



September 26, 2022

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

**Re: Big Cypress National Preserve Supplemental Draft Backcountry Access Plan /
Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement**

Dear Mr. Forsyth,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Supplemental Draft Backcountry Access Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental Draft Plan) for the Big Cypress National Preserve (Preserve). The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation supports most of the National Park Service's (NPS) preferred alternative, Alternative 3, except for the proposal to designate approximately 147,910 acres of the Preserve as Wilderness. Overall, Alternative 3 would provide important access for hunters, anglers and other outdoor recreationists as well as facilitate better management of the Preserve's natural resources.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

Of the proposed alternatives, Alternative 3 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 54 miles of primary ORV trails and 52 miles of secondary ORV trails, Alternative 3 would increase access across the 729,000-acre Preserve. We

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believe that Alternative 3 strikes the appropriate balance between minimizing impacts to the Preserve's natural resources while providing important access for sportsmen and women.

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, 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 3 would also add 114 miles of hiking trails as well as creating 83 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, and we suggest that the current curfew times be removed to increase access for sportsmen and women. We further recommend that any future proposed closures and curfews be targeted, minimal in duration and made in consultation with the local sportsmen's community and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Finally, CSF opposes the proposal to establish 147,910 acres as Congressionally designated Wilderness. This would unnecessarily restrict science-based management efforts on approximately 20% of the Preserve, negatively impacting wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities. We encourage you to consider other management area classifications that would provide a Wilderness-type experience but would not hamstring natural resource managers by removing tools from their toolbox.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Supplemental Draft Plan. Please let us know if you have questions about our comments or would like additional feedback.

Sincerely,



Mark Lance
Southeastern States Coordinator
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

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