



Finding of No Significant Impact

Gulf Coast Site Plan and Maintenance Dredging

Everglades National Park

July 2023

Recommended:

Pedro Ramos, Superintendent
Everglades National Park

8/1/2023

Date

Approved:

Mark A. Foust, Regional Director
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Date

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INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service (NPS) prepared the Gulf Coast Site Plan and Maintenance Dredging Environmental Assessment (EA) which evaluated improvements to the Gulf Coast facilities and infrastructure and dredging the marina basin and boat channels to address damages to the site from Hurricane Irma in 2017 within Everglades National Park (Everglades NP or “the park”). Additionally, this EA tiers off the selected alternative from the 2015 Final General Management Plan/East Everglades Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS). The GMP/EIS identified desired resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved over a 20- to 30-year planning period, and specifically identified constructing a modest-sized visitor center to replace the existing facilities while reclaiming and rehabilitating other areas of the site, such as improving parking and constructing a new canoe/kayak launch. Also, the GMP/EIS directed that nonessential on-site park maintenance functions will be relocated off-site in order to minimize the administrative and maintenance footprint and improve visitor experience by removing visual clutter and noise associated with park maintenance functions. NPS has determined that the environmental conditions and impacts described in the GMP/EIS are still valid.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is the decision document for the Gulf Coast Site Plan and Maintenance Dredging EA dated January 2023. The EA and FONSI were prepared in accordance with the NEPA, as amended [42 United States Code (USC) 4332(2)(C)]; the 2020 implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality [40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508]; the Department of the Interior NEPA regulations (43 CFR Part 46); and NPS Director’s Order (DO) 12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis and Decision-Making (DO-12) and the accompanying 2015 NPS NEPA Handbook. Attached to this document is the NPS determination that the Selected Alternative will support the desired conditions, visitor use and experience and park operations at the Gulf Coast site and will result in no impairment to park resources (**Appendix A**). The NPS will implement the Selected Alternative, Alternative B, as presented in the EA and summarized below.

The statements and conclusions reached in this FONSI are based on documentation and analysis provided in the EA and associated decision file. To the extent necessary, relevant sections of the EA are incorporated by reference below.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the Gulf Coast Site Plan and maintenance dredging is to address damages to the infrastructure and marina at the Gulf Coast site that resulted from Hurricane Irma. The Site Plan is anticipated to make the Gulf Coast site more resilient to flooding impacts from storms and King Tide events. The need is to restore visitor use and experience and park operations to conditions prior to Hurricane Irma and to prevent further damage to the site. Without the proposed improvements, visitor services will continue to degrade with limited access to land and water-based activities, park vessel operations would continue off-site and concession operations would remain congested in the marina (see EA, Chapter 1, page 8).

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Based on the analysis presented in the EA, the NPS selected Alternative B for implementation. The selected alternative was defined in the EA as the NPS preferred alternative and is described below, and a full description can be found in Chapter 2, page 14 - 21 of the EA. The selected alternative will restore visitor use and park operations, enhance resiliency at the Gulf Coast site and includes improvements identified during the GMP/EIS.

Under Alternative B, the entire Gulf Coast site will be redeveloped. A new visitor center, sidewalks, plazas with green space and gathering areas will be built. The visitor center will be designed and constructed to withstand 175 mile per hour (mph) winds and a 15-foot storm surge. A new building will be constructed near the canoe/kayak launch for remote concessions and NPS storage. The new visitor center and surrounding plazas, gathering areas, concessions building, and main parking lot will be raised 2.3 to 5.4 feet North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD) above current grade to mitigate tidal impacts, storm events and seasonal flooding. The elevation of the site will be supported through a new retaining wall seaward of the site. Where new bulkheads are not replaced, a living shoreline will be constructed in the southeastern area of the site consisting of red and black mangroves.

A parking lot with delineated parking spaces will be installed at the current, existing grassy overflow parking area for the canoe/kayakers to park vehicles; this parking lot will be surfaced with gravel to help minimize flooding. A new entrance road to the visitor center will be constructed to improve traffic and pedestrian flow. The existing paved parking, roads, sidewalks, and waterfront areas will be elevated to 2.3 feet NAVD. Hardscape elements such as seat boulders, stone benches, shade structures, picnic tables, bicycle racks, an outdoor shower near the canoe/kayak and other elements will be installed. Native landscaping and rain gardens will be planted throughout the site. New drainage consisting of a series of shallow, dry retention ponds will be installed adjacent to the parking lots and access driveways. All of the utilities on site will be replaced and brought up to code.

A new administrative boat ramp and canoe/kayak launch will be re-constructed to improve site flow with the parking areas and bulkheads and enhance visitor access to the water. The marina basin and entrance will be expanded to provide better maneuverability of vessels, and new bulkheads will be constructed and raised by 5.4 feet NAVD. The marina boat basin and boat channels will be dredged to -7.7 feet NAVD to support the combined administrative boat ramp and canoe/kayak launch. Continued maintenance dredging would be scheduled every 6-10 years, as needed, to ensure the safe navigation of vessels.

The dock facilities in the marina will be replaced and improved with new aluminum boat lifts. Cleats and fender piles will be installed. The existing fuel facility will be removed and relocated northeast of the overflow parking area to minimize flooding hazards, and a new dispensing station will be installed at the marina.

The other alternative considered was Alternative A, No Action Alternative (see the EA, Chapter 2 for a description of the no action alternative).

RATIONALE FOR DECISION

The NPS selected Alternative B for implementation because it meets the purpose and need of the project, which is to restore visitor use and experience and park operations at the Gulf Coast Visitor Center, and meets the objectives established in the GMP/EIS. This decision has been made after considering environmental impacts to resources including vegetation, wetlands and soils; wildlife and species of special concern; essential fish habitat; socioeconomics and visitor use and experience.

Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, does not adequately address the park's need to restore visitor experience and park operations at the Gulf Coast site. In addition, resiliency improvements will not be provided, and the site will continue to flood during storms and King Tide events. The marina basin and boat channels will not be dredged to previously excavated depths, and Congress' direction to construct and designate the "Marjory Stoneman Douglas Visitor Center" will not be achieved.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The NPS places a strong emphasis on avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating potentially adverse environmental impacts (see EA, Chapter 2, page 19). Therefore, the NPS will implement multiple mitigation measures and best management practices (BMPs) to protect the natural and cultural resources that the project could affect. The Preferred Alternative incorporates several monitoring and mitigation measures and BMPs to avoid or minimize impacts to vegetation and wetlands; wildlife and species of special concern; water quality and quantity, as well as visitor use and experience and potential cultural resources. These measures and practices were described in Chapter 2 of the EA. Unless otherwise specified below, the authority for these mitigations comes from the NPS Organic Act and NPS Management Policies. The following mitigation measures and BMPs will be included for the selected alternative.

General Resource Management

- All resource protection measures will be clearly stated in the construction specifications, and workers will be instructed to avoid conducting activities outside the project area. Areas of concern are clearly indicated on construction drawings.
- A preconstruction meeting will be held to inform contractors about sensitive areas and resources and provide procedures for identifying and addressing any unanticipated discoveries.
- Staging and storage areas for construction vehicles, equipment, materials, and soils will be sited in previously disturbed or paved areas approved by the park. These areas will be outside high visitor use areas and clearly identified in advance of construction, when feasible.
- The dredge material will be spread across a 0.67-acre low area on the lawn east of where the visitor center was located. The material will be spread in this area until there is no more room and coordination with the NPS will be conducted to identify other sites to place the dredge material.
- No utilities nor ground disturbing activities will cross or impact the previous city landfill cap.
- Dark sky-friendly lighting specifications will be implemented. Turning lights off outside of visitor center hours will help minimize effects to night skies. Manual override switches will be installed to turn off and on all exterior lighting when necessary.

- Construction will only occur during daylight hours to reduce light pollution and to avoid night-time noise disruption.
- Standard noise abatement measures will be followed during construction when feasible and include a schedule that minimizes impacts on adjacent noise-sensitive resources, the use of best available noise control techniques, and the use of hydraulically or electrically powered tools.

Cultural Resources

- In accordance with the 2008 National Park Service Programmatic Agreement Section VI, if cultural resources are discovered during project implementation all work in that area must stop and the Superintendent, Cultural Resources Program Manager, or Park Archeologist must be notified immediately.
- If items protected by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) are discovered during project implementation, all activity must cease in the area of discovery and immediate notice made to the Superintendent and Cultural Resources Program Manager. The Superintendent or Cultural Resources Program Manager will notify the appropriate federally recognized Indian Tribes/Organizations and State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

Vegetation and Wetlands

- To avoid or minimize the introduction or spread of non-native, invasive plant and animal species, disturbed areas will be allowed to recover naturally. If necessary, and in coordination with the park Botanist, any fill, mulch, reseeding, and sod material brought into the park must be free of non-native, invasive plants and animals, and noxious weeds.
- Special attention will be devoted to preventing the spread of invasive nonnative plants. Standard measures will include the following elements: ensure that construction related equipment arrives on site free of mud or seed-bearing material; certify all seeds and straw material as weed-free; identify areas of invasive nonnative plants before construction; treat nonnative plants or infested topsoil before construction (i.e., topsoil segregation, storage, herbicide treatment); and revegetate with appropriate native species.
- All construction base, fill, and finish materials sourced from outside of the park will be acquired from a certified seed and weed free source.
- To ensure newly planted trees, shrubs, and groundcover get established, watering and maintenance will begin immediately after planting and continue through the following twelve months. New plantings will be hand watered through the establishment period per agreed upon watering guidelines with the park.

Species of Special Concern and Wildlife

- Implement the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) *Standard Protection Measures for the Eastern Indigo Snake* during project construction.
- Implement the USFWS *Standard Manatee Conditions for In-Water Work* during project construction.

- Observers for manatees will be present at the site during construction for Important Manatee Areas as described in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Manatee Key (2013).
- Implement the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries) *Sea Turtle and Smalltooth Sawfish Construction Conditions* during project construction.
- Conduct a Limited Roost Survey for the Florida bonneted bat and tricolored bat in the project area prior to construction to include a thorough inspection of the administrative buildings that will be impacted by the proposed consolidation of those facilities. Document survey results and provide report to USFWS. If the Florida bonneted bat or tricolored bat is found to be roosting in structures identified for demolition, work will stop and consultation with USFWS will be reinitiated to determine next steps.
- If evidence of eastern indigo snakes, Florida bonneted bats, tricolored bats, American crocodiles, West Indian manatees, piping plover, red knot, eastern black rail or other listed species are present or observed at a proposed work location during construction, work will be postponed until individuals leave the area. Park Biologists and appropriate representatives from the Biological Resources Branch will be notified immediately of the time and location of the sighting(s) to determine if further mitigations are necessary.
- All work will only be conducted during daylight hours to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

Water Quality and Quantity

- An Erosion and Sediment Control and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be developed to comply with the current FDEP National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements and a FDEP NPDES Construction General Permit coverage will be obtained. The SWPPP will be developed to address all stormwater management Best Management Practices (BMPs).
- During waterside construction and dredging activities, turbidity levels will be monitored to ensure that applicable water quality standards are maintained and construction methods are in accordance with applicable regulatory permits and BMPs.
- Appropriate measures will be employed to prevent or control spills of fuels, lubricants, or other contaminants from entering waterways or wetlands. Actions will be consistent with state water quality standards and Clean Water Act, Section 401 certification requirements.
- The developed area (especially the parking lot) will use techniques such as backsloping to allow percolation and filtration of runoff through the soils to avoid potential pollution of bay waters by stormwater runoff contaminated by oil and other petroleum products.
- Implement pre-and post-construction erosion control BMPs for drainage, erosion and sediment control to prevent or reduce runoff from entering the water column.
- Inspect and maintain erosion and sediment control BMPs on a regular basis and after each measurable rainfall to ensure they are functioning properly.
- Adhere to all BMPs resulting from required regulatory permits.

Visitor Use and Experience

- Visitors will be informed in advance of construction activities through information posted at the park website, social media, and visitor centers.

- Construction activities will be limited during peak visitor-use periods to the extent possible.
- Temporary short-term full closure (about six months) of specific areas may be necessary on limited occasions. Such full closures will be required to complete the work activity. To the extent possible, partial and/or limited closures of visitor access will be used.
- Construction fencing and closure signage will be placed around construction areas, as needed, to discourage visitors from entering active construction areas.
- Visitor safety concerns will be integrated into park educational programs. Directional signs will orient visitors, and education programs will continue to promote understanding among visitors.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the selected alternative, Chapter 2 of the EA analyzes a no action alternative (Alternative A). Under the No Action Alternative, the NPS would maintain the existing conditions at the Gulf Coast site. The temporary facilities (trailers) would not be replaced with temporary or permanent structures. The canoe/kayak launch would not be improved and would continue to operate at sub-optimal standards for visitors. Park operations would continue to use a private boat ramp located off the Gulf Coast property. The site would continue to flood during rainfall, storm events and King Tides.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY CONSULTATION

Public Involvement

In May 2022, the park announced the release of the EA to provide the public an opportunity to learn about the Gulf Coast Site Plan and Maintenance Dredging and provide comments and input. The park posted a notice on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website and emails and letters were sent to federal, state, local and tribal governments. The park invited the public to provide questions or suggestions on the project. Correspondence was received from the Florida State Clearinghouse and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. No public meetings were held for this project.

On January 24, 2023, the park made the EA available for public review for a public comment period, ending on February 26, 2023. The park posted the EA on the PEPC website for review and comment and notified the park mailing list via email. The NPS had hardcopies of the EA available at Everglades National Park headquarters. During the public comment period, 17 correspondences were received. The majority of the correspondence were from unaffiliated individuals, 12 of whom were from Florida. In general, commenters expressed support for the project. Comments included suggestions to include additional elements and improvements, such as public access to the boat ramp for motorized vessels, water bottle refill stations, electrical vehicle charging stations and other eco-friendly improvements. Other comments received were regarding concerns with impacts to cultural and natural resources, use of resilient materials and impacts to visitor use and experience and socioeconomics from construction operations. The comments received during the public comment period did not result in changes to the EA.

Agency Consultation

In consultation with Florida SHPO under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Florida SHPO sent a letter of concurrence on December 2, 2022 that no historic properties listed, or eligible for

listing, on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) will be adversely affected by the selected alternative. The NPS submitted an assessment of effect to evaluate the Gulf Coast site for properties eligible for the NRHP on December 19, 2022. No historic properties were identified, and the assessment of effect was approved by the Superintendent of Everglades NP on January 4, 2023.

Consultation with the Seminole Tribe of Florida Tribal Historic Preservation Office (STOF THPO), Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma has been ongoing throughout the project. Continued consultation with the STOF THPO occurred at NPS' quarterly meetings, and no concerns or questions were raised.

In early consultation with the USFWS under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the park submitted a Biological Assessment (BA) that determined the selected alternative will have no effect on the Eastern black rail or Garber's spurge and may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the American crocodile, Eastern indigo snake, piping plover, red knot, Florida bonneted bat, tricolored bat, West Indian manatee and West Indian manatee critical habitat. The USFWS concurred on January 24, 2023 with the park's effect determinations for threatened and endangered species impacts under the selected alternative.

Consultation with NOAA Fisheries is ongoing under Section 7 of the ESA and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA). This consultation is occurring through the USACE's Jacksonville District's Programmatic Biological Opinion permitting process for the selected alternative.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

As discussed and analyzed in detail in the EA, the selected alternative has the potential for impacts to vegetation, wetlands and soils; wildlife and species of special concern; essential fish habitat; socioeconomics and visitor use and experience. There is no potential for significant impacts to any of these resources that will require an analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement. The NPS used factors as defined in 40 CFR 1501.3(b) to evaluate whether the selected alternative will have a significant impact on the environment.

The EA analysis identified adverse impacts that range in intensity and duration. BMPs were developed to minimize adverse impacts. Many adverse impacts are construction related and will be temporary and short-term. Several special-status species have the potential to be affected during construction, including the American crocodile, Eastern indigo snake, piping plover, red knot, Florida bonneted bat, tricolored bat and West Indian manatee. The selected alternative may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect any of the above species. Adverse impacts on wildlife and species of special concern and essential fish habitat will be short-term as a result of noise and disturbance to habitat during construction activities. Due to the short-term, temporary nature of the impacts and availability of suitable habitat nearby, these impacts to resources will not be significant.

Adverse impacts to socioeconomics and visitor use and experience will be short-term during construction activities as a result of closures, noise, disruptions to traffic and pedestrian and vehicle circulation from construction-related activities. Since the construction activities are temporary and short term, and

conditions will be improved once construction is complete, impacts to socioeconomics and visitor use and experience will not be significant.

Some impacts of the selected alternative will be longer term, including long-term impacts to wetlands as a result of the permanent impacts to 0.56 acres of coastal wetlands (mangrove habitat and an isolated mixed habitat of hardwoods) for the construction of the visitor center and associated bulkhead improvements. The NPS will mitigate for all wetland impacts through mitigation credits purchased from a mitigation bank, such as the Little Pine Island Mitigation Bank; therefore, there will be no net loss of wetlands associated with the selected alternative. Additionally, the wetlands being impacted as a result of the selected alternative are low-functioning. The mangroves are mostly above the Mean High-Water Line (MHWL) and considered to have minimal wetland function and value. The isolated mixed hardwoods also have limited functionality. The selected alternative will create natural habitat from the construction of a living shoreline that will improve vegetation on site and resiliency of the site. Overall, the impacts to wetlands will not be significant given the quantity of high-quality wetland habitat present nearby. Short- and long-term adverse impacts identified in the EA for all impact topics analyzed are not significant in either context or intensity with impacts being in local geographic context as defined in 40 CFR 1501.3(b).

CONCLUSION

As described above, the selected alternative does not constitute an action meeting the criteria that normally requires preparation of an EIS. The selected alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of NEPA and CEQ's implementing NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1500 et seq. Therefore, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and, thus, will not be prepared.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: NON-IMPAIRMENT DETERMINATION

INTRODUCTION

This non-impairment determination has been prepared for the selected alternative, as described in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Gulf Coast Site Plan and Maintenance Dredging Environmental Assessment (EA).

In order to manage and preserve national park lands, Congress passed the National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act in 1916. The Organic Act established the NPS as an agency under the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior with the stated purpose of promoting use of national park lands while protecting them from impairment. Sections 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 of the 2006 NPS *Management Policies* provide an explanation of impairment as “an impact, that in the professional judgement of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources and values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources and values.” As stated in Section 1.4.5, an impact to any park resource or value may, but does not necessarily, constitute an impairment. An impact would be more likely to constitute an impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is:

- necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park; or
- key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or
- identified in the park’s general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance.

Section 1.4.6 of the 2006 NPS *Management Policies* identifies the park resources and values that are subject to the no-impairment standard:

- the park’s scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife, and the processes and condition that sustain them, including, to the extent present in the park: the ecological, biological, and physical processes that created the park and continue to act upon it; scenic features; natural visibility, both in daytime and at night; natural landscapes; natural soundscapes and smells; water and air resources; soils; geological resources; paleontological resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; ethnographic resources; historic and prehistoric sites, structures, and objects; museum collections; and native plants and animals.
- appropriate opportunities to experience enjoyment of the above resources, to the extent that can be done without impairing them;
- the park’s role in contributing to the national dignity, the high public value and integrity, and the superlative environmental quality of the national park system, and the benefit and inspiration provided to the American people by the national park system; and
- any additional attributes encompassed by the specific values and purposes for which the park was established.

This determination on impairment has been prepared for the NPS selected alternative, Alternative B. The significance of each resource based on the park's enabling legislation is discussed in the sections below. The resource impact topics carried forward and analyzed for the selected alternative in the EA and for which an impairment determination is made are vegetation, wetlands and soils; wildlife and species of special concern; and essential fish habitat. An impairment determination is not made for socioeconomics nor for visitor use and experience because impairment findings relate back to park resources and values, and these impact areas are not generally considered to be park resources or values according to the Organic Act. Therefore, these impact areas cannot be impaired in the same way that an action can impair park resources and values. Each resource or value for which impairment is assessed and the reasons why impairment will not occur is described below.

Vegetation, Wetlands and Soils

Everglades NP includes a range of ecosystems from cypress prairies and domes, freshwater sloughs, pinelands, mangrove forest and marine and estuarine environments. The primary ecosystems that occur in the Gulf Coast region of the park are coastal prairie, mangrove forest and estuarine environments. The Gulf Coast site is primarily filled land built up over time by placing dredge sand into a swampy area that was previously used as a city landfill. The Gulf Coast site contains mangrove wetlands along the shoreline and an isolated mixed hardwood wetland, with the remainder of the site consisting of scattered trees and a mowed lawn. The selected alternative will result in unavoidable permanent impacts to 0.56 acres of mangroves (0.03 acres) and the mixed hardwoods (0.53 acres) compared to the no action alternative. The mangroves to be impacted are mostly above the Mean High-Water Line (MHWL) and considered to have minimal wetland function and value. Additionally, the isolated mixed hardwoods have limited functionality. Both wetland areas that will be impacted by the selected alternative are present solely as a result of existing developed conditions and/or specific management actions taken by the NPS. NPS staff concluded that both wetlands represent an incidental artificial wetland based on the NPS Procedural Manual 77-1: *Wetland Protection*. However, the selected alternative will create natural habitat as a result of the construction of a living shoreline consisting of red and black mangroves to offset wetland impacts, improve vegetation on site and increase resiliency of the Gulf Coast site. Best management practices (BMPs) will be implemented to avoid and minimize any indirect impacts to nearby wetland habitats offsite.

There is a high quantity of high-quality wetland habitat throughout the Gulf Coast region. Wetland impacts associated with the selected alternative will be mitigated through the purchase of wetland mitigation credits from an offsite mitigation bank with similar vegetative species composition and wetland functionality. Therefore, there will be no net loss of wetlands and there will be no impairment to this resource.

Wildlife and Species of Special Concern

Everglades NP is home to an array of wildlife and species of special concern. The project footprint is bordered by an airport and a residential area and is more developed than other more remote areas of the park. However, there is suitable foraging and roosting habitat for various species and wildlife. Sixteen federally listed species have the potential to occur within the project area. The occurrence of wildlife and threatened and endangered species is dependent upon the availability of suitable habitat. The selected alternative and its associated short-term construction activities will result in loss of wetland habitat which provides habitat for wildlife and species of special concern. Impacts on wildlife and species of special

concern from the selected alternative will be within natural fluctuations to populations, habitat and natural processes that sustains wildlife and species of special concern in the project vicinity. There is sufficient habitat available adjacent to the project area and throughout the park to maintain wildlife and species of special concern populations in the park. The selected alternative will not result in impairment to wildlife or species of special concern because it will not prevent species from utilizing nearby suitable habitat and will not prevent the park from maintaining sustainable protected species populations.

Essential Fish Habitat

Essential fish habitat is defined as waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding and growth to maturity. Chokoloskee Bay includes water column habitat, soft bottom habitat, submerged aquatic vegetation and mangrove habitat which support federally managed fisheries. The Gulf Coast site is in a more disturbed area compared to other areas of the park due to the marina basin and associated boat use and history of maintenance dredging in the boat channels. The selected alternative will result in dredging of the marina basin and boat channels, and bulkhead construction which will impact the benthic substrate and associated soft bottom habitat. However, these impacts will be limited to the duration of construction activities and no permanent alteration of these habitats will occur. Additionally, the installation of new drainage system with shallow, dry retention ponds adjacent to the parking lots and access driveways will capture stormwater runoff via sheet flow for water quality treatment prior to discharging into the Chokoloskee Bay.

During construction, BMPs including installing and maintaining silt fences and turbidity curtains around active construction zones will be implemented to minimize potential of turbidity and degradation of water quality. After construction is complete, the benthic conditions will be similar to current conditions. Therefore, the selected alternative will not impair essential fish habitat.

CONCLUSION

The NPS has determined that implementation of the selected alternative will not constitute impairment of the resources or values of the park. The impact analyses summarized above indicate that the selected alternative will not result in impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is, 1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park, 2) key to the natural or cultural integrity for the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or 3) identified in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance. This conclusion is based on consideration of the park's purpose and significance, a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the EA, comments provided by the public, and the professional judgement of the decision maker guided by direction of the 2006 NPS *Management Policies*.

APPENDIX B – RESPONSES TO SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTS DURING PUBLIC REVIEW

Gulf Coast Site Plan – Comment Analysis and Response Report

The comment period for the EA occurred from January 24, 2023 to February 26, 2023. A total of 17 correspondences were received via web form, including one duplicate hard copy received via mail. All 17 correspondences were from unaffiliated individuals around the country with the majority (12 correspondences – 70.6%) coming from Florida. Comments on the EA included but were not limited to overall support for the Preferred Alternative, concerns regarding natural and cultural resource impacts, the use of resiliency materials, socioeconomics and visitor use and experience impacts, and suggestions for new elements.

The following comments received during public review of the EA were considered substantive. Substantive comments 1) question the accuracy of the information in the EA, 2) question the adequacy of the environmental analysis, 3) present reasonable alternatives that were not presented in the EA, or 4) cause changes or revisions in the proposal.

Concern(s)		NPS Response
1	<p>Commenters expressed that new elements be considered as part of the proposed action. Such elements include floating docks along the outside of the seawall; a boat ramp for motorized vessels for public uses; electric vehicle charging stations; exhibits and signage about climate change throughout the site; more ADA access; a boat rental concession and more “green” improvements such as a water bottle refill station.</p> <p>Representative Quotes:</p> <p>“Most needed would be floating docks on the outside plus straitened out approach to the actual ramp.”</p> <p>“Please include a vessel launch ramp as the one at Flamingo.”</p> <p>“Myself and many of my colleagues would like to see a boat ramp established at the Gulf coast site. Currently we have very limited and expensive options to launch our vessels in the Chokoloskee and Everglades city area. “</p> <p>“Disappointed to see that there is still no boat ramp for park access!”</p>	<p><i>Outside floating docks:</i> The outside of the seawall is not protected from frequent storms and wave action. Installing docks at this location would require extensive management and maintenance; and therefore, are not considered a practical option.</p> <p><i>Straight approach to ramp:</i> The ramp is designed for only hand carry (non-motorized) watercrafts for public use.</p> <p><i>Public motorized vessel access at the ramp:</i> There are boat ramps nearby with sufficient access to launch motorized vessels for a fee. The ramp at the Gulf Coast site is intended to provide visitors a site to launch non-</p>

Concern(s)	NPS Response
<p>“robust investments in electric vehicle charging stations—for both government and public use- -are warranted to support existing federal efforts to advance electrification of the transportation system.”</p> <p>“in developing supporting exhibits and waysides for the Gulf Coast Site, the interpretation of global climate change, local impacts, park adaptation efforts, and large-scale solutions should be a prominent theme. Few areas in the National Park System are better suited to tell the tale so powerfully.”</p> <p>“that the reconstruction enhanced and surpasses ADA requirements to facilitate the immersive experience for this with disabilities.”</p> <p>“If possible, please consider including a boat rental concession at the Gulf Coast site.”</p>	<p>motorized hand carried watercraft and for park staff to launch motorized vessels for official purposes. The NPS has made a decision in the 2015 East Everglades Wilderness Study/General Management Plan to not provide a visitor boat launch for motorized vessels at the Gulf Coast site.</p> <p><i>Electric vehicle charging stations:</i> Electric vehicle charging stations will be installed at the visitor center parking lot.</p> <p><i>Climate change wayside interpretation:</i> The current climate change-related waysides and interpretation will be left in place throughout the construction operations, and these exhibits will be replaced with new climate change-related exhibits that will be installed at the visitor center.</p> <p><i>Accessibility enhancements:</i> The NPS continues to make accessibility enhancements throughout the site and are also improving the immersive experience the NPS is required to provide. The new visitor center and exhibits are designed to meet all Americans with Disability Act (ADA) standards for access including accessible restrooms, push activated entrances, and an elevator. The exhibits are designed to meet accessibility standards including</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
		<p>larger type and color-blind sensitive text, audio descriptions, touchable interactive exhibit features, loaner iPods for both blind and deaf visitors, and exhibit placement for all visitors (short, tall or in a wheelchair) to view without obstructions.</p> <p>Onsite outdoor wayside exhibits will feature bilingual text in English and Spanish. Audio and visual descriptions for all exhibits will be available to visitors through the NPS Application. The NPS Application can be downloaded at home and used offline, without an internet or cellphone connection.</p> <p><i>Boat rental concession:</i> Non-motorized vessel rentals (i.e., kayaks, etc.) are available at the Gulf Coast site. Motorized boat rentals are not available at the Gulf Coast site as there is not enough space to accommodate these on site. Additionally, it is not currently economically feasible to the NPS to provide motorized boat rentals at the Gulf Coast site.</p>
2	<p>Commenters are concerned about impacts to marine resources in the project vicinity. A commenter expressed concern that the proposed dredging will increase motorboat access and negatively impacting seagrass and marine species. Another commenter expressed concern regarding more impacts to resources (i.e., EFH, seagrass, mangroves) as a result of more recreational fishing and motorized vessel use in the project vicinity.</p> <p>Representative Quote: “The problem with this plan is when motorboat access is increased, seagrass is destroyed and overfishing occurs, so fish populations plummet and as a result of their critical link in the food chain, much of the</p>	<p>The proposed dredging does not increase motorized marine vessel access and will not increase the number of concession boat tours on site. The purpose of the dredging is to provide acceptable depths for park and concessioner motorized marine vessels to be able to operate. The proposed improvements at the Gulf Coast site do not provide a</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
	<p>wildlife, including endangered species, plummets along with them. Therefore, watercraft should be limited to paddle and electric only, and so dredging should not be necessary.”</p> <p>“A renovated Gulf Site will undoubtedly incentivize an increase in recreational fishing in the area. While this may enhance overall visitor experience in ENP, it also might lead to an increase in prop scarring of seagrass beds, pollution from recreational vessels, and other activities that may potentially damage resources of the EFH. We encourage the NPS and the Florida FWCC to increase their observation of recreational fishing activities in this area of ENP, including monitoring and enforcement of damages to seagrass beds and mangroves.”</p>	<p>launch point for recreational motorized vessels. Therefore, improvements at this site will not cause an increase in recreational motorized boating.</p>
3	<p>A commenter is concerned that the proposed best management practices (i.e., silt fences, turbidity barriers, etc.) and frequency of monitoring may not be sufficient during construction in the rainy season.</p> <p>Representative Quotes:</p> <p>“should construction of the Gulf Site occur during the rainy season, silt fencing, turbidity barriers, and other temporary protection measures may be incapable of restraining pollutants from the construction zone, and ultimately these may be released to the environment.”</p> <p>“Although the EA mentions that the NPS will conduct turbidity measurements during the construction process, additional information regarding the specific methods to be used and the frequency of measurements is lacking. We are also concerned about control of erosion and sediment mobilization after rainfall events which require immediate monitoring.”</p>	<p>The NPS recognizes that best management practices will be required during construction. The contractor will have all the required permitting and mitigation measures in place which would account for the wet season.</p> <p>The NPS also recognizes the issues related to flooding at the Gulf Coast site, particularly during the wet season. Monitoring methods will be based on requirements based on the environmental permits required for this project from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.</p>
4	<p>A commenter is concerned that the proposed capacity of the retention ponds would not be sufficient during heavy rainfall and storm events.</p> <p>Representative Quotes:</p> <p>“High rainfall during severe weather events together with sea level rise will cause increased rates of flooding. Storm surges due to hurricanes may range from four feet “in minimal hurricanes to greater than twenty feet.” These events may exceed the capacity of shallow dry retention ponds of depth between two to three feet. There is a high possibility that pollutants may be released into the environment during storm surges resulting from hurricanes at the site during both construction and operation phases of the proposal.”</p>	<p>As described in Chapter 2 of the EA, the majority of the Gulf Coast site will be elevated, including the seawalls, parking lot, plazas, gathering areas and visitor center. The retention ponds are designed to meet the water quality and quantity criteria of the South Florida Water Management District and City of Everglades City; however, the stormwater management systems are</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
		not designed for hurricane/heavy rainfall storm events. With the proposed elevation of the site, the frequency of inundation from storm surge will be reduced.
5	<p>Commenters expressed concern regarding the long-term impacts to Federally-listed species, the monitoring of during construction and what actions would be taken if found on site during the pre-construction surveys.</p> <p>Representative Quotes:</p> <p>“what steps will be taken if bats are found using their habitat areas. The likelihood of bats occupying these trees is high, as they were detected during a recent acoustic monitoring survey. Comprehensive surveys and appropriate responses are essential to protect roosting bats in the project area.”</p> <p>“While the short-term impacts of the construction were deemed to not adversely impact protected species, long-term impacts must be given the same attention. The NPS characterizes habitat loss as a long-term impact. However, the Service also concludes that protected species will experience long-term benefits. No explanation is given to justify why a loss of habitat would be beneficial to these species. NPS suggests that there is ample habitat around the project area to justify the permanent habitat loss, but this fails to consider the compounding threats driving habitat degradation in the Everglades. Further, the stated benefits generally relate to park management, rather than the animals’ benefit. We believe that the NPS should explain why habitat loss equates to a long-term benefit.”</p> <p>“NPCA would urge ENP to undertake scientific best practices during redevelopment to ensure the safety of wildlife in the area. Specifically, we request that ENP biologists and staff remain on-site during all construction activities to monitor the area for threatened and endangered species. This layer of monitoring will help ensure that sensitive wildlife are not disrupted or harmed during the construction phase of redevelopment.”</p>	<p>As described in the mitigation measures, surveys will be completed prior to construction and coordination with the park biologist would occur if any utilization of the bat is documented on site to avoid adverse impacts to the species.</p> <p>The beneficial effects cited were primarily the cumulative effects from other projects such as Everglades restoration that will provide regional benefits to many sensitive species. The cumulative effects summary characterizes effects of this project as constituting small permanent loss of habitat.</p> <p>Monitoring for listed species will be conducted during specific construction activities that may pose a threat to the species, but during periods of low risk, we do not plan to have biologists on-site, though contractors will be required to adhere to standard practices that minimize risk to listed species, such as adopting the eastern indigo snake standard protective measures.</p>
6	A commenter is concerned if the current community in Everglades City is able to support and accommodate visitors in their nature-based economy if there is an increase in visitation at the Gulf Coast site, and if the	The NPS is not anticipating an increase of staff or housing needs as a result of Alternative B. The NPS is

Concern(s)		NPS Response
	<p>City can provide housing to non-local workers during the construction phase and operations of the Gulf Coast site.</p> <p>Representative Quotes: “an increase in infrastructure, population, and site visitation raises questions of whether a small community and fragile environment can support such a significant demand without suffering adverse socioeconomic impacts to its nature-based economy, as well as on nearby Wilderness Areas. Increases in visitors and concessioner-related site visits may negatively impact the guided fishing and nature-based tour industries. Fishing enthusiasts seek out sight fishing in the Ten Thousand Islands, fueling a significant portion of the nature-based economy. If the proposal successfully attracts 300,000 annual visitors, we have concerns about overcrowding and pollution due to increased visitation and dredging in the delicate waterways outside of the marina, which could impact the guided fishing industry. Nature-based tours may be similarly affected if impacts are not adequately mitigated. Accordingly, further research on the potential socioeconomic impacts of the increase in visitors is necessary.”</p> <p>“Housing is an additional concern. Everglades City must provide the housing capacity and infrastructure necessary for the anticipated increase in accommodation needs. South Florida is currently experiencing a housing crisis, and further demand on the housing market will have a negative socioeconomic impact on the local community. Additionally, the proposal plans for construction at the Gulf Site during hurricane season, and we can assume that this will require additional housing for non-local workers. A quarter of Everglades City residents lost their homes following Hurricane Irma suggesting a severe housing shortage in the area. Thus, research on the housing market and existing infrastructure is necessary to avoid adverse socioeconomic impacts both during both the construction and operation phases.”</p>	<p>improving the infrastructure at the site to be more resilient against storms and King Tide events. The local community and visitors will benefit from the proposed improvements.</p> <p>During construction, the contractors will find the appropriate lodging to meet their needs in the local community.</p>
7	<p>Commenters would like to see sustainable supplies and practices implemented, including LEED-friendly contractors.</p> <p>Representative Quote: “that the supplies used to construct the facility are sourced sustainably. All items should be sustainably sourced- this can include up-cycling previously used pieces of wood, brick, etc. or it could mean intentional purchases from sustainable organizations that are transparent with their supply chain initiatives.”</p> <p>“We ask that NPS, "a world leader in...sustainable resource management," make a conscious effort to reduce its carbon footprint during the rebuilding process. Sustainable practices that are encouraged include working with LEED-friendly contractors, using recycled materials to construct buildings, and adopting clean sources of energy whenever possible.”</p>	<p>The NPS will utilize <i>Guiding Principles of Sustainable Design</i> or similar guidelines and consider LEED certification for the new structures and other proposed improvements at the Gulf Coast site.</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
	<p>“the use of fossil fuels should be greatly reduced and the use of clean alternative energy sources greatly increased. Some of the proposed work like dredging would be energy intensive so this transition is vitally important.”</p> <p>“Structures constructed during Gulf Coast redevelopment should aim to be just as “green” by minimizing the impact of park operations on the environment by incorporating infrastructure support for greener ways of operating e.g., provision of water refill stations to reduce plastic use, recycling and best-practice waste management facilities, etc.”</p>	
8	<p>A commenter is concerned regarding potential impacts to historic sites in the project vicinity due to the anticipated increased tourism and motor vehicle traffic to and from Everglades City and Chokoloskee Island. Additionally, they would like to see additional measures taken (i.e., edits to the construction drawings to show the location of cultural areas of concern, hold preconstruction meetings) on the potential cultural resource impacts during construction.</p> <p>Representative Quote:</p> <p>“the EA should analyze the potential cultural resources that may be affected by increased foot and vehicle traffic to and from the project site—not just within it. The Everglades City Visitors Center is centrally located just off Copeland Avenue, which turns to Smallwood Drive. This is the only road that allows access to Chokoloskee Island, an area that contains multiple archaeological sites. The Executive Director of the Archaeological and Historical Conservancy describes this island as a significant site in Florida documented as containing human remains. Increased tourism and vehicle traffic to and from Everglades City and Chokoloskee Island could potentially deteriorate the historical sites. In conclusion, the NPS needs to take greater action that will properly protect the affected cultural resources in the area.”</p> <p>“We think the Agency’s plan of having a cultural resource monitor that “would be used if excavation occur[ed] beyond the extent of previous disturbance” is not preventative enough of potential damage. Instead, if construction does proceed beyond the extent of the previous disturbance, another proactive survey should be performed to ensure no unknown cultural resources exist in the new area in addition to having a cultural resource monitor oversee the project. Construction drawings should identify cultural areas of concern detected in the 2012 archaeological and historical survey and the new proactive survey. A preconstruction meeting should inform contractors about such areas, how to protect them, and procedures to identify and address any discoveries during any project phase. The Project Manager should ensure these procedures are always followed.”</p>	<p>While the NPS agrees that there are several culturally significant sites within the local community, including on nearby Chokoloskee Island, the cultural resources in the vicinity of the Gulf Coast site referenced by the commenter, there is no evidence that these sites were damaged during periods of higher visitation in the 1990s. Given the fact that the actions proposed at the Gulf Coast site are consistent with historic use and is not seeking to increase visitor use of the area beyond peaks seen in the 1990s, an expected return to previous visitation should not result in an adverse effect to those resources. Furthermore, the NPS formally consulted on the scope and extent of the Area of Potential Effect (APE) with the State Historic Preservation Office as well as its Tribal partners who agreed with the interpretation of the APE and did not raise any objections or request a larger area to be included in analysis.</p> <p>For the purposes of this undertaking, the APE includes the entirety of the</p>

	Concern(s)	NPS Response
		<p>Federally owned property at the Gulf Coast site. The APE was limited to the area of disturbance for this project and did not include the greater area (including Chokoloskee, which is outside of the federally owned property). The APE was partially surveyed in 2012, and then surveyed in its entirety in January 2022. This survey provided project background, site history, a record of previous archeological inventories, recommendations for additional survey/inventory if needed, and recommend an assessment of effect for the proposed undertaking under the requirements set forth in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Previous surveys (including the 2012) identified one archeological site and three historic structures (Everglades City circa 1950 Landfill, Gulf Coast Visitor Center, Boat Basin, and the Seawall within the APE, all of which were previously identified as ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and one of which (Gulf Coast Visitor Center) having since been demolished due to damages that occurred from Hurricane Irma.</p> <p>As such, there are no known historic properties listed, or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places located within the proposed project APE. Given the history of the area's initial</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
		development it is doubtful that any archeological resources eligible for listing on the NRHP would have survived intact. Furthermore, any surviving historic resources on the property would likely have been previously reported given the continuous use of the developed portion of the parcel by the NPS. Given the depth of fill at the site, the survey argued that the proposed undertaking will not affect properties listed, or eligible to be listed on the NRHP. The Florida State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) as well as NPS Tribal partners all concurred with this assessment.
9	<p>A commenter is concerned that there could be unavoidable construction delays since the majority of the work would occur during the rainy season that would negatively impact visitor use and experience.</p> <p>Representative Quote:</p> <p>“Of concern is that most construction will occur during hurricane/low season, ultimately increasing the possibility of delays. Although weather and other natural events are unavoidable, it is necessary to account for these unpredictable occurrences to ensure that visitor experience is not delayed for extended periods.”</p>	<p>The NPS strives to keep portions of the Gulf Coast site open to visitors. The NPS will notify the public and concessioners regarding any changes to the construction schedule and visitor access.</p>
10	<p>Commenters expressed modifications to the proposed landscaping, such as removing sea grapes and rocky shoals spider lily from the plan, and suggestions for native plants that typically grow near the Gulf Coast site.</p> <p>Representative Quotes:</p> <p>“the project also suggests the use of sea grapes, a flowering plant that is native to coastal regions. However, these trees are often messy as they drop their leaves and fruit, so they are best used in casual, naturalistic landscapes. Most of the old leaves fall off during Spring before new leaves emerge and grow. Their leaves take a long time to decay, and thus, planting sea grapes over a pool deck or walkway would likely be an unwise choice and should not be used in this project.”</p>	<p>The NPS appreciates the input and recommendations regarding landscaping and agree that the NPS will, reevaluate specific landscaping plantings as we continue with implementation so we can make the best choices of species native to and representative of the area that will also promote natural resource management when possible.</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
	<p>“the project also suggests the use of <i>Hymenocallis coronaria</i>, commonly known as the rocky shoals spider lily, which is a rare species restricted to Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. The proposal also suggests planting saw palmetto, and we also recommend that the NPS utilize the rare ghost orchid as this species grows primarily in protected South Florida areas. The ghost orchid has stunning and unusual flowers and is found only in Cuba and flooded forests of South Florida, where approximately 2,000 grow. Planting the ghost orchid would not only use a native plant species, but also help boost its population.”</p> <p>“We also encourage ENP to strive for environmental stewardship and leadership through improving the landscaping choices presented in the EA during Gulf Coast redevelopment. There is an opportunity to recreate native plant habitat, not just landscape for aesthetic appeal using a random palette of native salt-tolerant plants as the EA currently does in its proposed landscape plan. Instead, NPCA urges ENP to guide its contractors to revise the landscape plan and select native plants that would normally grow together in the native plant communities/habitats nearby the site, by using science-based tools freely available to the landscaping community such as Natives for Your Neighborhood. By doing so, NPS will be promoting the use of native plants in landscape designs that can not only provide habitat for wildlife but also serve as an educational tool for visitors to learn about local plant species and habitats as well as the importance of native landscaping at home and in the community. This is especially relevant to encourage well-informed native landscaping in Florida where NPS faces significant challenges tackling invasive species.”</p>	
11	<p>A commenter would like more information on the future implications of the living shoreline construction.</p> <p>Representative Quote: “It is unclear from the EA whether the planting of red and black mangroves considers future sea level rise and the potential landward migration of these species.”</p>	<p>The living shoreline design does consider the expected changes to the area that are likely to occur due to sea level rise. The proposed mangrove species in the design represent species appropriate for conditions in the near future because the primary function will be to help stabilize the shoreline after construction. However, over time, we expect to see changes in where these species occur in the design, and do not plan to interfere besides ensuring that the shore is not subject to erosion, and we may see both landward and seaward movement of these species relative to the locations of original plantings – this is the “living” portion of the shoreline that</p>

Concern(s)		NPS Response
		we are encouraging – we expect it to adapt to changing conditions within the limits of the area.

APPENDIX C - ERRATA FOR THE GULF COAST SITE PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The following text has been changed based on additional information regarding the constructability of the site. The construction timing has been adjusted to include an additional 90-day closure period to allow all fill material transported to the site to settle (preload) prior to starting construction of new facilities on the fill.

Headings and page numbers referenced pertained to the Gulf Coast Site Plan Environmental Assessment. Original text from the EA is included to provide context and to allow for comparison to the text change. Additions to text are underlined and deleted text is shown by ~~strikeout text~~.

Alternative B (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative) **Pages 18-19**

Construction Timing. Contractor staging areas would be located on site within the limits of construction. The sequence of construction for Alternative B would be performed in ~~four~~ multiple phases over approximately two years. The sequencing of the actions in each of the phases described below may be integrated differently to improve construction timing:

Phase 1: The temporary restrooms would be relocated to the grassy, overflow parking lot. Construction fencing would be installed. The existing overflow parking lot would be used for public parking. Public access to the restrooms, grassy overflow parking lot, marina and canoe/kayak launch would be available.

Phase 2: Access to the temporary restrooms would be maintained. The marina, docks, concessions area and canoe/kayak launch and administrative boat ramp would be under construction with no public access. The fuel tanks would be removed and relocated during this phase. To ~~strikeout prevent replace with~~ minimize disruptions to visitor and park access, the dredging and marina and boat ramp construction would be conducted primarily during the ~~strikeout hurricane replace with~~ non-peak visitor season (~~strikeout June-October replace with~~ April 15th – November 15th). The marina, canoe/kayak launch and boat tours would be temporarily closed while work is conducted in those areas.

Phase 3: Construction of the new visitor center would begin and the new entry road to the site would be constructed. The temporary restrooms, grassy overflow parking lot, marina and canoe/kayak launch would be accessible to the public.

Phase 4: Landscaping would be performed throughout the site and the new visitor center construction would continue until completion. There would be public access to the temporary restrooms until the new visitor center construction is complete. Visitors would utilize the main parking area and would have access to the marina and canoe/kayak launch.

Mitigation Measures Associated with Alternative B
Visitor Use and Experience
Page 21

- Visitors would be informed in advance of construction activities through information posted at the park website, social media, and visitor centers.
- Construction activities would be ~~strikeout avoided or end-strikeout~~ limited during peak visitor-use periods to the extent possible.
- Temporary short-term full closure (about six months) of specific areas may be necessary on limited occasions. Such full closures would be ~~strikeout for the minimal time end-strikeout~~ required to complete the work activity. To the extent possible, partial and/or limited closures of visitor access should be used.
- Construction fencing and closure signage would be placed around construction areas, as needed, to discourage visitors from entering active construction areas.
- Visitor safety concerns would be integrated into park educational programs. Directional signs would continue to orient visitors, and education programs would continue to promote understanding among visitors.

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

Socioeconomics

Environmental Consequences

Impacts of Alternative B

Page 41

3rd Paragraph

Phased construction activities would result in full closures of specific areas.~~may~~ These closures, which could be in place for about six months primarily during the ~~strikeout hurricane/ end strikeout~~ non-peak visitation season (about ~~strikeout June 1 - October 31~~ replace with April 15th - November 15th), would result in ~~strikeout short-term~~ replace with temporary adverse impacts over a period of about two years as a result of a reduction in visitors and associated spending at the Gulf Coast site and Everglades City. However, the sequence (phasing) of construction activities would be planned in a manner to ~~strikeout avoid~~ replace with minimize disruption to concession operations to the extent practicable. Access to ~~strikeout the temporary parking area (existing grassy overflow parking lot)~~ replace with public parking at the site would be maintained at all times. The boat tour operations are expected to continue throughout construction. The canoe/kayak launch would be ~~strikeout continuously~~ end strikeout maintained for public use between about November 1st and May 31st with limited closures during this period ~~strikeout when~~ replace with while the launch is being replaced. ~~strikeout The canoe/kayak launch would have a maximum three month closure between June 1st and November 1st. end strikeout~~

**Visitor Use and Experience
Environmental Consequences
Impacts of Alternative B
Pages 44-45**

1st paragraph

Under Alternative B, changes to the Gulf Coast site would include a new, two-story visitor center, a new remote concession building in the vicinity of the canoe/kayak ramp, raising of the surrounding areas of the visitor center and parking lot to reduce flooding, dredging in the marina boat basin and near the canoe/kayak launch, and new and improved restrooms. Alternative B would include enhanced pedestrian walkways, outdoor seating and provide an outdoor classroom. In addition, native plantings and landscaping throughout the site would enhance aesthetics of the site. To enhance visitor safety, permeable pavers to reduce flooding and resilient materials to withstand storms would be used for construction of the outdoor paved areas and visitor center. The construction activities would take approximately two years to complete and would maintain visitor access to portions of the site at a time.

Phased construction activities would result in full closures of specific areas. These closures, which could be in place for about six months primarily during the lower visitation season (about April 15 to November 15), would result in temporary adverse impacts to visitor use and experience over a period of about two years. ~~strikeout Phased construction would be avoided or limited during peak season occur throughout the year, and partial closures (rather than full closures) would be used to the greatest extent possible. Temporary closures of the marina, and concessions areas, and canoe/kayak launch would take place primarily during hurricane/lower visitation season (June 1st to October 31st) to minimize disruptions to visitors. end strikeout~~ Construction fencing would safely keep visitors out of construction zones. The operation of construction equipment would result in noise that would temporarily disrupt visitor experience. Therefore, construction activities would cause ~~short term~~, temporary (about 2 years) adverse effects to visitor use and experience and viewsheds.

5th paragraph

In summary, Alternative B would result in ~~strikeout short term, replace with~~ temporary (about 2 years) adverse effects to visitor use and experience as a result of construction activities. However, long-term beneficial effects are anticipated as the proposed improvements would restore visitor use and experience to levels prior to Hurricane Irma, and improve and enhance the visitor center, facilities and infrastructure on site.