

Big Cypress National Preserve Off-Road Vehicle Operator Course

The Organic Act of 1916 created the National Park Service...
for the purpose...



"...to promote and regulate the use of the...national
parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the
natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and
to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner
and by such means as will leave unimpaired for the
enjoyment of future generations"



Swamp Buggy

Introduction

Big Cypress National Preserve was established by an Act of Congress in 1974, "in order 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..."

The Act states that the Preserve, as a unit of the National Park Service, is to be managed in a manner that will ensure its "natural and ecological integrity in perpetuity." It goes on to state that the National Park Service will develop rules and regulations that are, "necessary and appropriate to limit or control the use of federal lands and waters with respect to motor vehicles," as well as other uses.

Background



Airboat

In the 1980s and '90s the popularity of off-road vehicle use within the Preserve was seen by some as reaching the point of potentially impacting the area by altering the water flow of the swamp. As a result, a lawsuit was filed against the National Park Service.

Eventually, a settlement agreement between the National Park Service, other federal agencies, and various plaintiffs was reached, resulting in the development of the 2000 Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan, which outlines the management of future off road vehicle use in the Preserve.

The ultimate goal of the Off-Road Vehicle Plan is to protect resources while providing for reasonable off-road vehicle access along designated trails.

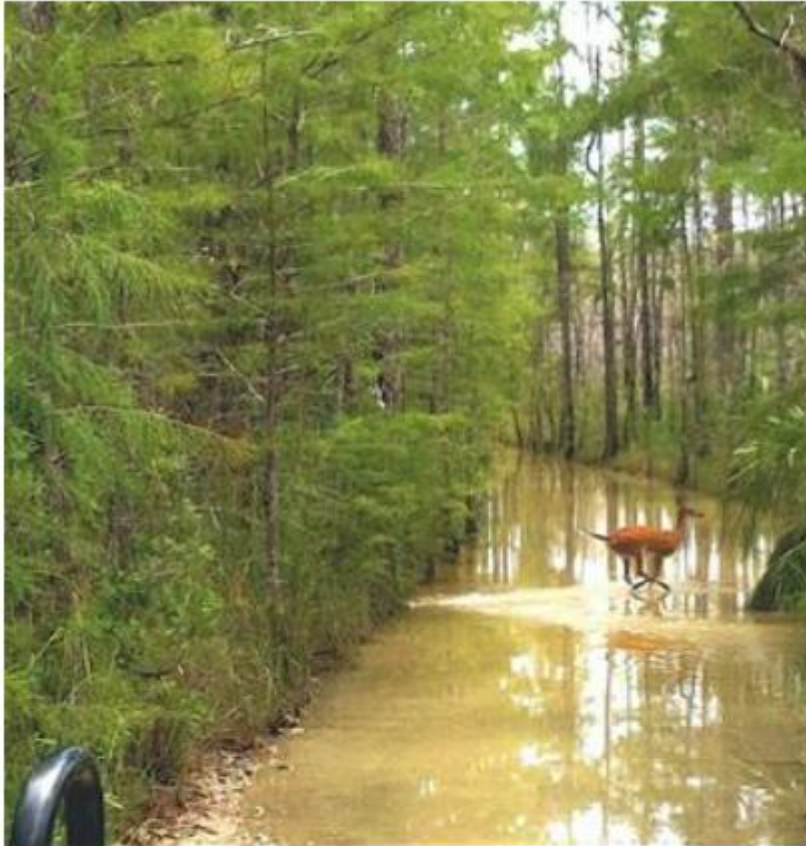


Photo credit: Rebecca Price.

Applicability

Off-road vehicle operation on designated trails for hunting, fishing, frogging, camping, wildlife observation, transportation to private property, and other traditional nature-based activities is consistent with the Big Cypress National Preserve enabling legislation and the Addition Act, and is, therefore authorized in the Preserve.



Aerial image of impacts from dispersed use in a prairie.



Designated primary trail.

Dispersed Use to Designated Trails

Beginning in the 2000s, and working through today, a designated trail system has been developed which minimizes and eliminates impacts to surrounding habitats. This trail system includes an extensive network of primary and secondary trails that provide access to a variety of destinations throughout the Preserve.

The placement of designated trails is a lengthy process, which considers the destination, soils, habitats, whether the trail will affect endangered species or known archaeological resources, and other environmental aspects that will minimize the overall impact of off-road vehicle use.

While you explore the Preserve backcountry by off-road vehicles, stay on designated trails to ensure the protection of Preserve resources and your privilege of off-road vehicle access.

Regulations

Under existing federal regulations, the superintendent has the authority to limit public use based on the determination that such action is necessary to maintain public safety and health, protect the environmental or scenic values, protect natural or cultural resources, aid scientific research, implement management responsibilities, or to avoid conflict among visitor use activities.

All of the current regulations are authorized by the Superintendent's Compendium and the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 1.5 and 7.86) which should be checked often for changes and additions.

To view the current Superintendent's Compendium, please click the link below.

[Big Cypress Superintendent Compendium - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)



Required Regulations

There are required regulations that you need to know before and during any trip into the backcountry. Please familiarize yourself with these regulations as you will be required to adhere to them while enjoying your off-road vehicles in the Preserve.

- Vehicles must use designated access points and follow trail requirements for each unit.
- Off-road vehicles are prohibited from operating in campgrounds, with the exception of the Bear Island, Pink Jeep, Gator Head, and Burns Lake Campgrounds, for the purpose of accessing backcountry trails.
- All off-road vehicles are limited to the number of riders intended by the manufacturer. Safety belts must be worn on vehicles that are equipped with them.
- Open containers of alcohol are prohibited on all off-road vehicles.
- Any device used to push aside, shear off, or otherwise damage vegetation is prohibited.



©GPellerin

Required Regulations Continued

- Vehicles parked at trailheads should not impede traffic flow on the road or access to the off-road vehicle trail.
- Speed limits: **15 miles per hour** for wheeled vehicles and **30 miles per hour** for airboats.
- Individuals are responsible for being aware of and adhering to Florida laws related to firearms and concealed weapons.
- Target shooting is prohibited.
- The possession of dogs in the backcountry is prohibited, except bird dogs or retrievers are allowed for hunting purposes during appropriate seasons. Additionally, landowners are allowed to transport pets to their private property.

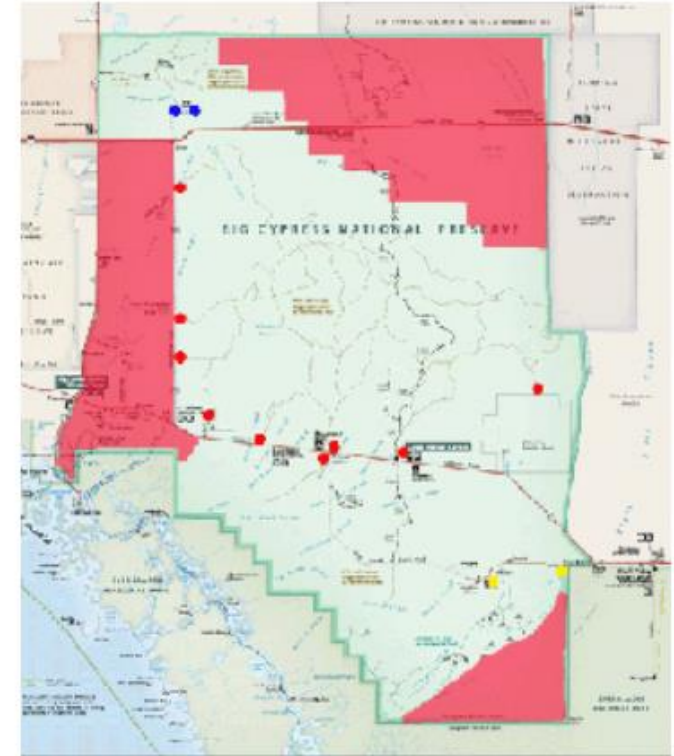


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Riding Limitations

It is always good practice to check the Preserve website or the Off-Road Vehicle Office and visitor centers for current closures. The following list of closures is in place year round.

- All areas off trail are closed to off-road vehicle use. Travel on designated trails only.
- Off-road vehicle use between the hours of 10:00 PM and 5:00 AM is prohibited.
- The 11-Mile Road and the Florida National Scenic Trail are closed to motorized vehicle travel, vehicles may cross at designated crossing points.
- An annual 60-day seasonal closure to **all** off-road vehicle use throughout the Preserve. The closure for Zone 4 airboat access is dependent on water levels. The closure for wheeled off-road vehicle access has generally been starting in June, but the dates may vary.
- Any zone may close temporarily due to environmental and emergency conditions.



Map of the Preserve with areas closed to off-road vehicles in red.

It's Up To You

Remember, it is up to you! It is the responsibility of the user to know and follow **all** applicable rules and regulations. The future of off-road vehicle access depends on the continued responsible use of the trail network.

Always remember to check trail heads, with a park ranger, or online before each trip to ensure you are up to date with all current regulations.



Permit Program

To access the backcountry using an off-road vehicle, the Preserve has implemented a permit program. The purpose of this program is to educate users, ensure that equipment and safety standards are met, monitor off-road vehicle use, and reduce impacts to the resource.

Under this program users are required to obtain the following permits:

1. Off-road vehicle operator license
2. Off-road vehicle permit
3. Backcountry permit

All permits may be acquired in the Off-Road Vehicle Office inside Nathaniel P. Reed Visitor Center. Backcountry permits are also available from the visitor center, trail access points, or online.



Inside the Nathaniel P. Reed Visitor Center

Operator License

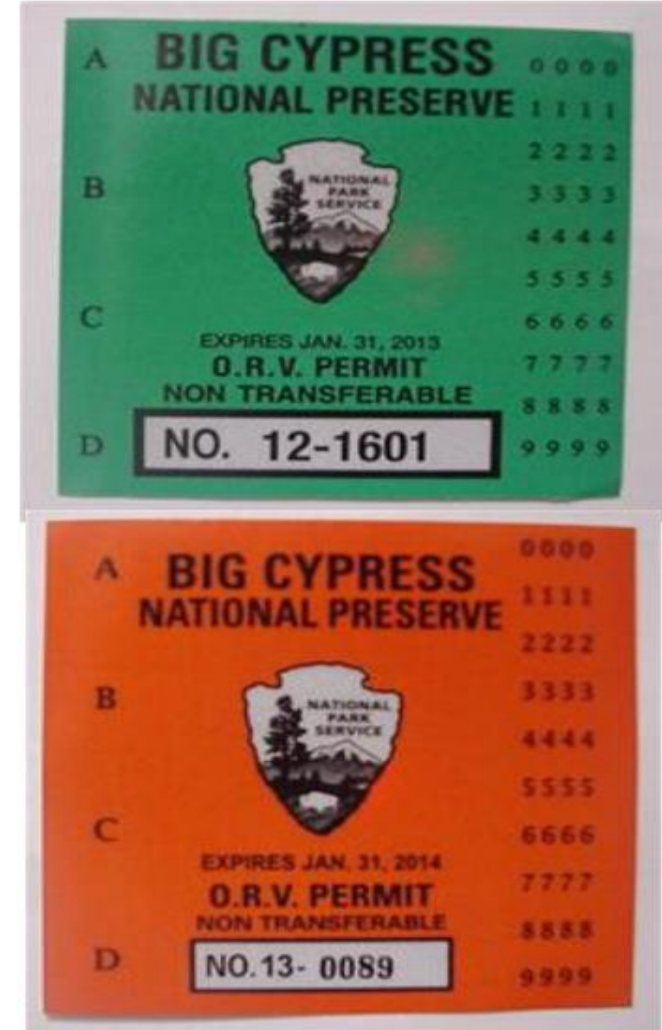
- Each person operating an off-road vehicle within the boundaries of the Preserve is required to obtain, and have with them at all times when driving, a free off-road vehicle operator's license.
- The license is verification that the user has been exposed to the rules and regulations of the off-road vehicle program. Anyone interested in obtaining an off-road vehicle operator license will have to possess a valid state driver's license or possess a valid learner's permit and be accompanied by a licensed family member over the age of 18. Once you obtain this license it is good for life.

Off-Road Vehicle Permit

Once you have completed this Off-Road Vehicle Operator Test, you will be able to obtain the permit for the vehicle. This permit is available for vehicles that meet the safety and vehicle specifications laid out in later chapters. Once an inspection has been completed favorably on your off-road vehicle, this sticker will allow access to the backcountry through the appropriate access points.

There is an annual fee of \$100 for each permit. Permits are valid on a yearly basis beginning each January 1, and expiring the following January 31. Each sticker must be adhered to the following places to ensure compliance with all rules and regulations.

- **Airboats**- the sticker must be affixed to the left rudder, on the outside facing surface.
- **Swamp Buggies**- the sticker must be affixed to the driver's side of the vehicle.
- **Street Legal 4x4**- the sticker must be affixed to the driver's side of the windshield or the driver's side front bumper.
- **ATV/UTVs**- the sticker must be affixed to the left back fender.
- Revenue generated from the sale of off-road vehicle permits will be applied towards such costs as permit printing, educational materials and operating the off-road vehicle program.



Sample vehicle permits

Backcountry Permit

All visitors entering the backcountry, including off-road vehicle users, hikers, bicyclists, canoe/kayakers and boaters are required to obtain a free backcountry use permit for **EACH** trip into the backcountry.

These permits allow for a comprehensive assessment of backcountry use as well as providing information in case of emergency response. The results of this assessment are incorporated, in an ongoing basis, into the adaptive management approach to ensure the protection of the resources and the quality of the visitor experience. Please review how to fill out the backcountry permit on the following page.

For current information regarding backcountry permits by clicking the link below.

[Backcountry Permits - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bcnp/learn/management/backcountry-permits.htm)



A backcountry permit.

Vehicle Inspections

It is the intent of the National Park Service to establish vehicle specifications that protect the Preserve's resources while providing for reasonable recreational access.

The majority of the specifications come from the Code of Federal Regulations section 7.86 which are regulations specific to Big Cypress National Preserve. These regulations are used to define what is considered a legitimate off-road vehicle and the minimum set of requirements needed for each to be considered as such.

Vehicle inspections are done at the Off-Road Vehicle Office, Friday through Monday, from 9:00 AM to 1:30 PM.



Staff inspecting an off-road vehicle.

Requirements for Swamp Buggies

Permitted swamp buggies must meet a minimum set of requirements to ensure personal and resource safety.

The requirements are as follows:

- All must have a minimum of nine inches of tread on the ground.
- Vehicle must have working white headlights.
- Vehicle must have working red taillights.
- Vehicle must have a working muffler.
- Vehicle may **NOT** be wider than eight feet.
- Vehicle must be equipped with four-wheel-drive.
- Tire chains, bar grips, or other device affixed to the tire in any way is prohibited.
- Tracked vehicles are prohibited.



ATVs and UTVs

- All-terrain vehicles (ATV) three wheeled and four wheeled, and utility terrain vehicles (UTV), are a great way to explore the backcountry, especially during the drier months.
- Vehicles will be inspected to ensure safety of the rider, and protection of the resource.
- ATVs and UTVs will be required to have four-wheel-drive.
- Front tire(s) must have a minimum width of seven inches of tread on the ground.
- Rear tires must have a minimum width of nine inches of tread on the ground.
- Working white headlights
- Working red taillights
- Working muffler
- Vehicle Identification Number
- Valid title or application for title in the event of a lien on the vehicle.



All-Terrain Vehicle

Street Legal 4x4s

Street-legal 4x4s are allowed in the Bear Island Unit. A minimum set of requirements for the vehicles have been created to preserve the environment as well as the occupants of the vehicle.

Requirements include the following:

- Minimum of nine inches of tire tread on the ground.
- Working white headlights
- Working red taillights
- Vehicle Identification Number
- Must be equipped with four-wheel-drive
- Must have a working muffler.
- Current state registration and insurance



Airboats

Airboats are allowed in Zone 4 of the Stairsteps Unit. This area tends to be the wettest in the Preserve, with broad expanses of wet prairies and is best suited for airboat use.

Airboats must meet the following minimum set of requirements to ensure user safety and resource protection:

- Working white aft light that can be seen from 360°.
- Current state registration decal.
- Total width cannot exceed eight feet.
- Maximum hull length of 14 feet, **including** the grass rake.
- Must have an automotive-style factory muffler.
- Must display Florida registration numbers at a minimum size of three inches on each side of the bow, OR a minimum of six inches displayed on both sides of rudders.
- Orange safety flag at minimum of 10x12 inches to be flown at a minimum of 10 feet above vessel.



Airboats Continued

- Working fire extinguisher must be ready and available.
- Personal Flotation Devices (life jackets)
- Working port and starboard lights.
- Hull Identification Number must be readily visible.



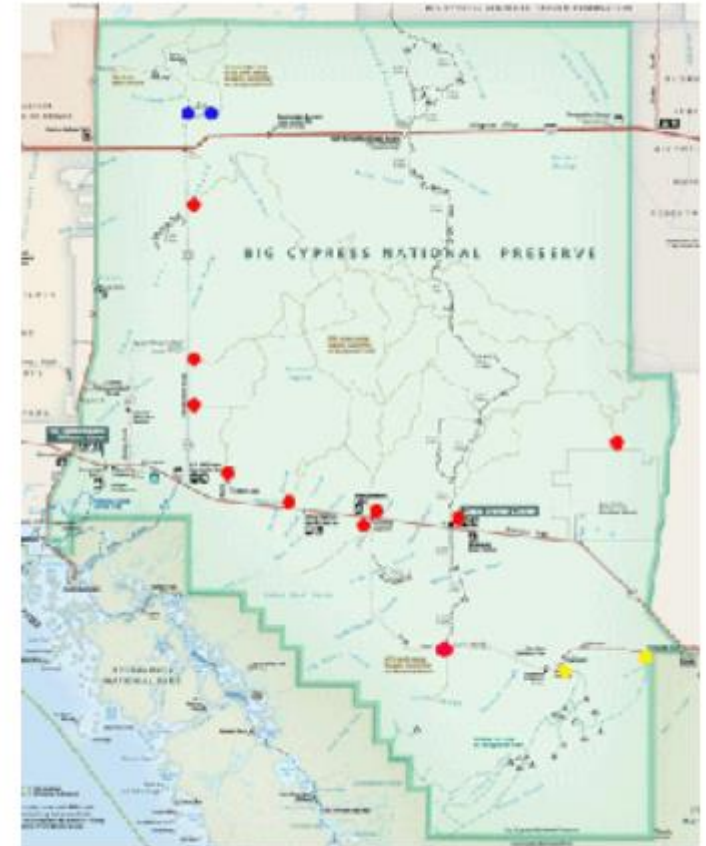
Off-Road Vehicle Access

There are 15 off-road vehicle access (backcountry access) points throughout the Preserve. These access points are the only areas where you can enter the backcountry with an off-road vehicle.

The access points that allow swamp buggy, ATV, UTV, and street legal 4x4s access have gates with combination locks. The combination is changed on an annual basis on February 1. Once you receive your annual permit you will be given the current combination.

Please safeguard this number and do not share it with anyone.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the gate is locked behind you each time you access the backcountry.

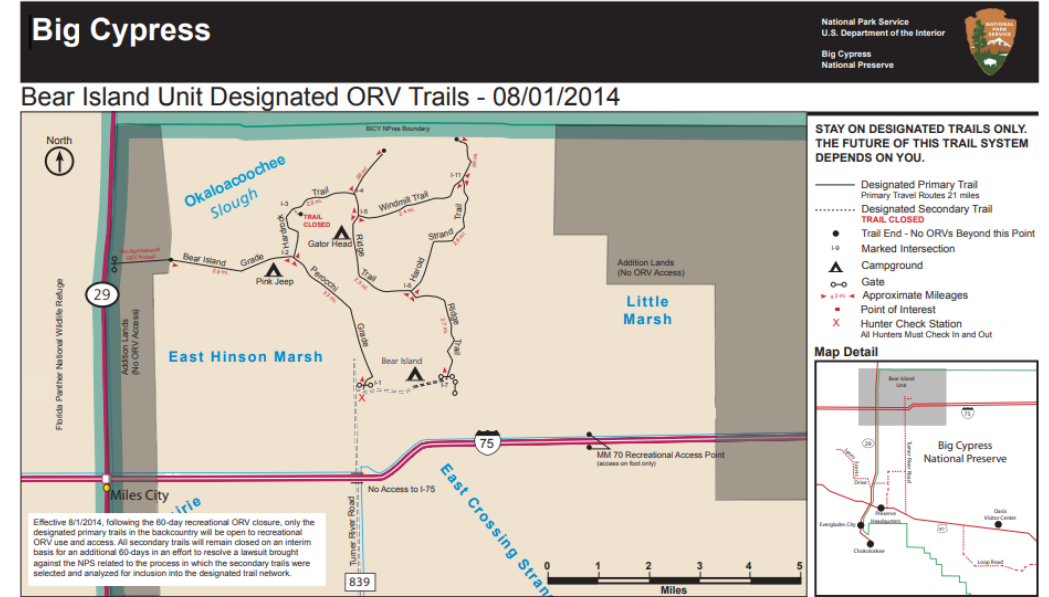


Street Legal 4x4

Street-legal 4x4s are only allowed within the Bear Island unit of the Preserve. This zone also allows for the use of swamp buggies, ATVs and UTVs; however, this area is most popular with street legal 4x4s.

The Bear Island unit is a fantastic spot for those looking to find the higher and drier areas of the Preserve. This unit is also a popular hunting area. Access into this area is from the west (access point 1) and east (access point 1A) ends of the Bear Island Campground Road. Parking is available at the west end of the road.

For a copy of the Bear Island Unit map, please click the link below.



[Designated Trail Implementation - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bigcypress/learn/management/designated-trails/)

Swamp Buggy, ATV and UTV Access

Swamp Buggies, all-terrain vehicles, and utility-terrain vehicles enjoy the majority of access points within the Preserve. Access can be found in all units: Bear Island, Corndance, Turner River, and Zones 2 and 3 of Stairsteps.

All access points in the various units are for designated trails only. Access points for these vehicles include:

- **Bear Island Unit-** west (Access Point 1) and east (Access Point 1A) of the Bear Island Campground Road.
- **Turner River Unit-** Turner River Road North (Access Point 2); Concho Billie (Access Point 3) and Windmill Tram (Access Point 4) are found off the Turner River Road. Parking for these areas is along the gravel road. Skillet Strand (Access Point 6) and Monroe North (Access Point 10) are located on US-41 and have developed parking areas. Burns Lake Access (Access Point 5) is located at the Burns Lake Campground, which has appropriate access point parking.
- **Corndance Unit-** Oasis Access Point (Access Point 8) is located at Oasis Visitor Center. The Jetport Access Point (Access Point 9) is located at the jetport property east of Oasis Visitor Center.
- **Stairsteps Unit Zone 2-** Monroe South Access Point (Access Point 11) out of Monroe Station.
- **Stairsteps Unit Zone 3-** Pace's Dike Access Point (Access Point 13) is located along Loop Road.



Concho Billie Trailhead.

Airboat Access

Airboat access is allowed in Zone 4 of Stairsteps Unit. Access into this area is found at the Mitchell Landing Campground (Access Point 14) and the Boundary Line Launch Site (Access Point 15) off from Loop Road. This is the only area of the Preserve that remains wet enough throughout the year to provide adequate water levels to accommodate airboats.

Like all off-road vehicles within the Preserve airboats are required to stay on designated trails to ensure the protection of the resource.

For more information and maps of this unit, please click the link below.

[Designated Trail Implementation - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bcnp/learn/management/designated-trail-implementation.htm)



Stairsteps Unit.

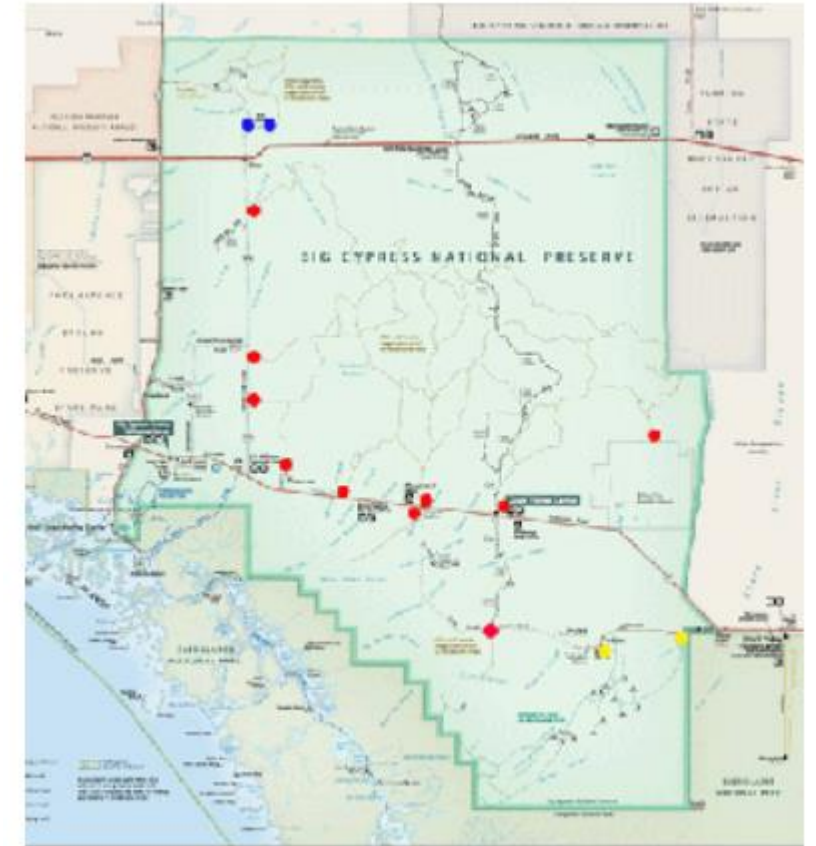
Designated Trail System

As of 2011, Big Cypress National Preserve allows for off-road vehicle use along designated trails only. As implemented, the trail system allows for up to 400 miles of primary trails, and secondary trails, that provide access to destinations, which provide a variety of nature-based recreational opportunities.

The trail system allows for reasonable off-road vehicle access to many areas of the Preserve. Given that many of these areas are difficult to reach by foot, the trails provide the opportunity for visitors to explore deep into the heart of the Big Cypress Swamp.

To protect the resource and your equipment it is the responsibility of the operator to know the limitations of their vehicle and their operational skills. **DO NOT** assume that you will be able to travel on every trail at any time of the year.

If you can't make it through on the designated trail you may have to turn around and go back. Stay on designated trails at all times.



Trail Markers

Each of the trails in the backcountry are marked with carsonite posts or markers affixed to trees. Airboat trails in Zone 4 are marked with white PVC pipes. Primary trails tend to be marked with green "carsonite" markers. Some of which, will have the name of the trail.

Secondary trails have an identifier marker at the beginning, and markers showing the route of the trail and where the trail ends. In some cases, the carsonite posts indicate the allowable width of the trail. However, some trails may not be marked, therefore the best rule of thumb is to not operate in an area if you aren't sure there is a trail.



Carsonite on the Skillet Strand North trail.

Closed Areas

Red carsonite posts indicate closed trails. In some circumstances trails need to be closed on a temporary or seasonal basis. Whether this is for ecological concerns, visitor safety, or maintenance; trails may be closed as needed.

Information regarding trail closures can be found at the trailhead, the Off-Road Vehicle Office, or on our website.



Bear Island Unit

The Bear Island Unit, located in the northwest corner of the Preserve, is a fantastic area of rugged beauty. The hardwood hammocks and pinelands of this unit offer some of the highest and driest landscapes found within the Preserve. Street legal 4x4s, swamp buggies, ATVs and UTVs are allowed on the trails in this unit.

- Camping is in designated areas only found at the Bear Island, Pink Jeep, and Gator Head Campgrounds.
- For more information and maps please click the link below.

[Designated Trail Implementation - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bcnp/learn/management/designated-trail-implementation.htm)

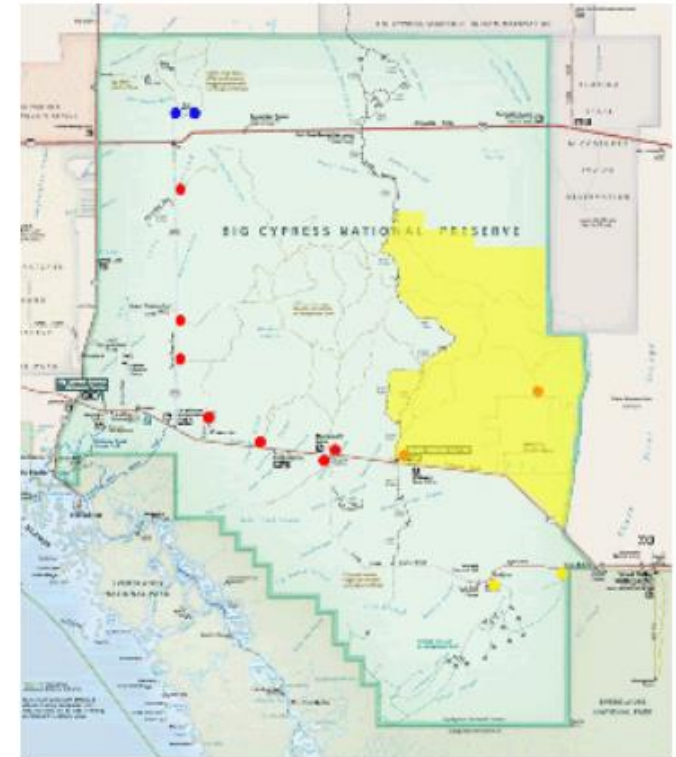


Corn Dance Unit

The Corn Dance Unit is found in the eastern half of the Preserve, east of the Florida National Scenic Trail, north of US-41 and south of the Mullet Slough area. The unit is a mix of dwarf cypress, cypress sloughs, and pinelands. Swamp buggies, ATVs and UTVs are allowed on the trails of this unit. Dispersed camping is allowed in this unit of the Preserve.

For more information and maps of this unit please click the link below.

[Designated Trail Implementation - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bicyp/learn/management/designated-trail-implementation.htm)



Corn Dance Unit highlighted

Turner River Unit

The Turner River Unit covers the portion of the Preserve west of the Florida National Scenic Trail and east of Turner River Road. Its southern boundary is US-41 and northern boundary is I-75. Swamp buggies, ATVs, and UTVs are allowed to explore the designated trails in this unit.

The trails traverse a variety of habitats that allow for a wealth of nature-based recreational opportunities. Dispersed camping is allowed in this unit of the Preserve.

For more information and maps about this unit, please click the link below.

[Designated Trail Implementation - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bicn/learn/management/designated-trail-implementation.htm)



Turner River Unit highlighted

Stairsteps Unit

The Stairsteps Unit of the Preserve is the area found south of US-41 and Loop Road. Zone 1 of this unit is closed to all off-road vehicle activity. Zones 2 and 3 currently allow access by swamp buggy, UTVs and ATVs, dispersed camping is allowed. Zone 4 is open to airboat use only.

The extreme southeast corner of the unit is a protected area for the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow and is closed to all recreational off-road vehicle use. There are designated campgrounds in Zone 4 that are accessible by airboat trails. Dispersed camping is allowed in any area of the unit by parking your airboat and hiking to any site suitable to camp.

For more information and a map of this unit, please click the link below.

[Designated Trail Implementation - Big Cypress National Preserve \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/bigcyp/learn/management/management-plans/Designated-Trail-Implementation-Big-Cypress-National-Preserve.htm)



Stairsteps Unit highlighted

Airboat Markers



Airboat trails in Zone 4 of Stairsteps Unit are marked by white PVC poles with red, white and blue reflective tape. The markers are placed in the center of the trail and may be traversed on either side by no more that 50 feet. Since airboats require water in order to operate, the choice is up to the operator as to which side of the marker has more water.

To protect the resource and your equipment it is the responsibility of the operator to know the limitations of their vehicle and their operational skills. **DO NOT** assume that you will be able to travel on every trail at any time of the year.

If you can't make it through on the designated trail you may have to turn around and go back.

Private Property

One of the unique attributes of being a national preserve is that there are many private landowners within the boundaries of the Preserve. It is possible, and likely, that you will come across private property during your backcountry explorations. Most of the private property you will encounter is marked as such, but not all.

Please be respectful of the private property owner and their land. Do not trespass.



Habitats of Big Cypress

Like all human activity off-road vehicle use has an impact on the habitats within the Preserve. Traveling through an area can disturb soils, sometimes to the point that surface water flow may be affected. The National Park Service is required to manage off-road vehicle use in a manner that will minimize or avoid these impacts to the Preserve.

Designated trails that off-road vehicles are allowed to explore are those that have been used for generations, avoid sensitive habitats and soils and provide reasonable access.

Knowing the habitats of the Preserve will provide an understanding of why trails were designated where they were, and allow you to have a deeper understanding of this special place.



Aerial view of the Preserve.



Gator Hole

Gator Hole

Gator holes are the lowest points within the Preserve. They are typically inundated with water throughout most of the year. The perennial water found here makes these areas a respite for wildlife, and an integral aspect for survival for many species during the driest time of the year. They have deep mucky soils.

Since the soils are unsuitable for off-road vehicles and there is potential for wildlife disturbance off-road vehicles trails avoid these areas.

Cypress Strands, Domes, & Prairies

Rising a few inches in elevation from the gator holes are the cypress strands and domes. Slightly higher than the strands and domes are dwarf cypress prairies. Cypress trees thrive in wet conditions. Though these areas are not flooded the entire year, several feet of water can be found here through most of the year, mainly during the wet season.

Trails found in cypress often have sandy or rock bottoms. Some areas in the cypress may be deep and suitable only for swamp buggies. Smaller ATVs and UTVs may not be able to get through some areas, especially in the wet season.



Cypress Strand

Sawgrass Prairies



Sawgrass prairie

Open sawgrass prairies are the habitat most prone to impacts by off-road vehicles due to their soils. These areas are dominated by low lying, dry grasses that are heavily influenced by water. The prairies are flooded for roughly six months of the year, as they are a few inches higher in elevation from the cypress strands, domes and cypress prairies.

Due to their potential for impact off-road vehicle trails avoid these areas as much as possible. If a trail is in the vicinity of a prairie, the trail skirts the edge of the prairie where it can. Trails in these areas tend to be the most stabilized to preserve the prairies.

Help to protect these areas by staying on designated trails.

Pinelands

Only flooded about three months of the year, the pinelands are several inches higher in elevation than the sawgrass prairies. Pinelands are often bordered by sawgrass prairies, and both habitats have evolved a natural fire cycle. Fires that are introduced from the prairies into the pine help to clear out the undergrowth of the palmetto and helps to ensure the healthy growth of the pine trees by limiting competition.

These habitats make for perfect homes for many different species, especially some of our endangered species; red cockaded woodpeckers, mangrove fox squirrels, and Florida panthers. The surface of the pinelands are typically made up of exposed limestone or sandy soils that make for suitable off-road vehicle trails. Pinelands also provide the best backcountry camping opportunities.



Pinelands

Hardwood Hammocks



Tropical hardwood hammock

The highest points found in the Preserve are hardwood hammocks. These areas are not flooded at all throughout the year, except during years of unusually high water. Continued flooding in these habitats can have devastating effects. This habitat provides a dry home and protection for many of the mammals found here. It is dominated by evergreen and hardwood trees, and appear to be among the most densely vegetated areas in the swamp.

Although these areas are the driest of the five habitats, they are also among the most protected against fire. Fire does not play a factor in the overall health of this habitat and therefore has a difficult time finding its way into the habitat. The nutrients supplied to these areas comes from the deposition of organic materials deposited by those species living there.

Off-road vehicle trails may travel through hammocks, though most of them are too densely wooded to allow access by off-road vehicles. Staying on designated trails will help make travel through these areas easier. Hammocks provide reasonable backcountry camping opportunities.

Impacts from Off-Road Vehicles

The landscape of the Big Cypress relies on the ability of water to travel unimpeded across the land. Even a slight change of just a few inches can create entirely different worlds. This is one reason dispersed use of off-road vehicles can potentially impact the habitats of Big Cypress, by causing rutting that disturbs soils and potentially modifying water flow.

Through the use of designated trails, placing trails in appropriate areas, and stabilizing trails as needed, we are able to minimize the impact and protect the surrounding undisturbed areas.

Staying on designated trails assures the privilege of off-road vehicle use within Big Cypress into the future.



A designated trail.

Enforcement

The vast majority of off-road vehicle users follow the applicable rules and regulations. However, sometimes infractions do occur. The National Park Service utilizes federal, state and local laws to ensure your safety as well as the protection of the swamp. It is not the intent of the National Park Service to stifle a good time, but rather to provide for the continued use and protection of the swamp by all of those who wish to enjoy it.

The primary offense that occurs within the Preserve is traveling off trail. Off-trail travel not only impacts the swamp, but also your ability to use your off-road vehicle within the Preserve. A first time offense can result in a one year suspension of your operator license.

Depending on the severity of the impact from driving off trail an operator could face fines upwards of \$5,000 under the Code of Federal Regulations section 4.10.



Park ranger and camp owner.

Concealed Weapons

Carrying a concealed weapon within Big Cypress National Preserve is administered by the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

Florida statute 790.06 (1) defines concealed weapons or firearms as those carried in a manner that conceals them from the ordinary sight of another person. This includes: handguns, electronic weapons, tear gas guns, knives, and billie clubs.

A concealed weapons license allows you to carry said weapon, but does not authorize you to use that weapon. Use of a concealed weapon is regulated by other provisions of Florida state and federal laws and regulations.

It is your responsibility to be familiar with the related laws to carry a concealed weapon or firearm responsibly, properly, and safely.



Backcountry Ethics

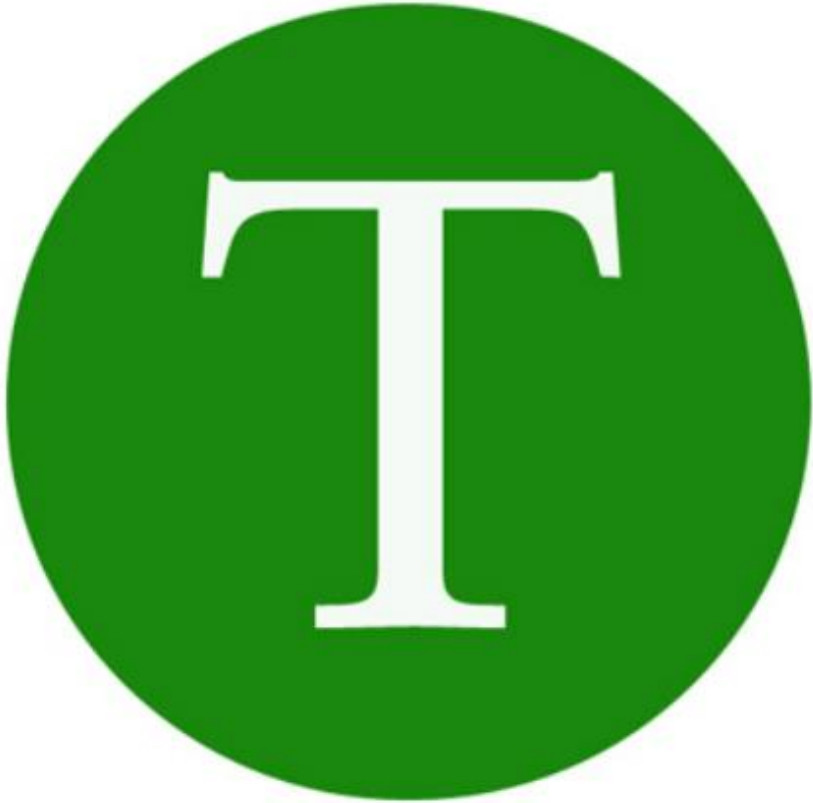
The future of off-road vehicle access into the Preserve depends upon the responsible riding that will minimize impacts to the resources, minimize conflicts between users and ensure the safety of operators and other visitors.

The Tread Lightly program is a non-profit organization whose mission is "to empower generations to enjoy the outdoors responsibly through stewardship to further the goals of responsible and ethical recreation." The tenets of this program are a fantastic foundation to proper riding techniques. Please take a few moments to review these guiding principles.

For more information about the Tread Lightly program, please visit their website by clicking the link below.

[Home - Tread Lightly](#)





"T" of TREAD

Travel responsibly on designated roads and trails.

- 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.



"R" of TREAD

Respect the rights of others including private property owners and all recreational 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 lands.



"E" of TREAD

Educate yourself by obtaining travel maps and regulations, 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 weather forecasts before you go.



"A" of TREAD

Avoiding sensitive areas such as open prairies. Stay on designated routes.

- Avoid "spooking" wildlife you encounter.
- Avoid causing undue resource damage by not traveling through areas your vehicle may not be able to go through. If you think you might get stuck, or would have to go off trail to continue, turn around and find another trail.



"D" of TREAD

"D" stands for Doing 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 local enthusiast groups.

- 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 you gear and support vehicle to reduce the spread of invasive species.
- Take it to the next level and become a backcountry volunteer with Big Cypress!

Safety

We believe safety to be paramount to anything else while recreating within the Preserve. This not only means the safety and protection of the swamp, but also the safety of those enjoying it.

Here are a few safety tips to remember when you are exploring the designated trails of Big Cypress. This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a good starting point.

- While a helmet is not required to operate an ATV or UTV in the Preserve we strongly recommend that you follow the operator guidelines suggested by the vehicle manufacturer.
- Never** ride under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Drive only on designated trails at, or under, the speed limit.
- Take part in an off-road vehicle safety class.
- Be cautious around deep water, know the limitations of your vehicle and know when to turn around.
- Be sure to only have the number of riders recommended by the manufacturer.



Final Test

The final portion of the Off-Road Vehicle Operator's Course is a test. It is designed to take you through a day of using the designated trail system. It is taken from the point of view that you already have your operator's license and have had your vehicle inspected and permitted. You will be given a series of choices, in which only one answer is correct. You can complete this test at the Off-Road Vehicle Office while obtaining your permit.

