Everglades National Park
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Everglades National Park Wilderness Stewardship Plan Public Comment Summary Report

June 2024

CONTENTS

Overview of Civic Engagement....1
Comment Analysis....2
Definition of Terms....2
Correspondence Received....2
Comment Summaries....5
Prompting Questions and Comment Summary Structure....5
Purpose and Need and Planning....6
Desired Conditions....6
Preliminary Management Strategies....8
Natural Resources Management Strategies....12
Out-of-Scope Topics....16

TABLES

Table 1. Correspondence Overview....2
Table 2. Correspondence by Organization Type....3
Table 3. Correspondence by Country....3
Table 4. Correspondence by State....3

This page intentionally blank.

EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY REPORT

OVERVIEW OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The National Park Service (NPS) initiated the wilderness stewardship plan for Everglades National Park to guide the preservation, management, and use of the park's wilderness areas. In accordance with the Wilderness Act and other applicable laws and policies, the plan would provide long-term direction for preserving wilderness character; protecting natural and cultural resources; improving wilderness conditions by restoring habitats, conducting research, and managing for invasive species and other threats; and providing appropriate recreational opportunities for and encouraging the public use of enjoyment of wilderness. The plan would replace Everglades National Park's 1981 backcountry management plan and supplement its 2015 general management plan.

The public, NPS staff, Indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders identified various issues and concerns during prior public scoping for this wilderness stewardship plan. Here, an issue is defined as a conflict or challenge regarding the use or management of public lands. The plan is needed to provide high-level strategies for addressing issues and opportunities in the context of the park's purpose, significance, and legislative mandates. The need for the plan can be found in the "Issues and Opportunities section" of the park StoryMap at https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d306038b63ce443e92404357f0601b08

As part of the planning effort, the National Park Service initiated civic engagement on February 2, 2024, and concluded on March 31, 2024, to seek feedback from the public during the initial phase of the project. As part of civic engagement, park staff developed a public web page to share progress on the plan and seek feedback through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkID=374&projectID=66765, as well as a StoryMap to provide background on the plan, its purpose, and a summary of preliminary new management actions. The National Park Service held four total virtual civic engagement meetings for the public to learn more and ask questions on February 28, 2024, and March 12, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. EST and 6:00 p.m. EST on both days.

All comments received (via PEPC, emails sent to park staff, and written comments mailed to park headquarters) were considered and included in the overall project record and are summarized here. A total of 1,767 pieces of correspondence were received during the public comment period.

This report summarizes the concerns and ideas expressed during the public comment period. The report first discusses comments related to general topics of interest and then addresses comments about the preliminary management actions presented in the StoryMap. Common topics included visitor experience, socioeconomics, and the management of marinas and associated concessions, launch ramps, and landing sites.

COMMENT ANALYSIS

Definition of Terms

Correspondence: A correspondence is the entire document received from a commenter and includes letters, emails, comments entered directly into the PEPC database, and any other written comments provided either at the public meetings or in person at the park.

Comment: A comment is a portion of text within a correspondence that addresses a single subject such as "natural resources." The comment could also question the accuracy of the information provided in the newsletter, question the adequacy of any background information, or present issues other than those presented in the newsletter.

Code: A code is a grouping centered on a common subject, such as "natural resources." Codes are developed during the public comment process and are used to track major subjects found in the newsletter. In cases in which no comments are received on an issue, the code is not identified or discussed in this report.

Comment Summary: A grouping that is centered on a common subject. Comment summaries combine similar comments.

CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

The following tables were produced by the NPS PEPC database and provide information about the numbers and types of correspondence received, organized by code and various demographics. Table 1 through table 4 present data on the number of correspondences received by correspondence type, organization type, country, and state. Table 5 details the number of comments identified by code and is located after the summary for reference.

The National Park Service reviewed each correspondence and identified individual comments, with the possibility that each correspondence could have multiple comments. A total of 1,064 individual comments were derived from the 1,767 correspondences received. Of the 1,767 correspondences, 753 were unique correspondence and 1,014 were form letters.

Table 1. Correspondence Overview

Correspondence Type	Correspondences
Letter	2
Park form	1
Web form	1,764

Table 2. Correspondence by Organization Type

Organization Type	Correspondences
State government	1
Unaffiliated individual	1,766

Table 3. Correspondence by Country

Country	Correspondences
Germany	5
Greece	1
Ireland	1
Italy	2
Mexico	1
Poland	2
Portugal	1
Slovenia	1
Spain	2
Switzerland	1
United Kingdom	11
United States	1,722
Venezuela	1
Unidentified	16

Table 4. Correspondence by State

State	Correspondences
Alabama	10
Alaska	12
Arizona	54
Arkansas	8
California	260
Colorado	69
Connecticut	16

State	Correspondences
Delaware	9
District of Columbia	6
Florida	199
Georgia	29
Hawaii	6
Idaho	17
Illinois	65
Indiana	19
Iowa	9
Kansas	11
Kentucky	12
Louisiana	1
Maine	14
Maryland	27
Massachusetts	39
Michigan	37
Minnesota	23
Mississippi	5
Missouri	28
Montana	20
Nebraska	5
Nevada	15
New Hampshire	14
New Jersey	50
New Mexico	35
New York	117
North Carolina	36
North Dakota	3
Ohio	39

State	Correspondences
Oklahoma	5
Oregon	55
Pennsylvania	65
Rhode Island	4
South Carolina	15
Tennessee	14
Texas	52
Utah	14
Vermont	15
Virginia	42
Washington	77
West Virginia	7
Wisconsin	42
Wyoming	4
Unidentified	35
Puerto Rico	2

COMMENT SUMMARIES

Prompting Questions and Comment Summary Structure

Four questions were posed to commenters to receive targeted feedback on the wilderness stewardship plan. Comments received from these prompts were considered and are summarized below. The prompts were as follows:

1. Which of the desired conditions are most important to you and which ones do you want future visitors to experience when they come to the park?
2. What barriers get in the way of visiting Everglades National Park wilderness areas? What barriers prevent you from achieving your desired experiences while in wilderness?
3. What are your suggestions for refinement of the strategies presented in the StoryMap?
4. What other strategies should be considered and why?

Purpose and Need and Planning

Many commenters felt the Everglades should foremost be a sanctuary where the environment and its natural processes are not disturbed.

Some commenters viewed the Everglades as becoming overcrowded and the wilderness becoming less of a place for solitude and suggested changes to the plan, including:

- limiting the number of people who can go into wilderness
- adding timed entries or limiting access to areas within wilderness

One commenter would like to see new discussions had with all stakeholders, including people from local communities, nonprofits, developers, contractors, and government entities so that multiple perspectives are considered regarding the use of the park.

One commenter suggested the National Park Service reconsider how plans and costs will be impacted by climate change, while another commenter would like the National Park Service to provide a science-based evaluation of climate change effects that decision-makers and managers could use to make good solution-based choices for the park.

Another commenter suggested the park conduct a thorough visitor capacity analysis that is available for public review.

One commenter wrote that indicators, thresholds, and triggers are needed to meet all necessary needs, interests, and concerns of all stakeholders involved. The commenter also suggested citing the information from the strategies section either at the end of the section or throughout so readers have a frame of reference to understand where these strategies are coming from and possible other sources the National Park Service could look at to improve their proposed strategies. Another commenter suggested that the summary of the 1981 plan and other historical documents should be made accessible to the public.

One commenter suggested a comprehensive environmental impact statement assessment for increased camping, paddle and hiking trail expansions, and visitor access.

Desired Conditions

Untrammeled Quality Desired Conditions

Many commenters would like the wilderness to be managed without human-centered desired conditions and felt this would provide a true wilderness experience.

Some commenters suggested the National Park Service should remove the emphases on "desired conditions, " since they believed a wild, untrammeled wilderness would produce its own natural, wilderness conditions. Commenters mentioned that "desired conditions" represented the human manipulation of wilderness, which, per the commenters, is prohibited by the Wilderness Act.

Natural Quality Desired Conditions

Commenters said they enjoy seeing a diversity of plants and wildlife when they visit the park.

Some commenters would like natural storm and erosion protections in the park, while others noted that a clean water flow was an important natural quality desired condition.

One commenter described their desired conditions as including, "Natural sounds - - the honk of an ibis, the rustle of wind, the soft drip of a paddle into smooth water - are an integral component of wilderness. Unwanted anthropogenic noise can cause wildlife to alter behavior, negatively impacting the naturalness of an area, and can also greatly impair opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Many visitors to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness and proposed East Everglades Addition seek quietude and a feeling of remoteness, not the buzz of boat engines or other auditory intrusions of modern industrial society on their experience of the non-mechanized, non-motorized wilderness. Similarly, visitors may seek a respite from the artificially bright night skies of Miami and other highly developed regions, and an opportunity to view celestial features only visible under clear, dark conditions. Bats, birds, moths, and the many other species whose growth and behavior can be affected by anthropogenic light may find a haven in areas with cycles of natural darkness. While some external skyglow may already seep into the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness and proposed East Everglades Addition, natural darkness is certainly a desirable condition to maintain and strive for. Although the acoustic environment and nighttime darkness are sensory components of ecological processes and human experiences, rather than more typical physical and biological resources, they're no less important. In terms of the visitor experience and overall feeling of remoteness and wildness, they may arguably even be more important. They could be considered integral parts of the Natural Quality of wilderness and independent components of Solitude and Primitive Recreation."

Undeveloped Quality Desired Conditions

Many commenters want an undeveloped wilderness and oppose "grandfathering in" existing structures and practices.

Other commenters mentioned they do not want to see artificial, human-made roads, canals, canal plugs, or mechanical structures that artificially direct the natural flow of the water in the park.

A couple of commenters mentioned a natural setting without fencing or signs is a desired condition for undeveloped quality.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Quality Desired Conditions

Many commenters identified a desired condition for visitors to have opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and opportunities to experience the undeveloped quality of the designated wilderness when visiting the park.

One commenter wrote, "The experience important to me is one of silence, vastness of the sea of grass, and beauty of the landscape." Many commenters noted they desire peace, quiet, and solitude. Others mentioned a clean and garbage-free setting was important, with an emphasis on Leave No Trace practices.

One commenter noted that for this wilderness character quality, the most important goal is, "Visitors develop personal connections and an appreciation of wilderness resources through educational and recreational opportunities."

Other Features of Value Quality Desired Conditions

N/A

Important Desired Conditions

Most commenters identified the following as important desired conditions:

- peace and quiet
- solitude
- a clean, garbage-free park
- trail opportunities
- wildlife viewing
- natural setting without human structures or interference
- clean water flow
- diversity of wildlife and plants

Preliminary Management Strategies

Visitor Use and Experience: Accessibility

Many local commenters with mobility challenges mentioned they would like more opportunities to help them visit the park. One commenter mentioned, "I wish there could be ranger led trips into the wilderness for older people, handicapped perhaps. Many more than currently have. I realize that means separating the true wilderness from a section for interested people."

Another commenter mentioned they would like to see more water access for those in wheelchairs or who are disabled. Another commenter would like to see a shuttle service for surrounding areas into the Everglades. The commenter noted, "I have only been able to go to the Everglades once in almost 40 years! Now as a senior, it would be nice to have perhaps a bus that would take me from my home in Bradenton to camp in the park. I am too nervous about my 20 yr old vehicle to drive there now. Perhaps the park could offer monthly bus trips or organize volunteer opportunities so that people who are transportation challenged (especially on the Southwest Coast) could visit and participate in the Park."

One commenter noted that visiting the Everglades should require effort since that is the nature of wilderness.

Visitor Use and Experience: Signage and Wayfinding

One commenter suggested better wayfinding by installing additional and updated signage, including implementing multilingual signage to ensure that all visitors feel welcome and informed in the park.

Visitor Information/Interpretation

Many commenters would like to see more rangers hired to help educate the public and more guided tours both on land and in the water. One commenter suggested adding guided tours throughout the park that go at a slower pace, especially for those who may want to do bird watching in certain areas. Another commenter mentioned that park interpreters need to provide information on clothing to use to protect against mosquitos and other insects, what repellents are good, and the types of head nets that could be beneficial.

One commenter suggested fundraising and increasing public awareness on the current problems the park faces to gain support. Another commenter mentioned that the National Park Service should present the Everglades Wilderness as beneficial to both mental and physical health as a way to get more people interested and involved.

A commenter said that “Encouragement of hiking and canoes would be ideal, I think, and also reaching out to native American populations in the area as guides and caretakers- -more hiring of native/indigenous employees to staff and guide. I would like to see canoeing and hiking/ trail maps readily available, as well as at certain points along each trail information about the birds, animals, wildlife, and plants- -ideally this would be done in the least invasive way. Public workshops on the wilderness features of the area could be expanded; and motorized vehicles prohibited from all areas. I think that thinking about not just the preservation of "wilderness" separate from humans but also taking into account ways that humans can live with and in their own environment is important. To that end, I think public education campaigns around "how nature supports us," including spreading information about native/indigenous plant research, ethnobotany, and how certain human activities (like leaving trash, or destroying areas, or logging or even electrifying parts of the Everglades) have an impact on the wilderness: I'd like to see everyone get a better understanding of what changes it might take in lifestyle to coexist with our wild environment and ENJOY it, including use it for food and medicine.”

One commenter wrote that they personally enjoy seeing the education information center and that it is a wonderful way to educate the public about what is in the wilderness area and why it is important to preserve it.

Finally, one commenter mentioned that public workshops focused on the wilderness features of the area should be expanded.

Commercial Services

One commenter noted that incorporating a comprehensive strategy to manage commercial services like permits, concessions and sustainable practices is essential for this area. The comprehensive strategy would ensure adherence to necessary criteria when considering commercial services. Overall, they noted that a commercial services presence in wilderness areas needs “thoughtful and responsible management to minimize negative impacts on the

environment, preserve the wilderness experience, protect cultural resources, and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources."

One commenter suggested expanding visitor center exhibits and services on the west perimeter of the park and limiting commercial services and suggested the park remind visitors to pack in and pack out their own food.

One commenter said that "Emphasizing public education on the advantageous uses of wilderness can speak to a larger crowd outside of the recreators which currently employ the park's resources. The NPS should strive to develop these personal connections not only for its avid visitors but for all of its neighbors. As an educator on Florida's Suncoast I believe that active encouragement and education on the park's recreational and educational benefits should be more prominent by the park and its partnerships with local communities. This can be conducted via commercial services if need be as the Special Provisions detailed under Section 4(d)(5) of the Wilderness Act explains commercial services may be used "to the extent necessary for activities which are proper for realizing the recreational or other wilderness purposes of the areas." Education is one of the most vital purposes."

Facilities to Support Wilderness Access and Use: Access

One commenter suggested adding general public areas with educational signage and adding clean bathrooms.

A few commenters suggested adding more parking to support increased visitation and to provide access to certain areas.

Another commenter noted that barriers are needed in areas where alligators are present to ensure the safety of visitors.

A few commenters mentioned the park should add shaded picnic pavilions, mostly near parking lots, along with unobtrusive latrines or composting toilets to prevent raw sewage from entering the water. Some commentors mentioned adding trash cans or otherwise, prominent signs about packing out trash should be installed. One commenter noted, "I picture parking lots at the outer edges of the park, but only non-motorized transportation in the interior, so the Park is truly wilderness."

Facilities to Support Wilderness Access and Use: Barriers to Access

Many commenters mentioned that they have mobility challenges and would appreciate a trail or ranger-led tours that would allow for them to experience a part of wilderness.

Facilities to Support Wilderness Access and Use: Launches

One commenter suggested adding more canoe launch sites adjacent to the wilderness to allow nonmotorized recreation.

Trails and Trail Maintenance: Current Conditions

One commenter mentioned that foliage can block the view of the immediate area, but advising visitors where to look for birds and other animals could help visitors engage in the surrounding area.

Another commenter said that adequate funding needs to be provided to maintain and improve current hiking and paddling trails.

One commenter noted that stakeholders would "benefit from an all-inclusive map delineating both existing and proposed trails throughout the park, offering a holistic view of future access and recreational opportunities. Overlaying these features with key resources, such as eligible or designated wilderness, existing campsites and park features, etc., in one inclusive map would be ideal."

Trails and Trail Maintenance: New Opportunities

One commenter noted that administrative trails (for park staff only) will be needed to access broader areas and to monitor conditions, but those trails should require special authorization for anyone else who may want to use them.

Another commenter shared that they want to see canoeing and hiking trail maps available, in addition to minimally intrusive educational signs along each trail with information about plants and wildlife.

One commenter mentioned a clear time line and prioritization list for new trails and that platform implementations should be provided to stakeholders for valuable insights into potential phased recreational infrastructure development. In addition, the potential costs of building and maintenance should be included for public disclosure when the planning process reaches that stage.

Trails and Trail Maintenance: Hiking Trails

One commenter suggested establishing wheelchair-accessible trails near parking lots. Other commenters suggested more trails for hikers, bikers, horseback riders, kayakers, and canoers.

Trails and Trail Maintenance: Paddling Trails

One commenter wants to see open water trails for visitors to investigate and experience the diversity of the park.

Another commenter believed the park should create an additional nonmotorized wilderness waterway that could connect to the public launch ramp at Coopertown to the Cane Patch campsite and the east end of the Shark River Slough. They noted that something similar may have been listed in the general management plan for the East Everglades.

One commenter noted that waste disposal could be an issue since the park's current boat that services restrooms may not be able to access those areas, in which case, carry in and carry out may need to be enforced.

Campsites and Campsite Maintenance: New Camping Opportunities

A couple of commenters thought there should not be any buildings in campsites, noting that buildings can promote trash. One commenter mentioned the tent platforms in photos look intrusive and out of place in wilderness. Another commenter suggested the park hire more rangers and add campsites or primitive camping to ensure rules are followed.

One commenter said that the plan to add camping on tree islands in the East Everglades District and the development of new paddling routes in Taylor Slough as new recreational opportunities will likely be impacted by Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program projects coming online, as well as the impending effects of sea-level rise. They noted that this plan will need to account for the changing recreation and management needs of the park while considering these factors.

Campsites and Campsite Maintenance: Actions to Address Impacts on Resources

One commenter mentioned that carrying capacity for campsites needs to be minimal to keep the desired condition of solitude.

One commenter wants the park to add composters to campsites and implement regulations for firewood, suggesting that campers need to bring their own firewood and not use kindling from wilderness.

One commenter wrote, “Lopez really needs a tent platform as it floods regularly at spring tides; Watson's place needs to be expanded out, as it has gotten considerably smaller over the years, while the number of campers allowed has stayed the same. I am all for a few more campsites in Florida Bay, and making some of them paddler/sailor only. Florida Bay does not need more motor boat traffic - - not only would it be better for 'wilderness' seekers, but also for the health of the Bay.”

Restoration

A few commenters want to see the beach edges restored with mangroves, along with other natural storm barriers.

Boating Operations: Motorized, Nonmotorized, and Airboats

Most commenters had issues with motorized boats and airboats, saying their presence degrades visitor and wilderness experience and disturbs wildlife. Some commenters mentioned that the presence of motorized boats and airboats stops them from visiting the park altogether. Many commenters questioned how motorized boat usage is permitted based on the Wilderness Act and want to see them banned from the park altogether.

Natural Resources Management Strategies

One commenter shared that they are encouraged to see the park considering strategies to improve the flow of freshwater through the Everglades, including potential changes to historic properties such as Old Ingraham Highway. They mentioned that a section of that road was culverted, which increased water flow into the Florida Bay, and they are seeing benefits from this modification. They suggest the National Park Service consider additional projects or opportunities for improving freshwater flow in the park.

Cultural Resources Management Strategies

One commenter gave suggestions regarding fire management, mentioned in the StoryMap. They suggested that there should be a section about cultural burning, as cultural burning is known to

be effective in landscape preservation and adaptive management efforts to regulate climate change and shows respect for the landscape and for indigenous people.

Tribal Activities

Many commenters noted that Tribal leadership holds immense significance in the stewardship of parks, and, therefore, plans should go beyond addressing Tribal collaboration and include Tribal leadership within park management.

Another commenter mentioned that the National Park Service needs to ensure the park remains accessible to Indigenous peoples at all times; further, limiting access solely to ceremonial purposes overlooks the connection they hold with this land. The commenter said this is "essential for cultural continuity, fostering a sense of belonging and connection for all Tribes whose land you are on."

One commenter mentioned that they thought the plan's discussion of "Tribal Relationships" was confusing, misleading, and unclear and may violate current NPS regulations. They noted that the plan speaks of undefined "Indigenous peoples" but are unsure whether the plan is referring to members of the Seminole or Miccosukee Tribes or if the plan intends to incorporate a broader range of Tribes. The commenter also noted that they believe Indigenous peoples are not a part of wilderness character since the Wilderness Act defines wilderness as a place "… where man … is a visitor who does not remain." The commenter suggested that there is no statutory exception for any peoples, Indigenous or otherwise. They also said that neither the Wilderness Act nor its legislative history have made provisions that pre-European contact peoples, or their activities, are part of "wilderness character." The commenter noted that on page 11 of "Tribal Relationships," the plan refers to continued "subsistence gathering" that is in relationship to plants and not animals, but the plan does not specify. The commenter notes that "gathering" park wildlife is strictly forbidden by NPS regulations at 36 CFR 2.1(a). Neither the laws establishing Everglades National Park nor its wilderness provide for taking plants or animals by hunting, trapping, or gathering by any persons or "peoples." The commenter further noted that the National Park Service may propose and adopt regulations that allow members of Tribes to gather plants in Everglades under NPS rules at 36 CFR 2.6 but that they do not believe the National Park Service has done so currently. They mentioned that if the Everglades is allowing Tribes to gather plants, then it would constitute an open violation of 36 CFR 2.1(a) and 2.6.

Research-Related Management Strategies

One commenter suggested that the wilderness stewardship plan should recognize all the existing monitoring programs that support the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan as meeting the minimum requirements for administering the area so that important research can be continued. The commenter also noted that other agencies maintain a variety of environmental monitoring stations within the wilderness areas and that accessing these stations for routine maintenance, repairs, servicing, and updates without mechanized transport may hinder the flow of information and place undue constrictions on research. They suggest the National Park Service should recognize the benefits of maintaining these stations and deem the stations and their management as meeting the minimum requirements for the administration of the area.

One commenter suggested leveraging modern technology in facilitating internal and external research access to advance Everglades restoration goals while prioritizing wilderness protection. They also called for the removal of scientific monitoring structures post-permit expiration.

Another commenter mentioned that they would like to see the National Park Service allow only research projects in the wilderness that do not violate the Wilderness Act and to reject all research proposals that do so.

Impacts on Untrammeled Quality

One commenter wrote that they felt it is important to distinguish between the park and the wilderness area aspects of the park. They believe the areas of development should be located outside of the wilderness area and that those grandfathered in should be limited to the maximum extent possible under easement agreements, and those easements should be bought out when possible.

Impacts on Natural Quality

Most commenters mentioned that invasive and nonnative species were a top issue, specifically pythons and their impact on the native ecosystem. One commenter noted, "Many python snakes not native to the Everglades National Park have been eating the native animals. People who are able to do so have been encouraged to catch and kill as many snakes as possible. The State of Florida pays people for each snake they kill and turn in. More people can be encouraged to do so. Provide boats and equipment to enable people to kill the snakes. It is very important to provide safe places for native animals like racoons and alligators to live. Also, it would encourage naturalists, photographers, students, tourists, and Floridians to visit the Everglades National Park wilderness. Provide boat tours and raised wooden walkways for people to walk on so they can get close to the wilderness plants, animals like small alligators, and birds like egrets and herons. Advertise this effort in the Miami Herald and other South Florida newspapers with articles and photos."

One commenter noted that around "180 plant and animal species in Everglades are listed by the State of Florida as threatened, endangered, species of special concern, or commercially exploited. Critical habitat, essential for the conservation of federally listed species, is designated for 10 of the 39 species in ENP [Everglades National Park], covering more than half of the park's area. Under the ESA [Endangered Species Act], federal agencies must consider impacts on listed species and critical habitat in their actions. The federally listed species of concern, which have designated critical habitat within ENP, are listed below and should be evaluated to avoid any potential adverse impacts by the proposed visitor enhancements, given that conservation of flora and fauna takes priority:

- Cape Sable seaside sparrow (*Ammodramus maritimus mirabilis*)*
- Florida leafwing butterfly (*Anaea troglodyta floridalis*)*
- Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*)
- Everglades snail kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*)

- Smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinate*)
- Bartram's scrub hairstreak (*Strymon acis bartrami*)
- West Indian manatee (*Trichecus manatus*)
- Cape Sable thoroughwort (*Chromolaena frustrata*)
- American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*)
- Loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

Exclusively inhabit ENP and its adjacent lands*"

Impacts on Undeveloped Quality

Most commenters want to see structures and installations removed and motorized vehicles prohibited from the wilderness area and do not want any grandfathered in. One commenter wrote, "As a biologist, I was surprised during my visit by the amount of artificial management of the system. For 40 years, I have advocated for removal of controls and structures that impede the natural recovery of the Everglades ecosystem. NPS must begin removing structures and water diversions."

Many commenters mentioned that structures and installations in the wilderness go against the Wilderness Act.

One commenter mentioned they would be in favor of maintaining the offshore chickees as structures for relatively mosquito-free campsites.

Impacts on Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Quality

Some commenters mentioned that when they visit the wilderness, they adapt to it, not vice versa. They do not want to see the wilderness changed in a way that puts visitor recreation before wilderness quality. One commenter wrote, "I visited the Everglades immediately following Hurricane Andrew in the early 1990's; it was exquisitely quiet and free of motorboat traffic, and as a result of the hurricane, the boardwalks were not all navigable, but this allowed for a far more intimate experience of the place as it would be without so much human interference. It is a great error to make this place an amusement park; it is most precious to us as a wilderness; so it is critical that you do all you can to restore the park to its wilderness character and eliminate all those aspects that compromise the wilderness of the park."

Commenters also noted that more visitors will disrupt the natural solitude and primitive state of the wilderness, and limitations should be put into place for the number of visitors, along with education on Leave No Trace principles.

One commenter would like to see detailed explanations of areas considered for unconfined recreation. The commenter further noted that the impact analysis should consider various kinds of unconfined or dispersed recreation that have been shown to cause adverse impacts on vegetation and rare species in some instances, with thoughtful consideration of environmental impacts of proposed visitor enhancements.

Commenters suggested it was unclear in the StoryMap how the National Park Service plans to manage recreational facilities inside wilderness without mention of the minimum requirements specific to signage, picnic tables, and camping platforms.

Out-of-Scope Topics

The below comments and comment summaries are considered out of scope since they are

- not related to the purpose and need of the plan,
- not related to the desired conditions of the plan,
- not related to the preliminary management strategies in the plan,
- not relate to impacts resulting from the implementation of preliminary management strategies,
- outside the geographic scope of the plan, and/or
- relate to actions in frontcountry non-wilderness areas.

Staffing

One commenter wrote that the Tribes in the area should be included as guides and caretakers and that more Native/Indigenous employees should be hired overall.

Another commenter suggested hiring more people or encouraging more social media influencers who are qualified to remove invasive species.

Fire Management

One commenter wrote that they want the fire control lanes to be well maintained and cleared so that when they are needed, staff can access hard-to-reach areas quickly to control and put out fires.

Commercialization

One commenter suggested that incorporating a comprehensive strategy to manage commercial services like permits, concession, and sustainable practices is essential for this area. The comprehensive strategy would ensure adherence to necessary criteria when considering commercial services. Overall, the commenter suggested that a commercial services presence in wilderness areas needs "thoughtful and responsible management to minimize negative impacts on the environment, preserve the wilderness experience, protect cultural resources, and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources."

Illegal Activity

One commenter was concerned about camping opportunities deep in wilderness, writing, "I once met a guy who had a camp in the Everglades and he bragged about baiting and poaching alligators off the camp. I was appalled and it really allows for illegal and irresponsible behavior not to mention a source of pollution deep in the Everglades."

Sprawl

Many commenters mentioned they would like to see strategies to address sprawl and destruction occurring in the park. One commenter suggested removing edge sprawl and expanding park boundaries, while another commenter mentioned adding a buffer zone around the park.

Conservation

Many commenters felt that supporting wildlife should take precedence over visitor experiences. A few commenters noted they do not want to see hunting, trapping, fishing, or collecting allowed in wilderness areas. Other commenters want penalties for poachers and those polluting nearby. Further, some commenters want to see active and visible enforcement of conservation rules, including fines and entry refusal. Some commenters want to see more trained staff, conservation-minded leadership, and communication with the local communities, along with the education, reinforcement, and clarification of conservation goals.

Commenters noted that aquifers and other water resources are being polluted by nearby businesses and that those responsible need to be held accountable.

Many commenters felt the Everglades should foremost be a sanctuary where the environment and its natural processes are not disturbed.

Planning

One commenter suggested the National Park Service should have a funding committee to support the main recommendations for the plan. Another commenter said that adequate funding needs to be provided to maintain and improve current hiking and paddling trails.

Motorized Boats

Others would like to see paddling routes where motorized boats are not allowed. One commenter suggested that motorized boats could be prohibited from certain portions of waterways on certain days of the week/month. Another commenter suggested allowing electric hover boats, like those that cross the English Channel, since they are quieter. Other commenters suggested allowing motorized boats for park personnel only.

Many mentioned that wildlife, like manatees, are greatly disturbed by motorboats. One commenter suggested that there should be large areas of submerged wilderness so that boat wakes could be regulated. Another suggestion was to have fishing preserves where no fishing is allowed to protect wildlife and so that motorized boats do not disturb those areas.

Commenters who use airboats want them to continue to be specially allowed since Congress granted them access.

Other

One commenter shared that they felt the park has an identity crisis that needs to be addressed, noting, “I have visited national parks all over the US and abroad. Some parks lend themselves more openly to human interaction and some do not; the Everglades is one that does not. It is a wild place; it should be entered only with knowledge and conscientious respect. Currently, the

park seems to have an identity crisis. The signage and web sites portray it as an adventure for thrill seekers wanting to conquer the wild, while the educational markers testify to the unique and irreplaceable qualities of the Everglades. I have never really understood this dichotomy in light of the Wilderness Act, which clearly supports maintaining the 'wildness' of places over exploitation and human manipulation."

Some commenters suggested having environmentally friendly access to the park in the forms of electric shuttles or other public transportation. Another commenter noted that logistic services are important for nonmotorized trips into the wilderness.

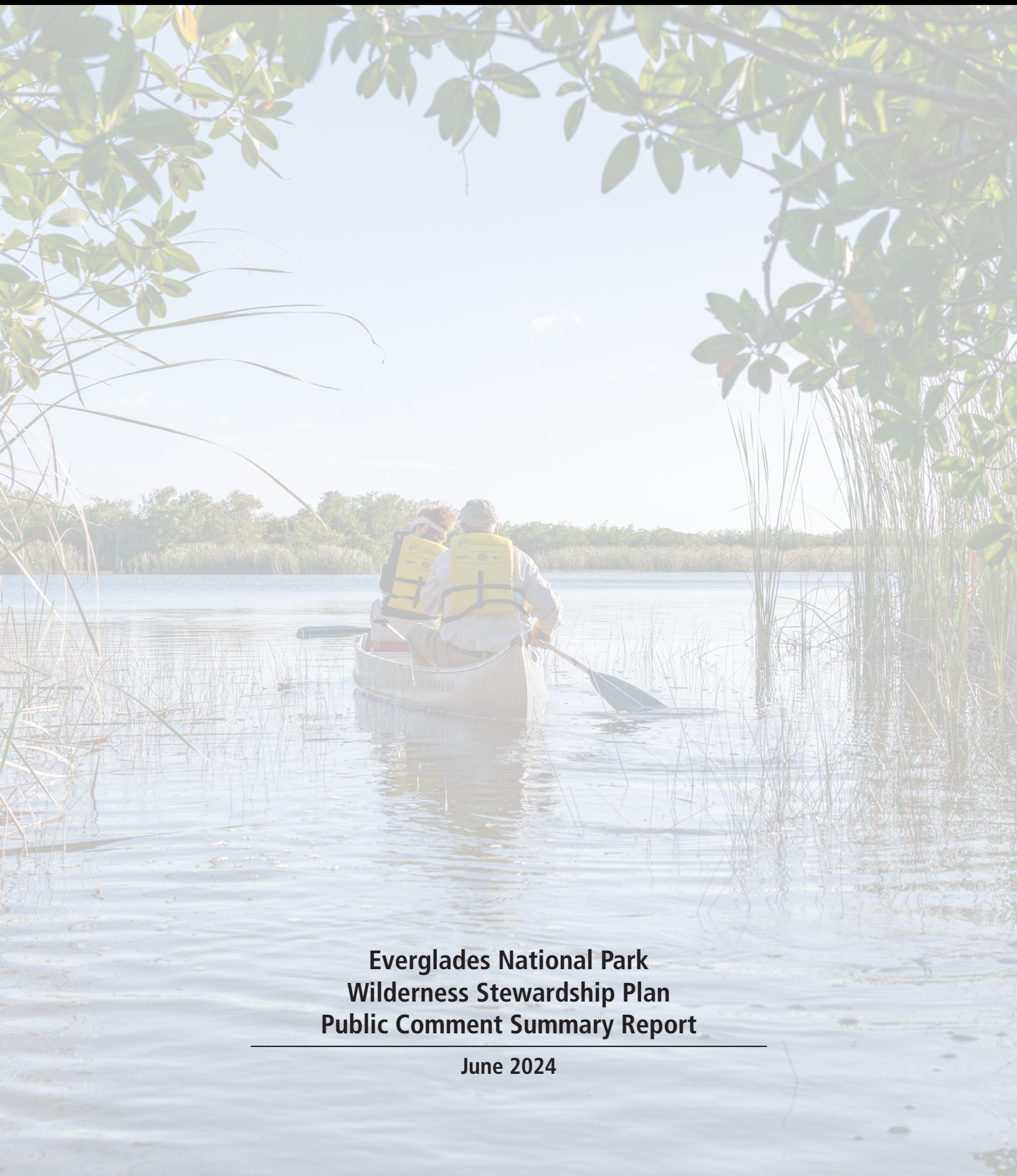
Another commenter said they have difficulties reserving a campsite with the current online system. They wrote, "The Recreation.gov site for reserving campsites up to 3 mo. in advance is cumbersome. It's difficult to change a selected site without starting all over again! The old system of showing up and requesting sites 24 hrs. in advance was much easier to use! Also the is no incentive to cancel a reservation on Rec. gov. Although I am unable to prove it, I imagine that quite a few sites are booked and not used, denying others the opportunity. Sure, it is everyones' responsibility to not exclude others, but that doesn't make it happen."

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under US administration.

EVER 160/193737
June 2024

Everglades National Park
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Everglades National Park
Wilderness Stewardship Plan
Public Comment Summary Report

June 2024