

September 28, 2009

NPS Leadership and Staff,

On behalf of the FL State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), our 15,000 members, hunters, recreationalists, and outdoor enthusiasts, I would like to express my concerns regarding the preferred Alternative as described in the Big Cypress National Preserve's General Mgmt. Plan/Wilderness Study/Off-Road Vehicle Mgmt. Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.

As is the case with the FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the FL State Chapter of NWTF and its members cannot offer support for the Preferred Alternative as presented, but Alternative B does provide many of the elements the FL NWTF could support if the language was modified prior to approval and subsequent implementation.

As such, the FL State Chapter adamantly opposes any wilderness designation within the 146,000 acre Addition Lands as this would ultimately hinder public access and utilization, along with prevent proper management of these lands for existing natural resources. In addition, this designation would eliminate some of the largest contiguous acreage regards Osceola turkey habitat in South Florida, and prevent many turkey hunters from using these public acres to pursue their passionate hobby. We recommend that the wilderness designation be eliminated and that the NPS take advantage of existing roads / trails to provide the greatest amount of multiple use opportunities to the public.

The FL NWTF strongly believes in active management of habitat, and that a hands on approach (ie- being pro-active vs. re-active) is certainly more favorable when unexpected and unanticipated circumstances arise. A high level of resource protection can still be achieved without wilderness designation, via implementing the latest research and mgmt. techniques and involving various Stakeholders and the general public to create a sense of ownership among Floridians.

The FL NWTF also strongly supports recreation on public lands, and believes that State and Federal Agencies should promote sound management while allowing for multiple use opportunities that are compatible with the resource. As such, we support FWC's recommendation and also oppose the designation of Primitive Backcountry Mgmt. Zones, while in favor of Backcountry Recreational Zones that would not present the same restrictions regards motorized access.

The FL State Chapter applauds the efforts of NPS staff for realizing the importance of public access within the Additional Lands, and supports the designation of ORV trails that would ultimately become part of a larger network within the BCNP. However, we are not in favor of the Phased-in approach as presented in the Preferred Alternative, but are supportive of the methodology behind issuing ORV permits as outlined in Alternative B and providing for new access points for all forms of recreational use including hunting.

The FL NWTF fully supports incorporating the Additional Lands into the BCNP in the hopes of generating additional multi-use opportunities for our NWTF membership and the public throughout the State. The proper use and sound management of our public lands in FL is essential because of our large population base and many user groups, thus making the designation and ultimate use of these 146,000 acres absolutely critical to sportsman and outdoor enthusiasts. As such, the FL State Chapter and its members cannot support the Preferred Alternative as presented, but could offer support for a revised version of Alternative B based on the recommendations and concerns outlined above.

The FL State Chapter would like to thank NPS Leadership and Staff for the opportunity to comment on this critical issue, and we look forward to working with the NPS to ensure that the natural resources within the BCNP's Additional Lands are protected and actively managed, while providing for managed public access and a variety of recreational opportunities.

Thank You !

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