



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Big Cypress National Preserve

Backcountry Access Plan/ Wilderness
Study/ Environmental Impact
Statement

Public Alternatives Workshop

February 10 and 11, 2016

Agenda

- Presentation
 - Plan overview and background
 - Wilderness
 - Preliminary alternatives
 - Next steps
- Workshop session
 - Maximizes detailed input
 - One on one, and small group discussions
 - Open discussion and refinement of ideas

Plan Purpose

- Establish guidelines for backcountry access and use for protection of the Preserve's natural and cultural resources
- Provide for public enjoyment
- Determine which parts of the original Preserve, if any, should be proposed for wilderness designation by Congress.
- Consistent with Preserve Enabling Legislation + Law and Policy

Public Scoping

- Public scoping concluded in May 2014
- 230 comments, 70 workshop participants
- Comments reflected both concern and support for the plan
 - Support further defining an ORV trail system to balance recreation and preservation
 - Concern that the plan is an effort to expand the ORV trail system
- Public scoping comment report available on the project website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicybap>

Wilderness in Big Cypress

- What is wilderness?
 - The Wilderness Act of 1964 established a network of undeveloped, wild areas
 - Receive the highest level of protection of any federal public lands.
- What is prohibited in wilderness?
 - Construction of permanent or temporary roads, motorized tools, mechanized transport
- What is permitted and encouraged in wilderness?
 - Hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, scientific research, and other non-motorized activities
- NPS policy requires all lands to be assessed (or re-assessed) through a wilderness eligibility assessment (WEA)
- Ensures ORV trails are not proposed in eligible wilderness

Wilderness Eligibility Assessment

- WEA and wilderness study for the Addition in 2010
- WEA for the original Preserve in 2015
 - Generalized review of wilderness eligibility using
 - Wilderness Act criteria
 - Aerial photography, GIS Data, staff knowledge of Preserve terrain
- Approximately 188,000 of 557,000 acres assessed meet eligibility criteria

Wilderness Study

- Follows a WEA to develop a wilderness proposal for eventual submission to Congress (only Congress can designate wilderness)
- We are currently “scoping” for the Wilderness Study
- The Wilderness Study will include the following elements:
 - A closer look at wilderness-eligible lands
 - May result in more or less eligible lands than what was found in the WEA
 - May include a re-assessment of immediately adjacent lands in the Addition
 - All areas deemed wilderness-eligible would be off limits to ORV use
 - Using public input, a range of alternative wilderness proposals
 - May range from all eligible areas, to no eligible areas being proposed
 - Draft alternatives will be available for review in the Draft Plan and presented to the public in the fall of 2016
- Preservation of wilderness character is required

Backcountry Access Plan Alternatives Development

- NPS held Alternatives Development Workshop in Spring 2015
- Approach to alternatives development
 - Represent a broad spectrum
 - Follow 2000 ORV Plan methodology
- 5 preliminary alternatives including the no-action
 - Conceptual in nature
 - Will be refined based on public comment
 - Development of NPS preferred alternative

Objectives

- Reduce and manage resource impacts from backcountry use
- Provide a range of:
 - Backcountry camping opportunities and experiences.
 - Resource-related recreational opportunities
- Ensure the protection of wilderness character within lands eligible for wilderness designation

Substrate Suitability

- Based on 2000 ORV plan with additional refinements
- Habitat types classified as **highly resilient**, **resilient**, **least resilient**, or **unsuitable**
- Variation by habitat types and associated resource impact

Habitat Type	Substrate Suitability	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5
Hydric Hammock	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Hydric Pine Flatwoods	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Mesic Hammock	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Mesic Pine Flatwoods	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Disturbed Areas	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Cypress Forest	Highly Resilient		X	X	X	X
Shrub Cypress	Resilient			X	X	X
Swamp Forest	Resilient			X	X	X
Marsh	Least Resilient					X
Marl Prairie	Least Resilient					X
Large contiguous Marl Prairie	Unsuitable					

Alternative 1 (no-action)

- No secondary trails
- Dispersed camping in all areas of the Preserve, except Bear Island Unit (BIU)
 - Camping in BIU in designated campgrounds only (common to all alternatives)
- 10-14 consecutive day stay limit not to exceed 30 days in a calendar year (equipment may be left for the duration of hunting season except Z4 of SSU)
- Free, self-complete backcountry permit required
- 60-day closure to allow for resource recovery

Alternative 2

Trails and Camping

- Previously open secondary trails in **highly resilient** substrates
- Backcountry campsites at ends of secondary trails
- Discontinue dispersed camping
- Camping permit and reservation system
- 14-day stay limit (visitors and equipment)
- Limitations on group size established
- Primitive backcountry campsites at Jones and Nobles Grades

Closures and Adaptive Strategies

- 60 day closure
- Possible use limits based on monitoring of trail and resource condition

Common to All Action Alternatives

- Trails only on previously disturbed routes
- “Leave No Trace” and “Tread Lightly” educational materials
- Disposal of human waste outside of Preserve (portable toilets)
- Re-route of FNST

Alternative 3

Trails and Camping

- Secondary trails in **resilient** and **highly resilient** substrates
- Limited walk-in, dispersed camping
 - At least 1/4 mile from any designated campsite or ORV trail
 - At least ½ mile from developed areas, county or state roads.
- Otherwise mirrors alternative 2

Alternative 4

Trails

- Same hiking and secondary trail system as alternative 3
- Expand primary trails in Stairsteps (per ORVAC recommendation)

Camping

- Further expand camping
 - Trail-side dispersed camping along ORV trails (except Bear Island)
 - ORVs remain on the designated trail and do not block travel
- Establish backcountry campgrounds at Jones and Nobles Grades

Closures

- Removal of 60-day closure
- Targeted trail closures based on resource monitoring

Alternative 5

- Expanded hiking opportunities
- Expanded secondary trails and destinations
 - No habitat restrictions (except large contiguous Marl Prairie)
 - All previously open secondary trails
 - Suggested trails from scoping
 - Historically used destinations with visible evidence of access
- Expanded primary trails
 - Stairsteps Unit (per ORVAC recommendation)
 - Bear Island Unit (previously open)
- Camping and closures mirror alternative 4

Indicators, Thresholds, & Monitoring

- Indicators are monitored
 - Indicators may include rut depth, trail width, off-trail incidences, species disturbance, etc.
 - Assessment of resource, trail and campsite condition through regular monitoring
- Thresholds would trigger adaptive action
 - i.e. trails wider than x feet
- Actions may include
 - Closures for resource recovery (alternatives 4 and 5)
 - Manage use levels through permits (alternatives 2 and 3)

Next Steps / Project Timeline

- January 11, 2016 – March 11, 2016: Review preliminary alternatives and scoping for the wilderness study
- Spring/Summer 2016: Analyze public comments and prepare the draft BICY BAP/WS/EIS
 - Your input will;
 - Help us refine the preliminary alternatives and develop wilderness alternatives
 - Identify or develop a preferred alternative
- Fall 2016: Public review of the draft BICY BAP/WS/EIS and formal wilderness hearing
- Spring 2017: Prepare the final BICY BAP/WS/EIS
- August 2017: Anticipated Record of Decision

Workshop Agenda

- Alternatives (Stations 1-5)
 - Discuss and provide input on the strategies suggested in the alternatives
- BAP Map Markup (Station 6)
 - Provide more information about a trail or destination
 - Place a numbered dot next to your drawing and on a corresponding comment sheet
 - Review and refine trails from scoping
- Wilderness Study Map Markup (Station 7)
 - Discuss and provide input into the Wilderness Study
 - Place a numbered dot on the map and on a corresponding comment sheet

Ways to Provide Input

- Today's Meeting
 - Key discussion points will be recorded on flipcharts
 - Map markups will be entered into project GIS
- Comment Cards/Card Drop Box
- Project Website:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy>
- Letters to the National Park Service
 - Big Cypress National Preserve
 - Backcountry Access Plan
 - 33100 Tamiami Trail East
 - Ochopee, FL 34141-1000