



Foundation Document Overview

Big Cypress National Preserve

Florida



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE is 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.



Significance

Significance statements express why Big Cypress National Preserve resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

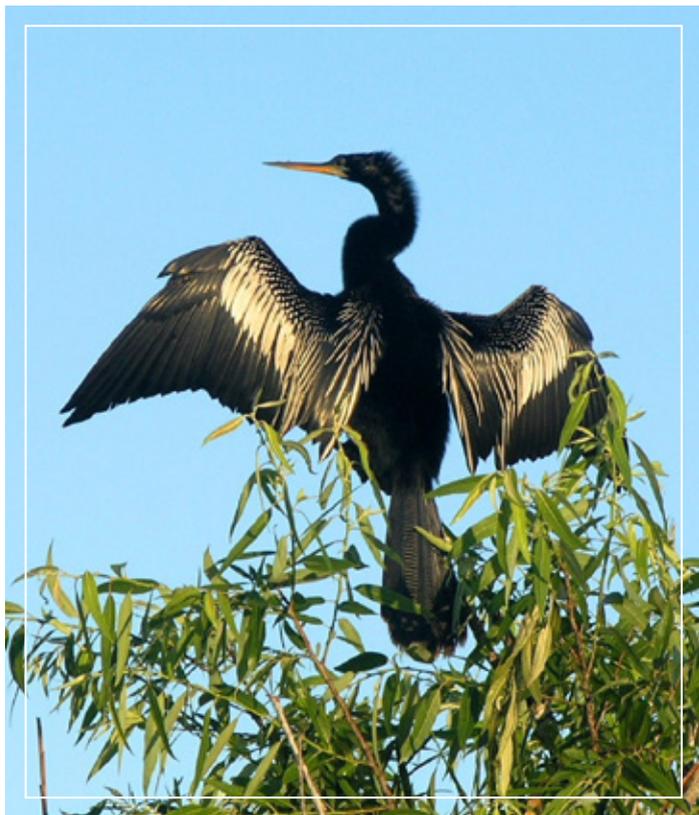
- The preserve protects the Big Cypress Watershed—an area critical to the survival of the greater Everglades ecosystem.
- The preserve contains the largest dwarf cypress forests in North America and the largest old-growth South Florida slash pine forest.
- The preserve protects vital habitat for state and federal threatened and endangered plant and animal species, including the Florida panther, red-cockaded woodpecker, and ghost orchid.
- The preserve provides opportunities for the public to enjoy outdoor recreation activities in a vast natural area spanning 729,000 acres of South Florida. These opportunities are increasingly rare in a region containing rapidly growing cities with more than 6 million people.
- The preserve contains evidence of approximately 15,000 years of human use and sustains resources that continue to hold importance to traditionally associated cultures including the Miccosukee and Seminole people.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Water Resources**
- **Ecological Integrity**
- **Native Plants and Animals**
- **Public Enjoyment**
- **Traditional Uses**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Preservation of the Big Cypress watershed is integral to ecological health and human quality of life in South Florida.
- The preserve provides a refuge for a great diversity of plant and animal species. The health of the species in the preserve is a reflection of the health of the region as a whole.
- The preserve ties our past to the future, reflecting a pattern of changing cultures and use in Big Cypress.
- The preserve provides a variety of outstanding opportunities for visitors to experience adventure, learning, solitude, dark night skies, and relaxation in a vast natural setting.



Description

Big Cypress National Preserve (hereafter referred to as the “preserve”) is centrally located between Miami and Naples in southern Florida. It encompasses 729,000 acres of a largely freshwater wetland ecosystem offering refuge to a wide variety of plants and animals. The preserve was established for the preservation, conservation, and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress watershed, and to provide for the enhancement of public enjoyment. Established as one of the first national preserves, Big Cypress represents a unique management concept where resource protection, public recreation, and specific uses stipulated within its enabling legislation are managed concurrently.

Water is the unifying force of the preserve, connecting its five habitats: hardwood hammocks, pinelands, prairies, cypress swamps, and estuaries. These diverse ecosystems encompass a dynamic mixture of tropical and temperate plant communities and wildlife. The preserve protects 9 federally listed and 31 state listed threatened and endangered or species of special concern animals and 120 state listed threatened and endangered plant species. Visitors can see nearly 200 bird species throughout the year, and large mammals such as the black bear and bobcat make the preserve their home. Federally listed animals that call the preserve home include the Cape Sable seaside sparrow, wood stork, red-cockaded woodpecker, Everglade snail kite, West Indian manatee, American alligator, American crocodile, eastern indigo snake, and the Florida panther, one of the most endangered mammals in the world. Big Cypress National Preserve protects the flow of freshwater from the Big Cypress Swamp into estuaries of neighboring Everglades National Park and the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

In the late 1960s, the area that was to become Big Cypress National Preserve was threatened by multiple forms of development, including a proposal to construct the “jetport,” which would have been the largest airport in the world at that time. Spurred by these impending threats, the concept of a preserve was born through a grassroots exercise in compromise.

Alarmed by the potential for environmental harm and the threatened loss of a traditional way of life, a coalition of hunters, conservationists, and citizen activists, including Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the newly formed Friends of the Everglades, pressured the then Dade County Port Authority to find another location for the jetport. Everyone saw the importance of protecting the Big Cypress, but many did not want this region merely added to nearby Everglades National Park. Many felt that traditional forms of access to the Big Cypress would be lost if the area was managed as a national park. The resulting compromise created a new land management concept—a national preserve. Under this concept, the area would be protected but specific activities identified in the preserve’s enabling legislation would be allowed to continue. A wide variety of traditional, consumptive, and recreational activities were carried out in Big Cypress before the inception of the preserve. Today, hunting, fishing, trapping, oil and gas exploration and extraction, operation of off-road vehicles (ORVs), private land ownership, and traditional use by Miccosukee and Seminole people are allowed, consistent with the preserve’s enabling legislation. Cattle grazing leases have expired and no new rights will be extended.

