



## Big Cypress National Preserve Commercial Services Plan

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS) is developing a commercial services plan for Big Cypress National Preserve. The plan will identify necessary and appropriate commercial services for the Preserve and evaluate options that the NPS can pursue to best manage these services. The planning team has been developing draft alternatives for management of commercial services; these are presented in this newsletter for your review. We value your input.

Big Cypress National Preserve's 1974 enabling legislation serves as the basis for establishing the Preserve's purpose, significance, and mission to protect the significant natural and cultural resources.

Commercial activities must be in accordance with these authorities and must comply with the overall NPS mandate to preserve and protect significant resources

while making them available for the appropriate use and enjoyment of the visiting public. The accompanying newsletter presents, for your review and comment, the planning framework that will be used to develop the commercial services plan. It describes the mandates, purpose, and significance for the Preserve. It also identifies a representative range of issues that have arisen both from discussions with NPS subject experts and from the input that has been provided to the NPS in your correspondence. In addition, preliminary alternatives are presented for managing commercial services; these different approaches represent long-term visions for carrying out these commercial services.

I invite you to review these various planning elements and alternatives and to provide us with your comments.

You have several ways to participate in this planning effort. You may mail your comments on the enclosed response form or drop them off at Big Cypress National Preserve headquarters in Ochopee. Copies of this newsletter and comment form can be accessed at: [www.nps.gov/bicy/parkmgmt/planning.htm](http://www.nps.gov/bicy/parkmgmt/planning.htm) by clicking on the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) link under the commercial services plan. You are also cordially invited to an open house where you can meet with the planning team to discuss your comments, questions, and concerns regarding the commercial services planning effort. The meetings for the Big Cypress National Preserve Commercial Services Plan will be November 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (see inset).

We look forward to your input on this key NPS planning document.

Sincerely,

Karen Gustin  
Superintendent  
Big Cypress National Preserve



### Scheduled Meetings –

**Date:** Wed., November 7, 2007  
**Time:** 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM  
**Place:** Big Cypress National Preserve  
Headquarters Pavillion

---

**Date:** Thurs., November 8, 2007  
**Time:** 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM  
**Place:** Edison Community College  
7007 Lely Cultural Boulevard  
B101 Holland Salley Auditorium  
Naples

# The Commercial Services Plan

The commercial services plan provides the process for establishing the types and levels of commercial activities necessary and appropriate for Big Cypress National Preserve. Commercial activities currently include canoe and kayak rentals and tours and are authorized through commercial use authorization permits. Commercial use authorizations replace the former incidental business permits. Because the laws have changed, and to provide greater oversight and control of commercial operations, the NPS is in the process of converting many commercial use authorizations to concessions contracts. This may or may not happen at Big Cypress. The commercial services plan is an implementation plan, and it will establish the most effective and efficient methods for the NPS to manage commercial activities. This plan is developed with public input and must comply with applicable laws and policies and be consistent with the management philosophies found in the Preserve's general management plan, strategic plan, and other relevant planning documents.



## Why are We Doing This ?

In 1998 Congress passed the NPS Concessions Management Improvement Act (Public Law 105-391), which guides the management of NPS concessions services. By law (36 Code of Federal Regulations 5.3), all commercial activities that occur within a unit of the national park system must be formally authorized and determined to be necessary and appropriate. Commercial Use permits authorizing current visitor services at Big Cypress National Preserve have either expired or will soon expire. This commercial services plan is an essential step in reviewing commercial services at the Preserve to ensure that they are still necessary and appropriate and properly authorized. The plan will also consider whether new services and/or improvements to existing services are needed to achieve future goals for the Preserve.

## How Could the Plan Affect Me ?

The commercial services plan will explore alternatives for improving, limiting, or expanding the range of services available to the visiting public. The NPS preferred alternative will be selected following public meetings, decision making, and further analysis of the *Draft Commercial Services Plan and Environmental Assessment* g. Although there are no plans to eliminate the activities and opportunities that you may have become accustomed to at the Preserve, some changes might arise from implementation of the plan. Because the NPS is mandated to preserve and protect important resources while providing for visitor use and enjoyment, existing commercial services will be analyzed to ensure that they are not causing unacceptable resource damage or degradation. If changes are required to protect resources, there could be changes in how commercial services are conducted or provided.

## What's Happening Now ?

The NPS's planning team consists of the Preserve superintendent and management staff and planners from the NPS regional, Washington, and Denver Service Center offices. The planning team has established a decision-making framework for the plan based on the Preserve's legislated mandate, mission, and goals. Managers will be guided by this framework as they determine the best approach for providing commercial services while protecting resources and addressing other policy requirements. The planning team has developed alternatives that represent different approaches for managing commercial services.

## How Does This Plan Relate to Other Plans ?

Several plans already exist for the Preserve, and others are in progress. Each plan is an independent effort, although some issues and proposals presented in the plans are related. The commercial services plan will address issues regarding commercial services in the context of necessary and appropriate types and levels of service throughout the original Preserve. The Addition of the Preserve will be addressed as an addendum to the Commercial Services Plan, after the completion of the General Management Plan for the Addition of the Preserve is completed, sometime in 2009. Other plans, such as the 1991 General management Plan for the original Preserve, address management strategies and alternatives for commercial services. Although the various plans are independent efforts, the planning teams will coordinate their efforts to ensure that consistent comprehensive commercial services strategies exist for the Preserve. The commercial services plan must be in accordance with the Preserve's broader, overarching plans such as the general management plan and strategic plan.

## How Can the Public Become Involved ?

The public is invited to comment on the alternatives presented in this newsletter. This is a crucial step in the planning process, and your comments will assist the planning team with evaluating whether or not the alternatives adequately address the range of appropriate issues that you and the team have identified. To make this process work, and to ensure that the public's views and concerns are addressed, we need your comments, feedback and participation in the upcoming public meetings.

You can also send us your comments and suggestions via e-mail, through our web-based planning process, regular mail, or by dropping them off at the Oasis Visitor Center or Preserve Headquarters in Ochopee.

The Preserve address is:  
Big Cypress National Preserve  
33100 Tamiami Trail, East  
Ochopee, FL 34141

The e-mail address is:  
[BICY\\_Superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:BICY_Superintendent@nps.gov)

The web-based Planning, Environmental Compliance and Public Comment (PEPC) process is available at:  
[www.parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy](http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/bicy)

You can also join our mailing list to receive future newsletters and relevant information providing updates on the planning process.

To review other steps in the commercial services planning process, please see below.

<b>Commercial Services Plan Process and Schedule</b>		
<b>Time frame</b>	<b>Planning Activity</b>	<b>How You Can Be Involved</b>
<b>Summer 2006</b>	<b>Project Scoping</b> – Planning framework (laws, mandates, mission, goals, issues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read newsletter and send in your comments</li> </ul>
<b>Fall 2007</b> <b><u>We are Here</u></b>	<b>Preliminary Alternatives</b> The NPS developed a range of preliminary alternatives incorporating planning issues and impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read newsletter</li> <li>• Send us your ideas and comments</li> <li>• Participate in public meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Late Fall 2007</b> <b>Early Winter 2008</b>	<b>Prepare Draft Document</b> A draft commercial services plan and environmental assessment will be developed by NPS staff. The draft document describes the preferred alternative, other alternatives and impacts of implementing each.	
<b>Winter 2008</b>	<b>Publish CSP Draft Document</b> The commercial services plan and environmental assessment draft is distributed for public review and comment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the draft plan</li> <li>• Send us your ideas and comments</li> </ul>
<b>Winter 2008</b>	<b>Prepare and Publish Final CSP Document</b> Incorporating public and internal review, a final Commercial Services Plan and EA is completed and distributed to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the final plan, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters.</li> </ul>
<b>2008 &amp; Beyond</b>	<b>Implement the Approved Plan</b> The final Commercial Services Plan is implemented as funding allows.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the Preserve to implement plan</li> </ul>

# Framework for Commercial Services Plan

The NPS strives to ensure that all Preserve planning efforts are grounded in a thorough appraisal of the park unit's purpose, significance, and mission goals so that decisions reflect the fundamental objectives of protecting resources and providing for appropriate visitor enjoyment. Purpose statements are derived from the park unit's authorizing legislation and reaffirm the reasons for which the area was established as a unit of the national park system. Purpose statements provide the foundation for all decisions regarding the management and use of the park unit.

## National Preserve Mission & Vision

The mission for Big Cypress National Preserve is described in the enabling legislation which created the original Preserve:

To assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed in the State of Florida and to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof (P.L. 93-440 and P.L. 100-301).

The Preserve's vision is stated as:

The NPS envisions Big Cypress National Preserve as a nationally significant ecological resource – a primitive area where ecological processes are restored and maintained and cultural sites are protected from unlawful disturbance. Visitors will benefit from aesthetic gratification and relaxation in a natural setting, the challenge of exploring the landscape and the chance to test traditional back-country skills and the opportunity to learn more about the natural environment.

Primary interpretive themes describe those ideas, concepts, or messages about Big Cypress National Preserve that are important for visitors to understand. Based on the site's purpose and significance, themes provide guidelines for making decisions concerning which interpretive stories will be told to visitors and what interpretive facilities and activities will be required to tell those stories. Primary themes do not include everything that may be interpreted; however, they do include those ideas that are critical to understanding significance of Preserve resources. These statements assist managers with making decisions that preserve the resources and values necessary to accomplish the Preserve's mission. All necessary and appropriate commercial services should relate directly to one or more of the themes. The Primary interpretive themes are described at length in the Long Range Interpretive Plan for the Preserve and include:

### **WATER**

Preserving the Big Cypress watershed is key to the survival of the South Florida ecosystem.

### **BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

Acting as custodian for ecological and biological processes, Big Cypress National Preserve provides habitat and protection for a great diversity of plant and animal species.

### **HUMAN/CULTURE**

Big Cypress National Preserve reveals stories from times long past and into the future, reflecting a pattern of changing culture and human involvement.

## RECREATION/MULTI-USE

Big Cypress National Preserve manages a spectrum of human activities, both recreational and commercial.

## Preserve Significance

Significance statements describe the Preserve's distinguishing resources and characteristics that set it apart in a regional, national, and sometimes international context. These statements assist managers with making decisions that preserve the resources and values necessary to accomplish the Preserve's purpose. A review of the House and Senate reports leading to passage of PL 93-440 identifies two fundamental resources in the Preserve:

**Water** – The natural flow of freshwater (that is the watershed) is key to the survival of Everglades National Park as well as the integrity of the entire south Florida ecosystem.

**Natural Values** – As important as the watershed, the natural, scenic, floral, and faunal values are cited as being worthy of recognition and protection on their own merit. Recreation is discussed along with the natural values because the natural resources provide opportunities for recreational pursuits.

The act states that the Preserve, as a unit of the national park system, is to be administered in a manner that will ensure its "natural and ecological integrity in perpetuity".

Given the mission, vision, and significance of the Preserve, the planning direction is clear - Big Cypress National Preserve will promote the responsible and considered use of nature, culture, and history. The alternatives in this plan intend to respond to that direction.

## Commercial Service Goals

Goals express the ongoing and desired future conditions that the park unit strives to achieve. The mission of Big Cypress National Preserve is to assure the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed and to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof. The planning team developed the following 7 goals for commercial services in Big Cypress National Preserve:

1. Commercial service access should be available from a central location (whether multiple services from one location or not). Very "green," sustainable activities exist (sustainable technology to the extent possible and are environmentally responsible). All visitors are aware of being in a unit of the NPS (identity). A high level of quality exists for all commercial services provided (enjoyable, comfortable, and accurate). Commercial service access will be from strategically located pods/locations (dispersed areas offering

- multiple services at each location).
2. All visitors have the opportunity to experience the Preserve even if they do not have motorized or non-motorized special equipment to allow it (access to backcountry specifically).
  3. The Preserve has the staff, funding and management tools to allow safe, efficient and effective management of the commercial services program, and is able to manage the impact of all authorized and unauthorized commercial activity in the Preserve. (This includes cost recovery, life cycle costing, phasing of projects).
  4. Partnerships that provide compatible commercial recreational activities and services that enhance visitor experience are used to the maximum degree possible.
  5. All interpretive information given to visitors is accurate.
  6. All commercial activities are compatible with the Preserve's natural and cultural resources.
  7. All commercial activities are compatible with the enabling legislation and authorized uses of the Preserve.

### What is Necessary & Appropriate?

A service deemed “*necessary*” must accomplish one or more of the following:

- **Contributes to visitor understanding and appreciation of Preserve purpose and significance**
- **Enhances visitor experiences consistent with Preserve area philosophies**
- **Assists the Preserve in managing visitor use and educating Preserve visitors**
- **Is an essential service or facility not available within a reasonable distance of the Preserve**

A service that is “*appropriate*” must accomplish all of the following:

- **Is consistent with the purpose and significance of the Preserve**
- **Is consistent with laws, regulations and policies applicable to the Preserve and the NPS**
- **Does not compromise public health and safety**
- **Does not significantly impact or impair Preserve resources or values**
- **Does not unduly conflict with other Preserve uses and activities**
- **Does not exclude the general public from participating in limited recreational opportunities**

### What We Have Heard from You

Last June, we sent out a Newsletter to ask for your ideas about what should be in the plan. We received 43 comments on the response form that was mailed with the Newsletter, as well as

letters and emails. The following are among the range of issues and concerns you've expressed with regard to commercial services at the Preserve:

- Retain the Preserve's natural, undeveloped character.
- Include Gas and food, especially along Tamiami Trail
- Don't provide any commercial services within the Preserve
- Limit commercial operations to essential services, particularly what is necessary for visitor safety (e.g., drinking water, clean restrooms, ice, convenience items) and what was present in the Preserve when it was created in 1974.
- Protect private property rights.
- Provide a small store to supply visitor convenience items (food items, sunscreen, etc.).
- Do not allow commercial operations to limit non-commercial recreational opportunities in any way
- Allow traditional guide services by horseback, canoe, hiking, airboat, jeep, and buggy
- Commercial visitor services such as convenience stores, gas stations, motels, and airboat rides have no place in Big Cypress and belong in the neighboring communities
- Expand and improve interpretive activities and tours, including tours and hikes in order to show visitors the varied ecosystem
- Open the former Monroe Station for visitor use opportunities such as a convenience store, outfitter rentals (including bicycles, guide services, environmental education, special events, etc.)
- The wilderness character of Big Cypress should not be sacrificed for recreational demand, high visitor statistics, or justification for bigger budgets. Commercial ORV use should be permanently prohibited from the Preserve.
- Allow eco-tours like hiking, kayaking/canoeing, biking, wet walks, but prohibit airboat operators, swamp buggy tours and ATVs.
- Explore ways to accommodate larger visitor groups and provide organized group activities.
- Overuse of popular visitor destinations by commercial operators (i.e. Turner River) cause all visitor experiences to be diminished

As you can see from this summary, we have received a wide variety of comments, but all had one thing in common – a concern for the Preserve and its future.



## Draft Planning Alternatives

The planning team has prepared the following preliminary alternatives for managing commercial services that reflect a range of approaches to provide the services that could be necessary and appropriate at the Preserve. The issues that were identified by the public and NPS staff have helped guide the preparation of these alternatives. A map including the possible alternative locations can be found at the end of this section.

### Alternative A (No Action)

The concept of this alternative is to maintain the existing types and levels of commercial activities, services, and facilities. Some management changes could be made to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Some minor changes to the level of services could be made for resource protection and visitor experience enhancement to be consistent with the management zone prescriptions established in the GMP, but essentially the alternative represents existing conditions. It is the baseline from which the other action alternatives will be compared and analyzed. At present in the Preserve, only two commercial operators are providing limited visitor services (canoe and kayak rental and livery service, guided canoe and kayak tours, and limited hiking in Zones 1 and 2 of the Stairsteps Unit and Turner River Unit). These services would continue, and when those permits expire, similar ones would be issued.

### Alternative B

The concept of this alternative is to have individual operators providing services. The goal would be to have a large number of service providers and a broad spectrum of service types.

This alternative proposes no land assignments to any commercial operators, and all commercial operations would begin and end outside the Preserve boundary. Services expected to be provided include the following:

- Hunting guides
- Buggy tours
- Hiking tours – both day use and multi-day
- Boat and kayak rentals and guided tours
- Firewood sales for campgrounds
- Bicycle rentals and guided bike tours
- Van tours
- Birding and wildlife viewing and photography – by van, foot, or buggy
- Cooperative associations (The Everglades Association)

Van tours would be limited to sedans or vans with a maximum of 15 passengers. Mini-buses and motor coaches would carry groups too large to be accommodated on the current amenities while still providing a positive visitor experience, except for those transporting large groups to the Oasis Visitor Center. As with all alternatives, new services resulting from changes in technology or need would be reviewed individually as to their necessary and appropriate nature. All backcountry commercial use would be on existing ORV trails network as identified in the 2000 BICY Recreational ORV Plan, as seen in Figure 3 or as amended in the future. The existing trails would be monitored using the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) and carrying capacity frameworks to ensure sustainability of commercial use. This alternative would provide a broader range of visitor opportunities than the no action alternative, but would not construct new visitor service facilities within the Preserve.



### Alternative C

The concept of this alternative is to develop the Preserve's visitor services to the level and quality described in the 1991GMP. Some management changes could be made to improve effectiveness and efficiency, and some minor changes to the level of services could be made for resource protection and visitor experience enhancement to be consistent with the management zone prescriptions established in the GMP.

This alternative proposes to seek a concessionaire to provide on site visitor services and facilities that would complement those provided by the NPS. The concessionaire would be asked to provide interpretive tours, canoe rentals, backcountry shelter rentals, backcountry guide and outfitter services for hunters and non-hunters.

Visitors would be able to rent canoes for use on the canoe trails within the Preserve, or they could take short guided trips into the backcountry on ORVs. Storage facilities would be provided for visitors who own ORVs, thus eliminating the need to haul these vehicles to and from the Preserve on trailers. The concessionaire would also provide buggy and airboat maintenance services, as well as restrooms, convenience store items and gasoline. Overnight trips (outfitter services) could also be provided into the backcountry.

The GMP describes two possible locations for the concessions facilities: a primary location at Monroe Station and a satellite concession center at Seagrape Drive. Monroe Station would be considered to be the main concession facility, since it is adjacent to a network of designated ORV trails that would provide visitors an opportunity to explore a large part of the Preserve north and south of US 41. From the Seagrape Drive site, short interpretive tours could be provided into the Preserve's backcountry. These tours could be by ORV or boat, and outfitter services, restrooms, and a convenience store would be provided. Visitor parking and a secure storage area for the concessioner would be constructed nearby. Alternative C would provide a broader range of visitor opportunities than the no action alternative, though less than Alternative B, and would concentrate the facilities on the US 41 Corridor, which is the most intensively traveled route within the Preserve.

**Alternative D**

The concept of this alternative is to develop the Preserve's visitor services by developing groupings of services by location. The activities would be available at four locations: Mitchell's Landing, Monroe Station, Bear Island, and Turner River/Halfway Creek. All facilities would be developed to be consistent with the management zone prescriptions established in the GMP and other planning documents. Alternative D would provide a wide range of visitor opportunities, and reduce crowding at facilities by decentralizing locations for visitors to begin and end their Preserve experience.

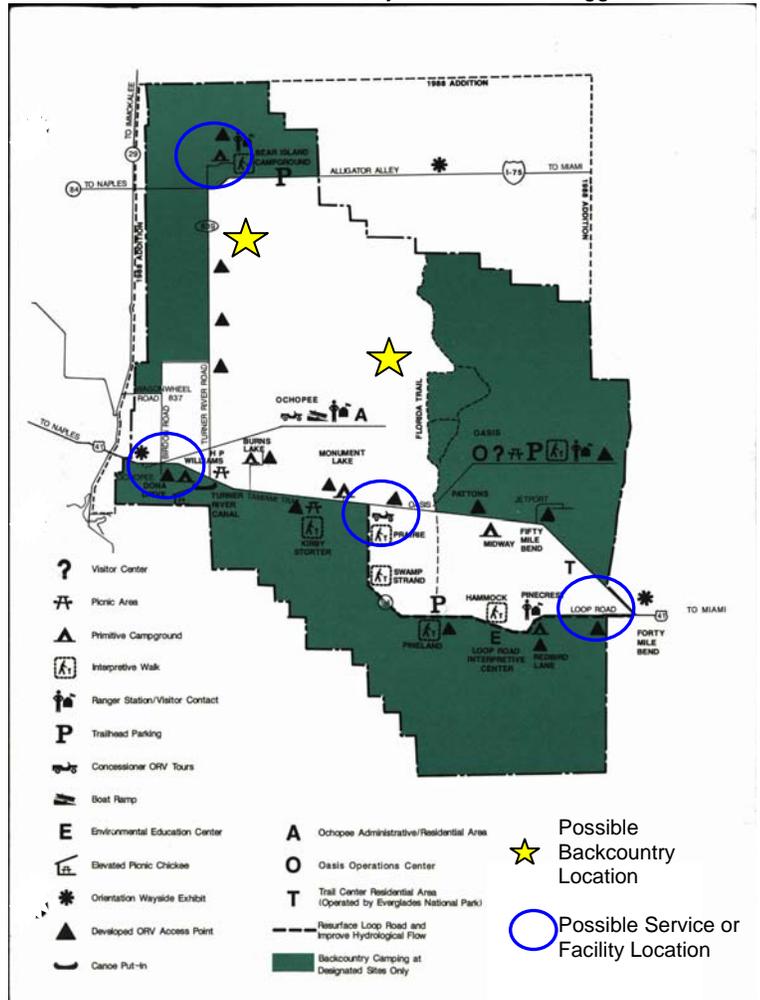
This alternative proposes to seek one or more providers for each of the four locations to provide on site visitor services and facilities that would complement those activities identified in Alternative B as necessary and appropriate, and would also review requests for other visitor services as the need arises. For example, hunting guides and buggy tours may be offered at Bear Island, and bicycle tours, hiking tours, and van tours could be offered from Monroe Station. The providers may be concessionaires or business owners that provide backcountry tours originating from outside the Preserve. All locations would be open to the public for the portions of the year with the greatest visitation and service demand, and the Mitchell's Landing and Bear Island commercial operation facilities would be closed during off peak seasons (June – September), when demand for these services is greatly reduced. This alternative recommends limiting commercial tour operators to using only the Kirby Storter Wayside boardwalk or the Oasis Visitor Center Boardwalk. Non commercial use in both locations would not be affected, but commercial use at the smaller Highway 41 visitor amenities would likely cause crowding and a positive visitor experience for all visitors at those locations could not be ensured. These two boardwalk locations have a

larger footprint, provide more space and reducing crowding, and would reduce conflicts between commercial and non-commercial visitation when both are present.

**Alternative E**

The concept of this alternative is to develop the Preserve's visitor services by developing one location to provide the visitor services deemed necessary and appropriate as identified in Alternative B. In addition, this alternative contemplates two possible backcountry camping complexes in the northern portion of the Turner River Management Unit. The front country facility would be located at Monroe Station, which was identified in the GMP as a suitable location for a frontcountry visitor service facility. The activities would begin at Monroe Station, but may actually take place in all management zones of the Preserve. All facilities would be developed to be consistent with the management zone prescriptions established in the GMP and other planning documents for the Preserve. Other individual activities would be possible, with operators beginning and ending their services outside the Preserve boundary. Alternative E would provide a range of visitor experience opportunities, while concentrating facilities to frontcountry locations, reducing impacts to visitor experience and natural resources in the backcountry.

This alternative proposes to seek one or more providers for each of the visitor services and facilities that would complement those activities identified in Alternative B as cabins or the Cal Stone camp. Both are NPS-owned cabins or groups of cabins, formerly back country camps, and either would provide a unique, multi-day, backcountry experience. Guided hunting, wildlife or vegetation viewing or ORV tours could be provided from these points. If the Cal Stones Camp is used, it would be reached by ORV, and the Wiggins cabins



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE  
33100 TAMIAMI TRAIL, EAST  
OCHOPEE, FL 34141**

---

First Class Mail  
Postage and Fees  
**PAID**  
City, State  
Permit Number

---

**OFFICIAL BUSINESS  
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300**



**EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™**

---