

## Briefing Statement

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**Bureau:** National Park Service

**Issue:** General Management Plan/Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement

**Unit:** Big Cypress National Preserve

**Date:** January 5, 2010

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### Background:

- Big Cypress National Preserve is currently composed of two distinct management areas: the original Preserve established in 1974 and the Addition, which was added to the original Preserve by legislation in 1988.
- The Addition contains approximately 147,000 acres and has remained closed to most public use since its Congressional authorization over 20 years ago.
- A 1994 lawsuit brought against the NPS over ORV use in the 1974 Preserve resulted in a settlement agreement which stipulated that the NPS prepare an ORV Management Plan for the 1974 Preserve. This plan, completed in 2000, stipulated that the Addition would not be open to recreational ORV use until a wilderness study and GMP were completed for the Addition.
- GMP preparation began in 1999 and a set of preliminary alternatives was released to the public in 2005.
- In September 2005, SERO and WASO managers recognized the need to integrate an ORV Management Plan into the GMP in order to provide more timely access to such areas that might be identified in a GMP preferred alternative.
- Pursuant to commitments made by the NPS in the 2000 ORV Management Plan and upon further consultation and review with SER and WASO, the Preserve also received approval to include a Wilderness Study component in the GMP.
- In 2007 revised preliminary alternatives were released to the public and workshops were held to obtain input.
- In 2008 the Preserve developed a draft preferred alternative, briefed the Regional Director and Deputy Director and received the concurrence to proceed to develop the draft EIS.
- In January 2009 the Preserve hosted a roundtable review of the draft with the participation from WASO, DSC, SERO, and BICY staff. The document was tremendously improved through the comments and input received during this review.
- In July 2009 the NPS released the draft GMP/ORV Management Plan/Wilderness Study/EIS for public comment. Public meetings and wilderness hearings were held across south Florida during August/September 2009.
- Based on comments received, the preferred alternative was revised and briefed in December 2009 to the NPS Southeast Regional Director, who gave concurrence for a Director briefing in January 2010.

### Current Status:

- GMP scoping has identified, among other important issues, a strong public perception that ORV access and hunting opportunities would be provided in appropriate areas soon after final approval of the GMP.

- Responses to public comments are being prepared.

**Interested Parties/Interests:**

- Worked diligently throughout the planning effort to keep key stakeholders informed.
- Met with and briefed key Federal, tribal, State and local governmental representatives.
- In 2007 we distributed a newsletter with preliminary alternatives that were revised to include wilderness and ORV management.
- Comments were received from Federal, State, and local governments.
- Comments were received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, which raised concerns that we incorporated in developing and revising the preferred alternative.
- Several non-governmental organizations representing environmental, conservation, hunting/angling and ORV interests submitted comments.
- Many public workshops were conducted throughout South Florida. These meetings were well attended and the public offered many comments and suggestions.
- In general, the majority of public comments received focused on either end of the wilderness/motorized access spectrum.

**Next Steps/Strategy:**

- The revised preferred alternative will be briefed to the NPS Director in January 2010.
  - The goal is to release the final EIS in August 2010 with a signed Record of Decision in September 2010.
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**Congressional District:**

Representative: Mario Diaz-Balart

Senator: Bill Nelson

Senator: George S. LeMieux

**Contact:**

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