



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

Big Cypress  
National Preserve

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# Big Cypress Grant Proposal

## Rehabilitate the Historic Structure at Monroe Station

### Goal

Repair and Rehabilitate the historic structure at the Monroe Station site along the Federal and State designated Scenic Highway within Big Cypress National Preserve so that it reflects the historic period in which it was constructed and is suitable to provide interpretive space and limited visitor services.

### Purpose

Reclaim a portion of Florida history related to the construction of the Tamiami (Tampa to Miami) Trail, US 41 in South Florida. The rehabilitated site will provide for visitor services (such as convenient items, limited food and/or canoe, kayak or bike rentals) as well as educate and interpret to visitors the role the Tamiami Trail has played in the development of South Florida and how this development subsequently impacted the Everglades/Big Cypress region.

### How

Utilizing historic plans and photographs, the site will be rehabilitated to reflect the 1930s period in which it began operation. The NPS will remove additions to the building that were added in later years and return the structure to a historic appearance. The lower floor of the structure will be used for interpretive space and limited concession services.

### Background

In 1928, six stations were built on the Tamiami Trail in Collier County, Florida, to provide goods and services to motorists that ventured across the state, and to house deputies of the Southwest Florida Mounted Police force. Monroe Station is one of two stations still standing along the Trail today. Pinecrest Station, the other, is privately owned and greatly altered from its original form.

Monroe Station is within the boundaries of Big Cypress National Preserve along the Tamiami Trail State and Federal Scenic Highway Corridor, and is a National Park Service (NPS) property. In the decades since its construction, Monroe Station has also been altered several times, most significantly by additions that have increased the structure's size and mass. The exact dates of changes to the building have not been determined, although they probably occurred between 1957 and 1988. At present the structure is in need of repair to prevent the loss of a portion of Florida history.



**Monroe Station in the 1930s**

The Stations along the trail were one room deep and had a narrow, rectangular footprint and low-pitched, hipped roof. The façade had two sets of paired doors on the lower level and four single windows on the upper level. The buildings originally served both as a gas and service station and as a residence for the family that operate the store.

The NPS proposes to repair and rehabilitate Monroe Station, using historic plans and photos. Rehabilitation of Monroe Station will provide needed services, via concessions contracts with the NPS, for present day visitors along this remote area of the scenic corridor. The restored building would provide an historical glimpse into the development of the area. Exhibits within the building would interpret the construction of the Tamiami Trail, early automobile travel into the heart of the everglades, early development of South Florida, creation of Big Cypress

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National Preserve and present recreation opportunities along the Trail. The structure may also house visitor services such as convenience items, limited food service and possible canoe, kayak and bike rentals.

The history of Monroe Station is intertwined with that of the development of South Florida as a tourist destination. Prior to about 1890, South Florida was largely undeveloped and uninhabited except for a small number of Seminole Indians. The construction of rail lines down the Florida peninsula during the 1880's and 1890's, led by Henry Plant on the west coast and Henry Flagler on the east, dramatically altered the landscape of the region. Both Plant and Flagler built luxury hotels at major stops along the railways, and communities soon grew up around the resorts. Extensive promotional campaigns encouraged Northeasterners and Midwesterners to vacation in the sunny, subtropical climate of Florida.

In the decades following World War I, the highest levels of disposable income in American history combined with the affordability of the Ford Model T to create an increasingly mobile population. Florida's popularity as a tourist destination continued to grow during this period, facilitated by the completion of routes like the Dixie Highway, which opened from northern Michigan to Miami in 1925.

As early as 1915, residents of South Florida recognized the need for a road connecting the east and west coasts of the peninsula. James F. Jaudon of Miami and Francis W. Perry of Tampa are credited with originating the idea of a southern route through the Everglades to connect the region's two largest cities. The proposed route was to begin in Miami, extend west to Naples, then continue northward along the Gulf Coast to Tampa. The name "Tamiami Trail" was chosen to indicate the terminal points of the route – Tampa and Miami.

Because the state of Florida did not have a functioning road department in 1915, the county governments along the proposed route financed the Trail's construction. Progress was slowed during the late 1910s and had stopped by 1921, because of World War I-related supply and labor shortages and escalating costs caused by the difficult terrain. In the early 1920s, Barron Collier, a streetcar advertising entrepreneur who owned more than 1,000,000 acres in Lee County, offered to invest his own money to complete the Tamiami Trail through his property in return for the state's creation of a new county composed of his property holdings. The state legislature created Collier County in 1923, and construction of the Trail resumed soon after.

Barron Collier invested more than \$1 million in road construction between 1923 and 1926, when the state highway department assumed responsibility for completion of the Trail. Built with a width of 30 feet shoulder-to-shoulder, the roadway was bordered by a canal on its north side, the result of blasting and dredging of rock for road construction. The highway was finally completed in 1928 at a total cost of \$7 to \$8 million. On April 25, 1928, a gala celebration, which included a 100-car motorcade along the length of the road, marked the opening of the Tamiami Trail.

The dangers of travel along the southern portion of the Tamiami Trail between Miami and Naples, which ran through the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp, became apparent early in the route's history. The long, straight roadway proved monotonous to drivers, and some motorists collided with the abundant wildlife that crossed the highway. Furthermore, when travelers experienced car trouble or had accidents, there was no where on the long stretches of uninhabited road to seek help.

As a result of the dangers to motorists, Barron Collier and the Collier County Sheriff's Office cooperated in 1928 to create the Southwest Florida Mounted Police Force. The officers, who were deputized by the county, were charged



**Monroe Station in the 1970s**

Through the years many additions and changes occurred to the building to accommodate for adaptive use. Little of the original building is identifiable. The station was privately owned and in operation in to the late 1980s, early 1990s.



**Monroe Station Today**

Today the building is in disrepair and has extensive structural damage. Rehabilitating the existing structure will help restore a portion of history related to the Tamiami Trail, a road that played a large part in establishing Florida as an international tourist destination.

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with patrolling the Tamiami Trail through the county and assisting stranded motorists. D. Graham Copeland, a deputy sheriff who had long been associated with Collier's Florida investments, oversaw the Southwest Mounted Police program for the county.

Barron Collier assisted the program directly, purchasing motorcycles to loan to the county and building stations along the Trail to house the officers. Six identical stations were built at ten-mile intervals between the county lines, at Belle Meade, Royal Palm, Fakahatchee, Turner's River, Monroe and Paolita. The narrow, two story rectangular station buildings housed a store on the lower floor and a residence for the officer and family upstairs. While the officer patrolled the five miles of Trail on either side of his duty station every hour, his wife ran the store, selling gas and oil, as well as food and beverages, to passing motorists.

Patrolling the Tamiami Trail was dangerous work, and several officers were killed in the line of duty. William Irwin, the first officer to serve at Monroe Station died of injuries received in an auto accident in January 1929, after just six months on the job. He was replaced by W.J. Weaver, who resigned in November of the same year and was replaced by C.L. Johnson. Turnover rates were fairly high among the officers; undoubtedly, the danger of the job, coupled with the relative isolation of the stations, made the job difficult for most.

The Great Depression brought an untimely end to the Southwest Mounted Police program: by April 1934, the force had been disbanded and all of the stations closed. Barron Collier's fortune was destroyed by the Depression; the loss of his financial support was a factor contributing to the program's failure, as was the increasing development along the Trail, which lessened the need for a police force dedicated to assisting stranded motorists on the highway. In the decades that followed, the six original station buildings were eventually sold or demolished. Some probably fell victim to a road widening program in the mid-1950's, while at least one was destroyed by a hurricane. In 1971, only four stations were standing; today only two, Monroe and Royal Palm, remain.