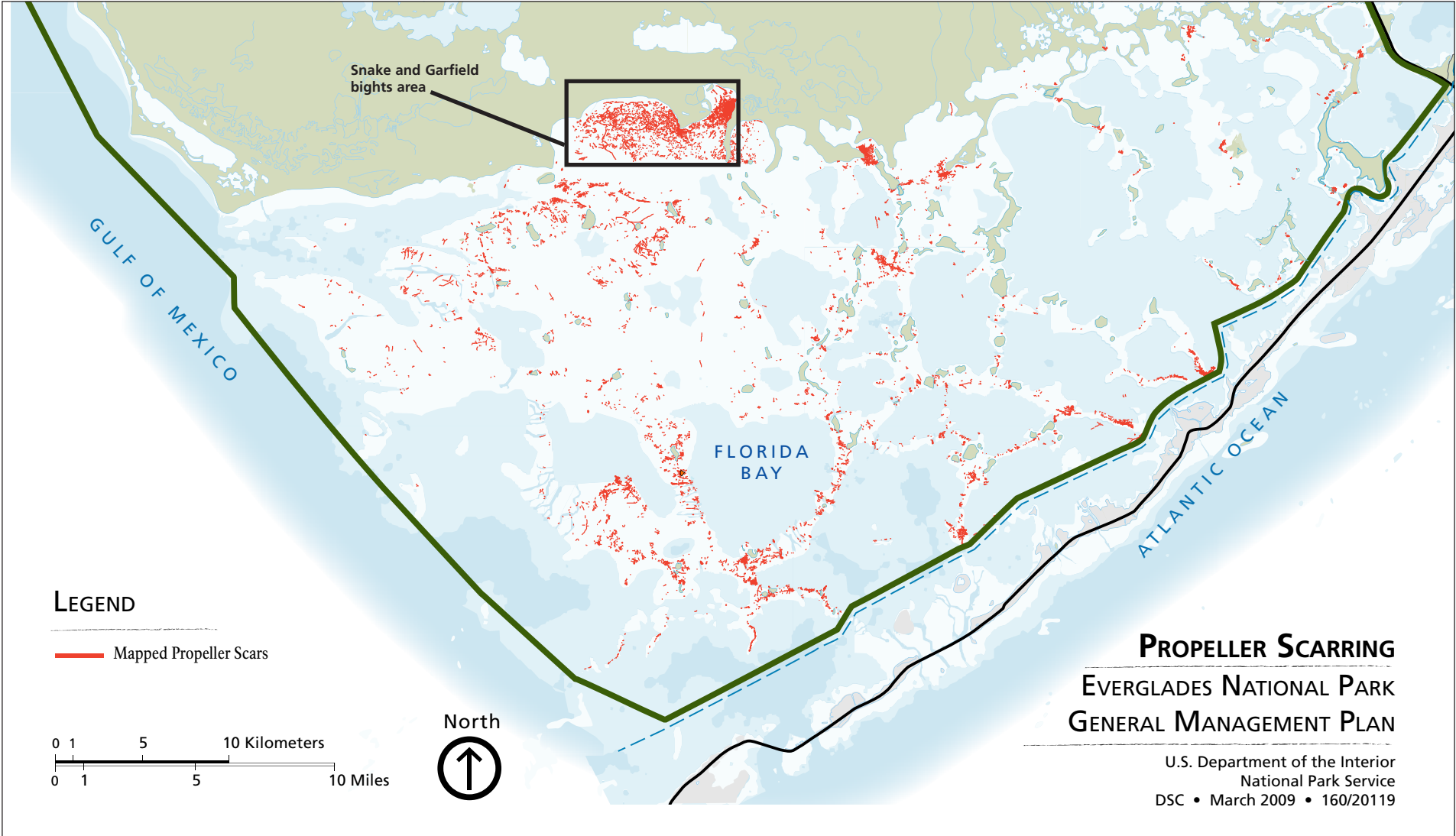
is widespread, with dense scarring found in shallow depths, near all navigational channels, and around areas most heavily used by recreational boats. Dense scarring is more common near marked and unmarked channels and shorelines. Substantially more scarring was identified in the study than in a previous statewide study conducted in 1995, and scarring may be increasing at specific Florida Bay sites. If higher resolution imagery had been available for all of Florida Bay, instead of for just Snake and Garfield bights, more scarring probably would have been documented.

Because the seagrass scarring problem is not improving and may be worsening over time, the study suggests that new management strategies are



RECENT RESEARCH STUDIES (CONTINUED)

needed to protect seagrass beds as part of an overall ecosystem management approach in Florida Bay. Potential management strategies to minimize damage caused by propeller scarring could include a mandatory education program, improved navigation aids, pole/troll zones, idle and speed zones, limits on motorized access by watercraft characteristics, and area-specific seasonal access limits or closures in highly impacted locations. The complete peer-reviewed study, titled, “Patterns of Propeller Scarring of Seagrass in Florida Bay: Associations with Visitor Use Factors and Implications for Natural Resource Management” and a study fact sheet are available via links from the park's home page at www.nps.gov/ever. (Click on the "General Management Plan" and "GMP Documents" links.)



Propeller scarring in Florida Bay, Everglades National Park using best available data sources (2004 digital imagery for all of Florida Bay, plus higher resolution 2006 imagery for Snake and Garfield bights only).

AERIAL SURVEY OF BOATER USE IN EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK MARINE WATERS — FLORIDA BAY AND TEN THOUSAND ISLANDS

A second recently completed research effort related to the general management plan is a study of boat use in Everglades National Park’s marine waters. In 2006 and 2007, an aerial census of vessels in the park’s marine waters, along with a concurrent census of boat trailers at major public boat ramps, was conducted in and around the park. From this information, reliable statistical models for predicting total boater use were developed. The study results allow us to understand current levels and patterns of boating activity in the park, how use has changed during the past 30 years, and most importantly how to accurately estimate boat use in the future from boat trailer counts.

The study found that flats boats accounted for the majority of vessels in park waters (Florida Bay and the Gulf Coast). When flats boats were combined with other small (23 feet and shorter) motorboats, they accounted for 80% to 90% of boats in the park on any given day. Outside park waters, small recreational motorboats were the dominant vessel type, followed by sailboats, flats boats, and commercial fishing vessels. The main vessel types engaged in fishing — both inside and outside park waters of Florida Bay — were flats boats and small recreational motorboats, with commercial fishing vessels accounting for a substantial component of the fishing fleet outside the park on weekdays.

Based on data gathered and statistical models developed in the study, it was determined that recreational boat use in Everglades National Park has increased approximately 200% to 250% during the past 30 years. The complete boat use study, titled “Aerial Survey of Boater Use in Everglades

National Park Marine Waters — Florida Bay and Ten Thousand Islands,” and a study fact sheet are available through links on the park's home page at www.nps.gov/ever. (Click on the "General Management Plan" and "GMP Documents" links.)

Combining boating use information with known vessel groundings and seagrass propeller scarring data helps park staff and the public understand the sources and trends of these problems. It also provides a foundation for managing visitor use in ways that preserve the park’s natural and wilderness values and enhance recreational opportunities for current and future generations.



REVISED MANAGEMENT ZONES FOR MARINE AREAS

Management zoning is the tool used by the National Park Service to map and articulate the appropriate variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved and maintained in different areas of a park. Draft management zones for marine areas of Everglades National Park are described briefly below. In all management zones, visitors would be required to comply with applicable park rules and regulations.

To explore the relative advantages of managing marine areas in different ways, four revised preliminary alternatives have been developed (alternatives 1-4) and are presented on pages 5-13. The four alternatives apply these management zones to Everglades National Park’s marine areas in different ways based on each alternative’s overall “vision” or concept for meeting the park’s mission.

MANAGEMENT ZONES

	Boat Zone (Water) darker = deeper	Access (Water)		Idle Speed-No Wake Zone (Water)	Pole/Troll Zone (Water)	Backcountry Zone (Water or Land, Nonmotorized)	Research Natural Area (Water)	Wildlife Habitat Protection Zone (Land)
Overview	This zone provides access to various types of watercraft, including motorboats traveling on-plane.			This marked zone enhances safety, provides more solitude for boaters and paddlers, and protects areas of natural resource concern by requiring that motorboats travel without leaving a wake.	This marked zone protects marine areas where there are natural resource concerns (e.g., seagrass scarring, disturbance of nesting wading birds), while allowing watercraft propelled by paddles, poles, or trolling motors.	This marked zone provides opportunities for safe, tranquil, wilderness experiences (nonmotorized) on land or water.	These are areas of outstanding resource value that are managed to protect the physical structure of habitats and ecological processes, and to serve as ecological benchmarks for research.	This zone is managed to protect sensitive wildlife areas (such as wading bird nesting and fledging areas) from disturbance.
Desired Resource Condition	Aquatic and benthic resources are maintained in a near-natural condition, supporting healthy interaction among human, plant, and wildlife communities.			Aquatic and benthic resources are maintained in a near-natural condition, supporting healthy interaction among human, plant, and wildlife communities.	Aquatic and benthic resources are maintained in a near-natural condition, supporting healthy interaction among human, plant, and wildlife communities.	Aquatic and benthic resources are maintained in a near-natural condition, supporting healthy interaction among human, plant, and wildlife communities.	Aquatic and benthic resources are maintained in a near-pristine, intact condition for the purpose of maintaining a baseline to measure long-term ecological changes.	Key sensitive wildlife areas are protected and preserved, allowing wildlife to thrive and reproduce.
Visitor Opportunities	Motorboating, paddling, fishing, nature/wildlife viewing, camping at designated sites, and guided tours.			Motorboating, paddling, fishing, nature/wildlife viewing, camping at designated sites, and guided tours.	Boating (with propulsion by paddles, trolling motors, or poles), fishing, nature/wildlife viewing, camping at designated sites, and guided tours. Combustion engines must be trimmed up and not in use within this zone.	Hiking, paddling, fishing, nature/wildlife viewing, camping at designated sites, and guided tours. To preserve the wilderness setting, motorboats are not permitted except in emergency situations, such as storms.	Not open to public access, with the possible exception of guided tours.	Not open to public access, including beaching of boats or foot traffic.
Appropriate Facilities	Navigational aids, signs, research facilities, docks, designated campsites and chickees (backcountry platforms).			Navigational aids, signs, research facilities, docks, designated campsites and chickees.	Navigational aids, signs, research facilities, docks, designated campsites and chickees.	Navigational aids, signs, research facilities, docks, designated campsites and chickees, and maintained trails.	Navigational aids, signs, research plot markers, and minor research apparatus.	Signs, research plot markers and minor research apparatus.
Management Activities	As necessary, restoration activities are conducted to restore degraded or damaged areas. Relatively high level of management and visitor education are needed to ensure resource protection and safety, and ensure a range of desirable visitor experiences.			As necessary, restoration activities are conducted to restore degraded or damaged areas. Relatively high level of management and visitor education are needed to ensure resource protection and safety, and ensure a range of desirable visitor experiences.	As necessary, restoration activities are conducted to restore degraded or damaged areas. Relatively high level of management and visitor education are needed to ensure resource protection and safety, and ensure a range of desirable visitor experiences.	As necessary, restoration activities are conducted to restore degraded or damaged areas. Relatively low level of management and visitor education are needed to ensure resource protection and safety, and ensure a range of desirable visitor experiences.	With park permission, research activities such as conducting baseline inventories and resource condition assessments are permitted. Scientific research activities would be non-manipulative.	As necessary, restoration activities are conducted to restore degraded or damaged areas.

ROUTES AND DESIGNATIONS SHOWN ON THE ALTERNATIVE MAPS

In addition to the management zones described on page 4, several routes and designations (described below) are included in the alternatives on pages 6-13.

“MARKED CHANNELS”

The marked channels designation, included only in alternative 1 (no-action or continue current management), shows the location of existing or previously marked channels where motorboat travel is currently preferred by the National Park Service in order to minimize damage to shallow Florida Bay bottom areas.

“PRIMARY MARKED CHANNELS” AND “PRIMARY ROUTES (UNMARKED)”

The primary marked channel designation, included in alternatives 2, 3, and 4, shows the location of proposed marked channels that motorboats would be encouraged to use to avoid damaging shallow bottom resources. Primary routes (unmarked) would be recommended routes for motorboat travel that would be shown on marine navigation charts, GPS systems, and other navigation tools.

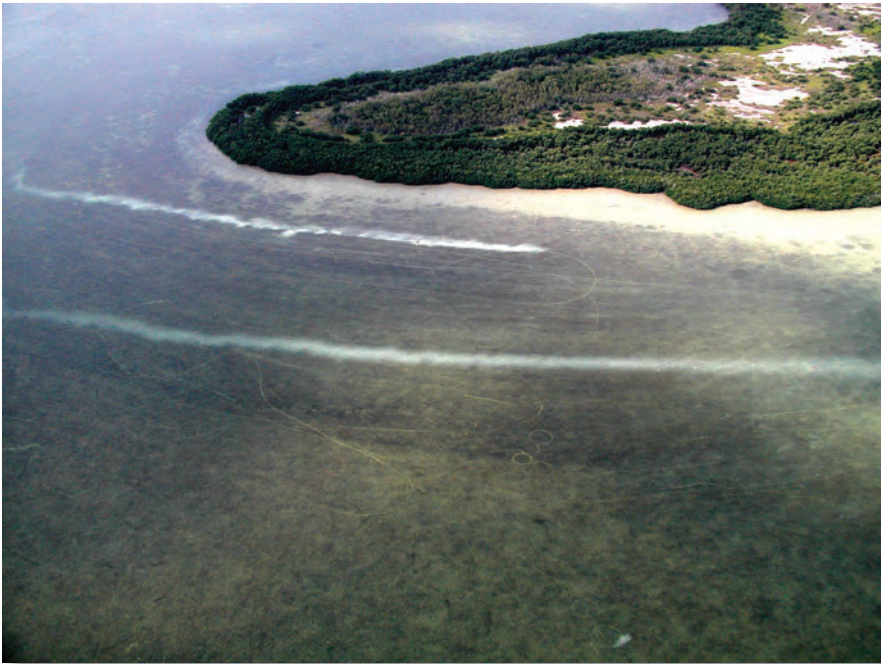


“SHALLOW DRAFT MARKED CHANNELS” AND “SHALLOW DRAFT ROUTES (UNMARKED)”

The shallow draft marked channel designation, included in alternatives 2, 3, and 4, shows the location of proposed marked channels that could be used by motorboats with a shallow draft (1 foot, or less). In alternatives 2 and 3, deeper draft vessels would be strongly discouraged from using these channels due to the risk of Florida Bay bottom damage and/or running aground. In alternative 4, only shallow draft vessels would be permitted to use these channels; deeper draft vessels would be prohibited from using these channels. Shallow draft routes (unmarked) would be shown on marine navigation charts, GPS systems, and other navigation tools used by boaters with shallow draft vessels.

CROCODILE SANCTUARY

The Crocodile Sanctuary, included only in alternative 1 (no-action or continue current management), is an existing designation that was established in 1980 as a temporary measure to protect important crocodile breeding habitat in Everglades National Park. The Crocodile Sanctuary is in the northeast portion of Florida Bay and is comprised of Little Madeira Bay, Joe Bay, and adjacent inland water areas. The Crocodile Sanctuary is currently not open to public access, but scientific research has been permitted in the area.



REVISED PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES FOR MARINE AREAS

The revised preliminary alternatives for marine areas of Everglades National Park presented on the following pages are new and are based on public input and new information gathered since the last round of public meetings. They are labeled as alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4 and are different from the alternatives that appeared in previous newsletters. Each is intended to meet a variety of desired conditions for the national park’s marine areas. These desired conditions can be broadly summarized as follows:

- protect aquatic and benthic habitats
- protect wildlife habitat
- protect wilderness conditions
- protect natural resource conditions
- provide quality visitor experiences, including wilderness experiences

