



Interim Update

Dear Friends,

This short newsletter is being prepared to update you on the Addition General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/ORV Management Plan. In April of 2007, we sent out a newsletter that contained a range of preliminary alternatives for public comment. Approximately 4800 public comments were received, and Preserve staff spent the fall and winter analyzing them and working on a preferred alternative.

This newsletter is a progress report to let you know that we are still actively involved in the planning process, what the next steps are, and how you can stay involved. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call the Preserve at 239.695.1103. We appreciate the interest and support shown thus far for the planning effort and welcome your continued participation.

Karen Gustin

Superintendent
Big Cypress National Preserve



Interstate Highway 75 Access

It is important to clarify how Interstate Highway 75 access is being addressed in the General Management Plan (GMP) for the Addition within Big Cypress National Preserve.

When Congress passed the Big Cypress National Preserve Addition Act (Public Law 100-301), it directed the National Park Service (NPS) to work with the State of Florida to construct three recreational access points off Interstate Highway 75. Subsequently, in 1990 the NPS prepared an I-75 Recreational Access Plan that identified two Addition access points to be located at mile markers 51 and 63 in the Addition and a third at mile marker 71 within the original Preserve. The access point at mile marker 71 has been established and is open to the public.

"The Secretary and other involved Federal agencies shall cooperate with the State of Florida to establish recreational access points... in conjunction with the creation of the Addition and in the construction of Interstate Highway 75. Three of such access points shall be located within the preserve (including the Addition)."

Public Law 100-301 Sec. 10 The Big Cypress National Preserve Addition Act

Our goal through the GMP planning effort so far has been to follow the Addition Act's mandate by maintaining access point location decisions made through the 1990 I-75 Recreational Access Plan. These are locations that our partners at the Florida Department of Transportation, as well as the Federal Highway Administration, have determined to ensure efficient and safe travel.

All of the preliminary alternatives that we shared with you in April 2007 include access point locations at mile markers 51 and 63. The differences among the alternatives are found in the types of access that would be provided at each of those locations. At a minimum, each alternative provides for walk-in access. The differences in types of access depend on the locations of wilderness and ORV trails proposed in each alternative.



Questions and Answers

Q -What is taking place now?

A - In May 2007, we conducted a round of public meetings that highlighted a range of preliminary alternatives with a component of proposed wilderness and conceptual ORV trails included. During the public comment period, approximately 4800 comments were received, and those comments were analyzed during the summer months. Currently, the NPS is working on a preferred alternative.

Q – What is the next step?

A – Once the NPS finalizes a preferred alternative, a series of internal briefings take place within the agency. After that, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is written and will be published and distributed to the public in the fall of 2008.

Q – Will there be any more opportunity for public comment?

A – Yes. After the Draft EIS is published and distributed in the fall of 2008, there will be a 60-day public comment period.

Q – Explain to me how wilderness works.

A – The alternatives provide a range of proposed wilderness. If wilderness is part of the preferred alternative and becomes part of the final decision, at that time, it is proposed wilderness and the land has to be managed so that the characteristics that deemed it suitable as wilderness in the first place are kept intact. The actual designation of wilderness is a separate legislative process.

Q – Where do ORV trails come into the picture?

A – Similar to the wilderness component, the alternatives provide a range of conceptual ORV trail systems. These trails are the result of months of field work by NPS staff and represent a conceptual, sustainable trail system. If ORV trails are part of the preferred alternative and become part of the final decision, then trails would be developed as part of a designated trail system. There would be no dispersed ORV use in the Addition.

| Time Frame | Planning Activity | How You Can Be Involved |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Summer / Fall 2008 | Prepare and Publish Draft Document A draft general management plan and environmental impact statement is released to public for comment. The draft document describes the alternatives and impacts of implementing each. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Read draft plan •Send us your ideas and comments •Participate in public meetings/ hearings |
| Summer 2009 | Prepare and Publish Final Document Based on a review by the National Park Service and the public, the NPS revises the GMP and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved in a published Record of Decision. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Read the final plan, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters |
| 2009 and Beyond | Implement the Approved Plan After the Record of Decision is issued, and as funding allows, the general management plan is implemented. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work with the Preserve to implement plan |

For continued updates on the Addition General Management Plan process visit: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>