ORV News

New Trails Opened in Stairsteps Zones Two and Three and Other Trail Updates

Monroe South and Pace's Dike designated trails will open on August 13th. This will provide access into Zone 2 and Zone 3 of the Stairsteps Unit for swamp buggies and ATVs. ORV access in theses zones will be along marked primary and secondary trails. The NPS is working with sportsmen to determine the best locations for future secondary trails.

At the end of the Monroe South Trail there are identified campsites. Remember to fill out your backcountry permit when accessing this and other backcountry areas within the Preserve.

Travel by motorized vehicle is restricted to the designated trails in these areas. Travel into other parts of the Zone must be done on foot. Portable toilets and trash facilities will be provided at Monroe Station during peak times of use. Parking for Pace's Dike will be along Loop Road, east of the trail entrance.

Oasis Trail at the Oasis Visitor Center has been re-routed and improved. The trail access entrance is now located on the east side of the new parking lot at Oasis. The original access point is closed. A temporary ORV tow vehicle and trailer parking area has been set aside near the NPS pole barn south of the airstrip hanger; and can be reached by following the signs.

At Monroe Station the Buckskin Trail can be accessed at a new entrance north of the parking lot. The Buckskin Trail has been stabilized as part of an ongoing program to improve the primary designated trail system.

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Primary trails - Pace's Dike and Monroe South, along with associated secondary trails, will provide increased access into the Stairsteps Unit of the Preserve.

REINSPECTION OF VEHICLES

On August 13th inspections and reinspections of vehicles will begin. If you have not purchased your 2004 permit by this date and your vehicle is due for reinspection (inspected 2000 - 2001), bring in the vehicle when you come to purchase your 2004 permit.

If you have purchased your 2004 permit and your vehicle is due for reinspection, you will need to bring in the vehicle when you purchase your 2005 permit after December 15th.

Buggies and 4x4 street legal vehicles will not be re-weighed unless there have been changes that would affect the weight of the vehicle.

Inspections will be conducted at the Oasis Visitor Center Area on Friday through Monday, from 8:30 am - 3:00 pm. Reservations for reinspections can be made by calling 239-695-1205. Walk-in inspections are still welcome, and will be served on a first-come first-served basis, with reservations taking priority.

Safety First -Number of Riders

The number of riders allowed on an ATV is restricted to the number designed or intended for use of a passenger by the manufacturer.

Many Improvements to be Seen in 2004 — 2005 Season

As we move into another busy ORV season, we hope that you will enjoy the upgrades to the trail system and visitor amenities that have taken place since last year. Due to a delay in receiving the necessary permits from the Corps of Engineers, work on the trails did not begin until April. The late start did not allow much time to work before the summer rains began and we did not accomplish as much as we originally hoped.

New for the 2004 - 2005 ORV / hunting season will be the opening of the Monroe South and the Pace's Dike Trails to swamp buggies and ATVs.

To ensure that the Preserve ORV trails are accessible to permitted ORVers, tribal members and landowners only, we will be implementing a gate and lock system this year. We feel that this system will help reduce the problem of non-permitted vehicles accessing the trails.

Other changes to be seen this year are the installation of a new ORV office at the Oasis Visitor Center Complex, improvements to Midway Campground, a shorter version of the orientation program and the rerouting of the trail access from the Oasis Visitor Center.

While traveling through the Preserve along the Tamiami Trail, and Loop Road you will notice that several of the US 41 scenic corridor visitor safety improvement projects are completed or near completion.

These and future upgrades will help you to have a safer and more enjoyable visit as you explore the many recreational opportunities that the Big Cypress has to offer.

We are looking for recent photos of ORV and hunting activities within the Preserve. These photos will be used in recreation related publications and on the Preserve website. If you have any photos you would like to share, contact Bob DeGross, Chief of Interpretation at 239-695-1107. It is our goal to positively convey to the public the variety of recreation for which the Preserve was designated.

From all of the Preserve staff have a safe, enjoyable and productive hunting and ORV year.

Carol A. Clark
Acting Superintendent
Big Cypress National Preserve

Trails to be Gated to Protect Permitted ORVers' Access

Effective September 15, to ensure access is only available to properly permitted ORV operators and tribal members, the National Park Service is installing gates with combination locks at the head of each trail within the Preserve. The combination of which will be provided to landowners and 2004 permit holders.

The combination will change when the 2004 permits expire. You will be notified of the new combination when you apply for and receive your 2005 permit This enhancement will help prevent non-permitted users, and vehicles that are not ORVs from using the trails.

Do your part to help prevent non-permitted vehicles from accessing the trails by not sharing the combination with non-permitted users. It's your trail system; and your permit fees are used to manage and improve the system, play a role in preventing unauthorized people from taking advantage of it. Put this number somewhere you will find it when you are planning to go out in the Preserve.

2004 Access Code: ----

New ORV Office Coming Soon

This September a new ORV Office will be in place at the Oasis Complex. The new building will be located to the rear of the parking lot at the end of the entrance road. The new office will be open 8:30 am to 3:00 pm on Friday through Monday for permit renewals, orientation classes, inspections and any questions you may have for the ORV staff. Tuesday through Thursday the office will be closed. You may get **permit renewals only** at the visitor center on these days. The Oasis Visitor Center will be open from 9:00 - 4:30.

In order to expedite the inspection process we will offer appointments during the Friday-Monday ORV Office operation hours. Please call ahead at 239-695-1205 to arrange an appointment. Visitors without appointments will be accommodated as time allows with priority given to those with appointments.

Safety First — Safety Belts

Safety belts must be used by all passengers in all motor vehicles whose seats were originally equipped with them by the manufacturer. (i.e. vehicle types such as street legal 4x4s, "gators" and "mules").

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This non-permitted street legal 4x4 tried to access the Concho Billie area in 2003, causing resource damage by not using the designated trail. The new gate system will help prevent occurrences like this in the future.

Campground News: Midway Being Improved

Burns Lake Campground will open on August 13th. There will not be a campground host at Burns Lake until November.

Midway Campground is scheduled to open in January and has undergone many improvements. Asphalt pads for RVs, electrical hook-ups, restrooms and a new dump station are planned for installation.

Special thanks to FWC on their generous funding assistance in partnership with the NPS in maintaining camping facilities within the Preserve.

Starting December 15th, the campground fee at Midway and Monument Campgrounds will be $16.00 per night. This will include use of the dump station at Midway or Dona Drive.

Also as of December 15th a $6.00 fee for use of the dump station at Dona Drive will be charged for individuals not paying for use of the campgrounds at Monument or Midway.

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Reopening of Midway Campground is planned for January 2005. The site will have many improved facilities, including a dump station.

CAMPING REGULATIONS IN ZONE 4 AND BEAR ISLAND UNIT

Zone 4 – Airboat users must camp in designated campsites only (1-17). Backcountry camping is allowed in other areas of Zone 4 (except the seaside sparrow closure area) when access is gained by foot or non-motorized vessel, and the campsite is located at least ½ mile from Loop Road and ¼ mile from any designated campsite or airboat trail. No personal property (tents, grills, cookware, tables, bedding, etc) can be left in the backcountry anywhere in Zone 4 when the user is not actively camping and staying overnight at the campsite.

Bear Island Unit – Backcountry camping in the Bear Island Unit is permitted only at designated campsites (Gator Head - 9 sites, Pink Jeep - 9 sites and Bear Island - 40 sites.)

An individual may camp or leave camping gear unattended in backcountry areas of the Preserve, including the designated sites in the Bear Island campground, and the Gator Head and Pink Jeep campsites, for the length of the specific hunting season as follows:

1. Archery Season/Muzzleloading Season
2. General Gun Season
3. Spring Turkey Season

Individuals occupying a site may bring camping equipment into the Preserve after 8:00 a.m. one day before the opening of the specific season and must remove camping equipment from the Preserve before 6:00 p.m. one day after the above stated season ends. In the Bear Island Unit, property may be left unattended only at designated campsites. Individuals who leave their camping equipment for longer than 24 hours must leave identification (name, address, telephone number) clearly visible with or on the camp gear.

After receiving several comments from sportsmen regarding proposed changes to the above camping regulations, we have decided to delay any changes pending further review and discussion of our policies and regulations that guide our campground management.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Oasis Visitor Center
(239)695-1201
ORV Office
239-695-1205
Hunting Information
(239)695-2040
Report hunting violations immediately to
(800)788-0511

Website
www.nps.gov/bicy/
Florida State Hunting Information
www.myfwc.com

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

TITLE INFORMATION FOR ATV OWNERS

"Florida Off Highway Vehicle Titling Act" Chapter 317 Florida Statues – This act was passed by the 2002 Florida State Legislature on behalf of motorized trail users. The purpose of this Act is to title Off Highway Vehicles (OHV), such as ATVs, that are sold in Florida and operated on public lands that are managed by federal, state, county, or municipal governments.

The owner of an OHV that is required to be titled must apply to the county tax collector for a certificate of title. New vehicles purchased from a dealer should come with a title.

Starting with the sale of 2005 ORV permits you will need proof of title for ATVs (buggies are not included). If you renew by mail you will need to send a copy of your title along with your request to renew your permit. This title copy will be kept on file so you will not have to show it again.

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This publication was paid for, in part, through the generous donations from the visitors to Big Cypress National Preserve.

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ORV News

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Be "Wildlife Aware" While Enjoying the Big Cypress

The endangered Florida panther is a symbol of wild Florida and an important link within the Everglades / Big Cypress ecosystem. There are fewer than 100 animals in the wild and the natural areas in Southwest Florida are vital to their survival.

Big Cypress National Preserve makes up one of the last large natural areas where many of the cats survive. While exploring in panther habitat, you are a partner in guaranteeing the future of this amazing animal.

The Preserve is also home to other large predators such as bears and alligators. On the trail or in the camp, we can all do our part to minimize attractants to large predators. Minimizing attractants reduces the possibility of large predators and small scavengers from becoming habituated to humans.

Once an animal becomes habituated, the need to remove it or destroy it becomes high. The population of both bears and panthers in Florida is so small that any loss that is not from natural causes has an impact.

Here are some things you can do to reduce attractants and avoid creating habituated animals:

- Keep your camp clean and keep trash picked up and stowed in a secure container. Bring all trash out with you at the end of your trip.

- **Do not feed wildlife**. Attracting deer, raccoons or other wildlife to your camp will attract bears and panthers. Keep wildlife wild.

- While in areas that allow pets, always keep pets on leash (no longer than 6') and keep the pet under control at all times. Avoid taking the pet near water.

- While fishing and hunting, be sure to clean game away from areas with high levels of human activity. The remains of game may attract predators and scavengers.

- Drive safely on area roads and watch for wildlife that may be crossing.