



Big Cypress National Preserve Newsletter

Proposed Construction of a Fire Station at Big Cypress National Preserve Headquarters Complex Ochopee, Florida



Fire Operations Center

The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing to update and increase the efficiency of the Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY) Fire and Aviation Program by constructing a modern, safe, and efficient Fire Operations Center (FOC). The new FOC and associated facilities will be constructed in a centralized location near the BICY Headquarters Complex in Ochopee, FL. The project will address the current inadequacies of the fire facilities. A new streamlined FOC will be instrumental in helping NPS meet its annual goal of >125,000 acres of prescribed fire in BICY.

The BICY Fire and Aviation Program currently operates out of three locations across BICY, making coordination and operations inefficient. The buildings were constructed in the 1970s and are inadequate for today's fire operations. These facts underscore the need for an updated and efficient Fire Operations Center and associated facilities. The purpose of this project is to support the park's expanding Fire and Aviation Program to reduce the severity and extent of wildfires and to enhance the health and quality of the ecosystems within BICY.



BICY Fire Program



Fire Benefits Natural Habitats

Project Overview: Fire Operations Center and Associated Improvements

This project entails constructing an approximately 5,000-square foot Fire Operations Center (FOC) building, an approximately 4,000-square foot Emergency Operations Center (EOC) building, and associated facilities and driveways on approximately 16 acres of land adjacent to the BICY Headquarters Complex off US Highway 41 (Tamiami Trail) in Ochopee, Florida. Construction of the FOC would occur in the immediate future while the additional structures are planned for future construction.



Project Purpose and Need

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide a modern, safe, and efficient FOC, and planned future structures, in a centralized location to support the preserve's expanding Fire and Aviation Program.

Project Need

Currently, the BICY Fire and Aviation Program facilities are spread over a wide area, making for inefficient and potentially delayed emergency fire response. The buildings were originally built in the 1970s and are inadequate for today's operations, including exposure of equipment to the elements, security concerns, failing utilities, and other significant deficiencies.

The NPS has identified the need for a new consolidated FOC and associated facilities. The existing facilities are inadequate for current and expected staff and equipment and underscore the need for an updated and efficient FOC and associated facilities.

BICY encompasses over 720,000 acres of swamplands, flatwoods, and estuarine wetlands. It is home to a myriad of plants and animals, including many rare, endangered, and threatened species. BICY has one of the most active fire programs in the NPS.



BICY Service Road

These prescribed fires are conducted to reduce the number and intensity of wildfires in southern Florida, as the state has the second highest average number of wildfires in the nation. Prescribed fires also enhance the quality and health of the fire-dependent ecosystems within BICY.

This project will:

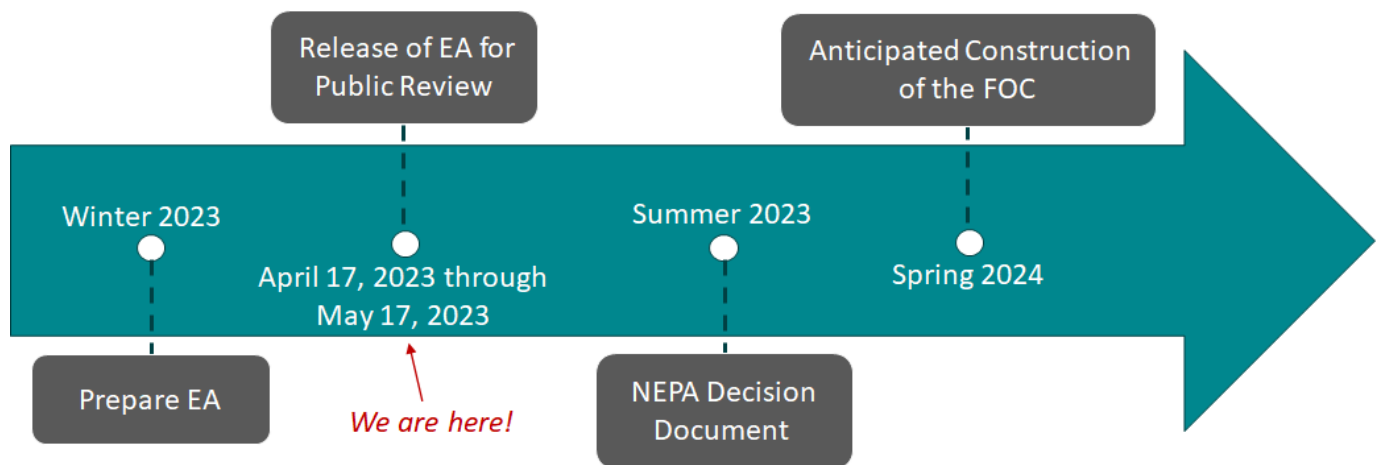
- **Create a safer and more efficient fire program operations for NPS staff;**
- **Produce faster wildfire and emergency response times;**
- **Have greater protection of park resources; and**
- **Help meet the NPS goal of a more robust fire program in southern Florida.**



BICY Fire Equipment

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires all federal agencies to consider and document the potential impacts of management actions on the human environment. The NPS Organic Act of 1916 directs NPS to both conserve park resources and provide for their use and enjoyment. Both Acts are used by NPS to plan and make informed decisions that help protect park resources and values.

Project Timeline



During the NEPA planning process, members of the public and agencies provide input on issues, concerns, or opportunities related to the proposed project during the review of NPS's Environmental Assessment (EA).

An EA is a NEPA document that evaluates the likely environmental consequences resulting from a proposed action, which includes the FOC, and planned future fire-related structures, at the project area. The EA addresses the project background, the purpose and need for the proposed project, and the alternatives considered. The EA also documents the existing environmental conditions and potential impacts of implementing those actions.

As part of the environmental review of the project and included with the EA is a Floodplain Statement of Findings (SOF). The Floodplain SOF was written in accordance with Executive Order 11988 (*Floodplain Management*), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), *Director's Order #77-2* (*Floodplain Management*), and NPS Procedural Manual #77-2 (Floodplain Management) (NPS 2002). The Floodplain SOF summarizes the floodplain development associated with providing a modern, safe, and adequate FOC in a centralized location to support BICY's expanding Fire and Aviation program.

You Are Invited to Review and Comment!

The National Park Service invites the public to comment on the Environmental Assessment and associated Floodplain Statement of Findings for this project at the NPS's Planning, Environment & Public Comment site at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FOC> or the QR code here:



Comments on the Environmental Assessment and Floodplain Statement of Findings will be accepted from April 17 through May 17, 2023. Written comments may be mailed to Superintendent Thomas Forsyth, 3100 Tamiami Trail East, Ochopee, Florida 34141. Mailed comments must be postmarked by May 17, 2023.

Please note that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may become publicly available at any time as required by the Freedom of Information Act. The NPS cannot guarantee that your personal information will be withheld from public review.