

Big Cypress National Preserve ORV News

INTRODUCTION: Starting January 2014, Big Cypress National Preserve's Off-Road vehicle (ORV) permit fee will increase to **\$100.00 per vehicle**; the operator permit will remain free. The Preserve has been selling ORV Permits since 1998. The fees started at \$35.00 and increased to \$50.00 in 2001. The ORV permit fee has not increased for 13 years.

The ORV program collects fees as a "Specialized Recreation Use Fee." This is a cost recovery program. The fees collected go back to the operation of the program. As stated in NPS Management Policies 2006, section 8.2.6.1, visitors who use federal facilities and services for recreation may be required to pay a greater share of the cost of providing those opportunities.

The enabling legislation states that the preserve, as a unit of the national park system, is to be managed in a manner that will ensure its "natural and ecological integrity in perpetuity." The legislation further states the management of the area should be in accordance "with the provisions of the Act of August 25, 1916" (NPS Organic Act). The enabling act allows for the use of off-road vehicles, but stipulates that this use will be controlled in a manner that does not impair the resources of the preserve. The legislative history of the preserve states that "While the use of all-terrain vehicles must be carefully regulated by the secretary (of the interior) to protect the natural wildlife and wilderness values of the preserve, the bill does not prohibit their use along designated roads and trails" (U.S. House of Representatives, 1973; U.S. Senate, 1974).

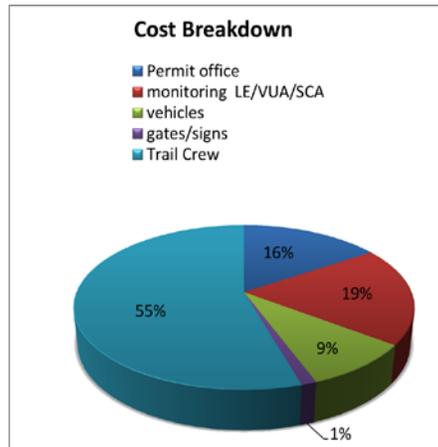
The off-road vehicle management plan was originally prepared as a settlement agreement negotiated between the Florida Biodiversity Project (FBP) and several agencies and bureaus. These include the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of the Army, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The settlement agreement was a result of a lawsuit filed by FBP, concerning the management of ORVs within the preserve.

The management plan and supplemental environmental impact statement consists of five chapters. The first chapter details the purpose and need for the plan, legislative mandates and special commitments, management objectives, and planning issues. The demands for service from the ORV community are spread out throughout the year with a peak during the hunting season from September through April the low season being the 60-day closure "rest period" in June and July. We have refined the cost of the permit operations and the numbers of employees required to manage, monitor, and maintain the impacts of off road vehicle program and trails.

Operation of off-road vehicles in excess of the authorized speed limit, off designated trails or for the purpose of challenging the vehicle against Preserve resources or other vehicles, such as racing, mudding, sport riding, motocross riding, and competitive events, is not consistent with the Big Cypress National Preserve enabling legislation, or the Addition Act. These non-traditional pursuits damage the resource and, therefore, are not authorized in Big Cypress National Preserve. Engaging in these activities can result in forfeiture of Off-Road Vehicle access privileges.

Big Cypress’s ORV program costs \$586,400 to manage over 420 miles of ORV trails

Permit Office/Administration (COC)	\$92,200
Trail Monitoring (LE/VUA/SCA)	\$114,000
Vehicles	\$53,000
Gates/signs	\$7,200
Trail Crew/maintenance	<u>\$320,000</u>
ORV program cost	\$586,400



COMPARABILITY STUDY: A comparison study of different locations that allow ORV activity (Private and public lands) was completed May 13, 2013

Apalachicola and Ocala National Forests:

- \$75 per operator per year

Cape Hatteras National Seashore:

- \$120 Annual, \$50 – 7 day pass

Cape Cod National Seashore:

- \$150 Annual, \$50 – 7 day pass

Tate’s Hell and Withlacoochee State Forests:

- Florida Resident \$60 year, \$15 daily
- Out of State \$100

Red Neck Yacht Club:

- \$30 per person per day

Miccosukee Reservation:

Miccosukee Nation allows trespass onto Indian lands to camp owners. This permit allows them to access their camps, fish, and frog. No hunting. The permit ranges from \$1,500-\$3,000 per year and covers all members of a family with several vehicles.

COMMUNICATION: The Preserve staff has reached out to stakeholders, ORV organizations, members of the public, local governments, state agencies and other federal agencies. We provided presentations at two public ORV Advisory Board meetings with public comments by the public. The Preserve will post new rates on the website, in addition to a press release prior to implementation.

For more information on ORV use within the preserve and permits required for this recreational access go to - <http://www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/orv-use.htm>. You may also contact the ORV office at 239-695-1205. The ORV office is open from Thursday through Monday, 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. On Mondays the office is open for permit renewals only.

CONCLUSION: The cost of the annual permit will increase to \$100. One hundred percent of the ORV permit fee goes directly back to the operation of Big Cypress National Preserve off-road vehicle programs. The funds support trail maintenance, trail monitoring (Rangers), and permitting.

Permit fees are based on the cost of operating and managing the Big Cypress National Preserve's Off-Road Vehicle program. Comparability analyses was completed of other ORV trail systems managed privately, by state agencies and other federal public areas to insure that increases are appropriate and competitive with current market conditions. The permit increase is required to ensure protection of the natural resource and provide appropriate oversight and management of the program.