



Big Cypress Addition

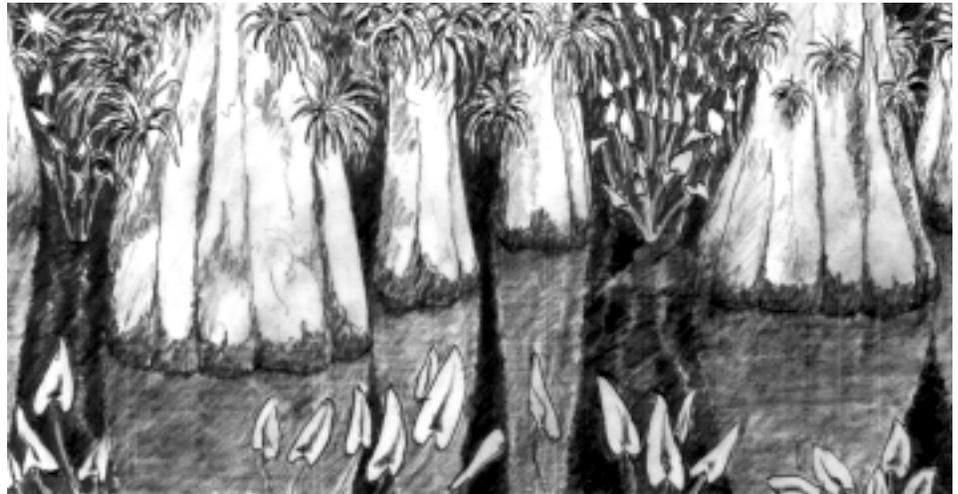
Purpose and Significance

Purpose and significance statements provide the foundation for management and use of the Addition Lands. Moreover, each NPS unit is also bound by the special mandates described in the congressional legislation that establishes it. In addition, it is important to recognize that each unit of the national park system is guided by a range of federal laws, regulations, and NPS policies (e.g. Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act).

In our first newsletter, we asked for your comments on the purpose and significance statements for the Preserve. Some responses suggested that traditional recreation activities should be given priority. Some suggested that specific resources, such as the Florida panther, be acknowledged. A number of comments related to inclusion of activities not typically found in national parks (e.g., oil and gas exploration and development, hunting, grazing, and motorized vehicle use management, relationship with the state). Some comments recommended that excerpts from the legislative history, enabling legislation, and other studies be included to convey the difference between the designation as a preserve vs. park.

The purpose and significance statements proposed in the first newsletter have been revised to reflect a thoughtful consideration of your comments and a careful re-examination of the preserve's enabling legislation, its legislative history, and guidance provided by federal law and NPS

See "Purpose and Significance" on Page 2



Message from the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, we are developing a general management plan (GMP) for the Addition Lands portion of Big Cypress National Preserve. When completed, the plan will guide the management of these lands over the next 15-20 years.

Our planning effort is progressing well because we have received valuable input from you. Approximately 90 people attended the public open house meetings held last summer at Everglades City, Naples, Miami, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida Reservation. In addition, we received over 100 comments and suggestions from a wide variety of individuals, organizations, and agencies in response to our first newsletter.

In this, the second newsletter, you will find a summary of the comments received so far, revised statements of park purpose and significance, and an overview of how that information will be used in future planning steps.

The next task in our planning process is to analyze the information gathered and develop a range of potential management alternatives that fulfills the preserve's purpose, significance, and legislative mandates and addresses as many of your comments and concerns as possible. Our goal is to develop several draft alternatives and present them for your consideration in the fall of 2002. Information about the draft alternatives and opportunities to share your comments and concerns about them will be provided in the next newsletter and through a series of public meetings.

Thank you for your interest in planning for the future of the Addition Lands at Big Cypress National Preserve. We hope you'll continue to stay involved in the planning process.

John Donahue
Superintendent



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Addition Lands General Management Plan**

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Purpose and Significance

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policy. The revised statements as well as an overview of the special mandates found in the enabling legislation are included in the following discussion.

Purpose

Big Cypress National Preserve, including the Addition, was established “to assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed in the State of Florida and to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof.”

Significance

Big Cypress National Preserve, including the Addition, contains vestiges of primitive southwest Florida. It is significant as a unit of the national park system because it:

- Is a large wetland mosaic that supports a vast remnant of vegetation types found only in this mix of upland and wetland environments
- Contains the largest stands of dwarf cypress in North America
- Is habitat for the Florida panther and other animal and plant species that receive special protection or are recognized by the state of Florida, the U.S. government, or the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
- Provides opportunities for the public to pursue recreational activities in a subtropical environment
- Is home to the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and Seminole Tribe of Florida and sustains resources that are important to their cultures
- Is a watershed that is an important component to the survival of the greater Everglades ecosystem

Special Mandates

Special mandates are legal requirements that apply directly to an individual NPS unit. Most often such mandates are expressed in the unit’s enabling legislation.

The following special mandates have been identified for the Addition Lands based on P.L. 93-440 and P.L. 100-301:

The Secretary shall administer the lands as a unit of the national park system in a manner that will assure their natural and ecological integrity in perpetuity and in accordance with the NPS Organic Act.

Members of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and Seminole Tribe of Florida shall be permitted, subject to reasonable regulations established by the Secretary, to continue their usual and customary use and occupancy of Federal or federally acquired lands and waters within the preserve and the Addition including hunting, fishing, and trapping on a subsistence basis and traditional tribal ceremonies.

No improved property, as defined in the act, nor oil and gas rights, shall be acquired without consent of the owner unless the Secretary, in his judgement, determines that such property is subject to, or threatened with, uses which are, or would be detrimental to the purpose of the preserve.

The Secretary shall develop rules and regulations necessary and appropriate to limit or control the following uses:

- Motorized vehicles
- Exploration for and development of oil, gas, and other minerals
- Grazing
- The draining or constructing of works or structures that alter natural water-courses
- Agriculture
- Hunting, fishing, and trapping
- New construction
- Such other uses as may need to be limited or controlled

The Secretary shall permit hunting, fishing, and trapping on lands and waters under his jurisdiction within the preserve and the Addition in accordance with applicable laws of the United States and the State of Florida, except that he may designate zones where and periods when no hunting, fishing, trapping, or entry may be

See “Special Mandates” on Page 3

Issues – Summary of Your Comments

Comments related to natural and cultural resources:

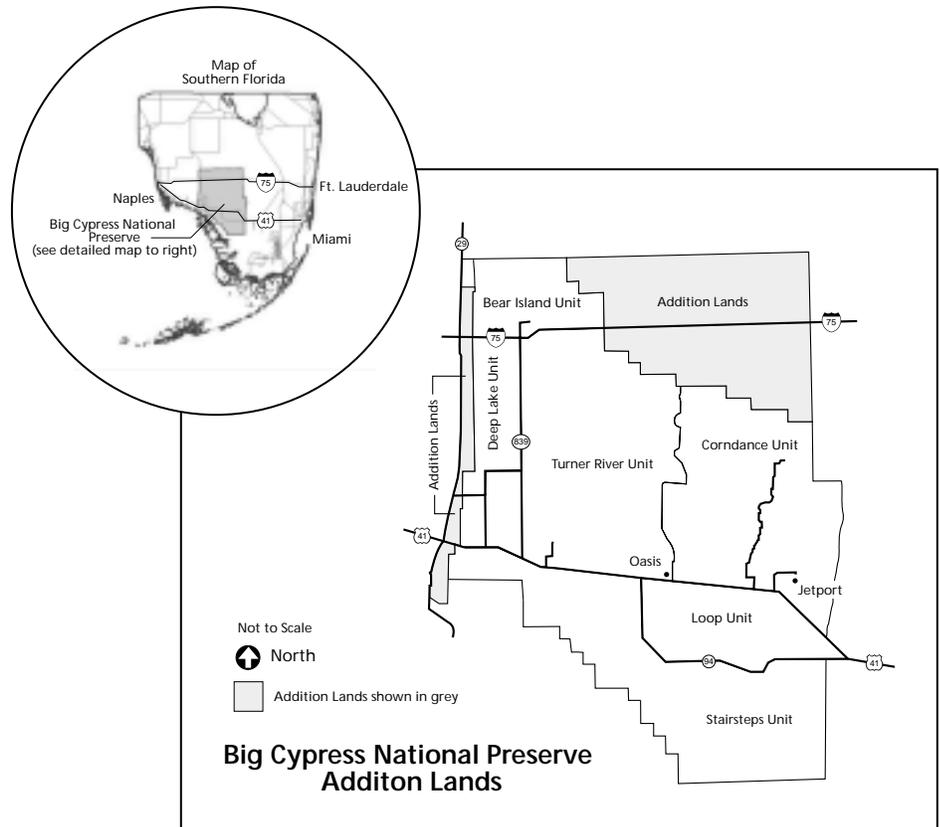
Commentors expressed the need to identify the Addition's role in the south Florida ecosystem restoration efforts. Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects that affect the Addition and preserve in general and any recommended modifications should be identified. There should be better cooperation and coordination with regard to CERP projects that affect the preserve and any NPS restoration strategies should be compatible with CERP. Other comments included analyzing the consequences of projects funded by the Water Resources Development Act and incorporating elements of the Big Cypress Basin Water Supply Plan.

Some commentors emphasized the need to manage for the natural and ecological integrity of the preserve. The NPS should implement science-based resource management. Resources, including important habitats (such as pine/hardwood hummock islands and estuarine/mangrove interphase) and threatened and endangered species should be protected, taking precedence over recreational use or facilities that would be inconsistent with this purpose (e.g., recreational ORV use). Non-motorized, non-consumptive recreational uses could be allowed.

Restoration of previously disturbed lands (e.g., agricultural lands, borrow pits, ORV trails) and the natural hydrology should also be emphasized. Others suggested that disturbed lands should be managed for wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

Commentors identified the need to address long-term goals and plans for managing exotic species, fire, and threatened and endangered species recovery. Some also suggested that contemporary cultural sites (e.g. historical trails, cattle loading pens, logging tram remnants) be protected. The need for additional resource

See "Issues" on Page 4



Special Mandates

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permitted for reasons of public safety, administration, floral or faunal protection and management, or public use and enjoyment. Except in emergencies, any regulations prescribing such restrictions related to hunting, fishing, or trapping shall be put into effect only after consultation with the appropriate State agency having jurisdiction over hunting, fishing, and trapping activities.

The Secretary and other involved Federal agencies shall cooperate with the state of Florida to establish recreational access points and roads, rest and recreation areas, wildlife protection, hunting, fishing, frogging, and other traditional opportunities in conjunction with the creation of the Addition and in the construction of Interstate Highway 75. Three of such access points shall be located within the Preserve (including the Addition).

The Secretary shall promulgate rules and regulations governing exploration for and

development and production of non-Federal interests in oil and gas located within the boundaries of the Big Cypress National Preserve and Addition as are necessary and appropriate to provide reasonable use and enjoyment of privately owned oil and gas interests and consistent with the purposes for which the Big Cypress National Preserve and Addition were added.

The Secretary shall review the area within the preserve or the area within the Addition (as the case may be) and shall report to the President in accordance with section 3(c) and (d) of the Wilderness Act, his recommendations as to the suitability or nonsuitability of any area within the preserve or the area within the Addition (as the case may be) for preservation as wilderness, and any designation of any such areas as a wilderness shall be accomplished in accordance with said subsections of the Wilderness Act.

Issues

...Continued from Page 3

data such as thorough habitat and wildlife surveys and determination of historic and natural water flows and trends was a concern. Commentors also recommended that the plan address relevant state designations such as Outstanding Florida Waters, Area of Critical State Concern, and Unique Natural Area.

Commentors expressed concerns about resource impacts such as water quality, quantity, timing, and distribution; habitat destruction and fragmentation; and air quality degradation from external sources, such as encroaching development, agricultural runoff and cultivation of alien species, and upstream discharges and water control structures.

Comments related to access, visitor use, and facilities:

Some respondents wanted the Addition to be more accessible in general, suggesting access to lands both north and south of I-75, from the L-28 interceptor canal, State Route 29, and along existing grades. Others wanted access to be restricted or to be maintained at current access points. Access for private landowners was also a concern.

There is a difference of opinion over the type or range of visitor use that should be allowed in the Addition. Some people felt that equal consideration should be given to all users, while others recommended activities that they identified as traditional (e.g., hunting, fishing, trapping, frogging, camping, ORV use) should be emphasized and tourism promoting development avoided. Others recommended that recreational opportunities should be limited to those compatible with protecting and restoring resources, and they recommended hiking, canoeing, kayaking, camping, and biking. Commentors also suggested that very little human use should be allowed at all.

There were many comments about off-road vehicle use. Some respondents supported greater access and trails for ORVs, including use of old roads and trails and provision of loop trails and trails connect-

ing to adjacent management units in the original preserve. Some commentors suggested that the number of ORV permits should be increased. Others respondents believe that ORV use should be limited or prohibited because of negative impacts to resources and to other visitors.

Views on hunting included providing and enhancing hunting opportunities including access for retrieval of game, establishing interim rules by 2002, and limiting hunting to walk-in only. Others believed that hunting should be prohibited until baseline information is collected or unless proven that hunting was compatible with panther protection and the purpose of the preserve. Others recommended having various hunting seasons or a lottery system. Some wanted fish, wildlife, and hunting within the Addition to be managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, in cooperation with the Commission, or fully by the NPS. The designation of the Addition as a Wildlife Management Area was also raised as an issue.

A wide range of suggestions on visitor facilities included visitor/interpretive centers, visitor contact stations, backcountry permit kiosks, wildlife check stations, boardwalks, picnic areas, trails, roads, campgrounds, backcountry camping at cabins and designated and dispersed campsites, drive-through habitat viewing, and highway vistas. Some suggested no or minimal development, or that it should be located in already disturbed areas or outside of the preserve. Environmental education as a component of the visitor experience was also mentioned.

Commentors had differing opinions on commercial operations in the Addition. Some felt there should be no or minimal commercial services or development. Others suggested activities such as airboat and swamp buggy tours, while others felt commercial activities should be consistent with resource protection and restoration (e.g., non-motorized type tours or rentals).

Some people supported management of the Addition Lands in as pristine a condition as possible and supported formally

designated wilderness, while others believed wilderness designation was not appropriate and negated the intent of Congress.

Comments related to American Indian issues:

Concerns were raised about acknowledging and working cooperatively with the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and Seminole Tribe of Florida with regard to customary use and occupancy. Also mentioned were concerns regarding tribal ceremonial sites, burial sites, and uninventoried ethnographic resources.

Comments related to administration and operations:

There were concerns for providing appropriate staffing, funding, and support facilities relative to patrol and enforcement, resource protection, and maintenance activities. Some people mentioned the need for support facilities, while others supported limiting the footprint of facilities to I-75 rest areas. Some opposed NPS housing in the Addition and suggested that residential inholdings purchased by the NPS should be removed and the areas restored.

Comments related to oil and gas development:

Some commentors believed that no further oil and gas exploration and development should occur, and that oil and gas rights should be acquired by the NPS. Others noted that this use should be managed to minimize resource impacts or limited to directional drilling only and to existing access points, roads, and buildings. Others said that policies should be applied that are predictable, consistent, timely and fair, and provide for reasonable use and enjoyment of private oil and gas rights.

Other comments:

There were also a number of general comments, many having to do with the planning process, such as inclusion and cooperation with all stakeholders, designation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a cooperating agency, recommendation that

See "More Issues" on Page 6

How We'll Use Your Comments

The general management plan will identify an overall direction for future management of the Addition. It will provide a framework for managers to use when making decisions about such issues as how to best protect resources, what levels and types of uses are appropriate, what facilities should be developed, and how people should access the lands within the Addition. The plan will not propose specific actions or describe how particular programs or projects will be implemented or prioritized. Those decisions will be addressed in more detailed implementation planning, which will follow the broad decision-making presented in the general management plan.

Some issues and concerns that were raised were considered beyond the scope of the general management plan. Many of these issues will be resolved in more detailed future implementation planning that will tier off this plan. For example, future planning could address development of any backcountry trail system, campsite locations, or permit

systems; provide specific hunting guidance such as season lengths, harvest totals, and hunting regulations; and address mineral exploration and development.

Other issues and concerns revolved around things that we must do regardless of planning initiatives. Since much of basic preserve management is specified in laws, regulations, and policy, issues that fall into this category will not be addressed through alternatives. These issues include lack of basic resource data, protecting and preserving native vegetation communities and species (including threatened and endangered species), preserving or maintaining natural processes such as fire, water flow and water quality, protecting native American cultural sites, controlling or eliminating exotic plant species, and involving the public during planning and decision making processes.

Comments related to major planning issues and related problems have been organized into three major decision points.

Decision points are the primary questions that the general management plan must answer. They are based on public and agency issues and concerns and are an important part of the planning process because they help focus the plan and help frame the management alternatives. They indicate where people's visions for the Addition's future are substantially different. These opposing viewpoints created by these differences are the questions the plan should address.

Decision Points

- To what extent can we provide visitor access and use without exceeding acceptable impacts to the Addition's resources and values?
- What is the appropriate range of visitor experiences and opportunities that should be provided?
- In order to support and accommodate visitor experiences and protect resources, what types and levels of development and management are needed?

Where We Are in the Planning Process and What's Next

As shown by shading in the chart below, we are currently in the early stages of developing alternatives for the management and use of the Addition. The planning process requires the assessment of alternative future conditions and management strategies for the Addition. As part of this

planning process, a range of management alternatives will be developed to reflect the range of ideas and different preferences expressed in the public scoping process. These alternatives will be presented for your comment in the next newsletter and in public meetings that will be scheduled for sometime next fall.

After we have received your comments, the alternatives will be modified as necessary to incorporate your ideas and suggestions. An analysis of the environmental impacts of implementing each alternative will then be completed and a preferred alternative will be identified. The alternatives and their environmental impacts will be described in the draft general management plan/environmental impact statement. You will have an opportunity to review and comment again for a period following release of the draft document.

| General Management Plan | | | |
|-------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|
| Step | Activity | Date | Public Involvement |
| 1. | Gather information, identify issues and visions for the Addition's future | Spring 2001 to Summer 2001 | Public scoping meetings and newsletter/response form |
| 2. | Develop and evaluate management alternatives | Fall 2001 to Fall 2002 | Public meetings and newsletter/response form |
| 3. | Identify a preferred alternative and prepare and publish a draft GMP/EIS | Winter 2002 to Summer 2003 | Review/comment on draft plan and public meetings |
| 4. | Revise and publish a final GMP/EIS | Fall 2003 to Spring 2004 | Final plan distributed to public |

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More Issues

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the GMP address the entire preserve, discussion of Congressionally mandated studies, and establishment of an advisory group.

Many people also suggested solutions to a number of issues such as identifying appropriate Best Management Practices

that could address water pollution from external sources, ways to restore wildlife movement corridors, and enlisting property owners and sportsmen's organizations as volunteers to remove exotics.

We also received a number of petitions and form letters addressing concerns pri-

marily outside of the scope of the GMP, including comments about the ORV management plan for the original preserve, bills within federal or state legislatures (i.e. HR 731, HB-445) affecting hunting, NPS obtaining ownership of county roads within the preserve, and opposition to further development, no hunt zones, or tourism promoting development.