



Purple Aster

EAST EVERGLADES WILDERNESS
STUDY AND PROPOSAL

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Blue Shanty Canal, East Everglades

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the wilderness study and proposal for the East Everglades Addition within Everglades National Park. The first part of this chapter provides background information on the overall wilderness situation at Everglades National Park so that readers can better understand the context for the East Everglades wilderness study and proposal. The purpose and need for the East Everglades wilderness study is discussed in chapter 1 of this document. The second part of this chapter discusses the wilderness study and proposal for the East Everglades Addition; options vary by alternative.

Originally this general management planning effort did not include the East Everglades wilderness study. However, in 2006 the scope of the general management plan was expanded to include the wilderness study. This made sense from an efficiency and cost standpoint because the two processes have similar environmental compliance and public involvement needs.

In July 2006 the NPS planning team published a newsletter to inform the public that the scope of the general management plan had been expanded to include the East Everglades wilderness study. In August 2006 the National Park Service hosted a wilderness study public workshop in Miami, Florida. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the public to the wilderness study and to gather initial input about the possibility of designating wilderness in the East Everglades Addition.

PURPOSE AND DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS

The purpose of wilderness designation is to preserve and protect wilderness characteristics and values in perpetuity,

including opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. With the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act (16 USC 1131 et seq.), the guiding piece of legislation for all wilderness areas, Congress declared that it is national policy to secure for present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness. Wilderness can be officially designated only through congressional action.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as follows:

- “lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition”—section 2(a)
- “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man”—section 2(c)
- “an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvement or human habitation”—section 2(c)
- “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable”—section 2(c)
- “has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”—section 2(c)
- “shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historic use”—section 4(b)
- “may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value”—section 2(c)

SUMMARY OF USES, DEVELOPMENTS, AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS PERMITTED AND PROHIBITED IN WILDERNESS

This section is a brief summary of what is and is not allowed in designated wilderness areas.

The Wilderness Act and agency policies identify uses, facilities, and management actions that are and are not permitted in wilderness areas. Note that submerged marine wilderness (discussed in a separate section below) is a special case in that motorboats are allowed on the water in the national park.

Recreational uses, management actions, and facilities **permitted** in wilderness areas under the Wilderness Act and NPS policies include the following:

- nonmechanized recreational uses (e.g., hiking, backpacking, picnicking, canoeing/kayaking, camping)
- hunting and trapping (where otherwise permitted by law) and fishing
- American Indian religious activities and other actions recognized under treaty-reserved rights
- guided interpretive walks and on-site talks and presentations
- wheelchair use by individuals whose disability requires its use
- scientific activities, research, and monitoring (provided the activities are appropriate and use the minimum requirement to accomplish project objectives)
- management actions taken to address impacts of human use; examples of such actions include restoration of extirpated species, controlling invasive nonnative species, managing endangered species, and protection of air and water quality
- fire management activities (including fire suppression and prescribed fire)

as approved in the fire management plan

- preservation of historic properties eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places
- trails necessary for resource protection or for providing for visitor safety
- campsites, where essential for resource protection and preservation or to meet other specific wilderness management objectives
- toilets, where they would resolve health and sanitation problems or prevent serious resource impacts
- signs (such as those identifying routes and distances) and other infrastructure necessary for visitor safety or to protect wilderness resources
- certain administrative facilities if necessary to carry out wilderness management objectives (e.g., storage or support structures, ranger station)
- uses and facilities permitted for landowners with valid property rights in a wilderness area

Certain uses and developments are prohibited under the Wilderness Act. Under the definition of wilderness in section 2(c) of the act, permanent improvements or human habitation are prohibited. Section 4 (c) specifically prohibits the following:

- commercial enterprises
- permanent roads
- temporary roads
- use of motor vehicles
- motorized equipment, motorboats, and airboats
- landing of aircraft
- other forms of mechanical transport (e.g., bicycles)
- structures or installations

With the exception of permanent roads and commercial enterprises, the Wilderness Act recognizes that the above uses may be permitted if necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area as wilderness or for emergency purposes. Other sections of the Wilderness Act also provide for some exceptions, including the preservation of features of historical value in 2(c) and certain recreational commercial services in section 4(d)(6).

Additionally, NPS policies prohibit some other developments as follows:

- new utility lines
- permanent equipment caches (unless necessary for health and safety or determined to be the minimum requirement)
- improvements for nonemergency use
- borrow pits (except for small quantity use of borrow material for trails)
- new shelters for public use (unless determined to be the minimum facility necessary for the for health and safety of wilderness users or for the preservation of wilderness resources and values)
- picnic tables
- interpretive signs, trails, and waysides

WILDERNESS AT EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness

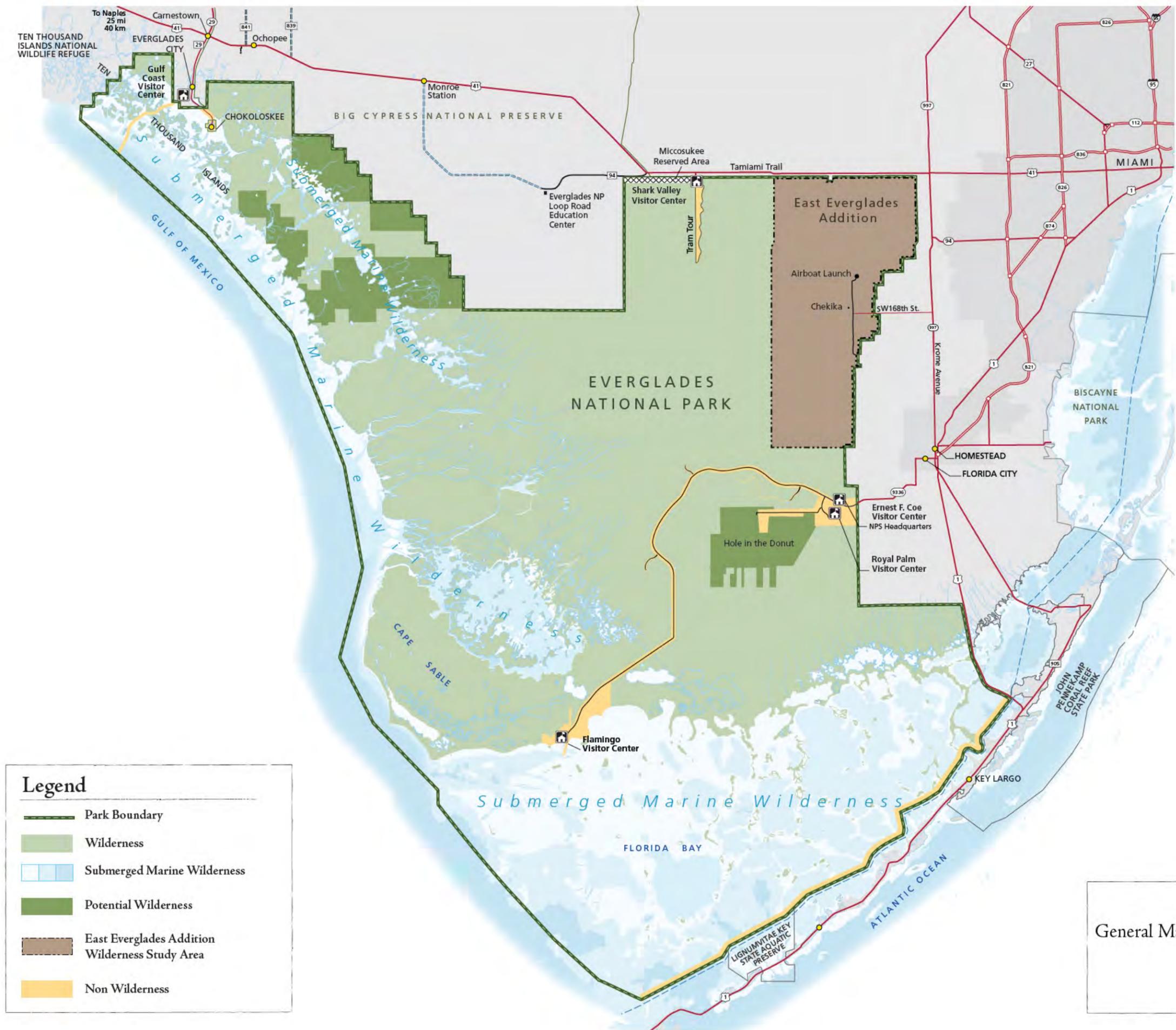
Nearly 87% of Everglades National Park is currently designated wilderness. This wilderness area, originally named “Everglades Wilderness,” was created by

Congress in 1978, and it comprises nearly 1.3 million acres of Everglades National Park’s 1.5 million acres (see “Wilderness Status” map). In 1997 the name was changed to “Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness.” The Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness includes most of the park’s undeveloped lands and inland waters, and it also includes submerged marine lands, which are a special case (see “Submerged Marine Wilderness” section below).

At the same time that wilderness was originally designated within Everglades National Park, 82,000 acres in several parcels were designated “Potential Wilderness,” meaning they would be converted to wilderness if or when nonconforming uses end. In the interim, these lands are managed as if they were wilderness, to the extent that is legal and practical to do so. Examples include the Hole-in-the-Donut area in the center of the park, which would become wilderness when restoration efforts are complete, and some parcels in the northwestern part of the park that contain nonfederal mineral rights. Existing wilderness and potential wilderness areas are managed under the Wilderness Act of 1964, *NPS Management Policies 2006*, and the *Everglades National Park Backcountry Management Plan* (1981).

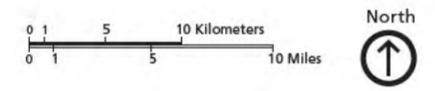
Submerged Marine Wilderness (Marine Waters)

The submerged marine (marine waters) portion of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness, approximately 530,000 acres in extent, is unusual in that it includes the marine bottom (benthic surface), but not the water column or the water surface. This distinction, which allows motorboating on the water surface, was included in the original wilderness recommendation and was carried forward by designation of Congress.



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Wilderness
- Submerged Marine Wilderness
- Potential Wilderness
- East Everglades Addition
- Wilderness Study Area
- Non Wilderness



Wilderness Status

General Management Plan/East Everglades Wilderness Study
Everglades National Park

United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service • DSC
September 8, 2010

EAST EVERGLADES WILDERNESS STUDY AND PROPOSAL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

In 1989, 109,600 acres were added to Everglades National Park as part of the Everglades National Park Protection and Expansion Act of 1989 (16 USC 410r-5). This area is known as the East Everglades Addition. The purposes of the 1989 act were to (1) increase the level of protection of the outstanding natural values of Everglades National Park and enhance and restore the ecological values, natural hydrologic conditions, and public enjoyment of such area by adding the area commonly known as the Northeast Shark River Slough and the East Everglades to Everglades National Park; and (2) assure that the park is managed to maintain the natural abundance, diversity, and ecological integrity of native plants and animals, as well as the behavior of native animals, as a part of their ecosystem.

The northeast part of the East Everglades Addition consists primarily of the eastern part of the Shark River Slough, with hammocks or tree islands scattered throughout. Chekika (a former state recreation area) is in the east-central portion. The eastern and southern portions are freshwater marl prairie that is mostly inaccessible because of shallow water and rocky conditions.

The East Everglades Addition is bordered on the north by Tamiami Trail (Highway 41); on the east by residential, commercial, and agricultural lands of Miami-Dade County; on the south by freshwater marl prairie and pinelands of Everglades National Park; and on the west by freshwater slough (Shark River Slough of Everglades National Park). See "Ecosystems" map in chapter 4. More than 99% of the area is federally owned. Six properties along Tamiami Trail are still in private ownership, and a narrow north-south

corridor is owned by Florida Power and Light. The park's 1991 Land Protection Plan provides management guidance for implementing the 1989 act and establishes priorities for land acquisition.

WILDERNESS ELIGIBILITY

The first step in the wilderness study was to evaluate the eligibility of lands within the East Everglades for wilderness designation. Wilderness, as defined by the Wilderness Act, is where

- the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by humans, where humans are visitors and do not remain
- the area is undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions
- the area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable
- has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation
- the area may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value

The Wilderness Act also says that wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historic use. Using this guidance from the Wilderness Act, together with additional considerations as outlined in NPS management policies, the

interdisciplinary planning team evaluated the East Everglades Addition in 2006. Of the 109,600 acres within the East Everglades Addition, approximately 102,100 acres were determined to meet or potentially meet wilderness eligibility (see East Everglades Eligibility Assessment in appendix G). This determination considered the natural resource protection and restoration goals for the area as defined in the purpose of the 1989 act and the potential for ending nonconforming uses (e.g., airboating).

About 7,500 acres were determined to be ineligible. Ineligible areas (because infrastructure such as improved roads and/or structures is present) include the following:

- the Chekika area (former state recreation area) and a 300-foot buffer around it
- near Chekika, SW 168th Street and SW 237th Avenue and a 150-foot corridor on either side of the road centerline
- areas of existing development associated with the commercial airboat operations and radio transmission buildings along the south side of Tamiami Trail
- 0.25 mile on the east side of the park boundary, on the west side of the L-31 Levee and Canal
- a 150-foot corridor on either side of the SW 237 Avenue right-of-way

OPTIONS ANALYZED IN THIS WILDERNESS STUDY

This wilderness study evaluates whether, and if so where, wilderness should be designated within the East Everglades Addition, given the best available information about wilderness character, public review and comment, and practical considerations. As the terms are used in this document, *proposed wilderness* is an area that has wilderness characteristics and would be proposed by the

National Park Service for designation. *Proposed potential wilderness* is an area that has wilderness characteristics but had temporary nonconforming conditions or uses. If these areas were designated by Congress as potential wilderness, they would be converted to designated wilderness once the nonconforming conditions have been rectified.

Using the overall vision for each action alternative and public comment, the planning team developed a range of possibilities for proposed wilderness that would meet the park's purpose. Each wilderness option is included as part of one of the general management plan alternatives; see "Chapter 2: Alternatives, Including the Preferred Alternative." The environmental impact statement included in this document analyzes the consequences of these four wilderness options.

Alternative 1, the no-action alternative, describes continuation of existing management at Everglades National Park. This alternative provides a baseline for evaluating changes and impacts of the three action alternatives. In keeping with the intent of this alternative, none of the East Everglades would be proposed for designation as wilderness.

Under the NPS preferred alternative, approximately 80,100 acres of the East Everglades Addition would be proposed for wilderness designation and about 9,900 acres would be proposed as potential wilderness. Potential wilderness would be converted to designated wilderness once nonconforming uses (primarily private airboat use) were discontinued and/or private property comes into federal ownership. In addition to the five ineligible areas described above, 12,100 additional acres in the northwest portion of the East Everglades Addition would not be proposed for wilderness designation to accommodate commercial airboat tour activities. See the inset on the "NPS Preferred Alternative" map for the visual depiction of these areas.

Under alternative 2, about 39,500 acres in the southern portion of the East Everglades Addition would be proposed for wilderness designation. This southern portion, south of Grossman’s Ridge, is marl prairie and is often too dry to accommodate airboat use. See the inset on the “Alternative 2” map for the visual depiction of these areas.

Under alternative 4, approximately 42,700 acres would be proposed for wilderness designation and 59,400 acres would be

proposed as potential wilderness. Potential wilderness would be converted to designated wilderness once nonconforming uses (primarily private airboat use and restoration of disturbed sites) ended and/or private property comes into federal ownership. All of the East Everglades Addition, except areas identified as ineligible on the previous page, would be proposed as wilderness or potential wilderness. See the inset on the “Alternative 4” map for the visual depiction of these areas.

TABLE 7. WILDERNESS OPTIONS EVALUATED IN THIS WILDERNESS STUDY

Alternative	Wilderness Proposal for East Everglades	% of East Everglades
Alternative 1: No Action	None	0% total
NPS Preferred Alternative	Proposed wilderness: 80,100 acres Proposed potential wilderness: 9,900 acres Total wilderness proposal: 90,000 acres	84% total
Alternative 2	Proposed wilderness: 39,500 acres Proposed potential wilderness: 0 acres Total wilderness proposal: 39,500 acres	38% total
Alternative 4	Proposed wilderness: 42,700 acres Proposed potential wilderness: 59,400 acres Total wilderness proposal: 102,100 acres	93% total

[Note: acreage figures and percentages are approximate.]

WILDERNESS PROPOSAL (FROM NPS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

Most of the Addition would be *proposed wilderness*. The following areas in the Addition would be *proposed potential wilderness*: (1) the portion of the Addition within which private airboat use would likely continue beyond the life of this plan (zoned frontcountry), and (2) the north-south corridor owned by Florida Power and Light, which is 7.4 miles in length and from 330 feet to 370 feet wide. Proposed wilderness plus proposed potential wilderness would together make up approximately 82% of the East Everglades Addition. The northwestern most portion of the East Everglades Addition, within which commercial airboating would continue over the long term (zoned

frontcountry), would *not* be proposed for wilderness.

Exclusions to the wilderness proposal (in addition to the northwestern most portion of the Addition) would include the following:

- an east-west strip (1,320 feet wide) along the park boundary south of Tamiami Trail
 - The 1,320-foot exclusion along the south side of Tamiami Trail is to allow for
 - appropriate resource management activities
 - activities associated with Northeast Shark River Slough hydrologic restoration

National Park Service anticipates forwarding a wilderness proposal to the U.S. Department of the Interior at the conclusion of this planning effort. The Secretary of the Interior is then responsible for reviewing this proposal and either approving or revising it before forwarding it on to the president as recommended wilderness. The president then formally transmits this recommendation to both houses of Congress for action.

Please note that the acreage figures for the various wilderness proposals are estimates based on small-scale maps; the acreage for the approved wilderness proposal would be refined prior to legislation, using detailed, large-scale maps.

Public Comment on Wilderness

During public scoping for the East Everglades wilderness study, a variety of perspectives on wilderness were expressed. Most people who supported wilderness did so because they value natural conditions; primitive recreation; and opportunities for solitude, particularly as portions of south Florida become more developed. Some who opposed wilderness designation did so because many areas in the East Everglades have some human imprint; others opposed wilderness because of concerns that certain activities (such as airboating) would be restricted or eliminated.

Implications of Managing Lands Proposed for Wilderness

Any lands within the East Everglades Addition that are proposed for wilderness designation in the “Record of Decision” for this planning process are to be managed “to preserve wilderness character” until such time as Congress specifically decides whether or not to include them in a formal wilderness designation (NPS *Management Policies 2006*). This means that management activities on lands proposed for wilderness cannot be

allowed to diminish the wilderness character of those lands.

Planning and Management

A wilderness or backcountry management plan is typically developed to guide preservation, management, and use of NPS wilderness areas. Such a plan would be developed with public involvement and would contain measurable objectives for preservation of wilderness values as specified in the Wilderness Act and NPS *Management Policies 2006*. Wilderness management plans, which are often combined with backcountry management plans, articulate management actions such as regulations, monitoring, and permit systems—such as those currently in place for backcountry camping in the park. Such a plan would be developed for any new wilderness areas within the East Everglades Addition. Management of the existing Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Wilderness is addressed by the 1981 “Backcountry Management Plan.”

Management decisions affecting wilderness would be consistent with the “minimum requirements” concept. This concept is a documented process used to determine whether administrative activities affecting wilderness resources or visitor experiences are necessary in wilderness, and if so, how to minimize impacts from such activities. Parks are to complete a minimum requirements process for evaluating administrative actions and equipment uses that could affect wilderness character.

Where practical alternatives do not exist, maintenance or other activities may occasionally be accomplished through the use of motorized equipment. The use of motorized equipment should be based on the minimum requirement concept. Motorized equipment need not be allowed for activities that can reasonably be accomplished using nonmotorized means.

Private Rights

Wilderness designation does not extinguish valid existing private rights such as land or right-of-way ownership or valid mineral interests. Valid private rights in wilderness are administered in keeping with the specific terms and conditions of each right.

Recreational Use

Recreational uses of NPS wilderness are to be of a type and nature that enable the areas to retain their undeveloped primeval character and influence, protect and preserve natural conditions, leave the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable, provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation, and preserve wilderness in an unimpaired condition. Hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and fishing are appropriate uses of wilderness at Everglades National Park. Public use of motorized equipment or any form of mechanical transport such as bicycles is prohibited, except as provided for in specific legislation (e.g., motorboat use is permitted on the waters above (or overlying) submerged marine wilderness areas of the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Wilderness). Wheelchair use by persons whose disability requires its use is allowed in wilderness. Service animals accompanying persons with disabilities are also allowed in wilderness.

Emergency Services

In emergency situations involving human health and safety, the use of aircraft, motorboats, and other motorized or mechanical equipment is allowed in wilderness. Wildfires would be controlled as necessary to prevent loss of life, damage to property, the spread of wildfire to lands outside wilderness, or unacceptable loss of

wilderness values or natural or cultural resources. The use of tool caches, aircraft, motorboats, and motorized firefighting equipment may be permitted for such control. Prescribed fire and hazard fuel reduction programs may be implemented according to approved plans. The minimum requirement concept would be followed for all fire activities in wilderness.

Resource Management and Research

Wilderness designation does not prevent the National Park Service from protecting and maintaining historic and other cultural resources within wilderness areas. Using the minimum requirement concept, cultural resource surveys will be conducted as needed in wilderness areas, and identified resources will be protected and maintained according to the pertinent laws, policies, and plans governing cultural resources. Natural resource management activities may be carried out in a similar fashion, and will generally be undertaken only to address the impacts of past and current uses or influences originating outside wilderness boundaries. Natural processes will be allowed, insofar as possible, to shape and control wilderness ecosystems. To allow natural processes to be effective in Everglades wilderness, restoration of natural water flow patterns and invasive nonnative species control (plant and animal) would be necessary.

Scientific activities are appropriate in wilderness. Even scientific activities (including inventory, monitoring, and research) that involve a potential impact to wilderness resources or values are allowed when the benefits of what can be learned outweigh the impacts on wilderness resources or values. However, all such activities must be evaluated using the minimum requirement concept.