

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

**NATIONAL
PARK
SERVICE**

**Big Cypress
National Preserve**

**Backcountry Access Plan/
Wilderness Study/ Environmental
Impact Statement Briefing**

Big Cypress NPres
Off-road Vehicle Adv Comm Briefing
October 20, 2015
Bob DeGross

1

Topics

- Project Background/Timeline
- Plan Purpose
- Project sideboards
- Alternative Development Process
- Wilderness Process
- Next Steps/Project Timeline

2

Project Background/Timeline

- 1992** Original Preserve GMP (including a commitment to develop an ORV management plan)
- 1995** Settlement Agreement ordering the NPS to “develop an ORV Management Plan accompanied by a Supplemental EIS.”
- 2000** Original Preserve ORV Plan (complying with the GMP commitment and the Settlement Agreement)
- 2000** BICY Superintendent Letter (implementing the ORV Management Plan)
- 2005** Summary Judgment in favor of the NPS (upholding the ORV Management Plan)

3

Project Background/Timeline

- 2007** BICY modified Bear Island ORV trails as part of implementation
- 2010** Addition GMP / ORV Management Plan
- 2011** Went to designated trails throughout preserve
- 2012** Bear Island Order (requiring closure of Bear Island trails opened in 2007)
- 2013** Complaint resulting in Prayer for Relief (requiring closure of all remaining open secondary ORV trails, except landowner access trails)
- 2013** NPS began scoping for the Backcountry Access Plan/EIS
- 2014** Judgment up-holding Addition GMP
- 2015** Alternatives Development Workshop (held in March)

4

Plan Purpose

To develop a backcountry access plan and wilderness study for Big Cypress National Preserve that develops a possible wilderness recommendation and provides reasonable management guidelines for backcountry access and use, while protecting the Preserve's natural and cultural resources and providing for public enjoyment. The plan will be in accordance with the Preserve's enabling legislation, NPS policy, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

5

Plan Sideboards

- Within plan scope
 - Designation of the secondary and hiking trail network (including a re-route of the FNST)
 - Sustainable approach to camping management
 - Complete primary trail network in Bear Island and Stairsteps
 - Further study of WEA findings to formulate wilderness proposal
- Outside of scope
 - Frontcountry access and recreation
 - Landowner access trails
 - Secondary trails in the Addition

6

Public Scoping

- Identified need for plan in fall 2013
- Public scoping concluded in May 2014
- 230 comments, 70 workshop participants
- Comments reflected both concern and support for the plan
 - support further defining a trail system to balance recreation and preservation
 - Concern that the plan is an effort to expand the trail system
- Commenters identified the wilderness eligibility assessment (WEA) as a needed component of the BAP to inform alternatives development

7

Alternatives Development

- March 2015 NPS Alternatives Development Workshop
- Preliminary approach to alternatives development
 - Represents a broad spectrum of stakeholder/user interests
 - Consistent with previous plans
 - Variation based on scientific data (i.e., substrate and habitat suitability) vs. subjective mileage limits
- Public review of preliminary alternatives December thru February. Public workshops in January
 - seeking input on concepts, variability, and approach

8

Wilderness Process

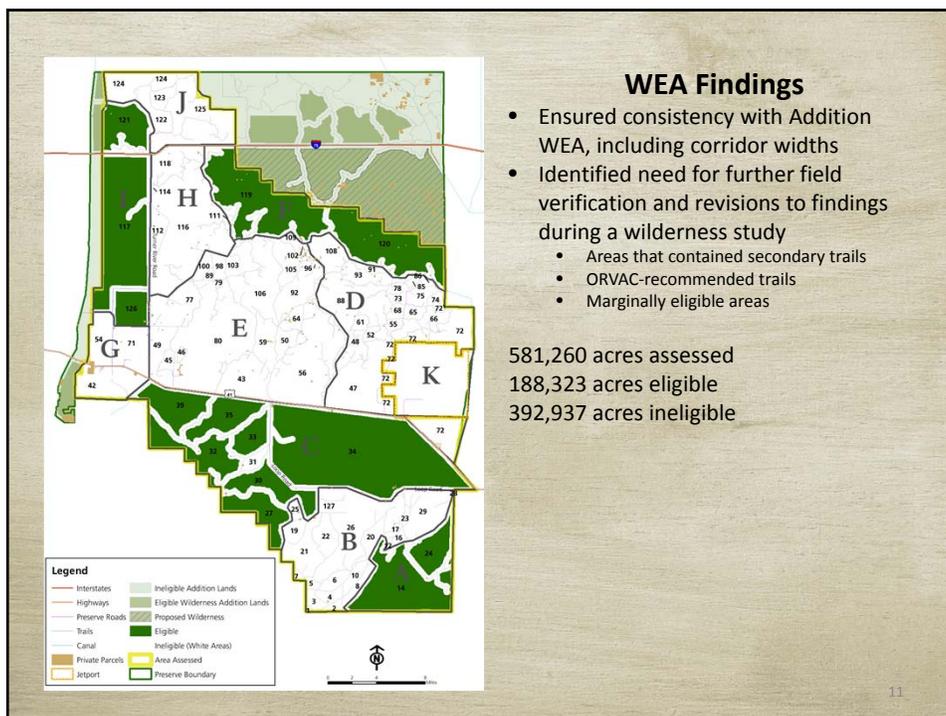
- Public comment and Preserve staff identified WEA a needed component of BAP
- WEA NPS workshop in Sept, 2014
- WEA signed on June 18, 2015
- Federal Register Notice for the WEA also announced the inclusion of a formal Wilderness Study to be completed as part of the Backcountry Access Plan/EIS

9

Wilderness Criteria

- The area is at least 5,000 acres or of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.
- The earth and its community of life are untrammeled [free/unconstrained] by humans, where humans are visitors and do not remain.
- The area is undeveloped and retains its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation.
- The area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of humans' work substantially unnoticeable.
- The area is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.
- The area offers outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

10



Wilderness Study Next Steps

- The Wilderness Study portion of the EIS will include the following elements:
 - An analysis of potential wilderness alternatives from all areas deemed eligible in the WEA, independent from the designation of secondary trails
 - Field work to further study and evaluate eligible and marginally ineligible areas
 - An analysis of areas identified in the 2010 Addition WEA as not feasible to manage due to their size and lack of contiguity with other eligible wilderness (now contiguous with eligible wilderness in the original Preserve)
- Public input regarding wilderness needed prior to formulating wilderness study alternatives.

Next Steps / Project Timeline

- Draft Alternatives Public Review and Comment Period; and, Initial Scoping for Wilderness Study – Dec 2015 – Feb 2016
 - Draft Alternatives/WS Scoping Workshop – January 2016
-

- Final Draft Public Comment Period
 - November/December 2016
- Public Meetings – December 2016
- Anticipated ROD – August 2017

Stay informed and involved at - parkplanning.nps.gov