



Dear Friends,

As you may be aware, the National Park Service (NPS) has decided to reexamine the long-term direction for redeveloping the Gulf Coast Visitor Center site in Everglades City as well as the park's facilities at Flamingo due to severe budget constraints and the susceptibility of these low-lying coastal sites to intense storms and flooding.

This newsletter is focused specifically on the redevelopment of the Gulf Coast site. We are seeking your ideas and suggestions for how best to provide visitor opportunities, meet park operational needs, and support future concessions operations in the Gulf Coast District. There will be a public meeting on January 19th, 2012 to discuss these topics. The public comment period continues through February 3rd, 2012 and provides an important opportunity to hear from you regarding the long-term strategy for the park's gateway to the Ten Thousand Islands and Wilderness Waterway.

This project is associated with the Draft General Management Plan (GMP)/East Everglades Wilderness Study/ Environmental Impact Statement that many of you have been involved with over the years. Please read the newsletter to understand the context for this project and the initial options being considered. We encourage you to attend the January 19th, 2012 meeting and we welcome your input, especially your input on what you see as the best path forward.

As always, thank you for your continued interest in Everglades National Park.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dan B. Kimball".

Dan B. Kimball, Superintendent
Everglades National Park

You are invited to attend a public meeting about this project!

**Thursday, January 19, 2012
5:30-8:00 p.m.**

Big Cypress National Preserve Welcome Center
33000 Tamiami Trail East, Ochopee, FL 34141

(2.5 miles east of Tamiami Trail and Route 29 intersection)

The first hour will be an open house to give everyone an opportunity to review project information, talk with staff and provide comments. At 6:30 p.m. there will be a short presentation about the project followed by additional public comment and discussion.

To learn more about the status and next steps of the Draft GMP, including new considerations for Flamingo, go to: <http://www.nps.gov/ever> and scroll down to General Management Plan update.





Redeveloping the Gulf Coast Visitor Center Site Facilities, Everglades City, Florida

Share your ideas for this major gateway to Everglades National Park

The National Park Service (NPS) is reconsidering how best to improve its aging Gulf Coast facilities at Everglades City in light of government-wide funding cutbacks and concerns about new construction in coastal sites which are highly susceptible to major storms and flooding.

The Gulf Coast Visitor Center, Ranger Station, and Commercial Services Facility are located in Everglades City, Florida. Everglades City is a central location for visiting Everglades National Park (ENP), Big Cypress National Preserve (BNP), and other nearby natural areas such as Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand State Park, and Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The park's Gulf Coast site provides primary access to the Ten Thousand Islands and Wilderness Waterway backcountry.

The existing facilities and related infrastructure were constructed in 1966 and have undergone minimal changes and few improvements over the years. These facilities have become functionally obsolete, structurally unsound, and are at-risk in this low-lying coastal setting.

Among other important elements of the Everglades National Park Protection and Expansion Act of 1989, the law authorized and directed the Secretary of Interior to expedite construction of a new visitor center at Everglades City and to designate it the "Marjory Stoneman Douglas Center." More than 20 years later this center has yet to be funded or built, and in light of the current and anticipated budget outlook, the NPS is looking for ways to fulfill this commitment in a cost-effective and sustainable way.

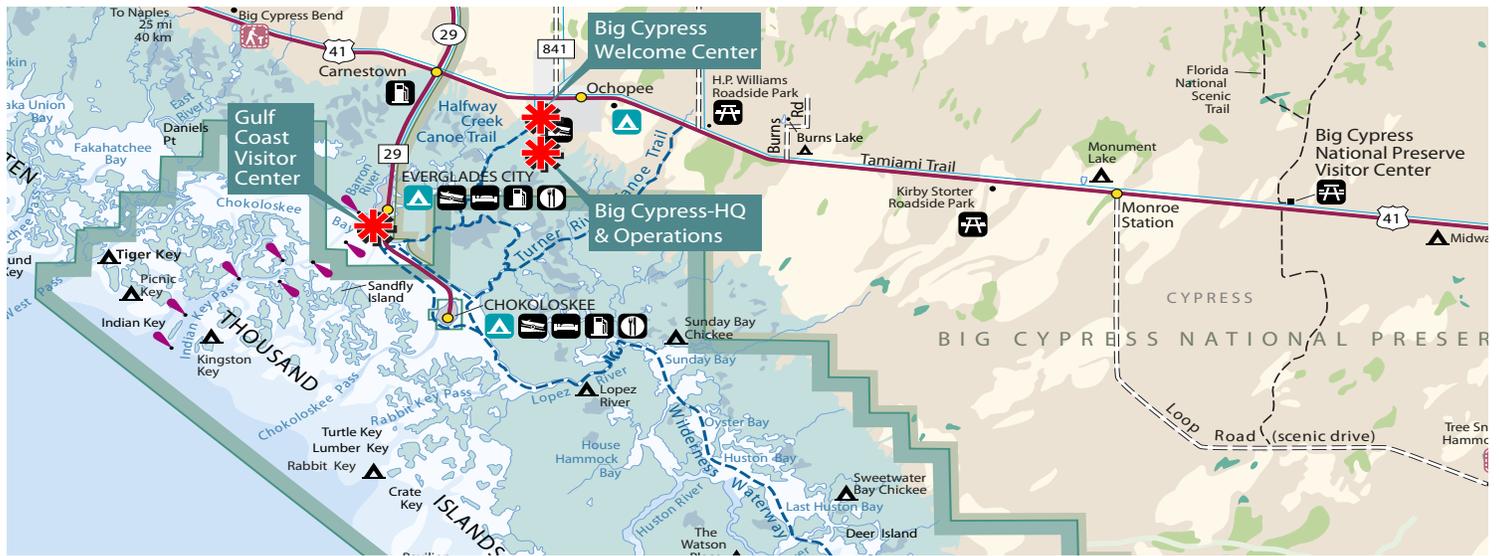
Planning considerations to be examined in the coming months, including your insights and ideas, will help to clarify the viable options for future visitor services and park operations, whether they remain completely on-site or include possible partnering options within Everglades City or Big Cypress National Preserve. The results of this planning process will be included in a draft general management plan that will provide both the management direction and rationale for securing funding for the design phase. The draft GMP is now projected for public review in 2013.



PROJECT GOALS:

- Maximize facility efficiency and sustainability
- Honor Marjory Stoneman Douglas
- Enhance the physical connection between Everglades National Park, Everglades City and neighboring communities
- Enhance public access to and use of the site's waterfront
- Improve site safety by separating visitor uses from operational functions
- Minimize marina and site congestion
- Improve canoe/kayak launching
- Improve site circulation

REGIONAL MAP



Potential Locations to Meet Future Needs	Current On-Site Location	Revised On-Site Location	Off-Site Partnership and/or Commercial Location	Off-site NPS Location (ENP and/or BNP site)
Services & Operations				
Visitor Services				
Visitor Orientation		•	•	
Education & Interpretation		•	•	
Backcountry Staging & Permitting		•	•	
Restrooms		•	•	
Parking	•	•	•	
Concessions				
Offices		•	•	
Retail, Food Vending		•	•	
Ticket Sales		•	•	
NPS Operations				
District Interpretation		•	•	
District Visitor Safety & Resource Protection		•		
District Maintenance - Water	•	•		
District Maintenance - Land	•	•		•
Boating Operations				
Concessions Excursion Boats	•		•	
Concessions Tour Boats	•		•	
Concessions Canoe/Kayak Rentals	•	•	•	
NPS Interpretation Boats	•		•	
NPS Law Enforcement Boats	•			
NPS Maintenance Boats	•			
Canoe/Kayak Launch	•	•	•	

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES:

The Gulf Coast facility is Everglades National Park's primary visitor contact location on Florida's west coast. The main visitor activity is concessioner-led boat tours through Chokoloskee Bay to the Ten Thousand Islands and to nearby rivers and creeks. Together with paddlers exploring the park's vast backcountry, these boat trips account for the majority of Gulf Coast's 110,000 annual visits. District-wide ranger, maintenance, and interpretive operations are also located here.

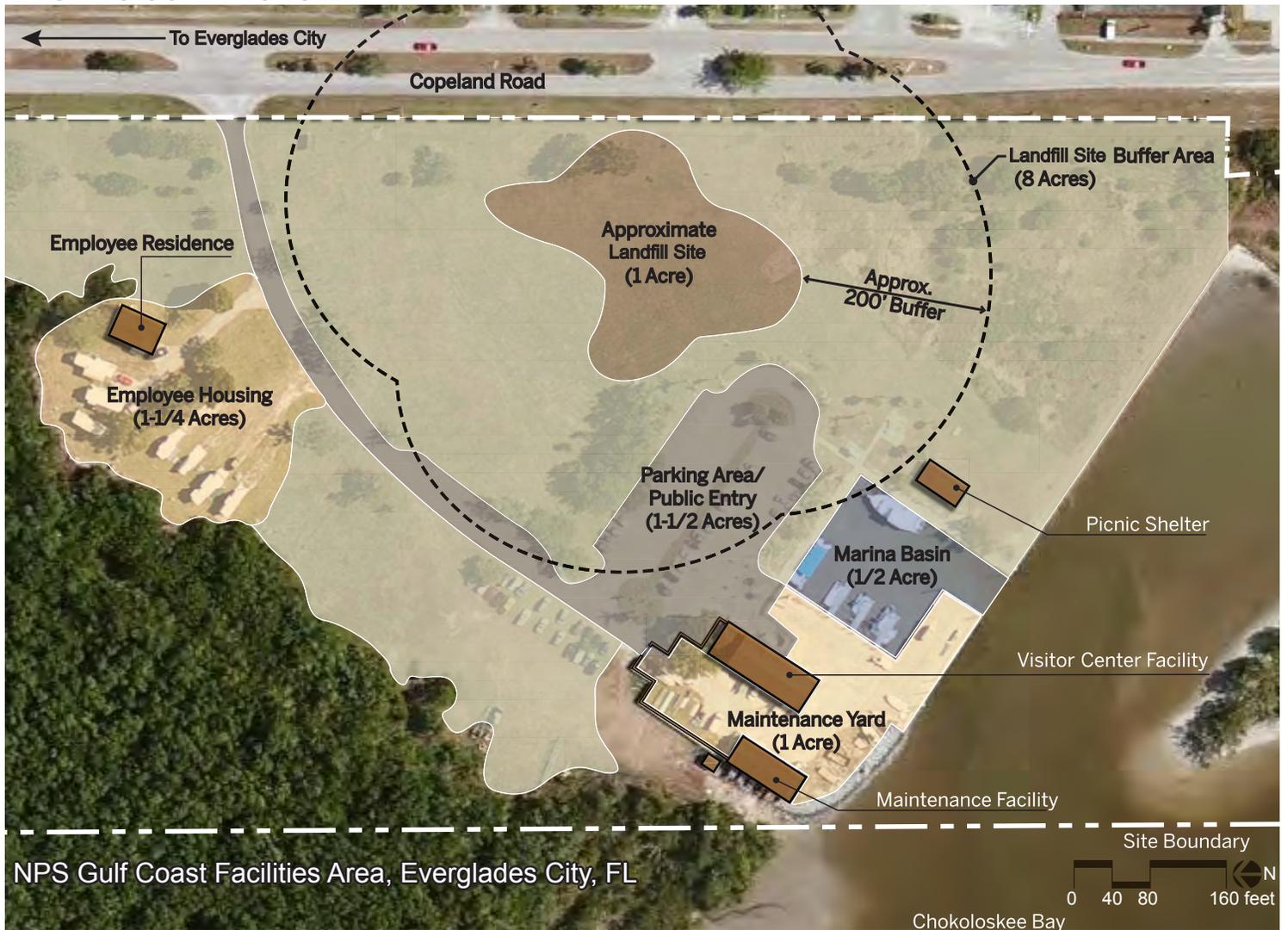
The NPS is considering on-site and off-site options for accommodating visitor services and district operations at Gulf Coast. The table to the left identifies the range of current and anticipated activities for the Gulf Coast district with potential location options for meeting those needs in the future.

As a hub to experience the park's coastal environment, use of the marina basin is critical for nearly every visitor. The existing marina basin is too small to meet all water-dependent needs and due to high costs, expansion is not anticipated. Site planning must balance and address the functionality of this small basin for accommodating boat tours, visitor enjoyment of the waterfront, park ranger and maintenance boat access to the water, and public canoe launch needs. Decisions will need to be made about which functions are provided at the basin and which can be accommodated at other sites.

It is anticipated that existing buildings will be replaced with sustainable, accessible structures that meet NPS guidelines for new development at coastal sites. This may include downsized structures that are elevated, hardened and possibly "mobile/re-locatable" to provide the flexibility needed to respond to uncertain coastal conditions.

Gulf Coast site development will be constrained by site features such as existing buildings, infrastructure and utilities, and a former on-site landfill with a significant construction buffer area (see page 4). In light of these challenges, the NPS is exploring how best to provide these important visitor opportunities as well as fulfill its management responsibilities for the Gulf Coast District.

EXISTING CONDITIONS MAP



Your participation is valuable! Please provide your comments.

Attend the public meeting at the Big Cypress Welcome Center on January 19, 2012 (see page 1 for details). If you are unable to attend, comments may be submitted electronically (preferred method) via the NPS Planning, Environment, Public Comment (PEPC) website . Go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ever>. Once at the site, click on the "Open for Comment" link on the left, select the "Gulf Coast Site Redevelopment" project, and "Comment on Document".

Please respond to the questions below or provide other information you want the project team to consider. Comments should be submitted on or before February 3, 2012.

1. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the information presented in the Background, Opportunities and Challenges, and Goals sections?
2. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the information presented in the Potential Locations to Meet Future Needs table?
3. Do you have any other recommendations or suggestions that should be considered for this project?

To provide written comments, mail or hand-deliver to:

Everglades National Park
Park Planning Office
40001 State Road 9336
Homestead, FL 33034

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.