



# Preliminary Alternatives

Dear Friends:

As most of you know, we have been working on a general management plan (GMP) for the Addition Lands to Big Cypress National Preserve. This plan will establish the management direction for the next 15 to 20 years for this new portion of the preserve. The planning team appreciated hearing and reading your thoughts, ideas, hopes, and concerns for the future of these lands. We have learned a great deal and have been challenged and inspired by your thoughtful comments and willingness to share your feelings about this special place.

Through initial scoping the planning team has conducted extensive public involvement activities while simultaneously gathering data and conducting additional research. Using the foundation provided in the legislation that expanded the preserve, the preserve's purpose for being created, the significant resources in the preserve, the information provided by the public, and the preliminary results of data gathering, the team developed five preliminary draft alternatives of how the Addition might look in the future. An important part of the alternatives are the management zones that have been developed and applied to each alternative in different ways. This newsletter presents a range of preliminary draft alternatives for your review and includes a form that can be returned to us with your comments. Eventually, a preferred alternative for the future of the Addition will be designated, but there will be ample opportunity for you to provide us input throughout the planning process.

In 1991 the National Park Service finalized the *I-75 Recreational Access Plan / Environment Assessment*. This plan identified the locations for development of the three recreational access points in the preserve called for in Public Law 100-301. One of the access points (Mile Marker 71) has been constructed within the original boundary of the preserve. The South Florida landscape has changed substantially since the access plan was prepared 14 years ago. In developing the preliminary alternatives, it became clear that the locations of these access points should be reviewed. Due to the existing infrastructure all the alternatives include an access point co-located with the Florida Department of Transportation rest area (Mile Marker 63). However, the preliminary draft alternatives presented in this newsletter include alternative locations for the one remaining access point.

We sincerely value your input regarding the future management direction of the preserve and thank you in advance for your time and participation. Public communication, collaboration, and cooperation are essential to develop a successful plan for the preservation and conservation of preserve resources.

Sincerely,

Karen Gustin  
Superintendent



## You're Invited...

We welcome your comments and hope to see you at one of the open houses/public meetings listed below:

### Monday

December 12, 2005; • 3:30 – 7:30 p.m.  
Everglades City School  
415 School Drive  
Everglades City, FL. 34139

### Tuesday

December 13, 2005; • 3:30 – 7:30 p.m.  
The Conservancy of Southwest Florida  
1450 Merrihue Drive  
Naples, FL. 34102

### Thursday

December 15, 2005; • 3:30 – 7:30 p.m.  
Weston Community Center  
Weston Regional Park  
20200 Saddle Creek Road  
Weston, FL. 33327



BACKGROUND

In 1988 Big Cypress National Preserve was expanded by about 146,000 acres with the passage of the Big Cypress National Preserve Act (Public Law (PL) 100-301). This new legislation amended the original enabling legislation (PL 93-440) to “assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreation values” of the Addition and “to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof.”

This expansion consisted of about 128,000 acres northeast of the original boundary and approximately 18,000 acres along the western boundary. These lands consist of a mosaic of prairies, marshes, sloughs, strands, hammocks, pinelands, and mangroves. The land is exceptionally flat. In the wet season (May-October), most of the landscape becomes covered with a shallow, continuous expanse of water that flows slowly towards the coast, providing a supply of fresh, clean water for the vital estuaries of the Ten Thousand Islands area.

This array of vegetation provides habitat to a diversity of species —9 federally listed threatened and endangered species can be found, including the Florida panther and the West Indian manatee.

The majority of the Addition Lands (82,000 acres) were acquired by the federal government through the Arizona-Florida Land Exchange. As a result these lands were placed in escrow until 1996, when the exchange was finalized and the lands were transferred to the National Park Service. The remaining acreage is being acquired through fee simple acquisition by the federal government or through donation from the state of Florida as required in the legislation.

There are currently no visitor facilities within the Addition. The area is closed to off-road vehicle (ORV) use and hunting but open to hiking, backcountry camping, and bicycling. In 2001 the preserve established a fire operation center near Copeland. This center is based on property that was acquired from a willing seller and is used to support the preserve’s fire management program. There is also a fire station at a former homesite near Deep Lake. The only other development in the Addition is at the southeast corner of the intersection of State Highway 29 and U.S. Highway 41. At this location the preserve has leased property to the Everglades City Chamber of Commerce and the Collier County Sheriff’s Office.

INFORMATION GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

Your comments and suggestions have provided us with important insights about what preserve visitors, neighboring landowners, government officials, scientists, and others think about the future of the preserve. You gave us your thoughts, ideas, and concerns, and suggested future visions for the preserve during our public scoping efforts. We distributed a newsletter requesting your comments and held public meetings in Naples, Everglades City, Miami, and at the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation. We have been meeting with our partners (representatives from county, state, and federal agencies), and we also have met with representatives from nongovernmental organizations. Throughout the planning process, American Indian tribes were notified, and consultation with interested tribes continues as an ongoing effort by the superintendent. The planning team appreciated hearing and reading your thoughts, ideas, hopes, and concerns for the future of the Addition.

In developing the preliminary alternatives, the planning team also considered plans of neighboring state, county, and federal agencies.

All of the above information has been analyzed and used to develop the draft preliminary alternatives presented in this newsletter for your review and comment.



MAJOR ISSUES

Many aspects of the desired future conditions of the Addition Lands are defined in the establishing legislation, the preserve’s purpose and significance statements, and established laws and policies. The resolution of questions or issues that have not been addressed by legislation, laws, or policies is the basis for developing different alternatives or approaches to managing the preserve into the future, because usually there is more than one way an issue can be resolved. As with any decision-making process, there are key decisions that, once made, will dictate the direction of subsequent management strategies. Based on public and partner comments and NPS concerns, the following major questions or issues were identified for the Addition.

1. What are the appropriate types of resource protection strategies that the National Park Service should use while providing visitors with the opportunity to experience and learn about the resources?
2. What are the most appropriate locations for providing visitor access, in particular along Interstate Highway 75?
3. What are the appropriate visitor uses that should be allowed for in various portions of these lands?
4. What is the appropriate message for interpretation and educational activities within the Addition?
5. What are different ways that the National Park Service can meet its obligation to maintain biodiversity and optimize habitat values for native species, including threatened and endangered species?

ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED IN THIS PLAN

The GMP will not address the following:

- Tribal rights provided to the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and Seminole Tribe of Florida by the Addition Act. As outlined in the legislation the usual and customary use and occupancy by members of the two tribes will be governed by the development of regulations by the secretary of the interior.
- Oil and gas development in the Addition. The exploration and development of private oil and gas rights in the Addition Act will be addressed in a separate oil and gas management plan that is being developed for the entire preserve.
- Funding for the implementation of the approved plan. The approval of the plan does not guarantee funding for implementation but provides the rationale for seeking funds.





THE MANAGEMENT ZONES AND ALTERNATIVES

Management zones are descriptions of desired conditions for resources and visitor experiences in different areas of the preserve. Management zones are determined for each national park system unit; however the management zones for one unit will likely not be the same for any other national park system unit (although some might be similar). The management zones identify the widest range of potential appropriate resource conditions, visitor experiences, and facilities for the preserve that fall within the scope of the preserve’s purpose, significance, and special mandates. It is important to note that all the activities and facilities appropriate in each management zone may not be

allowed or constructed in each area that the management zone is applied. Four management zones have been identified for use in this plan.

In formulating the action alternatives (alternatives B, C, D, E, and F), management zones were placed in different locations or configurations on a map of the preserve according to the overall intent (concept) of each alternative. Because the no-action alternative (alternative A) represents existing conditions, there are no management zones described for this alternative.

MANAGEMENT ZONES SUMMARY

|                                     | DEVELOPED   | FRONTCOUNTRY  | BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION  | PRIMITIVE BACKCOUNTRY  |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| ZONE CONCEPT                        | Visitor orientation/education would be the dominant goals for this zone. NPS administrative facilities would also be included in this zone.   | Visitor orientation and access would be the dominant goals for this zone.   | Preservation of natural and cultural resources, restoration of degraded resources, and continuation of natural processes would be the dominant goals in this zone. Visitors would experience a natural landscape through a variety of recreational opportunities supported by a network of roads and designated trails.   | Preservation of natural and cultural resources, restoration of degraded resources, and continuation of natural processes would be the dominant goals in this zone. Visitors would experience a natural landscape with opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation directly dependent on ability, knowledge, and self-reliance.   |
| RESOURCE CONDITION                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Natural environment modified for essential visitor and preserve operational needs</li><li>Known cultural resources would be avoided to extent possible or mitigated appropriately</li><li>Facilities would be designed and managed to ensure resource protection and public safety</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Natural environment modified for essential visitor needs</li><li>Known cultural resources would be avoided to extent possible or mitigated appropriately</li><li>Facilities would be designed and managed to ensure resource protection and public safety</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Native species and natural processes would predominate</li><li>Cultural resources would exhibit a high degree of integrity</li><li>Evidence of human impact would be apparent along roads and trail corridors and designated campsites and infrequent and limited in extent elsewhere in the zone</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Native species and natural processes would predominate</li><li>Cultural resources would exhibit a high degree of integrity</li><li>Evidence of human impact would be infrequent and limited in extent</li></ul>  |
| VISITOR EXPERIENCE                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Visitor attractions convenient and easily accessible</li><li>NPS or self-guided opportunities</li><li>Moderate to high encounters with other visitors and NPS staff — should expect to experience relatively high levels of human-related noise</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Visitor attractions convenient and easily accessible</li><li>Self-guided opportunities</li><li>Low to moderate encounters with other visitors and NPS staff — should expect to experience relatively moderate levels of human-related noise</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Some opportunities for solitude, challenge, adventure, and self-reliance.</li><li>Variety of visitor experiences from NPS-led tours to self discovery</li><li>Encounters with NPS staff and other visitors could be frequent — should expect to experience periodic human-related noise</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Numerous opportunities for challenge, adventure, solitude, and self-reliance</li><li>Discovery area with no on-site interpretation and very limited facilities</li><li>Encounters with NPS staff and other visitors would be infrequent — should expect to experience natural sounds</li></ul>   |
| APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES / FACILITIES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I-75 access points</li><li>Orientation and interpretation facilities, such as visitor centers</li><li>Comfort stations</li><li>Boardwalks and trails to access adjacent natural/cultural features</li><li>NPS administrative/staff facilities — offices, housing, support facilities for preserve management (shops, storage areas, fire cache, etc.)</li><li>Commercial facilities to support appropriate visitor activity</li><li>Closed to hunting</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Recreational access or trailhead parking</li><li>Picnic areas</li><li>Orientation facilities and signs</li><li>Campground</li><li>Comfort stations</li><li>Boardwalks and trails to access adjacent natural/cultural features</li><li>Commercial activities would be consistent with the visitor opportunities and activities</li><li>Closed to hunting</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Activities could include hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, camping, boating, bicycling, vehicle use</li><li>Vehicle and stock use allowed only on designated roads and trails</li><li>Trails and routes may be designated for hiking and boating. Navigational markers may be provided</li><li>Hunting allowed in designated areas and seasons as determined by the NPS</li><li>Camping in designated sites only</li><li>Public water supply</li><li>Information/interpretation kiosks and signs</li><li>Backcountry support facilities such as ranger stations and fire cache</li><li>Outfitter/guide activities would be consistent with visitor opportunities and activities</li><li>Resource protection and monitoring equipment</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Activities could include hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, camping, and nonmotorized boating</li><li>No mechanized use</li><li>Visitor facilities limited to designated trails, marked routes, and designated campsites</li><li>Dispersed camping and, where necessary for resource protection, camping sites would be designated</li><li>Hunting allowed in designated areas and seasons as determined by the NPS</li><li>Outfitter/guide activities would be consistent with visitor opportunities</li><li>Resource protection and monitoring equipment</li></ul> |

THE ALTERNATIVES

The National Park Service planning process requires development of action alternatives (alternatives B-F) for comparison with continuing current actions (alternative A). Each alternative has an overall management concept and a description of how different areas of the Addition would be managed. The concept for each alternative gives the NPS staff the idea for what the alternative is going to look like. For example, one management zone is called “primitive backcountry” and another zone is called “frontcountry.” An alternative whose concept is to keep most of the preserve in an undeveloped and natural/wild condition would have more of the primitive backcountry zone than the frontcountry zone. Both zones might also be larger or smaller and in different locations in different alternatives, depending on the overall concept for each alternative.

The action alternatives present different ways to manage resources and visitor use and to develop facilities in the Addition. The five action alternatives embody the range of what the public and the National Park Service want to see accomplished with regard to natural resource conditions, cultural resource conditions, and visitor use and experience in the Addition. The National Park Service would continue to follow existing agreements and servicewide mandates, laws, and policies regardless of the alternatives considered in this plan. However, actions or desired conditions not mandated by policy, law, or agreements can differ among the alternatives.

The NPS preferred course of action, the preferred alternative, has not been identified. This alternative will be designated after we hear from you and include your comments as part of an analysis process. The preferred alternative could be one of the following alternatives or a combination of several elements chosen from any of the alternatives. The preferred alternative will be included in the Draft GMP/EIS.

