



July 8, 2024

Honorable Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20004

Re: Big Cypress National Preserve Wilderness Designations

Position: Oppose

Honorable Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation,

As leaders of the Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus (Caucus), we are writing to express our opposition to Wilderness designations within the Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP), and we urge you to continue to consider the negative impact Wilderness designations would have on the BCNP. Congressionally designated Wilderness would unnecessarily restrict science-based management efforts on the BCNP, negatively impacting wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities. As the BCNP encompasses roughly 729,000 acres, the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) is paramount to the success of management efforts and opportunities for outdoor recreation. If Wilderness designations were to be created within the BCNP, ORV use would be prohibited within those areas; thus, limiting access to Floridians.

Since its inception, the Caucus has been the leading voice for sportsmen and women in the Florida Legislature. The bicameral and bipartisan Caucus has dozens of members from all corners of the Sunshine State. The Caucus actively works in concert with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and numerous conservation organizations to advocate on behalf of hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers in Florida.

Hunting within the BCNP is a longstanding tradition for many Floridians, and establishing portions of the BCNP as Wilderness would negatively impact opportunities for hunters. Without the use of ORVs within the BCNP, natural resource managers would not be able to maintain or improve habitat through practices such as prescribed burning, invasive plant and animal control, and more, leading to habitat degradation over time. Habitat loss not only impacts game species and the opportunities they provide hunters, but it also impacts non-game species. A hands-off approach to management within the BCNP is counterproductive to implementing sound conservation practices and negatively impact resource management and access and opportunity for Florida's sportsmen and women. Therefore, we encourage the National Park Service to

consider other management area classifications that would provide a Wilderness-type experience without hamstringing natural resource managers by removing tools from their toolbox and limiting public access for sportsmen and women and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Sportsmen and women and associated industries generated over \$90 million in conservation funding for the FWC through the American System of Conservation Funding in 2023 alone, highlighting the importance of maintaining public access to areas such as the BCNP.¹ In addition to this critical funding for conservation, hunting in Florida generates \$93 million in state and local taxes while also supporting approximately 14,300 jobs.²

Again, Congressionally designating portions of the BNCP as Wilderness would unnecessarily hamper science-based management practices to improve wildlife habitat for both game and non-game wildlife species, fight invasive plant and animal species, and public access to areas of the BCNP that are nearly impossible to reach without a motorized ORV.

We thank you for considering the ramifications that Congressionally designated Wilderness would have on Florida's wildlife resources as well as our state's sportsmen and women.

Sincerely,

Representative Danny Alvarez
Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

Senator Jim Boyd
Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

Senator Jason Brodeur
Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

¹ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.congressionalsportsmen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/11142453/Florida-ASCF-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

² <https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Florida-State.pdf>