



December 15, 2020

Tom Forsyth  
Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve  
33100 Tamiami Trail, East  
Ochopee, FL 34141

Re: Big Cypress National Preserve Backcountry Access Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Forsyth,

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF), thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Big Cypress National Preserve Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Plan). CSF strongly supports the National Park Service's (NPS) preferred alternative, Alternative 5. Alternative 5 would provide important access for hunters, anglers and other outdoor recreationists as well as facilitate better management of the Big Cypress National Preserve's (Preserve) natural resources by fish, wildlife and other natural resource management professionals.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation has maintained a singleness of purpose that has guided the organization to become the most respected and trusted sportsmen's organization in the political arena. CSF's mission is to work with Congress, governors, and state legislatures to protect and advance hunting, angling, recreational shooting, and trapping. CSF has a strong track record in Florida, working with the Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus and conservation partners to protect and advance Florida's sporting heritage by supporting pro-sportsmen legislation and state fish and wildlife management objectives.

CSF supports Alternative 5, the NPS's preferred alternative. Alternative 5 would provide the most backcountry access for sportsmen and women. Large portions of the Preserve are currently inaccessible due to trail closures and lack of trails that provide access to backcountry destinations and areas historically important for hunting and fishing. By reopening 66 miles of primary ORV trails and 154 miles of secondary ORV trails, Alternative 5 would significantly increase access across the 729,000-acre Preserve. As noted in the Plan, these trails would impact less than 0.1% of the Preserve with most of the trail mileage traversing highly resilient to resilient substrates. We therefore believe that Alternative 5 strikes the appropriate balance between minimizing impacts to the Preserve's natural resources while providing important access for sportsmen and women.

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CSF additionally supports the increased primary ORV trail and secondary ORV trail mileage to support the on-the-ground resource management needs of the Preserve. Invasive species, fire, law enforcement and related management responsibilities would benefit from the increased trail mileage as thousands of acres of land within the Preserve are difficult to access under the current trail mileage limitations.

Alternative 5 would also add 51 miles of hiking trails as well as creating 203 new backcountry destinations. The expanded hiking trail system and new backcountry destinations, including campgrounds, are also important for hunters and anglers. CSF supports these expansions.

Additionally, CSF supports the removal of the 60-day closure for ORVs provided that future closures are targeted, minimal in duration and made in consultation with the local sportsmen's community and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Responsible ORV use is critical to maintaining public support for the use of ORVs on the Preserve, and we believe that the designated trail system ensures that resources are protected, other uses are respected, and access is preserved for hunters and anglers as well as youth, the elderly, and others with mobility limitations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Plan. We look forward to continuing to engage in this process as it moves forward, and please do not hesitate to contact us should you have questions about our comments.

Sincerely,

Mark Lance  
Southeastern States Coordinator  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
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