



# Big Cypress National Preserve Hunting Management Plan / Environmental Assessment

## Public Meeting

**Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center**

**August 9, 2012**



## Updates Included in the Revised Draft Hunt Plan/EA

- Modifications to the objectives to provide greater protection for rare, threatened, and endangered species
- Provided the raw data for the habitat comparison analysis conducted between existing units and the Addition and the associated detailed habitat map
- Provided additional history for the creation of Big Cypress as one of the first Preserve units in the National Park System
- Included additional applicable regulations and NPS management policies
- Added additional potential issues identified by public comments



## Updates Included in the Revised Draft Hunt Plan/EA

- Provided additional details of the framework for the adaptive management process (alternative 3)
  - Adaptive management triggers
  - Potential range of management actions
  - Proposed rules and regulations for the Addition and how they were developed
- Updated environmental consequences analysis
  - Lead-based ammunition impacts on wildlife and threatened/endangered species
  - Florida panther, using the deer population as an indicator
- Included all public involvement/comments from the Draft Hunt Plan/EA



## Purpose

To develop a hunting management plan for the Big Cypress National Preserve / Wildlife Management Area that allows the superintendent of the Preserve to provide for hunting opportunities in the Preserve in a manner that is in the best interest of the Preserve's resources and the public, while meeting the requirements set forth by the NPS, the Preserve's enabling legislation, the NPS/FWC Cooperative Partnership Agreement, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.



## Need

A hunting management plan is needed for the Big Cypress National Preserve / Wildlife Management Area:

- to provide clear and informational guidance for safe and responsible hunting within the Preserve to the public
- to provide for a visitor use experience that complies with the enabling legislation for the Preserve
- to manage the resources present in the Preserve
- to provide a framework for hunting management within the Preserve that meets the requirements set forth by the NPS, the Preserve's enabling legislation, the NPS/FWC Cooperative Partnership Agreement, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations



## Objectives

1. Provide guidelines for hunting within the Big Cypress National Preserve / Wildlife Management Area that satisfy all NPS regulations, the Preserve's enabling legislation, the NPS/FWC Cooperative Partnership Agreement, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations and that maintain or improve the Preserve's ability to contribute to the conservation of rare, threatened, and endangered species.
2. Provide a programmatic framework for facilitating agency communications and goal-setting that provides guidance over a number of years.



## Objectives

3. Utilize science-based resource management (e.g., habitat, wildlife, and protected species) for adaptive decision-making for:
  - the NPS and the FWC to collaborate and cooperate on the rule-making process regarding hunting
  - the NPS to take action independently, with notification to the FWC and USFWS as soon as practicable, for resource protection or public safety in certain cases (i.e., high water events, fires, threatened and endangered species issues), which may have an effect on hunting within the Preserve



## Objectives

4. Provide the public with clear and understandable information regarding:
  - hunting management within the Preserve
  - safe and responsible hunting practices
5. Manage opportunities for a positive visitor use experience for hunters and nonhunters.
6. Manage an array of access options to allow for a diversity of hunting opportunities within the framework of existing regulations and funding.





## Alternatives

### Alternative 1 – No Action – Apply Current Management to the Addition

Under alternative 1 (no action), management of hunting in the entire Preserve would occur in accordance with the NPS/FWC Cooperative Partnership Agreement.

### Alternative 2 – Minimum Management – No Hunting in the Addition

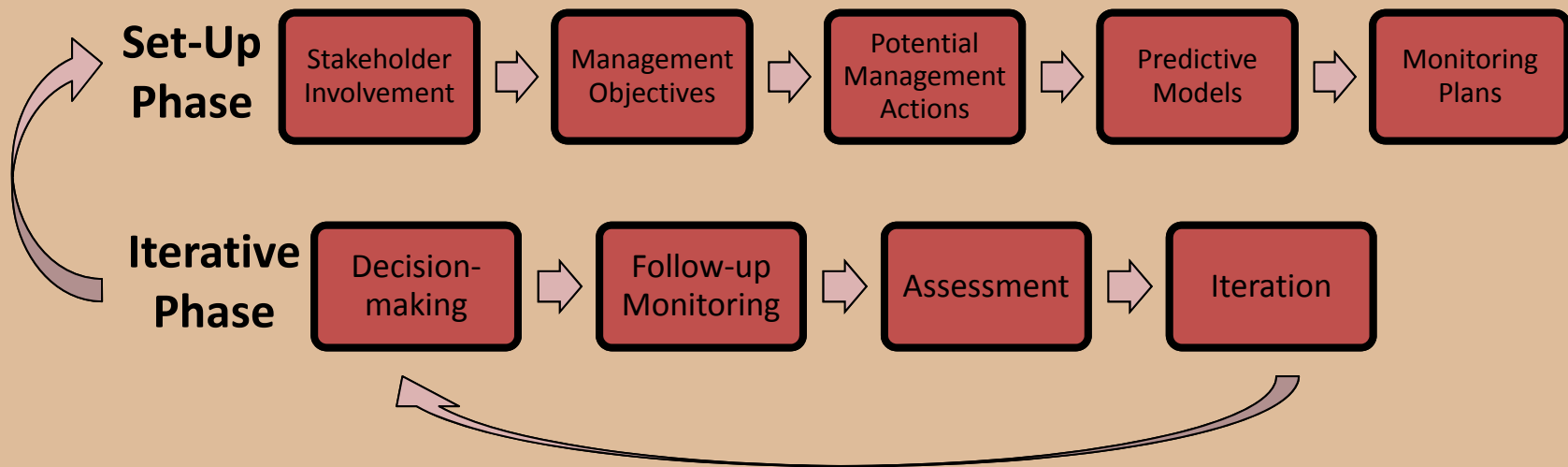
Under alternative 2, current hunting management would continue within the original Preserve boundaries, using the guidance outlined in the NPS/FWC Cooperative Partnership Agreement. In the Addition, public hunting would be prohibited.

### Alternative 3 – New Adaptive Management Strategy (Preferred Alternative)

Under alternative 3, the NPS and FWC, in consultation with the USFWS, would cooperate to implement an adaptive management strategy to manage hunting in the Preserve.



## Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) Adaptive Management





## **Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative)**

### **Adaptive Management Objectives**

- Manage a sustainable deer population in the Preserve, which ensures that the effects of hunting in the Preserve are beneficial, discountable, or insignificant to the Florida panther population.
- Manage the feral hog population in the Preserve in a manner that balances the feral hog as an invasive species and ensures that the effects of hunting in the Preserve are beneficial, discountable, or insignificant to the Florida panther population.
- Manage a sustainable population for all other game species in the Preserve including wild turkey and small game species.



## **Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative)**

### **Actions to Achieve Adaptive Management Objectives**

- Monitor key game species (white-tailed deer) and threatened and endangered species (Florida panther) in the Preserve, as necessary to determine the appropriate ecosystem management actions for managing hunting in the Preserve.
- Conduct ecosystem management actions in the Preserve to sustain an ample, healthy, and diverse wildlife community.
- Adjust ecosystem management actions (e.g., prescribed burning, vegetation management, hydrological restoration), when necessary, to manage a healthy ecosystem in the Preserve.
- Conduct ecosystem management actions in the Preserve to control problem nonnative invasive nongame wildlife species to the lowest level practicable.
- Conduct other ecosystem management actions applicable to hunting management (e.g., prescribed burning, nonnative invasive plant control, etc.), as necessary to maintain a healthy ecosystem in the Preserve.



## Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) Adaptive Management Triggers

- Multi-year (three- to five-year) declining trends in deer populations or panther populations (as indicated by deer population indices) linked to extended high water events
- Documentation of a disease outbreak in the deer population (or other major game species) as documented by NPS or FWC staff through hunter check station data
- A documented decline in the deer population (or other major game species) linked to an extreme event, such as a tropical storm, hurricane, or catastrophic wild fire
- Multi-year (three- to five-year) declining trends in deer populations or panther populations (as indicated by deer population indices) linked to sustained drought conditions
- Multi-year (three- to five-year) increasing trends of problem nonnative invasive nongame wildlife species
- Any other currently unknown or undocumented substantial multi-year trend in the Preserve identified by future monitoring activities that could cause an adverse impact on the Preserve resources that the NPS is charged with protecting



## Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) Management Actions

- Providing additional habitat management for the benefit of priority wildlife species as provided by NPS policy and as resources allow
- Increasing or decreasing bag limits (number of animals allowed to be harvested)
- Increasing or decreasing season lengths
- Increasing or decreasing the number of quota permits issued
- Increasing or decreasing antler restrictions (age of allowable harvest)
- Modifying legal methods of take (type of firearms or archery equipment allowed)
- Implementing emergency restrictions or closures to harvest due to high water events, hurricanes, or other emergency situations



## Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) Addition Rules and Regulations

- All current general rules and regulations for hunting in the Preserve would apply Preserve-wide, including the Addition
- Season lengths, dates, and hours would be the same as currently allowed in the Bear Island Unit
- Current bag and possession limits would continue to apply Preserve-wide, including the Addition
- Deer hunting in the Addition would be limited to bucks-only harvest with at least one five-inch antler
- Deer hunting in the Northeast Addition and Western Addition would be limited to a maximum of one quota permit per 194 acres



## **How to Comment (PEPC)**

**To comment on the project via the NPS website:**

1. Go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>
2. Click on Big Cypress National Preserve
3. Click on the “Open for Comment” link on the left
4. Select the document to review and comment
5. Click on “Comment on Document”

**Comments must be submitted no later than August 24<sup>th</sup>**





## **How to Comment (Comment Form)**

**To comment on the project via comment form:**

1. Drop off here or
2. Mail to:

Superintendent

Big Cypress National Preserve

33100 Tamiami Trail East

Ochopee, Florida 34141-1000

**Comments must be postmarked no later than August 24<sup>th</sup>**