



Big Cypress National Preserve

Public Review Draft Backcountry Access Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Virtual Public Meeting

November 2020
last updated version 11/6/2020

[Morgan] - Every few minutes repeat

[5 mins prior] Good evening, the meeting is scheduled to start around xxx p.m. We will start in a few minutes. I will continue to keep us on mute until it is 7 o'clock.

[At 7:00 p.m.] It is 7, we are going to wait for 1 more minute to allow everyone to sign on.

Tom, we have xxx attendees; we are ready to present the plan overview.

[TOM will be in the screen and introduce himself. Morgan Next screen]



Welcome!

Meeting Agenda

- Presentation (½ hour)
- Questions and Answers (1.5 hours)



Presentation

- What is NEPA?
- Project Background
- Alternatives
- Schedule
- How to engage

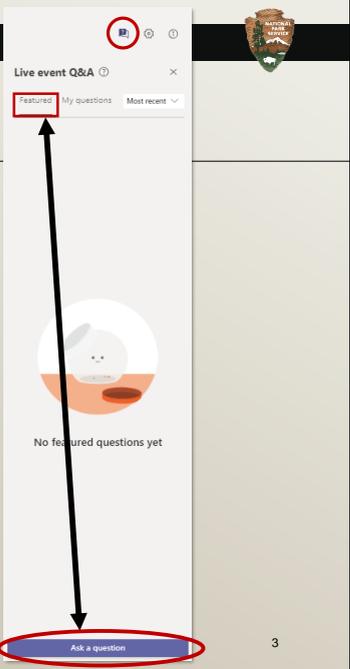
- [TOM starts]

Welcome and good evening to everyone. I am Tom Forsyth, Superintendent here at Big Cypress National Preserve. Thank you for joining our virtual online public meeting to discuss the public review process of the draft for the Cypress National Preserve Backcountry Access Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. The presentation will include a discussion of the NEPA process, project background, the alternatives, the timeline for this process, and how you can best share your thoughts and feedback.

National Park Service • U.S. Department of the Interior

To Ask Questions

- As an attendee, you will be in listen-only mode.
- After the presentation overview, we will use the chat function to review and answer your questions to the best of our ability.



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Since you can hear me, we know you have been successful navigating the teams' live event, and we are glad you are here. As an attendee, you will be in listen-only mode. Near the end of the presentation overview, we will open the chat box and ask that you to start entering your questions.

To ask questions, please go to the webinar control panel and use the chat feature.

We will answer as many of your questions as possible. If we don't get to your question tonight, we will enter them into our online database and formally respond to them in our final report.



After this Presentation / Comments

We intend to take your questions today and answer as many of them as possible. Formal comments on the Plan/EIS should be submitted via our website or mail.

This is the link: <https://parkplanning.gov/BICY>

At the end of this presentation, we will walk through step-by-step on how to submit comments.

Today, we will be taking your questions about the process, the draft EIS, and the development of the plan. We will answer your questions on the plan's content and about our process thus far. This isn't the best format to respond to questions about why we did or did not consider specific trails or destinations. We ask you to provide your formal comments or questions on those types of concerns by visiting the link on this slide. At the end of this presentation, we will walk through a step-by-step process for posting comments.



Thank You to Everyone Involved

- Previous park management and staff
- Landowners
- Other stakeholders
- Big Cypress ORV Advisory Committee



- Franklin Adams – Sportsmen/Landowner
- Robin Barnes – Gateway Community of Everglades City
- David Denham - Environmental
- Edwin Everham – Academia/Environmental
- Manley Fuller – Sportsmen
- Karl Greer – Sportsmen/Landowner
- Chuck Hampton – Sportsmen/Landowner
- Wayne Jenkins – Sportsmen
- Gary Lytton – Environmental
- Barbara Jean Powell – Sportsmen/Landowner
- Marsha Connell – State FL
- Steve Thompson – Sportsmen
- Curt Witthoff – Academia
- Ed Woods – Seminole Tribe

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Before we get started, I would like to recognize the many participants who helped develop this plan over time. These folks include the individuals and teams listed on the slide, and I am sure many others that I am not even aware of. They personally provided on-the-ground site visits, attended our workshops, and even helped us delineate the proposed trails. It has been a long process, we have learned a lot, and we appreciate everyone's cooperation and support over the years. Thank you.



What is NEPA?

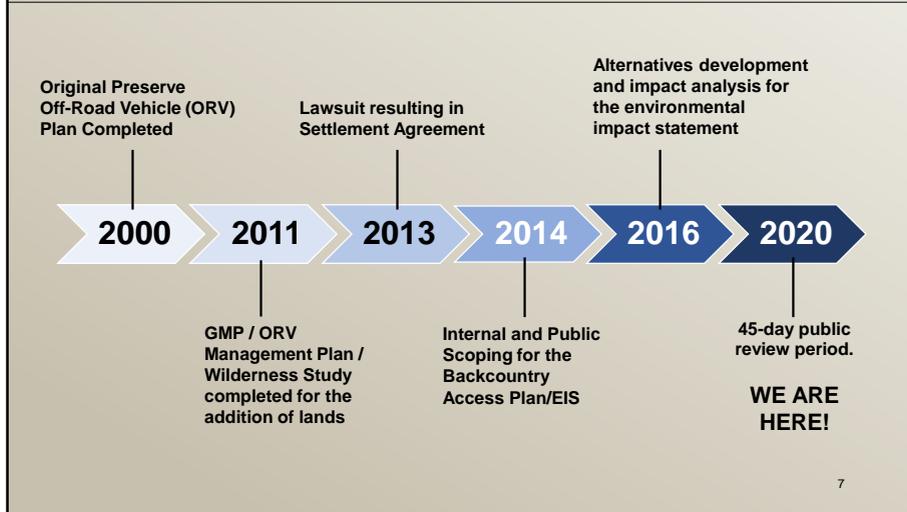
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is part of a planning and decision-making process and requires federal agencies to:
 - Analyze the environmental impacts of federal actions
 - Engage the public in the decision-making process



The National Environmental Policy Act (or NEPA) is part of the planning and decision-making process, which requires federal agencies to analyze the environmental impacts of federal actions and engage the public in the decision-making process. Recently, the NEPA requirements were updated. However, since we started this process in 2013 and the document was nearly finished when the new guidance was released, it was grandfathered under the earlier policy guidance.



Project Background/Timeline



This plan will be part of the preserve's planning portfolio. The plan when finalized and read in conjunction with the 2000 Recreational ORV Management Plan and the 2010 Addition's GMP will provide comprehensive guidance on managing the trail system for the preserve. Instead of developing the Draft immediately after scoping, we decided to go back out to the public in February 2016 with preliminary alternatives to confirm the general direction of the plan. Scoping and preliminary alternative development included hikers, hunters, and ORV users to identify routes and camping destinations that were important for these user groups to access.

As you can see, we did not make much progress from 2017 through 2019 due to management changes as well as the hurricane.

The actions included in this plan are high-priority management actions ready to be acted upon. And now, I'll start providing an overview of the draft Plan/EIS.



Purpose and Need

- Protect the preserve's resources while providing for sustainable recreational backcountry use of the preserve in accordance with its enabling legislation.
- Comply with settlement agreement regarding establishing secondary trails.
- Evaluate alternatives for a secondary ORV trail network in the Original Preserve that provides reasonable access to backcountry destinations.



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The plan was developed in accordance with the preserve's enabling legislation; management plans; NPS policies; and applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The plan was developed to provide management guidelines for backcountry access and use in the preserve.



Purpose and Need (*continued*)

- Establish management approach for backcountry camping as it relates to off-road vehicle (ORV) use, hunting, hiking, and other activities.
- Clarify definitions of key terms within the 2000 ORV Management Plan and 2010 Addition General Management Plan.
- Establish a permanent route for the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) and other nonmotorized recreation opportunities (Addition and Original Preserve).



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Ultimately, this plan protects the preserve's resources while providing for sustainable recreational backcountry use of the preserve in accordance with its enabling legislation. And, it complies with the settlement agreement regarding establishing secondary trails by evaluating alternatives for a secondary ORV trail network in the Original Preserve that provides reasonable access to backcountry destinations. And, finally, it will establish a permanent route for the Florida National Scenic Trail as well as a management approach for backcountry camping.



Backcountry Plan Definitions

- **Primary ORV trail:** Primary ORV trails are those trails emanating from the designated access points and provide recreational access within the preserve. These trails are the principal ORV routes.
- **Secondary ORV trail:** A secondary ORV trail branches off a primary trail and leads to one or more backcountry destinations.
- **Backcountry destination:** A backcountry destination is a specific *campsite* or *geographic point of interest* in the backcountry of the preserve.



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One of the aspects of the 2000 ORV plan that needed to be addressed in this planning effort is clarification of certain definitions related to backcountry access. These are the definitions that form the basis for the alternatives described in the plan. The National Park Service has sought to define these terms in specific ways that account for the visitor experience and build the visitor into our decision making.

- Secondary trails are “out and back” trails to a destination; they do not connect to other trails, and they do not have loops.
- A campsite is a specific point that provides features desirable for camping such as shade and/or high, dry ground.
- A geographic point of interest is a location that attracts—or could be anticipated to attract—a broad spectrum of visitors such as a scenic vista, a viewing area for wildlife, a place with distinctive flora, a lake, or a feature of cultural or historic interest. Some destinations may feature both campsites and geographic points of interest.



Backcountry Plan Alternatives

- Five alternatives including the no action.
- Alternatives vary according to level of development and access.
- Major components of the alternatives
 - Miles of primary ORV trails
 - Miles of secondary ORV trails
 - Miles of hiking trails
 - Number of backcountry destinations and campgrounds
 - Approach to camping management



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We developed 5 alternatives by evaluating a range of backcountry use for ORV and hiking trails, destinations, and camping management. We used substrate-suitability assessments to help us build different configurations, following the same framework as the 2000 ORV plan.

For example:

- Alternative 2's trails and destinations occur only in highly resilient substrates, and
- Alternative 5's trails and destinations are allowed in all types of substrates, including least resilient substrates.
- Camping assessments range from dispersed camping to a reservation-only system.



Actions Common to All Action Alternatives

- Segments (44 miles) of the Florida National Scenic Trail would be rerouted to a previously used trail to separate motorized and non-motorized vehicles.
- All ORVs would be required to abide by rules governing vehicle specifications and permitting requirements.
- All backcountry overnight campers (incl. ORV users, hikers, campers, and boaters) would be required to obtain a backcountry permit.



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- In accordance with NEPA, the National Park Service is required to examine a range of alternatives when preparing an environmental impact statement. While each alternative represents unique approaches to management of the preserve, there are many strategies that do not vary among the alternatives. These strategies are considered “common to all” of the action alternatives and ultimately serve to protect the resources and values of the preserve. The actions common to all alternatives are addressed in this slide and the next two slides.



Actions Common to All Action Alternatives (*continued*)

- Temporal and spatial closures would be implemented as necessary for visitor safety and protection of preserve resources.
- Education of and communication to all visitors, including ORV operators and hikers, would be ongoing and adaptable.
- Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly educational materials would be provided to visitors as they obtain backcountry or camping permits.



These are more actions that are the same in each of the alternatives, like temporary closures and tread lightly. I will pause for a moment to give you time to read these.

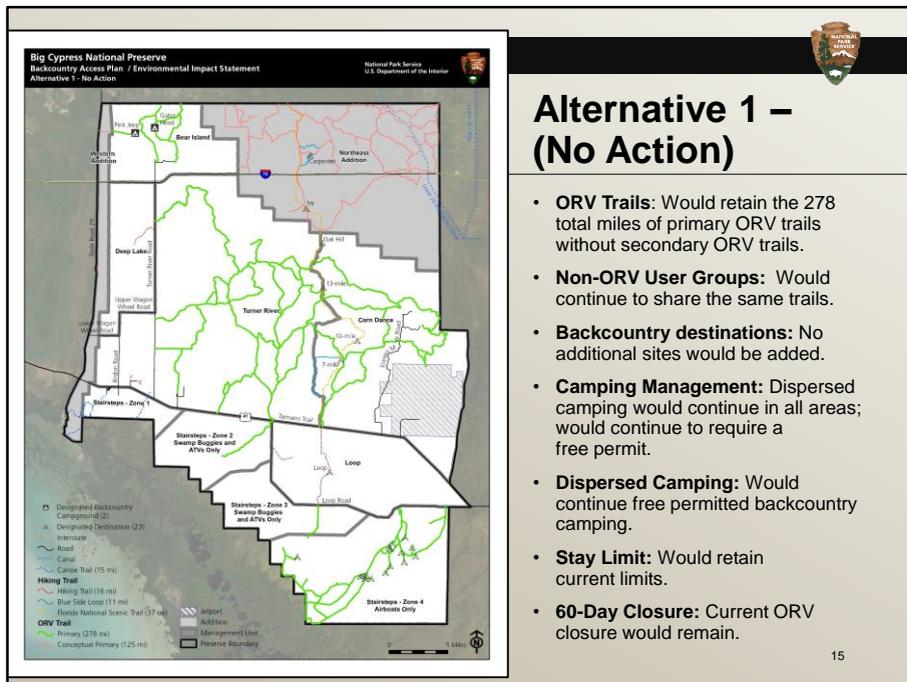


Actions Common to All Action Alternatives (*continued*)

- A signage plan would improve trail markings and way finding.
- No changes are proposed to the existing canoe trails (15 miles) in the Western Addition and Stairsteps Unit Zone 1.
- No changes are proposed to the existing conceptual primary trail network in the Northeast and Western Additions.



And the remaining actions that are the same regardless of alternative, like trail marking and way finding. Again, I will pause for a moment to give you time to read these.



The no-action alternative represents the continuation of current management practices related to backcountry recreational access in the preserve. Under this alternative, ORV trails would continue along existing primary trails and no new primary or secondary ORV trails would be opened. Accordingly, existing ORV backcountry recreation access opportunities would continue as is. Also, under the no-action alternative, the ORV and non-ORV user groups would share the same trail network. In addition, dispersed camping would continue to be permitted in most of the preserve with free backcountry camping permits needed. And, finally, no additional designated backcountry camping areas would be provided under this alternative.

Alternative 2

- **ORV Trails:** Would keep current primary ORV trails and would add 33 miles of secondary ORV trails.
- **Backcountry destinations:** Would add 46 backcountry destinations.
- **Camping Management:** Would discontinue all dispersed camping. Reservations would be required, and limitations on group size would be established.
- **Stay Limit:** Would be changed to 14 consecutive days.
- **60-Day Closure:** The current ORV closure would remain.

Alternative 2 offers visitors slightly increased access compared to the no-action alternative. Under this alternative:

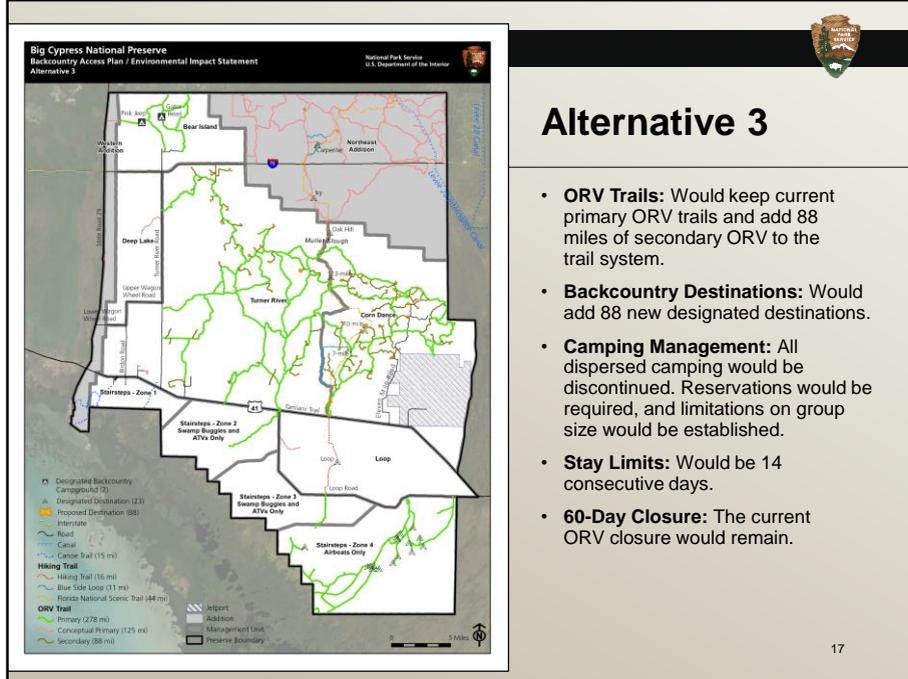
- 33 miles of designated ORV secondary trails would be added that traverse highly resilient substrate types.
- 46 new backcountry destinations would be opened to accommodate additional camping opportunities, but dispersed camping along trails would be discontinued.

A reservation system would be established for camping, and limitations on group size would be implemented.

The camping stay limit would be 14 consecutive days year-round, and the 60-day ORV closure would remain in place.

And under this and each of the other action alternatives, The Florida National Scenic Trail would be re-aligned to separate the hikers and the ORV's

[next slide]



Alternative 3 offers visitors increased access compared with alternative 2. Under this alternative:

- A total of 88 miles of secondary ORV trails that traverse both resilient and highly resilient substrate types would be opened,
- An additional 88 backcountry destinations would be opened, and
- A reservation system for camping, limitations on group sizes, and the annual 60-day ORV closure would be the same as in Alternative 2.
- [next slide]

Alternative 4

- **ORV Trails:** Would add 59 miles of primary ORV and 100 miles of secondary ORV trails.
- **Hiking Trails:** Would expand hiking trails by 51 miles.
- **Backcountry Destinations:** Would add 136 backcountry destinations.
- **Camping Management:** Dispersed camping would be allowed in all management zones, including Bear Island. No reservation system would be implemented.
- **Stay Limits:** The stay limit would remain 14 consecutive days.
- **60-Day Closure:** The current 60-day ORV closure would be lifted.

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Alternative 4 would once again increase backcountry access for visitors, while balancing impacts to natural resources by using pre-existing routes and other previously disturbed areas. Under this alternative:

- We would open 59 additional miles of primary ORV trails and 100 miles of secondary ORV trails on highly resilient to resilient substrate types.
- 136 additional backcountry destinations would be opened.
- The hiking trail system would be expanded by 51 miles.
- Regarding camping under this alternative, dispersed camping would be allowed in all of the preserve’s management zones and no reservation system would be implemented.
- The stay limit would be 14 consecutive days.
- The annual 60-day ORV closure, however, would be lifted.
- [next slide]

Alternative 5 – Preferred Alternative

- **ORV Trails:** Would add 66 miles of primary ORV and 154 miles of secondary ORV trails.
- **Hiking Trails:** Would add 51 miles to hiking trail system.
- **Backcountry Destinations:** Would open 203 additional backcountry destinations and add two constructed backcountry campgrounds.
- **Camping management:** Dispersed camping would be allowed in all management zones, including Bear Island. No reservation system would be implemented.
- **Stay Limits:** Would be 14 consecutive days.
- **60-Day Closure:** The current 60-day ORV closure would be lifted.

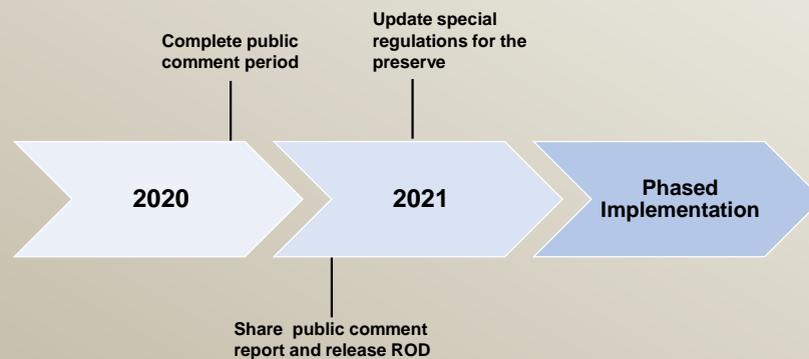
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Alternative 5 provides the greatest amount of public access to the preserve, while still providing for the protection of cultural and natural resources and is the preferred alternative. This alternative would:

- Open 66 additional miles of primary ORV trails and 154 miles of secondary ORV trails, most of which would traverse highly resilient to resilient substrate types.
- In addition, a total of 203 additional backcountry destinations would be opened.
- The camping, as well as the hiking trail system would be the same as in alternative 4.
- As under alternatives 2, 3, and 4, the camping stay limit would be 14 consecutive days.
- And, again the 60-day ORV closure would be lifted.
- Two additional backcountry campgrounds would be constructed,
- And as in the other action alternatives, the Florida National Scenic Trail would be realigned to improve the backcountry experience of hikers by separating ORV and non-ORV users.
- [next slide]



Next Steps



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Once we read and consider all the comments that have been entered in PEPC, we will develop formal responses and share these via a public comment's analysis report. It will be released with the final decision document, what we call a Record of Decision (or more commonly, a ROD).

Before we can implement the plan, our next step will be to update our regulations (36 CFR) to make the actions are legal. We expect to have this completed by late Summer or early Fall, then we will begin the process of re-opening the trails.

I am now going to hand it back to our moderator, Morgan, who will give a quick tutorial on how you can comment on the draft Plan and then she will begin reading your questions to us. Morgan, back to you...

[next slide]



Ways to Comment on the Plan

As mentioned earlier, today we are here to answer your questions on the process and the plan proposal.

We'd like your formal comments entered on our project website, which has instructions for submitting comments at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BICYBAP>

Writing to the park:

Big Cypress National Preserve
Attn: BAP
33100 Tamiami Trail East
Ochopee, FL 34141

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[Morgan start comment overview] Thank you Tom,

I am going to open the chat now. While you are entering your questions for tonight. I am going to go over the steps on how to enter your formal comments online.

After these instructions, we will start our live question and answer period.

[next slide]



Substantive Comments

- Examples may include:
 - identifying a factual error in the document and offering supporting information;
 - identifying a relevant environmental issue not considered and explaining why it should be given detailed analysis; and
 - suggesting an alternative not considered in the document or specific modifications to an alternative.



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Substantive comments are the most helpful comments for us when reviewing the Plan

- Examples of substantive comments could include identifying a factual error in the document and offering corrected information; identifying a relevant environmental issue not considered in the document and explaining why it should be given detailed analysis.

- [nextslide]



Using PEPC

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BICY>

The screenshot shows the National Park Service website for Big Cypress National Preserve. The page title is "Big Cypress National Preserve" and the location is "Southeast • Florida". A red circle highlights the "Open for Comment" link in the left-hand navigation menu. Below the navigation menu, there are sections for "Archived Projects", "Park/Unit Information", and "Park News". The main content area features a table of "Park Projects (found total 4)".

Project Title	Project Type	NEPA Type
Burnett Oil Company Nobles Grade 3-D Seismic Survey	Other Plan	EA
Construct Everglades City Replacement Housing Hardened to Resist Storms and Flooding	Other Maintenance Activities	EA
Backcountry Access Plan	Backcountry Management Plan	EIS
Update Fire Management Plans for Big Cypress National Preserve and Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge	Fire Management Plan	EA

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the NPS logo, "nps.gov", and the slogan "EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™". Below this, there are links for "U.S. Department of the Interior", "FOIA", "Privacy Policy", "Disclaimer and Ownership", "USA Gov", "NPS Home", "Accessibility", "RSS", and "NPS".

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- The next few slides will be a step by step on how to enter your formal questions after this meeting on online.
- Go to the following link, <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BICY>
- Click on open located on the left column
- [next slide]



Using PEPC

The screenshot shows the National Park Service website's PEPC (Public Environmental Process) section. The page title is "Documents Open for Comment". Below the title, there is a table with the following data:

Document Name	Project Type	Park
Big Cypress National Preserve Backcountry Access Plan / Draft Environmental Impact Statement	Backcountry Management Plan	Big Cypress NP/Pres

The document name in the first row is circled in red. The footer of the page includes the NPS logo, the URL nps.gov, and the slogan "EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™".

Click the document name, and it will lead you to where you may download the document and provide comments [next slide]



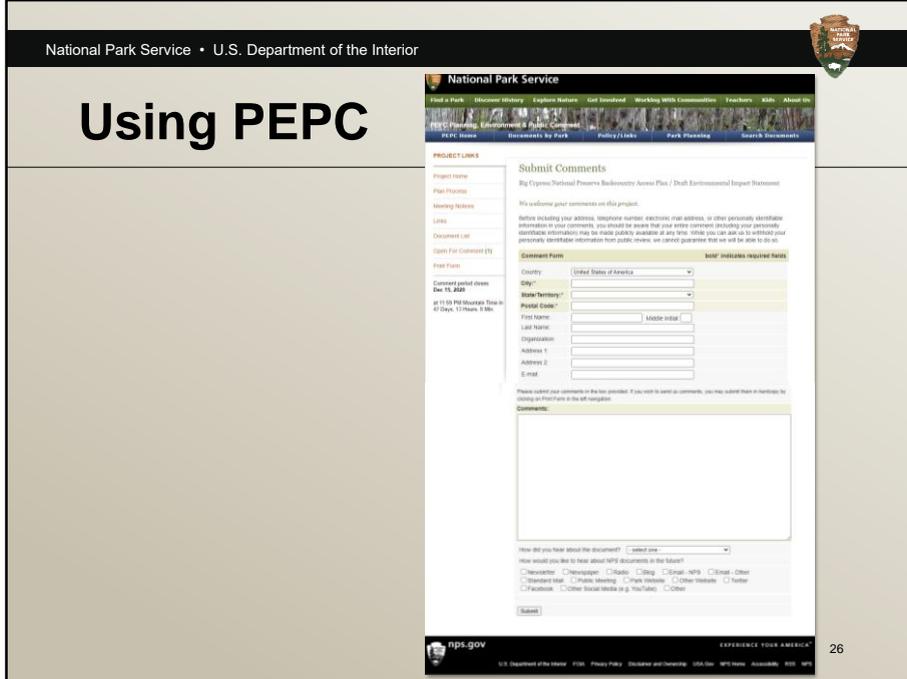
Using PEPC

The screenshot shows the National Park Service website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'Find a Park', 'Discover History', 'Explore Nature', 'Get Involved', 'Working With Communities', 'Teachers', 'Kids', and 'About Us'. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with 'PEPC Home', 'Documents by Park', 'Policy/Links', 'Park Planning', and 'Search Documents'. The main content area is titled 'Big Cypress National Preserve • Backcountry Access Plan • Document List • Document Contents'. The page features a 'PROJECT LINKS' sidebar on the left with options like 'Project Home', 'Plan Process', 'Meeting Notices', and 'Links'. A 'Comment Now' button is prominently displayed. The 'Document Contents' section lists a PDF file: 'BICYHAP/CEIS_S08_20201026.pdf (9.6 MB, PDF file)'. A red circle highlights the 'Open For Comment (1)' link in the sidebar, and another red circle highlights the PDF document link in the 'Document Contents' section.

Clicking on the document PDF file will allow you to download the plan to read.

On the left column, clicking on "Comment Now" will open the comment fields.

[next slide]



Here is where you will type your comments. You will need to fill in the requested personal information. Although we try not to share this information, we cannot guarantee we will be able to do so.

You can help us in our review by providing comments that are short and to the point and relevant to the issues and alternatives; give us your reasoning or rationale for a comment and where possible add data if you have it.

Please remember that commenting is not a form of “voting” for a particular alternative.

This finishes the steps on how to enter your formal questions that we will review, analyze, and develop a public report. And as appropriate revise our Final Plan/EIS.

- [nextslide]



Ground Rules for Today's Question and Answer

- Today we will respond to clarifying questions about our analysis and development of the plan and document process.

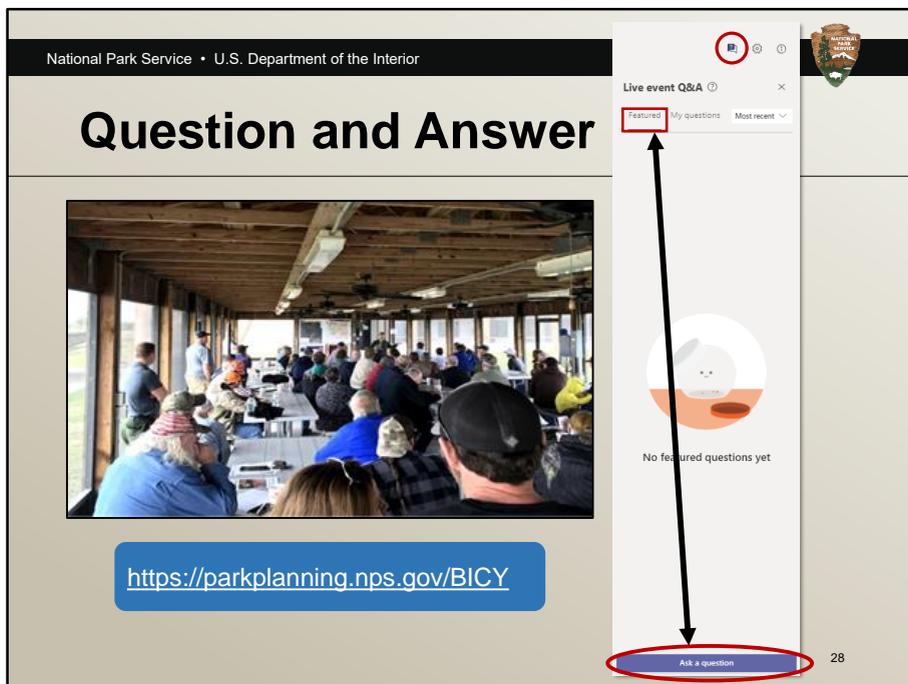
CHAT BOX

- Comments about what was done wrong or right during the process or specific comments suggesting changes to data are the types of comments that should be formally entered online.



Photo copyright Ralph Arwood

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BICY>



If you have not already entered a question, please do so now in the lower field of the right-hand column of your screen.

Tom, this is our first question.

[Morgan will read questions and publish]

[Morgan after the panel responds Morgan will read next question]

[Marlena will periodically push our 3 general announcements out including – please use our online site, go see our live web, and call the park directly with non BAP questions]

[Marlena will respond to as appropriate to the dismissed list]

If there are no more questions. I will turn it back to TOM for closing.. [next slide]



Thank you!



<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BICY>

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- [TOM CLOSE OUT]
- Thank you for attending today's webinar, and thank you for your interest in preserving the Big Cypress National Preserve and the recreational opportunities it provides.