

September 23, 2009

I serve as the Executive Director of Allied Sportsmen's Associations of Florida, an organization that represents the interests of numerous sportsmens organizations from around Florida. We work closely with the FWCC and the Florida Legislature, and were instrumental in the Florida Legislature creating the Florida Legislators' Sportsmen's Caucus. Since 2003, we have worked on numerous piece of legislation and issues, with many of them geared towards protecting or increasing access to public owned lands.

I am writing today to comment on the Big Cypress National Preserve's (BCNP) Preferred Alternative for the General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Off-road Vehicle Management Plan/Environenatl Impact Statement.

First, our organization adamantly opposes the wilderness designation in the Addition, and the establishment of primitive backcountry management zones. We agree with the FWCC that this is a misapplication of wilderness designation. Many of our organization's members have used trail and roads that have existed for many, many decades (prior to the 1988 Addition). The wilderness designation will deprive families that have a deep cultural history of their ability to once again utilize lands that their fathers and grand fathers enjoyed. We would recommend that the wilderness designation be eliminated and the primitive bckcountry management zones be changed to backcouty recreation management zones.

Second, we would urge the NPS to take advantage of the trail and road systems that have been in existence for more than two decades. These roads should be designated for public use, so that there can be a much more comprehensive system of trails for both pedestrian ccess and other multiple uses.

We also strongly urge taht the FWCC be specified in the Record of Decision as an equal partner in all decision making regarding management of the ORV trail system, including opening or closing trails for ORV access. The FWCC understands what the residents of Florida want, and we ask that they be given an equal seat at the table.

Finally, the BCNP Addition should be made a part of the Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area. It must be opened up to provide public access for hunting, fishing, trapping, and other forms of recreation. While I was not involved in the decisions that lead to the establishment of the BCNP, it is my understanding from folks who participated back then that it was the clear intent to have this land opened for hunting and fishing, and that access for such activities would not be deminished.

Floridians across the state need access to public lands for hunting and fishing, and our residents should not be deprived of the opportunity to hunt and fish on these lands. Curtailing traditional forms of access, and limited use of roads and trails that have been used for decades, in tantamount to eliminating these recreational activities. Open up the lands and let our people enjoy them, as their fathers and grand fathers, and those before them had the chance to do.

Lane Stephens, Executive Director

Allied Sportsmen's Associations of Florida