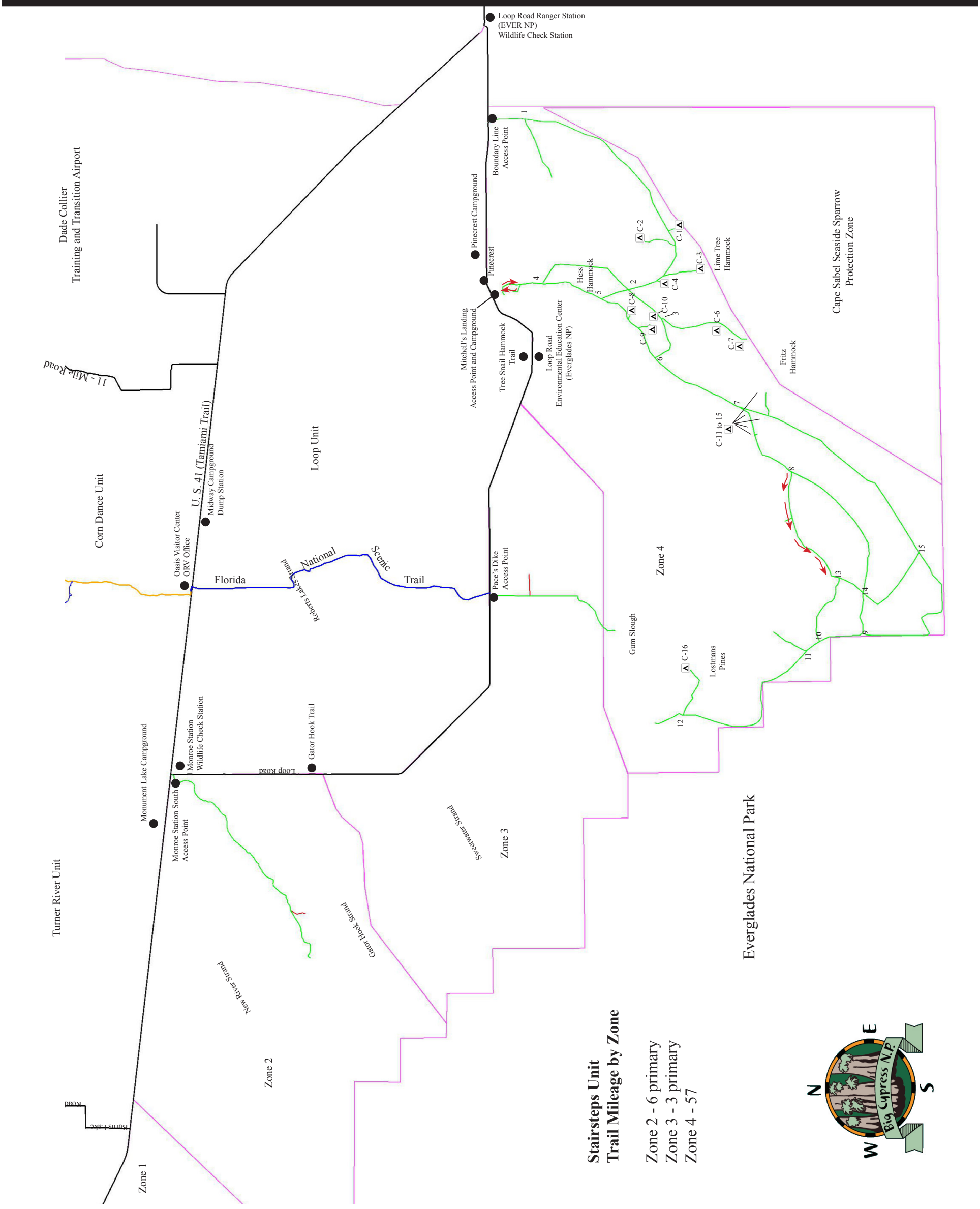
Big Cypress National Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Stairsteps Unit Trails as of 08/01/2014

Effective 8/1/2014, following the 60-day recreational ORV closure, only the designated primary trails in the backcountry will be open to recreational ORV use and access. All secondary trails will remain closed on an interim basis for an additional 60-days in an effort to resolve a lawsuit brought against the NPS related to the process in which the secondary trails were selected and analyzed for inclusion into the designated trail network.

For updates on trail maps refer to backcountry access kiosks, go to the Oasis ORV Office or visit www.nps.gov/bicy

Travel along marked designated trails will ensure the protection of Preserve resources and your privilege to enjoy the backcountry on ORVs.

Stairsteps Unit Trails

The freshwaters of the Big Cypress Swamp, essential to the health of the neighboring Everglades, support the rich marine estuaries along Florida's southwest coast. Protecting over 720,000 acres of this vast swamp, Big Cypress National Preserve contains a mixture of tropical and temperate plant communities that are home to a diversity of wildlife, including the elusive Florida Panther.

Remote areas of the Preserve are challenging to reach by foot, generations have explored these areas by homemade airboats or swamp buggies. Today, people continue to enjoy this traditional recreational activity.

The following off-road vehicles (ORVs) are allowed on the trails in the Stairsteps Unit:
Zone 2 - ATVs and swamp buggies
Zone 3 - ATVs, swamp buggies and airboats
Zone 4 - airboats

ORV use within the Stairsteps Unit is allowed on designated trails only. These trails are marked with markers that show trail routes. All other trails within the unit are closed to recreational ORV use. Bicycles are allowed only on open ORV trails. Hiking is allowed anywhere within the unit.

ORV Rules

ORV use is prohibited between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.

ORV speed limit is 15 mph.

Ensure that your vehicle meets the applicable requirements.

ORV permit sticker is required.

ORV inspection sticker is required.

An ORV operator's permit (with photo), a valid driver's license, or learner's permit, is required of all persons operating an ORV. If the operator has a learner's permit, s/he must be accompanied by or within 100 feet of a licensed/permitted adult 18 years or older.

Riding double on ATVs is prohibited, unless the vehicle was manufactured for such purposes.

Riding in, or on, any trailer being towed by an ORV is prohibited.

Consumption of alcohol or possession of an open container of alcohol in or on a motor vehicle, including off-road vehicles, is prohibited.

Tread Lightly

Various trails within the unit may be difficult for some vehicles to traverse. Know the limitations of your vehicle and your off-roading skills. Stay on designated trails at all times.

Respect the rights of others including private property owners, all recreational trail users, campers and others. Allow them to enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed.

Do your part by leaving the area better than you found it by properly disposing of waste, minimizing the use of fire and avoiding the spread of invasive species.

Things to Remember

A backcountry permit is required for all modes of backcountry travel. Permits may be obtained at access points or at the Hunter Check Station.

Bicycle riding within the Stairsteps Unit, and other areas of the Preserve, is allowed along designated ORV trail routes only.

Dispersed camping continues to be allowed within Zones 2 and 3. You may drive your ORV to a location along a designated trail nearest the camping spot you prefer, park your ORV along the shoulder of the trail, in such manner that does not impede travel by others, and carry your camping equipment in to the campsite. Zone 4 allows for camping at designated sites only.

Camp fires may be banned during high fire danger. Check bulletin boards for postings regarding special regulations.

Within the backcountry the possession of dogs (other than bird dogs and waterfowl retrievers for hunting purposes during appropriate seasons) is prohibited.

Please know and follow all Big Cypress National Preserve and Florida State hunting rules and regulations.

As of February 22, 2010, a new federal law allows people who can legally possess firearms under applicable federal, state, and local laws, to legally possess firearms in the preserve. It is the responsibility of visitors to understand and comply with all applicable state, local, and federal firearms laws before entering this preserve. Federal law prohibits firearms in certain facilities in this park; those places are marked with signs at entrances.

Hunting within campgrounds is not allowed.

Emergency Numbers

National Park Service Emergency Dispatch
1-800-788-0511
#NPS on cell phones

For more information on

Big Cypress National Preserve, visit
www.nps.gov/bicy

Hunting in Florida, visit
www.myfwc.com/hunting

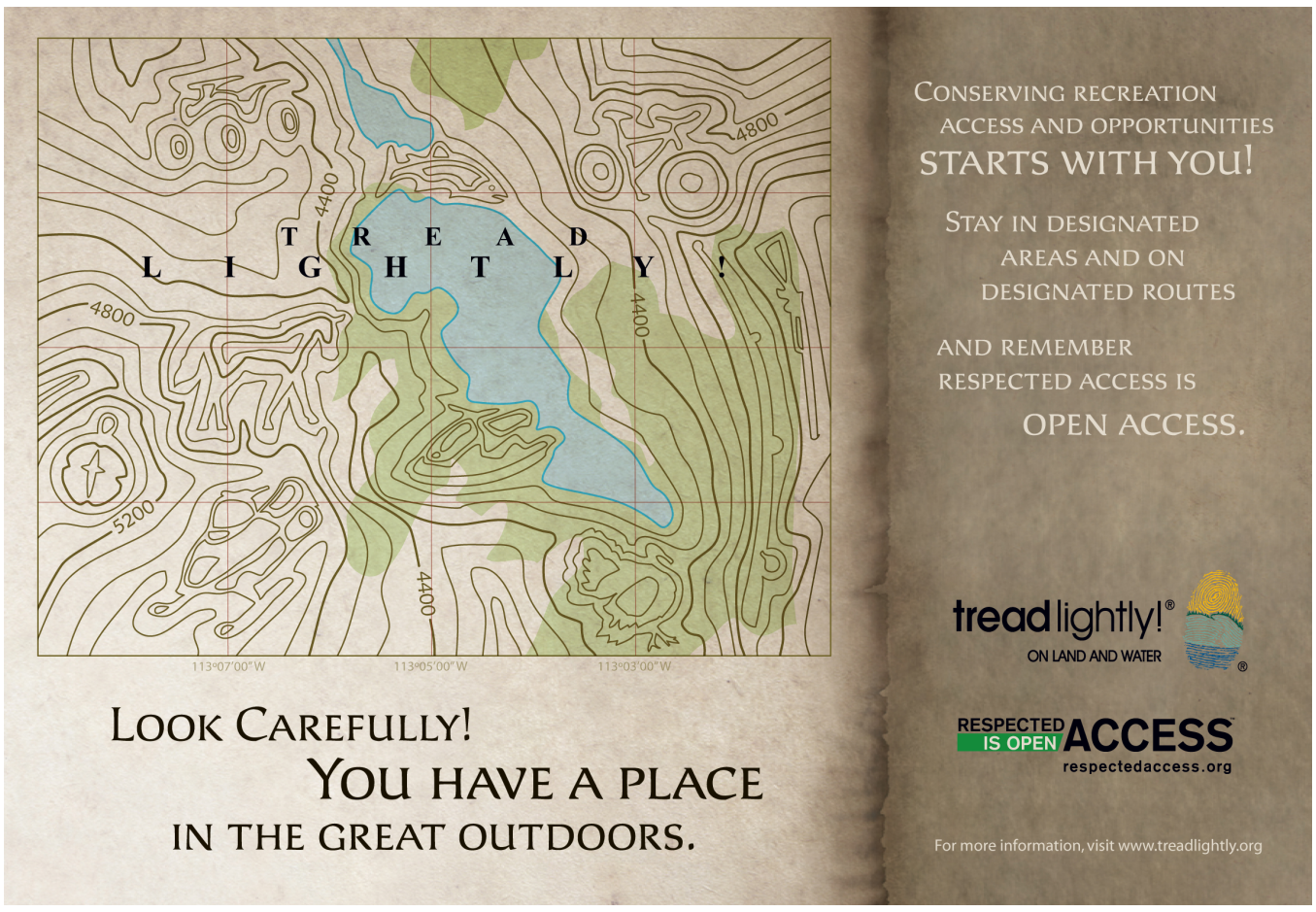
Responsible ORV recreation, visit
www.treadlightly.org

ORV Travel Tips From Tread Lightly

Travel responsibly on designated roads, trails, and areas.
- Stay on the trail even if it is rough and muddy. Driving trail edge widens trails, causes erosion, and visual scarring.
- Comply with all signs and barriers.

Respect the rights of others including private property owners and all recreational trail users, campers and others to allow them to enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed.
- Be considerate of others on the trail.
- Respect private landowners, don't travel on posted land.

Educate yourself by obtaining travel maps and regulations from public agencies, planning for your trip, taking recreation skills classes, and knowing how to use and operate your equipment safely.
- It is your responsibility to contact the land manager to learn of any permit requirements, closures or restrictions.
- Obtain a map of your destination and determine which areas are open to your type of travel.
- Make a realistic plan, and stick to it. Always tell someone of your travel plans.
- Check the weather forecast before you go.

Avoid sensitive areas such as open prairies. Stay on designated routes.
- Avoid "spooking" wildlife you encounter.

Do your part by leaving the area better than you found it, properly disposing of waste, minimizing the use of fire, avoiding the spread of invasive species, restoring degraded areas, and joining a local enthusiast organization.
- Pack out all trash.
- Carry a trash bag on your vehicle and pick up litter left by others.
- Practice minimum impact camping by using established sites or durable surfaces.
- Before and after your trip, wash your gear and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species.