

ITEM 8:

Consider an amendment to the Florida Caverns State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 3619).

LOCATION:

Jackson County

APPLICANT:

Division of Recreation and Parks

STAFF REMARKS:

The Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) is requesting ARC approval of an amendment to the Florida Caverns State Park (Florida Caverns) Land Management Plan. Florida Caverns is approximately 1,450 acres in size, located in Jackson County approximately 2.7 miles from Marianna. Access to the park is from State Road 166. The DRP is requesting approval of a land planning concept that would redevelop, enhance, and improve land use and resource management for the state park.

The amendment is a summary report of the DRP's redevelopment planning and implementation efforts for Florida Caverns following the extensive damages incurred during Hurricane Michael. The details of the report distinguish between projects already completed and those that are conceptual. Consistencies with and departures from the 2018 approved management plan are also noted.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan amendment.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

- APPROVE**
- APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** _____
- DEFER**
- WITHDRAW**
- NOT APPROVE**
- OTHER:** _____

Florida Caverns State Park

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

May 2022





FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

INTRODUCTION	1
FORMER GOLF COURSE	1
Proposed Campground, and Proposed Mountain Biking Trail	2
<i>Conceptual Land Use Plan</i>	3
Park Entrance Modification, and Proposed Restoration.....	5
Interpretive Opportunities	6
CAVERNS	6
BLUE HOLE	7
CHIPOLA RIVER	8
UPLAND GLADES	9
SHOP RELOCATION	9
OPTIMUM BOUNDARY	10
PARKWIDE TOPICS	10
Roads, Trails, and General Uplands Restoration	10
<i>Optimum Boundary Map</i>	11
INTERAGENCY REVIEW LETTERS	13
Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources	14
Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission	15
Florida Forest Service	16
Florida Natural Areas Inventory	17



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to describe progress on and plans for the redevelopment of Florida Caverns State Park nearly four years after Hurricane Michael devastated the Florida Panhandle; regionwide devastation that included the infrastructure and natural landscape of this unique historic park.

Efforts at debris removal and restoration on all fronts began after the hurricane. Multiple tons of sediment were removed from the main tour cavern entrance by a coordinated volunteer project, accompanied by park-wide efforts removing treefalls and debris deemed dangerous to visitors or park infrastructure.

FORMER GOLF COURSE

The Florida Caverns Golf Course, until its closure in 2018, was a nine-hole golf course constructed by the Works Progress Administration in 1939. It is recognized as part of the Florida Historic Golf Trail by the Florida Division of Historical Resources. The landscape formerly occupied by the Florida Caverns Golf Course possesses scenic topography, ecological benefit, historical value, and recreational potential, for which the DRP has worked to determine the best management direction. Considering the fullness of landscape character, and given the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, the DRP has identified goals of environmental stewardship, resource-based recreational development, and historical interpretation specific to the former golf course's landscape.

Plans for the former golf course merge goals to develop new recreation opportunities with the potential for reforestation. Given the altered landcover of the former golf course, significant reforestation is recommended to ensure natural resource-based visitor experiences. The former golf course will be restored to scenic landscape showcasing and protecting natural resources for visitor education, facilitated through camping amenities and a system of mountain biking trails. Interpretive themes and programming may be based on the gradual restoration efforts and westward pastoral views afforded by high points centrally located within the tract. Conceptual frameworks and themes for interpretation are further discussed below.

Development and restoration efforts on the former golf course seek to balance and connect the scenic, interpretive, and recreational potentials of the landscape. These plans for the former golf course intend to preserve and improve park resources, while also benefiting visitor experience.

Additional restoration efforts may be implemented apart from those identified, which must be balanced with concurrent recreational development goals on the former golf course. These development goals consist of a new standard facility campground, an area of tent camping sites, and a mountain biking trail, all of which may ideally be thematically linked through interpretive programming.

These proposed concepts are represented visually in the Conceptual Land Use Map. Areas shown are approximate and not intended to convey final decisions on location.



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

Proposed Campground

Development of these amenities on the former golf course is meant to facilitate enjoyment of the entire landscape, supplementing and catering to an expected increase in visitation. For example, the campground developments need not be considered as the exclusive access points for the other features of the former golf course landscape, nor should designs seek to guide campers' access away from the rest of the park. Design alternatives will be evaluated to consider larger buffers between sites, quality of immersion, and further beautification of the landscape.

Given the sloping terrain of the former golf course, certain construction challenges are anticipated. These include considerations such as erosion control, site spacing, and accessibility.

Design alternatives will be evaluated to consider larger buffers between sites, quality of immersion, and further beautification of the landscape.

Phasing the construction of the proposed campground may be necessary. Once some campsites are operational, the DRP will be able to assess the draw yielded by new amenities and determine the demand for additional capacity. Additionally, such phasing may avoid the construction of more sites than needed in a landscape already warranting restoration. Were a phased approach utilized, then measured increases in demand for this new overnight amenity would inform further development.

The future campground loops will be situated near or adjacent to areas of upland mixed woodland restoration. As restoration efforts will entail periodic prescribed fire, care must be taken to ensure both the effective implementation of the fire regimen and protection of campground infrastructure. Numerous campgrounds throughout the park system are similarly situated with successful management of adjacent and intertwined fire-type natural communities. Restoration at Florida Caverns will follow comparable methods.

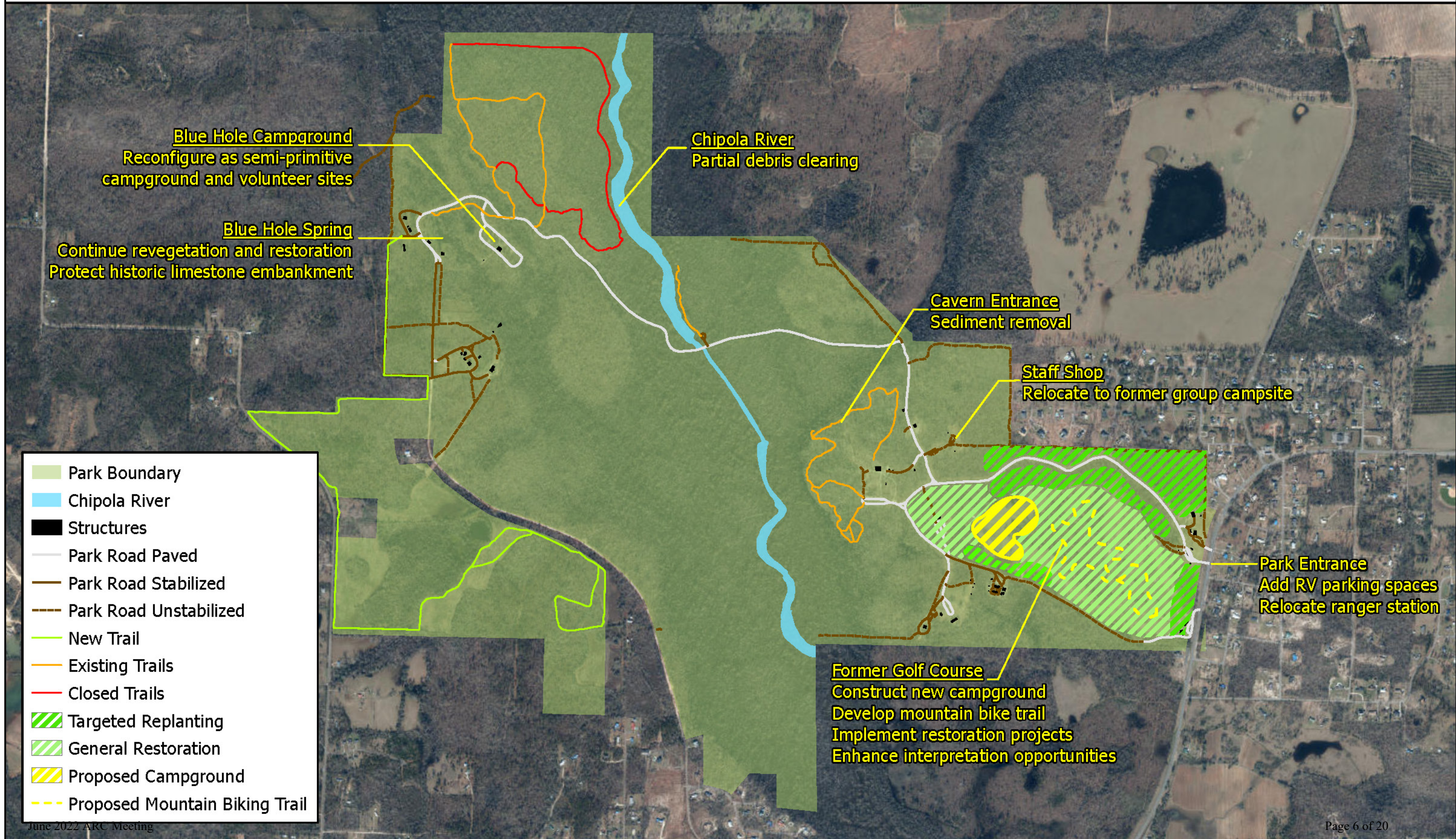
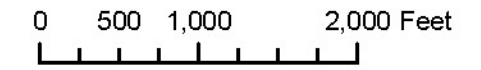
Proposed Mountain Biking Trail

The mountain biking trail planned for the former golf course will utilize prominent topographic relief (up to 180 feet above sea level), interfacing with lightly forested areas as well as portions where future reforestation is planned. Additional loops may be added north of and encircling the former golf course. While segments of trail through open unforested space may be incorporated in the trail network, a majority-canopied environment is optimal for fostering a resource-based visitor experience. Thus, maximizing acreage that will be reforested is recommended for the benefit of visitor experience on the proposed mountain biking trails.

It is desired that these various amenities – trails and campgrounds – all be accessed from shared entrance(s) in the park interior. In the short term, this may not be feasible given construction timelines; in which case the mountain biking trails may be configured for access via the existing structure at the eastern roadside boundary (former golf pro shop). This structure could also be used as an initial site for a concessionaire.



Florida Caverns State Park - Conceptual Land Use Plan



- Park Boundary
- Chipola River
- Structures
- Park Road Paved
- Park Road Stabilized
- Park Road Unstabilized
- New Trail
- Existing Trails
- Closed Trails
- Targeted Replanting
- General Restoration
- Proposed Campground
- Proposed Mountain Biking Trail



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

If the existing roadside structure is used in either of these ways – as a trailhead and/or for concessionaire use – then phasing out the structure and later utilizing the interior park facilities will be desirable for these purposes. Sweetgum pavilion or other similar structures may be well suited as trailheads and/or concessionaire locations.

Throughout the former golf course landscape, opportunities for overlooks at high elevation points, primitive campsites, and multi-use walking paths should be considered. To the extent feasible, such amenities would benefit from a viewshed minimally affected by development. Larger buffers between RV campsites, as mentioned above, would further serve this interest. Walking paths and overlooks are meant to serve as opportunities for interpretation of the landscape and its natural resources – signage identifying wildflowers, trees, and other plant species along trails is favorable. Signage interpreting the Marianna Lowlands as a unique geographic region of north Florida is also favorable.

Park Entrance Modification

The addition of new recreational amenities on the former golf course may lead to increased day use and overnight visitation. Addressing this potential need, changes to the ranger station at the park's main entrance may be warranted. An increased number of parking spaces may be needed to accommodate RV camping registration, and the ranger station may need to be moved further down the length of the main park road to accommodate day use visitor registration. Populations of three rare and imperiled plant species occur immediately south of the park entrance: creamflower tick-trefoil (*Desmodium ochroleucum*, G2G3, S1), Flyr's Brickell-bush (*Brickellia cordifolia*, G3, S2), and nettle-leaved sage (*Salvia urticifolia*, G5, S1). Steps must be taken to avoid negative impact to these plant populations, including but not limited to avoidance by heavy equipment.

Proposed Restoration

Restoration efforts by park and district staff have included wiregrass seeding and the reimplementation of prescribed burn regimes. Wiregrass seeding was not successful in its early stages, nor has longleaf pine planting been readily successful in other sections of the park.

For these reasons, the current consensus among biologists is to restore applicable sections of the former golf course to a state matching upland mixed woodlands throughout the park prior to Hurricane Michael, and in other natural areas of North Florida, such as Torreya State Park. This natural community type characterizes the landscape surrounding the former golf course, and thus represents our desired future conditions. The suite of tree species chosen for restoration shall primarily be selected from those characteristic of Florida Caverns upland mixed woodlands. Shortleaf and longleaf pine may be included at the discretion of park and district staff.

To the full extent possible, plants used should be not only native to Florida, but *of* localized parentage; sourced from either within Florida Caverns or local to the northern panhandle. Other conservation lands such as Torreya State Park will likely serve as sources for plant material that matches the genetic character of Florida Caverns. The DEP Nursery facility in north Pensacola has served as an important



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

base of operation for such efforts in the past and may continue to serve this role. Groups such as the Florida Native Plant Society, Florida Forest Service, and Florida Natural Areas Inventory may serve as advisory partners.

To maximize viewshed quality throughout the former golf course, targeted replanting should occur in locations to conceal State Road 166, the adjacent northeastern neighborhood, and southeastern shop complex. Where targeted replanting occupies pre-existing natural communities (such as upland pine and upland mixed woodland), tree species utilized should match those already present.

Interpretive Opportunities

Along with interpretive opportunities pertaining to natural resource of the former golf course, historical topics for interpretation warrant consideration. The golf course that once occupied the landscape was built during the same era as CCC infrastructure throughout the park. One green of the former golf course may be maintained for interpretive use along with supporting interpretive paneling or programming. The interpretive layout for the former golf course of Fort George State Park may provide a design analog.

CAVERNS

The caverns, underneath and throughout the State Park, are crown jewels among the public lands of Florida. After Hurricane Michael, the totality of treefall across the state park resulted in mechanical root damage to the ceilings of some caverns. Additionally, multiple tons of sediment were deposited at the entrance of the tour cave system, rendering passage infeasible. This damage was assessed and removed by hand over the course of multiple staff-organized volunteer days. The main tour cavern is now deemed safe for necessary passage by park staff. Cavern tours have resumed at full capacity since July 1, 2019.

In 2019, the Bennett Tract acquisition brought 12 new caverns into the park. These caverns need to be properly accounted for in the Florida Caverns Cave Management Plan. Additionally, this document needs general revision by park and district staff for effective application. Compiling all relevant information and guidance pertaining to various caves will require surveying and other fact finding.

Three caverns are known to need new gating and/or refencing at their entrances; one within the Bennett Acquisition (Bennett Cave) and two outside the Bennett Tract acquisition (Natural Bridge and Millers Cave). Many additional areas in need of upgrade would likely be identified by parkwide surveying. Additionally, a new cavern was recently discovered on the Bennett Tract, and has been given the name Liz's Surprise. This cavern is being studied and further explored. These activities should all be completed in tandem with a parkwide update to the Florida Caverns Cave Management Plan.



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

BLUE HOLE

Blue Hole is a second magnitude spring contributing to the Chipola River watershed that has long attracted visitor for swimming and interpretive purposes.

The standard facility campground adjacent to Blue Hole will be reconfigured as semi-primitive group and volunteer campgrounds, situated in a landscape undergoing future active restoration and thematically centered around the presence of Blue Hole Spring. The paved loop road should be partially removed along with RV parking pads and other visible camping infrastructure. The retained portion of the paved loop road will serve volunteer campsites. The group campsite located at Three Rivers State Park represents a design analog for the future of this site. Space should not be given for camper-trailers or RVs. The footprints currently occupied by pavement should in large part be revegetated with hardwoods and herbaceous species typical of Florida Caverns' upland mixed woodlands prior to Hurricane Michael. Replanted species may include, but should not be limited to, longleaf pine and wiregrass at the discretion of park and district staff. Unused utility infrastructure damaged by Hurricane Michael should be removed to avoid ecological damage to Blue Hole Spring.

As the clearings of the former individual campsites are restored to a natural condition, defunct water and electrical utility lines should also be removed, focusing access to potable water at a centrally located site within the group camp area. The only portions of the current campground to be kept in a cleared state are any necessary sections of the paved loop and the field it encloses. Segments of the paved loop road not used by campers may also be restored to a natural condition. Removal of unused utility lines will ensure protection of soil and water quality by avoiding corrosion or decomposition of metals and plastics. Such efforts will be especially beneficial given the adjacent presence of Blue Hole Spring.

Blue Hole underwent significant restoration efforts in 2008 to improve spring flow and reduce muckiness in the spring swimming area. Prior to these restoration efforts, the Blue Hole swimming area possessed an artificially sandy shore from 1960s amenities developments. While aesthetically pleasing, this condition was detrimental to spring health (impeding natural flow) and resulted in damage from overuse by visitors. The sand would wash down the length of the spring run and collect in foreign deposits, further impeding spring flow.

Adding sand to the shores of blue hole is not a viable future action for the above stated reasons. The restored clay and topsoil surrounding the spring from 2008 will thus be retained, and further restoration efforts should be pursued in the future, such as tree plantings and other revegetation. To guide visitors to the swimming platform, and to address stormwater and erosion issues, it is desired that the area surrounding Blue Hole swimming area be reforested to a state typical of natural communities surrounding other springs in the Florida panhandle. Cypress and other wetland hardwoods and herbaceous species may be included. Shepherd Spring in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge represents an aesthetic analog for the envisioned future of Blue Hole. The platform on Blue Hole will also be retained as a favored resource by which visitors can enjoy swimming in Blue Hole.



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

Immediately to the south of Blue Hole, there is a historic limestone embankment which previously acted as a perimeter for the artificial sandy beach previously discussed.

The embankment in its present state – slightly decayed from weathering – no longer serves a utilitarian purpose in the landscape. However, it is an interesting aesthetic feature. The limestone embankment should remain as a landscape feature surrounding Blue Hole.

In order not to degrade the limestone embankment, replanting along the south bank of Blue Hole may be limited to only smaller plant species. Large tree species may not be advisable in the vicinity of the limestone embankment, since their root growth could mechanically weather the feature. Only bank-side flowering shrubs and herbaceous species are desired for that area. Guiding examples include but are not limited to *Viburnum obovatum*, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, *Rhododendron spp.*, and *Packeria glabella*.

CHIPOLA RIVER

Debris along the river course are of benefit to the imperiled aquatic species, such as Alabama shad (*Alosa alabamae*), shoal bass (*Micropterus cataractae*) Apalachicola alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys apalachicola*), Barbour's map turtle (*Graptemys barbouri*) and Suwannee cooter (*Pseudemys concinna suwanniensis*). These species gain shelter and sunning perches from treefalls on the river.

The portion of the Chipola River intersecting Florida Caverns has not been cleared of any treefall material beneficial to wildlife, save for minimal clearing performed by paddlers. Unlike Florida Caverns, debris was removed from both upstream and downstream of the park boundary by an inter-agency effort. Thus, Florida Caverns State Park currently preserves a uniquely high quality of habitat along the Chipola for imperiled aquatic species.

In the interest of safe and easy passage in kayaks and canoes on the Chipola, some debris removal is warranted. This is to the benefit of visitors utilizing the Chipola River Paddling Trail. To balance these interests of conservation and recreation, the best common practice in the past has been to clear debris across one third of the width of the Chipola River. This practice should be continued, so that the remaining two thirds of the river may continue to support habitat for imperiled aquatic life. Clearing one third of the width of the river (roughly 36 feet in most sections) provides roughly 12 feet of cleared waterway for users to safely pass through. The log run connecting the upper and lower portions of the Chipola should also be cleared of debris for safe passage by visitors utilizing the Chipola River Paddling Trail.



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

UPLAND GLADES

Bumpnose, Interior, and Moranz Glades, from west to east totaling 1.5 acres, represent one of our state's most unique and rare natural communities; upland glades. Interior and Moranz glades are in pristine condition, unaffected by human activity, other than rare foot traffic by park staff for monitoring purposes. Bumpnose Glade abuts and extends beyond the park boundary along Bumpnose Road.

Of the three glades within Florida Caverns state park, Bumpnose Glade is the candidate best suited for public interface. Along with the lower risk to natural resources posed by its public showcase, Bumpnose Glade possesses no less natural beauty or ecological character than the other two more pristine glades, giving the public just as much opportunity for enjoyment and education.

The newly opened Bumpnose Trail interfaces with Bumpnose Glade and is undergoing revision and upgrades for public use. Bumpnose Glade is within sight from a section of the trail. Signage marking the natural community as an environmentally sensitive area – prohibiting walking or visitation by trail users – has been installed.

In tandem with or predating any interpretive development, Bumpnose Glade also warrants significant restoration efforts. Throughout its history predating acquisition, it was used as a site for dumping local refuse. Much of the trash has already been removed through volunteer efforts. A remaining mound of "fill dirt" – mostly clay mixed with asphalt fragments – occupies the western edge of the glade, likely originating from the development of Bumpnose Road. This fill dirt mound, along with any residual trash, warrants careful removal to restore the glade to a more natural state without causing further environmental damage. The location of Bumpnose glade extends beyond the park boundary (see Optimum Boundary Section for further discussion of Bumpnose Glade).

Moranz Glade and Interior Glade are preserved in pristine condition. They are uncommonly high-quality examples of this natural community. Given their pristine condition, and for the sake of the continued preservation of the glades, no interpretive infrastructure or advertisements should be developed to interface with Moranz or Interior Glades at any point in the future.

Cautionary or prohibitive signage has in some cases unintentionally served as a helpful landmark rather than as a deterrent to persons seeking to visit sensitive natural features protected from and unsuited for public interpretation. Thus, no signage should be implemented for any of the other glades in the park.

SHOP RELOCATION

The current staff shop floods significantly, at its location post Hurricane Michael. A new staff shop at a different location is needed, that meets all the following criteria: it must be above increased flood levels, and be in a centralized location, and minimize viewshed disruption for visitor experience. It is recommended that the new staff shop be constructed at the location of the current (but soon-to-be-phased out) group campground.



FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

OPTIMUM BOUNDARY

A triangular 2.34 acre parcel on the west side of Bumpnose Road is proposed for addition to the Florida Caverns State Park Optimum Boundary. An upland glade – which has been given the name Bumpnose Glade – is cross cut by Bumpnose Road, with one portion within Florida Caverns State Park and the remaining portion contained by this parcel. The acquisition of this parcel would bring Bumpnose Glade fully into the protection of Florida Caverns State Park, thus further protecting one of the state’s rarest and most imperiled natural communities.

PARKWIDE TOPICS

Roads

A combination of repaving and pothole filling is warranted for many roads and other paved areas throughout Florida Caverns State Park. These projects are in design phases currently. Striping is not favored on the park’s various paved roads. Leaving park roads unstriped imparts a sense of transition from a visitor’s drive to the park (on striped highways) to driving *in* the park. Unstriped roads also have a natural slowing effect on traffic.

Trails

Park staff recently opened its newest installed trail – Bumpnose Trail – for hiking, biking, and equestrian use. Two trails in the western portion of the park – River Trail and Fenceline Trail – have been closed due to increased flooding post Hurricane Michael. These trail closures are being offset by the opening of the above-mentioned Bumpnose Trail.

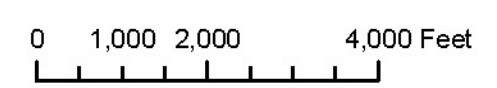
The various trails at Florida Caverns State Park find use as venues for educational botanical tours, taking advantage of Jackson County’s biodiversity and offering the public a course on local botany. To better serve this use and to further beautify the landscape of Florida Caverns, plantings of native trees and wildflowers may occur along the trails. It should be noted, for best management practices, that the only species that may be used in these plantings are those associated with natural community types present at Florida Caverns as defined by FNAI. Plants utilized should be of *localized parentage* to avoid any misrepresentation of regional biodiversity. Plants must match the genetic and ecological character of the Marianna Lowlands. Educational use of Florida Caverns trails would further benefit from interpretive signage presenting information on the region’s botany and ecology.

General Uplands Restoration

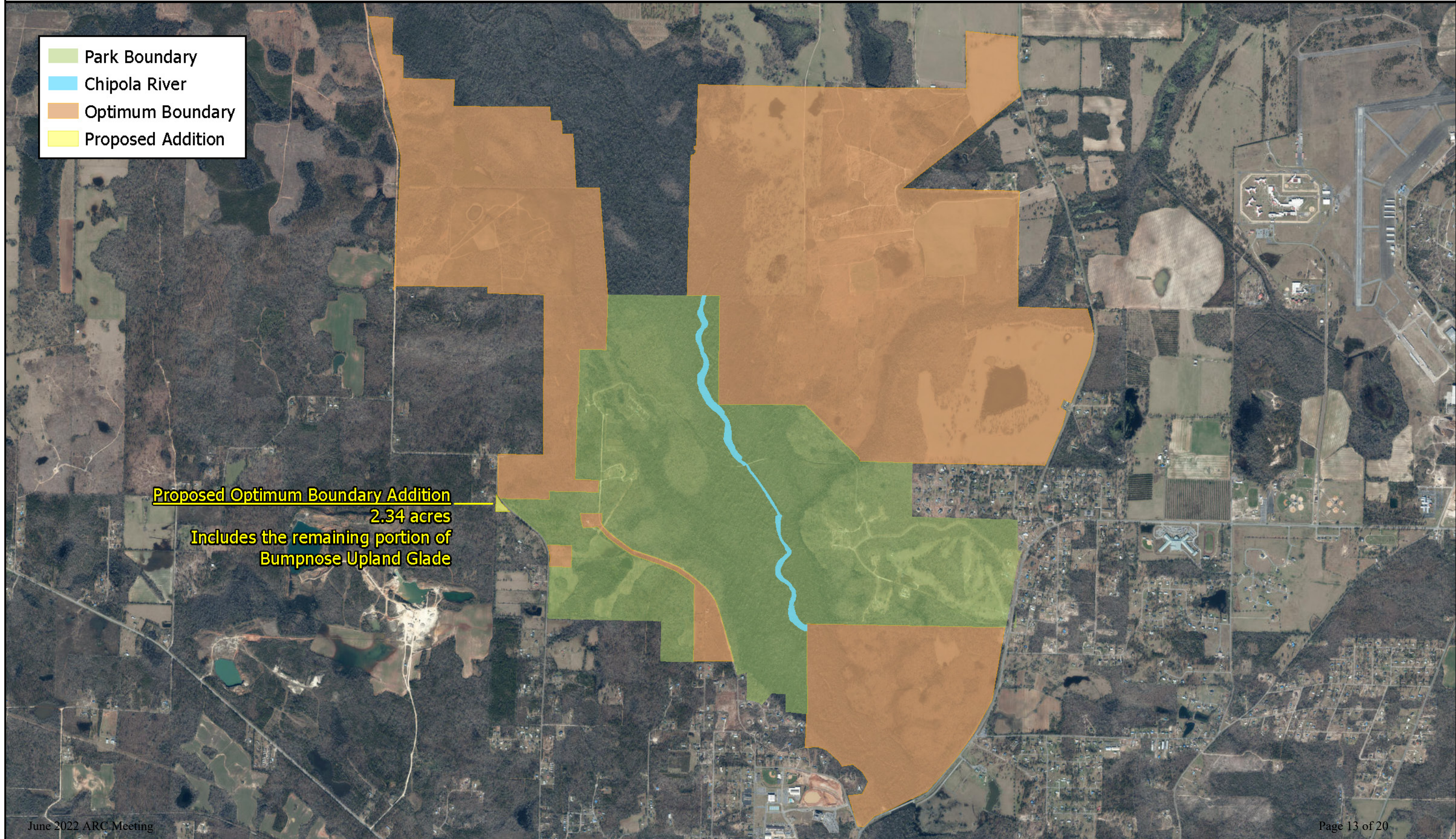
Many of the restoration actions herein described may at times be applicable to other natural communities of the park on a case by case basis. Establishing new populations of applicable native plant species, instituting prescribed burns, debris clearing, and other restoration actions are all viable options at the discretion of park and district staff for Florida Caverns natural communities.



Florida Caverns State Park - Optimum Boundary



- Park Boundary
- Chipola River
- Optimum Boundary
- Proposed Addition



Proposed Optimum Boundary Addition
2.34 acres
Includes the remaining portion of
Bumpnose Upland Glade

Interagency Review
Letters of Support and ARC Process Comments
May 2022

- Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources
- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Forest Service
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

RON DESANTIS
Governor

LAUREL M. LEE
Secretary of State

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks
Office of Park Planning

April 29, 2022

Re: DHR Project File No.: 2022-2288
Project: Florida Caverns State Park Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

To Whom It May Concern:

Our office reviewed the referenced projects in accordance with Chapter 267, *Florida Statutes*, and implementing state regulations, for possible effects on historic properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), or otherwise of historical, architectural or archaeological value.

Thank you for providing our office with the opportunity to comment on the referenced proposed redevelopment plan. Based on the information provided, we have no objections or other comments at this time. However, Florida Caverns State Park contains numerous historic and cultural resources which have not been evaluated for NRHP eligibility. Please note that Chapter 267, *Florida Statutes*, requires consultation with the Division of Historical Resources for undertakings on state lands. Therefore, we request that our office be contacted to review and comment on individual projects prior to any ground-disturbing activities, at which time our office may recommend that the project area be subjected to archaeological monitoring or a cultural resource assessment survey.

If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Tobias, Historic Sites Specialist, by email at Jennifer.Tobias@dos.myflorida.com.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Kelly L. Chase in blue ink, with the word "For" written below it.

Timothy A. Parsons, Ph.D.
Director, Division of Historical Resources and State Historic Preservation Officer

Division of Historical Resources
R.A. Gray Building • 500 South Bronough Street • Tallahassee, Florida 32399
850.245.6300 • 850.245.6436 (Fax) • FLHeritage.com





April 22, 2022

Item 8: Florida Caverns SP MP Amendment

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Mr. Daniel Alsentzer
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks
Office of Park Planning
3800 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Commissioners
Rodney Barreto
Chairman
Coral Gables

Steven Hudson
Fort Lauderdale

Gary Lester
Oxford

Albert Maury
Coral Gables

Gary Nicklaus
Jupiter

Sonya Road
St. Augustine

Robert A. Spottswood
Key West

Office of the
Executive Director
Eric Sutton
Executive Director

Thomas H. Eason, Ph.D.
Assistant Executive Director

Jennifer Fitzwater
Chief of Staff

Division of Habitat and
Species Conservation
Melissa Tucker
Director

850-487-3796
850-921-5786 FAX

*Managing fish and wildlife
resources for their long-term
well-being and the benefit
of people.*

620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida
32399-1600
Voice: 850-488-4676

Hearing/speech-impaired:
800-955-8771 (T)
800 955-8770 (V)

MyFWC.com

RE: Proposed Interim Management Activity at Florida Caverns State Park re: Hurricane Redevelopment

Dear Mr. Alsentzer,

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has completed their review of the proposed hurricane redevelopment plans for the Florida Caverns State Park (FCSP). Overall, the FWC finds this interim management activity description to be effective in describing the management activities that will take place on the FCSP. The FWC does not foresee any direct impacts to locally important fish and wildlife on the area. However, FWC staff recommend continued coordination with FWC biologists to avoid any possible impacts from these activities to found wildlife and their habitat. The FWC also recommends the use of management guidelines in the FWC's published Species Action Plans for the management of imperiled and locally important bird species found on the area. The FWC Species Action Plans provide beneficial resource guidelines for habitat management and monitoring of the respective species. For your reference, the FWC Species Action Plans can be accessed at this web address: <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/imperiled/species-action-plans/>.

The FWC sincerely appreciates the opportunity to review and make recommendations to the FCSP proposed interim management activity. Please contact Dylan Haase at Dylan.Haase@MyFWC.com or at 850-487-9102 should there be any questions.

Sincerely,

Tom Houston, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

FLORIDA FOREST SERVICE
(850) 681-5800



THE CONNER BUILDING
3125 CONNER BOULEVARD
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-1650

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED

May 2, 2022

Mr. Daniel Alsentzer
Planning Manager, Office of Park Planning
Division of Recreation and Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Re: Florida Caverns State Park, Post-Hurricane Michael Redevelopment Plan

Mr. Alsentzer:

Our office has reviewed the above-mentioned plan for recreational, natural community restoration, and other proposed activities.

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) agrees with proposed new campground and mountain bike trail. The phased approach to the new campground will allow for the assessment of additional needs as the campground opens. The mountain bike trail location seems appropriate and there is a growing demand for that type of recreational opportunity. All other recreational and interpretive activities listed in the plan are reasonable.

The FFS encourages use of prescribed fire in areas that need prescribed fire to thrive. The FFS is available and willing to provide technical advice on reforestation and any other forestry activities to help ensure the success of this project.

If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Jason Love, Land Management Coordinator, by email at Jason.Love@FDACS.gov or by telephone at (850)681-5854.

Sincerely,

Keith Rowell
Land Programs Administrator
Florida Forest Service

From: [Alsentzer, Daniel](#)
To: [Fugate, Brian](#); [Farley, Preston](#)
Subject: Fwd: Florida Caverns State Park, Post-Hurricane Redevelopment - request for interagency concurrence review
Date: Wednesday, April 20, 2022 12:23:21 PM
Attachments: [Florida Caverns Post-Hurricane Redevelopment April 2022.pdf](#)

From: Amy Jenkins <ajenkins@fnai.fsu.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, April 20, 2022 11:41 AM
To: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>
Cc: Frank Price <fprice@fnai.fsu.edu>
Subject: FW: Florida Caverns State Park, Post-Hurricane Redevelopment - request for interagency concurrence review

Mr. Alsentzer,

We appreciate the opportunity to review this Redevelopment Plan of Florida Caverns State Park.

Overall, this plan is excellent, thorough, and well written. We agree with, and support the goals, objectives, concepts, and intentions in this plan. The plan would benefit from a brief discussion of restoration activities both completed and planned in the upland hardwood forest and floodplain communities within the park. Below are a few specific comments:

Page 3. We support concentrating the development of the newly proposed campground within the current footprint of the old golf course as outlined in Conceptual Land Use Plan Map, however the placement of the campground within a restoration area for upland mixed woodland will pose conflicts for fire management of this habitat. How this conflict will be addressed should be mentioned in this plan.

Page 5. It is mentioned in the plan that there may need to be changes to the main park entrance facilities due to increased visitation. Consider putting in safeguards for the three rare plant species occurrences (creamflower tick-trefoil (*Desmodium ochroleucum*, G2G3, S1), Flyr's Brickell-bush (*Brickellia cordifolia*, G3, S2), and nettle-leaved sage (*Salvia urticifolia*, G5, S1)), all of which occur to the immediate south of the current entrance, when designing any changes.

Page 5. The plan states that longleaf pine and wiregrass plantings in the past have failed and that for this reason the park will restore the habitat of the old golf course to upland mixed woodland. Reconsider including these two species or shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) in the suite of species to be restored for upland mixed woodland habitat as these species are key components of this community type and add valuable fuel for the frequent fires this habitat requires (FNAI 2010). Additionally, the plan states that in areas where strategic plantings would help to block the view of neighborhoods, SR 166, and the shop area, consider stating what evergreen species would be planted to ensure that

they are native components of upland mixed woodland.

Page 7. The plan states “The footprints currently occupied by pavement should in large part be revegetated with hardwoods and herbaceous species typical of Florida Caverns’ natural communities prior to Hurricane Michael.” Given that this area of the park is mapped as upland mixed woodland, consider being more specific here about the restoration target community and include longleaf pine and wiregrass in the mix of species to be restored.

Page 8. Consider revising “upland limestone glade” to “upland glade” to follow FNAI (2010).

Page 9. We support the addition of the 2.34-acre parcel to the Optimum Boundary as protecting the entirety of Bumpnose Glade is vitally important to this critically imperiled natural community.

Please let me know if you have any questions about these comments.

Sincerely,

Amy

References:

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). 2010. Guide to the natural communities of Florida: 2010 edition. Florida Natural Areas Inventory, Tallahassee, FL.

Amy Jenkins

Senior Botanist

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

1018 Thomasville Road, Suite 200C

Tallahassee, FL 32303

850.224.8207 x224

Science for Conservation



Florida Caverns State Park