

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
DIVISION OF RECREATION AND PARKS  
**OFFICE OF PARK PLANNING**



**MYAKKA RIVER  
STATE PARK**

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Recreation and Parks

Myakka River State Park  
Public Meeting  
January 24, 2019

**Purpose**

The purpose of this meeting is to receive public input on the Unit Management Plan (UMP) update for Myakka River State Park. The draft UMP is available for review at: [www.floridadep.gov/park/public-participation](http://www.floridadep.gov/park/public-participation)

**Public Input**

Thank you for taking the time to share your comments with us. Please provide any comments you may have by **February 8, 2019**. You can provide your comments by calling (850) 245-3070, sending an email with the park name in the subject line to [Tyler.Maldonado@floridadep.gov](mailto:Tyler.Maldonado@floridadep.gov), or by regular mail at the address below:

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3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 525  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3000



**Comment Form - Myakka River State Park**

*A would appreciate these issues decided in the Final Unit Management Plan, please:*

- (1) CAR CAPACITY STUDY HAS NOT BEEN FUNDED.*
- (2) BOAT USE MUST BE RESTRICTED TO ELECTRICS, OR SMALL 5hp. GAS MOTORS.*
- (3) PRACTICE OF TOUR BOATS REVVING THEIR MOTORS TO SCARE ALLIGATORS OFFSHORE SHOULD BE PENALIZED AND FORBIDDEN.*
- (4) SPECIES OF BIRDS, FISH, ETC. SHOULD BE FOUND TO EAT APPLE SNAILS.*
- (4) BIKE USE SHOULD PROMOTED AND ENCOURAGED OVER CAR USE.*
- (5) LIMIT INFRASTRUCTURE*
- (6) FUND MORE STAFFING*
- (7) LIMIT ROAD BUILDING*
- (8) KEEP MRSP IN ITS NATURAL STATE.*

*ALLAIN HALE  
5327 DENSAW RD.  
NORTH PORT, FL 34287*





## COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC MEETING ON MYAKKA RIVER STATE PARK 1/24/2019

### IMPROVED PARKING:

HOPEFULLY YOU WILL NOT PUT PARKING ON THE PRAIRIE ON BOTH SIDES OF RT 72 GOING EAST AND WEST. THEY ARE A TREASURE OF THE PARK.

## YOU WANT TO DIVERT PEOPLE TO OTHER ACTIVITIES:

### BIKE TRAILS –

BE PART OF THIS MOVEMENT. ON PAGE 115 OF THE PROPOSED PLAN FROM SECTION “UNDEVELOPED AREAS” - “PARK VISITORS IN THIS AREA ARE LIKELY TO STAY OVERNIGHT IN THE PARK DUE TO THE TIME AND EFFORT NEEDED TO EXPERIENCE THIS LEVEL OF SOLITUDE IN A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT”

NO - THEY DO NOT HAVE TO STAY OVERNIGHT TO HAVE SOLITUDE – THEY CAN AND DESERVE A DAY IN SOLITUDE. THEY CAN WALK A TRAIL OR BIKE ALONG THE MAIN DRIVE AND HAVE THE SOLITUDE OF A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

WE HAVE VERY FEW AREAS TO PUT ADDITIONAL PARKING BECAUSE YOU DON'T WANT TO DESTROY A WETLAND, PINE STAND, PRAIRIE OR OAK HAMMOCK. YOU WANT ALTERNATIVE THINGS FOR PEOPLE TO DO – YOU WANT TO DIVERT PEOPLE TO OTHER ACTIVITIES RATHER THAN JUST THE BOAT TRIP. YOU WANT LESS CARS IN THE ROAD.

WHY NOT HAVE A BIKE TRAIL ON THE MAIN DRIVE. WHY NOT HAVE GUIDED BIKE RIDES THROUGH THE PARK WITH A RANGER OR TRAINED VOLUNTEERS. THESE COULD POSSIBLY BE SMALL FEE PROGRAMS. IF THE RANGERS CANNOT PARTICIPATE IN A PROGRAM THAT HAS A FEE, THEN RANGERS WOULD STILL DO THEIR PROGRAMS AND OTHERS CAN BE DONE BY TRAINED VOLUNTEERS. THESE FEES WOULD GO TO THE CSO AND STAY IN THE PARK.

### A BIKE TRAIL MEANS:

LESS CARS ON THE MAIN DRIVE. ONE MAIN PARKING LOT WHERE THEY WOULD PARK AND THEN TRAVEL THROUGH THE PARK ON A BIKE.

SAFE EXERCISE FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN – CHILDREN CAN'T BIKE IN SUGAR SAND ON TRAILS OFF THE MAIN ROAD. MANY ADULTS WHO BIKE CAN'T EITHER OR THEY DO NOT HAVE THE PROPER TIRES. IT IS NEVER A GOOD IDEA TO MIX BIKES AND CARS. KEEPING BIKES ALONG THE MAIN DRIVE HELPS PROTECT THE QUIETNESS OF THE OFF-ROAD HIKING/BIKING AREA.

ENABLING VISITORS TO “STOP AND SEE” ANYWHERE. BIKES DO NOT REQUIRE A LARGE PARKING LOT (WHICH WE ALREADY KNOW IS A CHALLENGE TO PROVIDE). A DOUBLE-SIDED BIKE RACK THAT IS 10' LONG CAN HOLD 20 BIKES. THAT TAKES MUCH LESS SPACE THAN 20 CARS.

THE CONCESSION SHOULD UPDATE THEIR INVENTORY OF BICYCLES AND HELMETS FOR RENT – THEY ARE TERRIBLE.

ENVISION THIS --- A MEANDERING ROAD OF A DIFFERENT KIND.

GUIDED WALKS:

WALK WITH A RANGER OR TRAINED VOLUNTEER. VISITORS COULD PAY A FEE AND THE MONEY WOULD GO TO THE CSO AND STAY IN THE PARK.

EQUESTRIAN AREA:

I ASKED A QUESTION AT THE MEETING AS TO WHETHER THE STATE IS CONTEMPLATING LEASING LAND TO AN OUTSIDE VENDOR FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING HORSES FOR RIDING AND GUIDED EQUESTRIAN TOURS.

I DON'T KNOW IF THE GENTLEMAN AT THE MEETING WAS STUNNED BY THE QUESTION OR DID NOT WANT TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

COULD THAT BE CLARIFIED YES OR NO

I HOPE THE PARK SYSTEM WOULD NOT LEASE LAND. EVER.

THE UPPER MYAKKA LAKE V-E-Z:

PLEASE MAKE AS A DECISION TO TAKE OUT OR REPAIR/REPLACE THE WEIR. THE IMPACT OF EITHER WILL DRASTICALLY CHANGE THE DYNAMICS AT THE UPPER MYAKKA LAKE VEZ AS WELL AS THE PARK AS A WHOLE. THAT SHOULD BE THE FIRST DECISION THAT HAS TO BE MADE AND MADE QUICKLY.

HOW MANY STUDIES DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A DECISION? THIS PROBLEM WAS NOTED IN THE 2004 MANAGEMENT PLAN, IT IS NOW 2019 AND WE STILL HAVE TO HAVE A STUDY. TO AGREE TO DO A STUDY AND DELAY OR FEET DRAG IS NOT MANAGING. IF YOU KEEP WAITING, NATURE MAY MAKE THE DECISION FOR YOU. THEN YOU ARE CAUGHT FLAT FOOTED AND EMBARRASSED BECAUSE YOU KNEW IT MAY HAPPED AND DID NOTHING. ATTENDANCE WILL PLUNGE UNLESS ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES ARE ALREADY IN PLACE.

PLAN A – REPAIR OR REPLACE THE WEIR

WHAT IS THE PLAN TO KEEP VISITORS COMING AND OCCUPIED WHILE THAT DISRUPTION IS TAKING PLACE? MAYBE SOME OF THE GUIDED ACTIVITIES NOTED ABOVE COULD BE DONE. THIS REPAIR OR REPLACE WOULD TAKE SOME TIME SO A PLAN SHOULD BE UP AND RUNNING AHEAD OF THE SCHEDULED DISRUPTION.

PLAN B – REMOVE THE WEIR

TAKE OUT THE DOCKS AND BOAT, REMOVE THE BOAT RAMP AND NOW WHAT.

HOW DO YOU GET VISITORS TO THE RIVER WHICH WILL PROBABLY BE A GREAT DISTANCE AWAY FROM THE CONCESSION AREA FOR CANOE/KAYAK ACTIVITIES? WILL THE RIVER BE DEEP ENOUGH TO FLOAT A CANOE OR KAYAK WHEN IN LOW AND HIGH-WATER SEASON?

WHERE WILL YOU DIRECT PEOPLE WHO WANT TO FISH?

WHERE WOULD YOU DIRECT PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BIRD?



I AM SURE THE DEP WANTS THE VISITOR NUMBERS TO AT LEAST REMAIN THE SAME OR INCREASE SO BEING CREATIVE IN PRESENTING A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES IS A GOOD SOLUTION I BELIEVE.

DIVERT PEOPLE FROM THE LAKE AREA WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES. SPREAD THEM OUT.

DRAW A DIFFENT TYPE OF VISITOR – YOUNG AND YOUNG AT HEART ALL WANT TO BE ACTIVE IN THIS BEAUTIFUL WEATHER WE HAVE. THEY LIVE HERE, VISIT RELATIVES HERE OR VACATION HERE. THEY WANT TO DO SOMETHING UNIQUE – SOMETHING ADVENTUROUS.

WE HAVE ENOUGH DISNEY TYPE PLACE. UNFORTUNATELY

WE WILL NEVER HAVE ENOUGH PLACES OF SOLITUDE. UNFORTUNATELY

THE COMMENTS I SUBMITTED AFTER THE MEETING 3/2/17 WERE NEVER ADRESSED. I SEARCHED AND SEARCHED THE INTERNET. I WAS DISAPPOINTED. .

I HOPE THAT YOU READ AND ADDRESS EVERYONES COMMENTS THIS TIME.

**Baxley, Demi**

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**From:** Kathy Surprenant <ksurpra@verizon.net>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 21, 2019 9:01 AM  
**To:** FLStateParkPlanning  
**Subject:** public comments

I saw online that Myakka Park wants public input for their water management plan by Feb 8. I don't know where to send my comments, so I am sending here. Please let me know if I need to contact somewhere else where public input will be read.

My input: please ask the DEP to stop the permit that allows Mosaic to dump industrial waste from Wingate Mine into the Johnson Creek before ending in Wingate Creek that flows into the Myakka River.

Thanks for your time  
9417162407

**From:** [Maldonado, Tyler](#)  
**To:** [Baxley, Demi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Myakka Park  
**Date:** Friday, February 1, 2019 1:56:55 PM  
**Attachments:** [Myakka River SP - Citizens Response.pdf](#)

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FYI

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**From:** Terry Muzzey <muzzeyt@comcast.net>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 28, 2019 4:21 PM  
**To:** Maldonado, Tyler <Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** Myakka Park

Tyler,

Thank you for conducting the public meeting in Sarasota last week on the Myakka River UMP. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the process. Our Citizens Response Form and comments are attached.

Thanks,

Robert & Teresa Muzzey



Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Recreation and Parks

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**Comment Form - Myakka River State Park**

Myakka River SP is an exceptional example of several different ecosystems that are fragile and disappearing. Unfortunately we are 'loving it to death' while inadequate funds are being budgeted for park maintenance and preservation. Political support and leadership is outrageously absent. As best as possible with limited funding, I would recommend the following:

1. A much improved visitor center focusing on Environmental education, esp. on threats to Myakka River SP.
2. A 'Hard Cap' established of daily visitors based upon a well developed recreational carrying capacity.

over →



Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
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Comment Form - Myakka River State Park

3. More Funds directed specifically to  
Ranger led Eco + Nature tours  
for education of visitors.

4. More Funds specifically directed  
to additional Rangers to  
manage/patrol the human load  
and abuses that results from  
400k/yr visitors!

Robert Muzzey

muzzeyr@comcast.net

Remember: Once it's gone, it's gone  
forever!!

**From:** [Maldonado, Tyler](#)  
**To:** [Baxley, Demi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Myakka State Park UMP  
**Date:** Monday, February 4, 2019 9:16:26 AM

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Myakka comments

-----Original Message-----

From: Kathie Cross <kcross2@live.com>  
Sent: Friday, February 01, 2019 7:57 PM  
To: Maldonado, Tyler <Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>  
Cc: Earl Cross <ecrossjr812@yahoo.com>  
Subject: Myakka State Park UMP

Thank you for having these public meetings to keep us informed.  
I do have some concerns.

The existing park facilities sometimes can not handle the present park attendance.  
To considering increasing attendance by 166 % in the lake area would make present park facilities overwhelmed in some areas.

The main entrance into the park frequently gets backed up with vehicles on Rt. 72 which is a traffic hazard.  
The Visitor Center parking lot often is filled to capacity.  
Rest Rooms throughout the park frequently have issues currently.

The Bridge viewing area is regularly congested with traffic and pedestrians.  
A pedestrian walkway along the bridge would ease some of the congestion.

The Canopy walk parking area is regularly congested and cannot always accommodate all the vehicles.

The lake area with everyday attendance has parking and and restroom issues.  
Bldg. 18 has frequent problems with sanitary back ups.

The Weir area, the weir culvert bypass and condemned fishing deck needs some kind of attention. These areas are eyesores and have safety concerns. visitors continue to climb on the Weir and the fishing deck as they do not adhere to warning signs and barriers. This a great viewing area of wildlife but needs repair to become safe.

We have one of the most beautiful State Parks in Florida.

To have a major increase in attendance we need facilities to serve and accommodate the people, therefore cutting into the parks natural internal barrier between development and wilderness.  
Instead of expanding the lake area and main drive attractions, let's maintain and restore existing buildings that the CCC constructed. They are apart of the history of Myakka State Park and tell a story of our country.  
It's a shame to not put extra effort into keeping these buildings and areas in pristine condition.

Thank you again for the informative meetings, but please consider some of my concerns.

Sincerely,  
Earl Cross Jr



**From:** [Maldonado, Tyler](#)  
**To:** [Baxley, Demi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Comment on Unit Management Plan - Myakka River  
**Date:** Monday, February 4, 2019 9:16:38 AM

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## Another Myakka comment

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**From:** Howard Berna <hberna@scgov.net>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 04, 2019 8:22 AM  
**To:** Maldonado, Tyler <Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Cc:** Oliver, James <James.Oliver@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** Comment on Unit Management Plan - Myakka River

Tyler,

I attended the recent Myakka River Management Coordinating Council meeting in Sarasota where you presented some information about boating on the upper lake. As a comment for the Unit Management Plan, it is important to recognize that Sarasota County has a State-approved Manatee Protection Plan (MPP). The MPP is applicable to all upstream waters of the Myakka River. Within this document, slips are defined as wet or dry and the numbers of slips at boat ramps include available trailer parking spaces (and if there are any overflow parking spaces available). You mentioned during your presentation that the number of boats on the upper lake was based on a calculation of area of the lake. I would strongly recommend that you base the number of vessels on the upper lake on the available trailer parking spaces in the parking lot. The MPP does not recommend any expansion of boating facilities on the Myakka River for motorized vessel use. During state permitting reviews, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is likely to make comments and utilize the Sarasota County Manatee Protection Plan in their determinations.

As such, I would encourage you to recognize the MPP and reduce the number of existing and future motorized vessels at the ramp facility to only that number of trailer parking spaces that exist today, which is substantially less than the number that was presented during the MRMCC meeting. To remain consistent with the MPP, expansion of the capacity of the boat ramp facility should not be proposed.

Thank you,

**Howard J. Berna**  
**Manager, Environmental Permitting**  
Sarasota County – Planning and Development Services  
Environmental Protection Division  
1001 Sarasota Center Blvd  
Sarasota, Florida 34240  
PH: (941) 330-5750



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Your feedback is valuable to us: [Customer Service Survey](#)

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**Comment Form - Myakka River State Park**

Hello,  
Sarasota County performs monthly ambient water quality monitoring in the Myakka River watershed. Some of the sampling stations are in the State Park. We post the data on the Sarasota Water Atlas website and it is available there for download. We are also willing to produce an annual presentation about the data for the MRMCC, if you wish. The Sarasota Water Atlas is also a resource available for you to archive reports, photos, maps, videos or data.

Our group also manages TMDLs and impaired waters for Sarasota County. We are partners



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Comment Form - Myakka River State Park

to a NPDES MS4 permit with North Port  
and FDOT (in Myakka watershed) as well  
as other cities.

We are willing to partner with you  
in the event that our missions or activities  
coincide. Don't hesitate to call.

Regards,

Johan Ryan

Sarasota County

941-650-2159

jryan@scgov.net

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Deanne Piccasso  
info@drdeanne.com  
941-726-2345

**Comment Form - Myakka River State Park**

Thank you for the presentation.

Please stop the permit that allows Mosaic to dump industrial waste from Wingate Mine into Johnson Creek - this ends up in Wingate Creek which flows into the Myakka River. Who can address this.

also what is the parks utilization of herbicides in managing aquatic plants? Glyphosate has been banned in many countries - is it used in the park? Or atrazine any other toxin, who can stop this?

This park needs to advocate for improved water quality and address the upper watershed, daily maximum loads and enforce water quality regulations



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**Comment Form - Myakka River State Park**

*encroaching more & more*  
Worried about development as Sarasota  
County approves more and housing & commercial  
projects without corresponding infrastructure.  
Pretty soon the only Florida of my youth  
will only be seen in our parks. That is  
why it is so important to keep Myakka State  
Park pristine & beautiful for years and  
generations to come. To that end,  
the State of Florida must fight to stop  
further mining permits of the phosphate  
mining industry that imperil our rivers including  
the Myakka that flows through the park  
and into our Gulf. More & more permit to  
a company that does not pass inspections at any  
of their mines must be stopped for the sake of  
our parks, lands, resident health and our <sup>gulf, rivers</sup> & drinking water.



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As someone who initiated lighting season burns and  
choppings @ MRSP as well as overseeing its  
MGT for 22 1/2 yrs as mgr of 4 yrs as District MGR  
THE PLAN IS AN INSULT TO THE MANY PROFESSIONALS  
WHO CONTRIBUTED TO MAJOR RESTORATION OF NOT ONLY  
THE RESOURCES BUT FACILITIES AS WELL. MANY DATES  
OF "HAPPENINGS" ARE WRONG, GEN'L INFO HAS TO  
MANY FALSE STATEMENTS, COMMUNITIES MAPS  
ARE NOT CORRECT (THE ELEVATION MAP IS MORE  
AKIN TO ABSTRACT ART - USE A STANDARD QUAD MAP!  
TOO MANY SLAPS IN THE FACE - e.g. GOAL: ACHIEVE  
PROPER FRIS IN NEXT 10 YRS - WE HAD IT ON A  
2.5 YR RTN IN 2003 & THIS IS DESPITE BURN "BANS" BY  
DNR AN ALL PARK BAN BY DNR IN 1984. BY 2012 THE PARK  
WAS ON A 2.5 YEAR RETURN INTERVAL. NOW, THERE ARE  
ZONES THAT HAVE NOT BURNED IN 6+ YRS & CRUDE CHOPPINGS  
OVER

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~~HAS~~ INCREASED THE WOODY / HERBACEOUS  
RATIO BECAUSE OF ROUTINE SOIL PENETRATION  
ON ~~THE~~ MANY RHIZOMACEOUS SPECIES. THE  
1ST 2 PLANS GET FS & THIS ONE IS BARELY  
A D. AS SOMEONE WITH MORE  
"INSTITUTIONAL" KNOWLEDGE THAN ANYONE <sup>(HISTORIC FIM  
1945-2003)</sup>  
ALIVE I WILL BE HAPPY TO HELP BECAUSE  
MYAKKA MANAGEMENT IS BAD CURRENTLY.

NO CRITICISM OF WRITERS - THEY DON'T  
KNOW ABOUT RESPONSIBLE RES. MGT ACTIONS  
& HAVE NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN RESEARCH OR  
ON THE GROUND. MGT. A "PLAN" DOES NOT  
ASSURE IT WILL BE ADHERED TO.

LOSE THE ELEVATION MAP. <sup>PLANS ARE CHEAP &  
NO SKILL TO REPRODUCE  
FOR U.M.P.</sup>

*[Handwritten Signature]*

*mrpyrorata@verizon.*

NET

941-650-4726

NEED VIS. DEMO GRAPHICS PERFORMED  
TO GUIDE ANY FUTURE DEVELOPMENT - IT WILL  
TREND HEAVILY TO "SR. CITIZENS"

ADDITIONAL, MORE COGENT COMMENTS WILL  
BE SENT VIA E-MAIL PRIOR TO 2/0



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THANK you for the plan revisions  
Non consumptive use  
Cattle grazing off the table  
palm frond collecting off the table  
etc.

In a time of tight money how can FPS not  
collect percentage of income from boat concession.  
The park is losing a ton of money not collecting \$\$\$  
even under temporary circumstances.!!!!

Please better monitor tours for inappropriate  
behavior. They are sometimes the only contact a park  
visitor has and they need to provide the best tour possible  
and protect wildlife at the same time.  
Jill Farrell



## MYAKKA RIVER MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

**Council concern:** Scant recognition of the Wild and Scenic River Designation, Myakka River Rule and Management Plan

**Suggested Fix:** Add one page summarizing how the Statute, Rule, and Management Plan affect management of the park

**Jan '19 Draft:** Page 1 The Myakka Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act constrains use of the property within the "River Area", as defined by the Act.

Page 2. The Act also directed the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to adopt rules and a permitting program to regulate activities within the protected River Area.

Page 7. This management plan update for Myakka River State Park was developed with the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council as a key stakeholder in an effort to align the objectives outlined in the Myakka River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan.

Page 53. Development will not detract from, nor overshadow the splendor of surrounding natural and cultural resources, and minimize impact to the viewshed of the Myakka Prairie and the Myakka Wild and Scenic River.

Page 108. The Act instructed DEP to adopt rules and a permitting program to regulate activities within these protected areas. . .

Following Page 108. PROTECTED AND DEVELOPED AREAS MAP

Page 111: For any activity not covered under a preexisting use exemption, the DRP will complete the necessary process to obtain a Myakka River permit.

The Protected and Developed Areas Map shows the River Area and the Myakka River Protection Zone, as well as the currently developed areas of the park. Proposed developments applying for a Myakka River permit will be considered for approval or denial based on parameters set out by the Rule. Recreational carrying capacity concerns should also be considered prior to applying for a Myakka River permit.

Page 118: As stated previously, most of the park's use areas are within the protected river area. Any improvement that expands the footprint of an existing structure or new development, including road paving, within the protected river area will require a Myakka River permit. The DRP will complete the permitting process as needed and will comply with all regulations governing the river area.

Page 119: New picnicking amenities could potentially benefit the visitor experience at the park. For example, the picnic tables to the north of the concession building at the Upper Myakka Lake area are frequently used by visitors waiting for the boat tour.

All of these new recreational developments, if approved by the master planning process, would require Myakka River permits.

**Analysis:** The current draft provided much improved recognition of the Act, Plan, and Rule, which can be hard to summarize. The Act and Rule are included in the Appendices, however the Appendices are now a separate document and the River Rule is not identified with a header in the Appendix – it simply launches in with definitions.

This section would be improved by simply stating that, in general, "any activity which adversely impacts resource values" requires a permit and all activities in the River Area "are presumed to have adverse impacts".

It is worth noting that, despite passage of the Act and Rule, historically the Park has not sought permits for activities in the River Area.

**Council Concern:** No analysis of visual impact on recreational river user – no avoidance of new impacts, and no proposals to remove or ameliorate existing visual intrusions

**Suggested Fix:** Add “avoid or” to all references to minimizing impacts on river values

**Jan '19 Draft:**

Page 112: Potential resource impacts are also identified and assessed as part of the site planning process once funding is available for facility development.

Creation of impervious surfaces is minimized to the greatest extent feasible in order to limit the need for stormwater management systems, and all facilities are designed and constructed using best management practices to limit and avoid resource impacts.

Page 117: Current recreational demand indicates that gradual redevelopment of the park’s existing use areas will be needed to maintain the balance between safe public access and protection of park resources. To address this challenge, the DRP will create a comprehensive vision for the park through the development of a new conceptual master plan. The master plan will address potential redesign of the park’s most popular day use destinations through careful consideration of interpretative programming, recreational activities, park operations, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, accessibility, critical viewsheds, and potential impacts to the park’s natural and cultural resources.

Page 119: Implementation of all proposed park improvements will need to carefully evaluate potential impacts to the viewshed of the Myakka Wild and Scenic River. Designs should minimize the intrusion of manmade elements into the river’s critical viewshed.

**Analysis:** Although the document could be more emphatic in advocating avoidance of impacts, the word “avoid” does make an appearance on page 112.

**Council Concern:** Capricious and inaccurate mapping of Protection Zone Floodplain, which excludes most development

**Suggested Fix:**

**Jan '19 Draft:**

Following Page 108: Protected and Developed Areas Map

Page 112: The Visitor Experience Zones (VEZ) are a series of geographic designations that will help guide future land use and resource management decision-making. These designations will shape the types of recreation opportunities offered within an area and help determine the contextual design of recreational facilities in each area.

Following Page 112: Visitor Experience Zones Map

**ANALYSIS:** The term “Protected Zone” which was featured on page 118 in the June 2018 draft appears nowhere in the current draft. And while there is a Protected and Developed Areas Map, there is no discussion regarding, or definition of, a ‘Protected Area’. Instead, or possibly in addition to, a new set of terms related to Visitor Experience Zones. These zones are not based on how people use the park recreationally, but rather on existing management zones that were created independently of any recreational consideration. In addition, the “developed areas are VERY small on the Protected and Developed Areas Map, and are not depicted on the more detailed South Entrance and Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Areas Map. As a result, there is a lot of ambiguity about the status of the former Protected Zones, the implications of the Visitor Experience Zones, and the rules used for mapping Developed Areas accurately.

**Council concern:** Still no Recreational Carrying Capacity Study

**Suggested Fixes:** Find short term funding for recreational carrying capacity study and complete study before proposing increased uses in river area. Hold off on increased recreational opportunities in the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use River area until completion of the recreational carrying capacity study.

**Jan '19 Draft:**

**Page 20:**

Action 1	Support the efforts of the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council to determine an appropriate recreational carrying capacity for segments of the Myakka River located within the park.	Study completed	UFN	\$110,000
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Page 111: Given the conceptual nature of this management plan, site-specific plans and designs are not included in this update. As such, future recreational carrying capacity cannot be calculated with an acceptable degree of accuracy. However, the development vision for Myakka River State Park is largely focused on improving the visitor experience within the current facilities footprint, and new infrastructure proposals are not intended to increase the capacity of the park.

Proposed developments applying for a Myakka River permit will be considered for approval or denial based on parameters set out by the Rule. Recreational carrying capacity concerns should also be considered prior to applying for a Myakka River permit. In the following sections, it will be specified which developments proposed by the DRP will be required to complete the Myakka River permitting process.

Page 116: The DRP currently develops recreational carrying capacity based on formulas that provide a range of visitors per unit of measurement (see Appendix 10). This is a crude method of calculation that has been systematically applied to all state park units. While simple and easily applied for general estimates, the drawback of this method is that it struggles to take into account regional variations in recreational use, and, in the case of Myakka River State Park, is not tailored for additional layers of resource protection.

In addition to a conceptual master plan for the park, the DRP should prioritize working with the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council and other relevant stakeholders to develop a recreational carrying capacity study for the Myakka River.

**ANALYSIS:** The need for a recreational carrying capacity study is not simply a desire of the MRMCC and a goal of the Management Plan. It is an explicit requirement of the statute passed in 1985 and an explicit finding/recommendation of the 2014 Land Management Review. It needs to be a short term funded project, especially in light of proposed increased recreational uses of the River.

(5) DEVELOPMENT OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

(c) The proposed management plan shall include provision for:

3. Periodic studies to determine the quantity and mixture of recreation and other public uses which can be permitted without adverse impact on the resource values of the river area.

*October 10, 2014 MRSP Land Management Review*

The team recognizes the increased visitation to the area, and the team recommends that carrying capacity and infrastructure needs to be studied, and solutions be explored. (6+0-)

***Managing Agency Response:*** *Agree. A study of the park's carrying capacity and infrastructure needs will be addressed in the next Unit Management Plan. Costs associated with the study will be included in the plan, but can only be allocated as fund become available on a statewide priority needs basis.*

Finally the current draft shows dramatic increases in proposed recreational use, increases not simply in terms of the current carrying capacity, but even in terms of the June 2018 draft.

According to the June 2018 draft, the existing capacity was 4202 and was proposed to increase to 4362. The January 2019 draft shows a total increase to 5,582. The only proposed increase in 2018 was Picnicking.

This 2019 draft shows changes in three uses relevant to the Wild and Scenic River:

Canoe and Kayaking proposed numbers were reduced from 240 to 140, but neither of these figures involved an analysis of impact on river area resources. There is no data or analysis to suggest these numbers do not impact river resources or values.

Power Boating (Overall proposed increase from 132 to 140, despite there only being parking for 7 boat trailers). This is complete overkill for Upper Myakka Lake. There's no documentation of demand, nor is any data or analysis to suggest these numbers do not impact river resources or values.

Boat tours (Overall proposed increase from 210 to 800, from 3 trips a day with 70 people to 8 trips a day with 100.) The boat tour increases are apparently being rationalized on a premise

that tour boat operators have previously been operating in violation of existing carrying capacity limits, as if, persistently breaking the law somehow changes the law. No data was presented to document increased use in excess of adopted carrying capacity and no justification is provided Any increase above 210 should require a permit and the permit should be based on a recreational carrying capacity study. And DEP needs to express a commitment to enforce the carrying capacity limits it does establish.



**From:** [paul kiefer](#)  
**To:** [FLStateParkPlanning](#)  
**Subject:** Myaka River State Park  
**Date:** Thursday, February 7, 2019 8:38:07 PM

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Have heard above proposed resource use for cattle and tree harvest on the Myaka site. I don't understand how the related to the preservation of this land. I thought parks and preserves were more like museum pieces to be looked at and enjoyed but not touched. Same goes for the Savannah site.

Paul Kiefer  
Dade City, FL

**From:** Sarah Hollenhorst <[sarahlh7101@gmail.com](mailto:sarahlh7101@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 07, 2019 8:10 PM  
**To:** Maldonado, Tyler <[Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us)>  
**Subject:** Myakka River UMP

Sarah Hollenhorst  
9347 SW Raccoon Trail  
Arcadia, FL 34266  
863-244-1663

Re Myakka Park. I want the park to be as natural as possible. I want controlled burns, primitive trails and camping, no development for recreation beyond improvements by bridge for canoe and kayak launching. I do not like that a roller disc is used to clear brush, making it impossible for wire grass to recover. I like the uniqueness of Myakka, real Florida and I definitely am strongly against cattle grazing, logging and stumping, and I'm especially against hunting. I want the museum exhibits improved into an educational center at the front.

I want the state and DEP to stop issuing expansion permits to Mosaic for mining. The Myakka River will be impacted due to watershed damage and possible spills. Protect our Park, stop catering to Mosaic!

**From:** [Maldonado, Tyler](#)  
**To:** [Baxley, Demi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Comment on Myakka River State Park UMP  
**Date:** Monday, February 11, 2019 12:12:09 PM  
**Attachments:** [MRSP UMP Comment Letter.docx](#)

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### More Myakka comments

**From:** Julie Morris <myakkajulie@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 08, 2019 9:06 PM  
**To:** Maldonado, Tyler <Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** Comment on Myakka River State Park UMP

Dear Tyler,

Please find attached my comment letter on the MRSP Unit Management Plan. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Julie Morris

Feb. 8, 2019

Julie Morris  
4535 45<sup>th</sup> Court  
Sarasota, FL 34234

Tyler. Maldonado  
Office of Park Planning  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Recreation and Parks  
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard , MS525  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Regarding: Myakka River State Park Unit Management Plan

Dear Tyler,

I urge you to include proactive measures in the Unit Management Plan to address the water that enters the park from the upper watershed of the Myakka River. The park managers should be actively involved in decisions by state, regional, local, and federal agencies and institutions that have the potential to protect and restore the timing, quantity and quality of river water that reaches Myakka River State Park from the upper watershed.

- The UMP notes that dry season flows entering the park began to increase in the 1970's due to increased dry season agricultural irrigation upstream. The river habitats and wildlife are not adapted to dry season flows of mineralized ground water as agricultural tailwater.
- The UMP also notes that water quality impairments in Howard Creek and Clay Gully are having a negative effect in the Upper Lake and the park.

The Land Use Component section of the UMP does not address the land use change trends in the upper Myakka River watershed. Conversion of low intensity native range to more intense land uses – row crops, dairies, fish farms, and residential development- will accelerate changes in the timing, flow, and quality of the water entering Myakka Park. These changes will be challenging for the management of the river and the wetlands associated with the river in the park. I urge you to add a section to the Land Use Component that describes both the historic trends and projected future changes in land use upstream of the Park.

Sincerely,

Julie Morris

**From:** [Maldonado, Tyler](#)  
**To:** [Baxley, Demi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: UMP Comments  
**Date:** Monday, February 11, 2019 12:12:21 PM

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Myakka

**From:** mrpyrorat@verizon.net <mrpyrorat@verizon.net>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 08, 2019 6:04 PM  
**To:** Maldonado, Tyler <Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** Fwd: UMP Comments

Mr. Maldonado, as you can see, I have more than a few "problems" with the current MRSP UMP draft. As you do not know me I will give you a brief "resume" : Park Manager MRSP Sept 21, '79-March 1, 1988. District 8 Manager March1, '88-Jan 1, '93. Jan 1, '93-Jan 4, 2003 Park Manager MRSP. Taught at Ranger Academy 16 years (Rx fire, plant and animal ID), Member of the cadre that developed the Inter-Agency Prescribed Fire Course. Taught Ecological Effects, planning, firing techniques, history of fire in Florida at the IAPFC and served as a burning instructor for 15 years, Asked to teach Ecological Effects and served as an on-site burn instructor at both in-state and out-of-state courses for The Nature Conservancy Fire Team Leadership Training, asked to do a management of Tall Timbers Research Station twice, asked to present programs on prairie restoration at Statewide FWC biologists meeting, asked to present a paper on prairie restoration to the first Florida Dry Prairie Conference, taught all the Forestry S courses and a USFS course on pyric communities of the U.S., accepted the 1993 Resource Manager of the Year Award and traded the \$4000 Resource Mgt course at Penn State for \$4000 in my park budget to conduct RM activities, asked to present courses on burning and Ecological Effects of Fire for the NRCS. Asked to present a paper at a Tall Timbers Research Station conference, asked by Florida Audubon to author a piece on Rx fire which they published. . . . . that is quite enough. Oh, while doing the above we managed to do over 100 work projects my first 5 years at MRSP, gain grants for hydrological restoration, a Sect of State Cultural Resource Grant, solicited researchers from universities to study longleaf pine demographics (by the way, research has demonstrated that at least 1% of longleaf pine are struck by lightning each year so if you have 700 trees occupying an area of MRSP you can expect 7 to get popped by one or more lightning bolts and get crisped), remove 2 non-performing concessionaires and replace with high performers, lowered 3 miles to the old RR bed to grade (which is not mapped on your altered areas maps or referred to elsewhere), and somehow managed to burn zones which we created (we needed only 13, as we burned up to 3200 acres at a time) until they were on a 2.8 year return interval despite 4 DOF (now FFS) spring burn bans and a DRP burn ban in '84. I truly wish to help the park get on track which it is not at all currently in any of the "Big 5". I sent the below comments to Jono Miller, Valinda Subic, Chris Becker, and David Clark.

Cheers, R Dye

I have yet to make any comments owing to the overwhelming number of incorrect statements, vague objectives, omissions, and alleged achievements within it. Yes, this draft is a major improvement; however, to me, it follows a really bad one which supplanted an extraordinarily horrible one. This one is simply bad despite the work done on it by Paula and Chris Becker, both of whom concentrated on management guidelines and a more realistic description of the true character of Florida dry prairie. My belief is that a UMP must be factual, serving as a guide for the management of the park and as a measuring stick for determination of the level of management the park is receiving--SOMETHING TO HOLD MANAGERS, AND DISTRICT STAFF OVERSEEING, THEM RESPONSIBLE. Of course, the plan is only good if the park's manager reads it and adheres to the guidelines. And, the district requires park management to strictly adhere to the tenets of the plan and stipulations made in RM contracts to achieve the desired outcome of work performed. There have been repeated "mistakes" by contractors at MRSP

(which should have been closely monitored by park management) and the supervisors/subcontractors of F4Tech have not complied with contract requisites in a number of cases. Double roller-chopping has occurred in some zones, part of a prairie zone FNAI deemed "representative Florida dry prairie" was chopped "by mistake" despite requirements dictating on-site meetings prior to the conducting of work, cabbage palms within hydric hammock were felled by subcontractor workers for some unknown reason, gopher tortoise burrows have been chopped over and areas containing cogon grass were chopped rather than skirted as required by contract, the 1-4 acre/10 acre skips to be left when chopping noted in the 2004 UMP have not been created, and other practices performed have been done contrary to requirements of contracts and the extant UMP. There is currently no oversight of any resource management measures and the burn zones, which met the required interfire interval when Paula Benschhoff retired in 2012, now have gone from the 2.5 year interval she attained, to 21 zones not having burned in over 4 years. There are 10 zones which have not received fire in 6+ years and 7 of these have gone 7-8 years unburned. Yet, the handful of zones burned since the winter of 2016, have primarily been burned following chopping, thus burying groundcover which was then exposed to damaging, hotter, longer glowing phase/residence time. Great resource sensitivity huh? Oh, and the bulk of zones burned in '17 were done in the fall which is the worst time to burn.

Additionally, rather than burning "backlog" zones, the burning conducted has all been in zones that had been burned 2-3 years previously rather than those unburned for 4+ years. Who reviews annual burn plans? The UMP writers often refer to a decades long period of fire exclusion and address oaks which encroached onto the prairie, quoting the '91 publication by Jean Huffman and Sarah Blanchard. The bulk of the encroachment existed between the All Weather Road and the pseudo-hammock to the west. This "encroachment" was resolved by 2003, so why quote a 1991 document when the condition described no longer exists some 29 years after the research was done? That did not happen because not a soul currently working for the park service has a whit of institutional knowledge of the changes brought about by management practices performed At MRSP from 1980-2012. The park, at least until 2015, had been BURNED APPROPRIATELY FOR MORE THAN 3 DECADES!

It does NOT suffer from 30 decades or more of fire exclusion/suppression as it did nearly 40 years ago though it seems to be heading that way. Planners in Tallahassee simply do not possess much resource management expertise (and I do not expect them to) beyond that which is told to them by those who have no inkling. Low water crossings were successful? Ha! Any thinking person should recognize that sheetflow moving southward will seek the lowest outlet when dammed up by an old RR grade/powerline which runs E/W. Thus, the lower water crossing gets blown out annually with "normal" rainfall with the result being channeling of the flow (isn't that what ditches do?) and prevention of use of the travel-way. Then, it does not get repaired for over a year just like the washed out bridge at Backbone Gulley which blew out in the summer of '17 and was still not repaired as of December of '18. It may still be unrepaired. Let's move disked lines to the side of the road (never mind that the same gradient exists) so we can "prevent erosion". So now we have a disked line and a road susceptible to erosion? How successful is that? What an accomplishment it is to put an 8' fireline along a road (and go to the unnecessary expense of disking it, and all others, twice per year) when the same road used to be burned off of with no disking. A UMP which emphasizes the need to control exotic animals should not state on the very first page that - "Wildlife viewing in the park is exceptional, particularly in the wintertime when groups of white pelicans, flamboyant roseate spoonbills and black-bellied whistling ducks are common." Besides being exotics with a natural distribution from extreme south Texas to Argentina, and year-round residents here, these ducks compete with wood ducks, screech and barred



owls, and pileated woodpeckers for nesting cavities. Myakka's population stems from early '70s releases at Sarasota Lakes (pers. comm., Ken Alvarez) although there were undoubtedly other releases in Florida as they are now the most common duck seen in Charlotte County and have been observed in north Florida as well. Quite a number of objectives should start with ACHIEVE rather than continue. And the list goes on. I will burden you no longer other than, once again, assuring you this draft needs more than a little editing. I hope you will be supportive of my desire to see this become a factual, realistic document.

**From:** [Maldonado, Tyler](#)  
**To:** [Baxley, Demi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Jono Comments MRSP Jan '19 draft UMP  
**Date:** Monday, February 11, 2019 12:14:27 PM  
**Attachments:** [UMP MYakkaj jan 19 v2 .pptx](#)  
[Myakka RSP Jan '19 UMP.docx](#)

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## Myakka – Just document the Word file for this one

**From:** Jono Miller <jonosarasota@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 08, 2019 11:30 AM  
**To:** Maldonado, Tyler <Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Cc:** Subic, Valinda <Valinda.Subic@FloridaDEP.gov>; Becker, Chris <Chris.Becker@dep.state.fl.us>; Giguere, Stephen <Stephen.Giguere@dep.state.fl.us>; Oliver, James <James.Oliver@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** Jono Comments MRSP Jan '19 draft UMP

Tyler:

It turns out I have 1.83 TB (and nearly 300 files) in my Myakka UMP folder. I'm hoping this will be over soon.

You have done a great job. We've come so far from the earliest approaches that still reflected the resource extraction model of a prior administration. Paula Benschoff and her network of former MRSP employees (working with Chris Becker) have vastly improved issues related to natural resource management and corrected several factual errors. The timber assessment has been relegated to its proper place. The graphics have improved. Problems remain, but overall, the January 2019 draft UMP is far superior to any of its predecessors.

Although I am deeply interested in and concerned about the management of the hammocks and prairies away from the river, as chair of the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council, I've focused on issues related to the Act, Plan, and Rule. The attached comments are my own, although they generally follow concerns raised and formally adopted by the Council.

My largest remaining concerns relate to the plan still showing increased recreational use in the river area at the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area (UMLDUA). It's hard to beat the advice: "When you are in a hole, stop digging." For a third of a century DRP has basically ignored key mandates of the Myakka River Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act. This is most obvious at the UMLDUA, the most congested area of the park that, according to the January 2019 draft, is being programmed for failure with a "carrying capacity" potential of 730 people attempting to use a site with only 145 parking spaces.

It may be outside your purview to reduce proposed recreational activity increases at the UMLDUA. If so, I hope you will forward this up the chain. As I write in my comments: ". . . now is not the time for the Division of Recreation and Parks and the Office of Park Planning to project increased recreational use in the river area, particularly in the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area. Instead, it is time to reassess the sometimes contradictory aims of the park and the Act/Rule, bring proposed future changes into the required permitting process, initiate the master planning process, and undertake the long-awaited

*and much needed carrying capacity study."*

I've attached a copy of the Powerpoint I presented at the most recent Council meeting. You should also note that the bulleted items in the Land Management Review section on page 90 end abruptly and are incomplete.

There are some information requests buried in my comments. If you'd like I can break them out in a separate email.

I'm hoping to see a revised draft with no intensification of impacts at the UMLDUA and I look forward to working with you and other stakeholders on a long range vision for the park via the master planning process. Please feel free to call me at any time.

Sincerely,

Jono Miller  
941-320-3846

# Comments of Jono Miller

jonosarasota@gmail.com

RE: Myakka River State Park Jan. 2019 Draft Unit Management Plan

I applaud the general inclination to move contentious issues to the master planning stage where they can be dealt with a level of detail and stakeholder participation not possible, or appropriate, in a UMP.

Therefore, I am troubled and confused by provisions of the January 2019 draft UMP that reflect increasing levels of recreational use above the levels adopted in the current UMP. I am most concerned about increased recreational pressure on the river and lake and the implications for the most congested area of the park, the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area (UMLDUA), all of which is in the River Area and therefore subject to the most stringent provisions of the Myakka River Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act.

On Page A 10 -1, at the bottom of the page, is the following language: “**. . .communities which are considered to be rare or endangered will be avoided. These areas best serve the public in scenic, interpretive, and biological categories.**”

A review of the rivers on the west coast of Florida reveals that from the Suwannee River to Flamingo in Everglades National Park, there are only two remaining rivers with naturally occurring, permanent freshwater mid-stream lakes – Lettuce Lake on the Hillsborough, and Upper and Lower Lakes on the Myakka.\* Since Lettuce Lake Park is managed by Hillsborough County, Upper and Lower Myakka Lakes are the only FNAI River Floodplain or Swamp Lakes managed by DEP on the west coast of the Florida peninsula – a fact that argues for their consideration as rare or endangered communities worthy of reduced development.

Since Floodplain or Swamp Lakes are not included in Attachment A, we are left with Attachment B for guidance. The fifth paragraph on A 10-2 makes the case that: “**For State Parks, . . .the carrying capacity should be reduced to insure compatibility with the management objectives of each category.**” (BTW Page A 10-2 ends without a period.)

- Lake Rousseau on the Withlacoochee was created more than a century ago. Lake Hicopochee was incorporated in the Okeechobee Waterway. Lake Hancock is considered the headwaters of the Peace River and not a lake occurring along the main stem of the river.



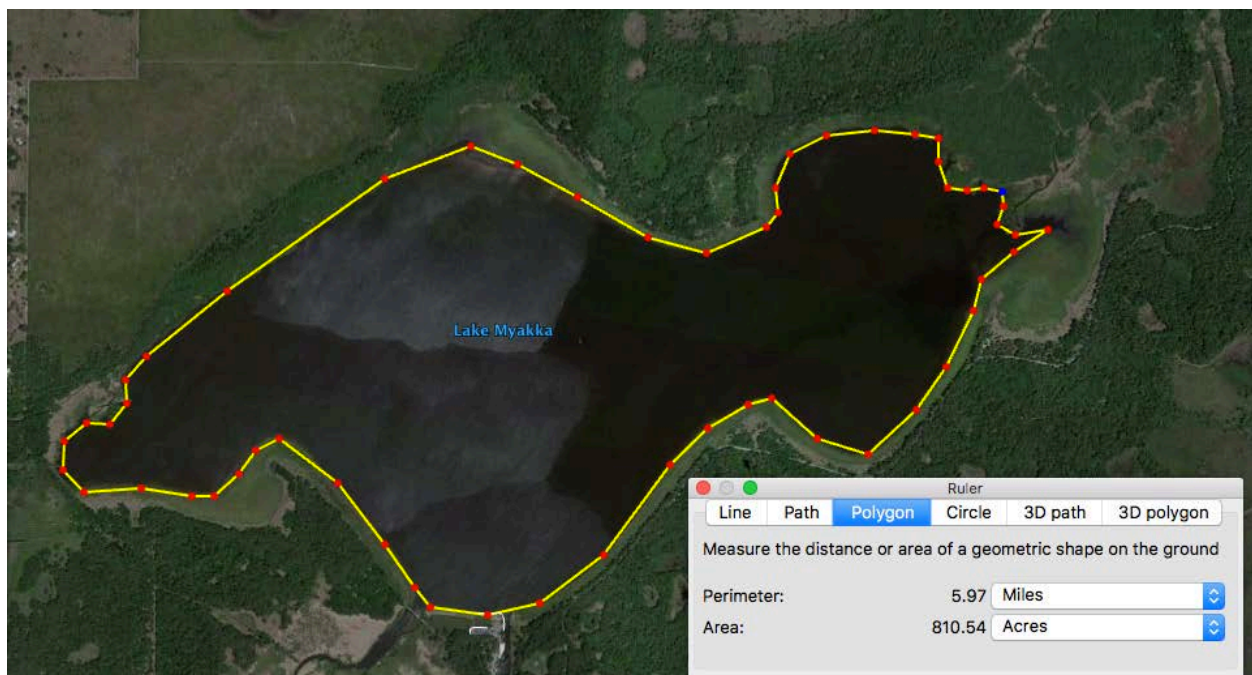
# POWERBOATS

The current 2004 UMP sets the carrying capacity for unlimited powerboats at 132. This is based on four people in a boat. That is a generic rule of thumb, not based on data from Myakka Park. Why wouldn't we be measuring boating by the number of boats? Anyway, that created a carrying capacity of 33 boats.

The January 2019 draft proposes increasing this to 35 vessels. No data or analysis is presented in the draft UMP to either to establish a revised demand level or assess direct (noise, wildlife flushing, etc.) and indirect (parking, pedestrian congestion) impacts of this proposed increase. In the absence of any analysis justifying a change, the figure should either remain as it is, or be revised lower pending review during the master planning process, or via the mandated carrying capacity studies and permitting process.

Furthermore, why is the Office of Park Planning using the "unlimited power" category instead of what would seem to be more appropriate: "limited power", since 62D-15.012 (1) mandates a slow/minimum wake speed within the park. Who's going to drag a 40' Donzi GT with twin 400 Horsepower Mercury Vorado engines to an extremely shallow lake with manatees and slow/minimum wake speed zone??

As noted, limited power would seem to be much more appropriate than unlimited power. Attachment B, page A10-6 suggests one 10 horsepower or less boat for every 5 to 10 acres with a turnover rate of twice a day. At 810 acres (see figure) and the higher ten-acre figure, that would be 81 boats at one time or 162 boats a day total, with two people per boat, which would be 324 people on Upper Myakka Lake, which I argue is clearly ridiculous. There is no explanation for how these boats would access the lake.



Yet the January 2019 UMP is advocating using the unlimited power standard, increasing the acreage per boat to 25 acres, which (at 810 acres) still yields 32.4 boats at one time. So if seven trailers occupied the existing boat trailer parking, then the 25 other trailers would consume 39 car parking stalls and create seven illegal parking situations (see illustration).



This would be a parking disaster for the already clogged Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area and a clear repudiation of the concept that **communities which are considered to be rare or endangered will be avoided**. 32 boats on the Upper Lake at one time is the sort of illogical outcome that causes the public to question the common sense of the agency.

Since the boats will arrive on trailers, the relevant metric needs to be boat trailer parking.

This situation raises an important point: there are two distinct types of “carrying capacity”: Self-limiting and non-self-limiting. There are 90 campsites (although I’m not sure all are actually RV campsites). When all 90 are booked, additional prospective campers are told there are no campsites. You can’t have 110 vehicle campers on a busy day because there aren’t 20 additional places to put them – this number is self-limiting.

But boats on lake doesn’t become self-enforcing until some absurd limit is reached. If a hypothetical boat is ten feet long and eight feet wide, then Upper Myakka Lake could hold over 441,000 boats – clearly a different approach is needed and that’s why boat trailer parking areas make sense –the system is self-limiting.

Until carrying capacity studies are completed and permits secured, Upper Myakka Lake should be limited to seven under 10 HP boats at any one time. That’s because these boats will arrive on trailers and there are only parking places for (at most) seven trailers.

## CANOES AND KAYAKS

The current 2004 UMP sets the carrying capacity for canoes/kayaks at 120, with one turnover for a total of 240. The previous UMP draft kept the number at 240. The January 2019 draft reduces this total to 70, with one turnover, for a total of 140. That's an improvement, but again, no data or analysis based on actual park demand is presented. Here again, wildlife flushing is an important issue. Poikilothermic animals such as alligators, turtles, and snakes sometimes need to sunbathe in order to regulate their metabolism. Perhaps paddling access on the river should be regulated based on some relationship between air temperature, water temperature, and solar gain, but this is a technical matter best left for the master planning process and/or the recreational carrying capacity study.

Because canoes and kayaks can be carried on car-tops, and because canoes can be rented in the park, there is no comparable self-limiting parking factor for paddle craft. There are three more or less distinct paddling opportunities in the Park: the Wilderness Area, the Upper Lake, and the river from the Upper Lake to the Pavilion just north of Highway 72. The Wilderness Area has an established capacity, although it can be consumed entirely by hikers, leaving no paddling access to the Lower Lake on any given day.

Paddling in the Upper Lake is an example of "still water" paddling described on A10-6. Using the most conservative figure offered (10 acres per boat) yields an unlikely 81 canoes or kayaks at one time on the Upper Lake. If these craft arrived one per vehicle they would occupy more than all the paved parking adjacent to the boat launch area. That makes no sense. Until limits based on the situation at MRSP can be established, I'd suggest limiting paddle craft to 1.5 times the number of craft currently available for rent at the UMLDUA.

The table on A10-6 shows that boating "no-power", moving water should be 2 to 10 boats per mile. Based on both the admonition (cited above) to reduce capacity inside state parks, and the Wild and Scenic status of the Upper Lake and River, two would seem to be the appropriate number. So for the 4.25 miles from the boat basin to the pavilion north of Highway 72, that would yield 9 (8.5) boats with one turnover for a total of 18 boats a day.

At the Myakka UMP meeting it was emphasized that the so-called "carrying capacity" numbers are "not a limit or cap". Yet, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 I drove a hundred miles to a public information session on the Weeki Wachee River. I learned that [paddling there is regulated](#) in the State Park. "Reservations are required for all boats launching (private boats included) to ensure you have the best adventure possible." So while Myakka paddling numbers are not a limit or cap, there is no reason why there couldn't be and several reasons why there should be.

Until carrying capacity studies are completed and permits secured, canoes and kayaks on the river north of 72 should be limited to nine boats at any one time. Paddling on the Upper Lake should accommodate current rental levels and some private boats until real carrying capacity numbers are established.

## BOAT TOURS

The current 2004 UMP sets the carrying capacity for “airboat” (the Gator Gal) at three trips a day of 70 people (max) on each trip for a total of 210 people. The June 2018 draft UMP proposed keeping the numbers at 70 and 210. I am unaware of any public testimony advocating any increase in these numbers. (If such testimony or correspondence exists, I would appreciate seeing a copy).

However, the January 2019 draft proposes increasing this to seventy people (max) to eight trips a day of 100 people (max). Somehow, between June of 2018 and January of 2019 the number of trips was increased 166%. No justification for this increase is included in the draft UMP, even though an argument is made for additional picnicking opportunities.

I have heard assertions that at times the Gator Gal exceeded the carrying capacity numbers, although no documentation has been provided to substantiate this claim. The 2004 UMP (page 53) was quite clear that the optimum capacity of 3 trips/70 passengers was determined by applying guidelines “*which estimate the physical capacity of the unit’s natural communities to withstand recreational uses without significant degradation.*” That creates a clear presumption that any uses exceeding the optimum represent some level of degradation, an outcome both the Optimum Carrying Capacity process, the Act, and the Rule are designed to prevent.

As you know, passage of the Wild and Scenic River Act in 1985 mandated a management plan that would F.S. 258.501 (5) (c) 3. “*Continuation of land uses and developments on private lands within the river area which are in existence on January 1, 1986.*” The subsequent Act “grandfathered” both agricultural and forestry practices [(5) (c) 7.] and land uses and developments **on private lands** within the River Area which were in existence on January 1, 1986 [(5) (c) 2.].

Page 111 of the Jan. 2109 draft UMP refers “pre-existing use exemptions”, but I don’t find any wording in the Act or Rule that grandfathers activities **on public lands** in the River Area. Please let me know if you find some. Clearly, there is a valid public interest test explicitly invoked in the Legislative Declaration of the Act, but that commitment to accommodating “all of the diverse interests involved” was meant to be a function of the permitting process.

Even though it should have, I don’t believe the prior “Gator Gal” airboat tour ever sought a permit, pursuant to the Rule, which took effect on July 22 of 1991. Now there is a new vessel, with a new means of propulsion, and with added capacity and new wildlife hazards (and possibly a new route?) that needs adjustments to their docking facility. The following provisions of the Rule mandate that a permit be sought for any adjustment to docking facilities.

- (d) *Constructing, installing, expanding, or renovating marinas, landings, boat ramps, docks, mooring buoys, pilings, dolphins, decks, or piers;*
- (k) *Constructing, erecting, installing any form of structure related to a water-dependent activity, or any other structures in the river area;*
- (m) *Establishing recreational facilities on publicly owned portions of the river area; and,*
- (n) *Any other activity not subject to Rule 62D-15.006, F.A.C., conducted or proposed to be*

*conducted after the effective date of this rule within the river area which adversely impacts resource values in the river area.*

When I first started going to the park in the 70's, I was told the noisy Gator Gal ("largest airboat in the world") was employed because propeller driven craft spread invasive exotic aquatic weeds such as *Hydrilla*. I don't know if spreading invasive aquatic vegetation is still a concern, but a new concern has emerged: manatees. While it is true that hull strikes are also a potential problem for manatees, the risk of propeller damage to manatees needs to be factored into permitting for the new vessel.

Why does the new vessel need to be permitted?

- 1) The Act (10) (a) is very clearly states that "*No person shall conduct any activity within the river area which will or may have an adverse impact on any resource value in the river area without first having received a permit from the department.*"
- 2) In addition, the Act mandates that the Management Plan include provision for (5) (c) 3. *Periodic studies to determine the quantity and mixture of recreation and other public uses which can be permitted without adverse impact on the resource values of the river area.*" Either DNR and/or DEP have prepared such periodic studies (in which case I am asking for copies) or the agency hasn't, in which case it needs to do so.
- 3) In addition, the Act mandates that the Management Plan include provision for (5) (c) 4. *Regulation, control, and distribution of public access where necessary to protect and enhance the resource values of the river area.*" Since I know from personal experience that, at least on one occasion, the current craft has been deliberately steered in a manner to motivate alligators to enter the water, I have to ask what analysis has been conducted to assess the impact on river values. If there is none, it seems inappropriate to increase the use level. The extent to which flushing wildlife is a problem would need to be evaluated in the course of permit review and cannot be adequately addressed in the UMP.
- 4) Showing an increase in recreational use via boat tours in the new UMP presupposes the outcome of the permitting process and might inappropriately encourage the vendor to invest in an enterprise that either cannot be permitted or comes with expensive or unacceptable conditions. Presumably the new vendor knew of both the park's adopted carrying capacity standards and the implications of the Act and Rule when bidding on the operation and implicitly agreed to abide by them. Am I wrong to assume the RFP, RFQ, or other solicitation for the boat tour services included these legislative and agency conditions/constraints?

To be clear, the proposed increases in boat tours from three trips a day of seventy people (max) to eight trips a day of 100 people (max) is not simply a 166% increase in the number of trips, and a 281% increase in the number of people per day, they represent two aspects of a complete change in the boat tour operation.

The parking implications alone are daunting, in part because the Appendix 10 is showing that the draft plan apparently anticipates a second vessel. That's as many as 200 people at once. This is crucial. Eight trips of 100 disperses UMLDUA patrons through time. With two vessels operating



simultaneously, instantaneous parking demand doubles even though the daily total remains the same.

Even if all 200 people arrive four to a vehicle (which I suspect is high), that's a minimum of 50 parking spaces consumed for the Boat Tour. So the increase for simultaneous parking is not from 70 people to 100, but from 70 to 200, representing a 185% increase in instantaneous parking demand.

Also at the Upper Lake -- parking needed for the Tram Tours. Page A10-7 shows 2 trips of 100 people each at one time, so that's another 200 people, so another fifty parking spaces?? You have now already exceeded the east west parking lot adjacent to the Upper Lake by 30 vehicles.

But wait, there's more. The UMLDUA is also supposed to accommodate 120 picnickers. If they also arrive four to a vehicle, that's another 30 parking spaces.

It's worth noting that Office of Park Planning is using a limited definition of recreation and ignoring other significant parking pressures on the UMLDUA. For many people gift shopping is a recreational activity and some percentage of patrons at the gift shop are not simply biding their time until the tram or tour boat leaves.

So, between picnicking, paddling, power boating, boat and tram tours, the January 2019 draft UMP is advocating as many as 730 people at the UMLDUA at one time. That's without any people gift shopping, eating in the restaurant, using the rest rooms, wandering over to the spillway, or being lost. So using 800 as a round number, and assuming people arrive four per vehicle, that's a parking demand of 200 parking spaces. Of course, if people show up as couples, that's 400 parking spaces. According to the 2018 draft (page 121) there are only 145 parking spaces at the UMLDUA.

Bottom line: These increased use figures for the UMLDUA represent planning for failure. That's because there is general agreement that this is the most congested area of the park and (because of the Act and Plan) it is not assured that any additional parking can be permitted in the vicinity.\* So long as the majority of visitors arrive at the UMLDUA in private vehicles, no increases in recreational or parking pressure should be proposed for the UMLDUA. Ideally, significant reductions would help.

- From the January draft, page 118. *“Any improvement that expands the footprint of an existing structure or new development, including road paving, within the protected river area will require a Myakka River Permit. The DRP will complete the permitting process as needed and will comply with all regulations governing the river area.”*

## RECREATIONAL USE SUMMARY

In summary, I believe there are several reasons not to increase the potential for recreational use, particularly in the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area.

1. The Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area lies entirely within the River Area, the portion of the Wild and Scenic designation that carries the most restrictions.
2. Many structures and activities have been allowed in the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area without receiving permits as required by the Act and Rule.
3. The Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area is the most congested area of the park.
4. Despite a legislative mandate a third of a century old, a unanimous finding by the Land Management Review team, and several Actions (6.1, 6.2, & 7.1) of the Management Plan, no carrying capacity study has been completed.
5. No data or analysis is included in the draft UMP or appendices to justify increases in water-oriented uses in the river area.
6. Finally, we don't know what the master planning process, permitting process, and the recreational carrying capacity study will reveal.

After a third of a century of ignoring key provisions of the Myakka River Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act now is not the time for the Division of Recreation and Parks and the Office of Park Planning to project increased recreational use in the river area, particularly in the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area. Instead, it is time to reassess the sometimes contradictory aims of the park and the Act/Rule, bring proposed future changes into the required permitting process, initiate the master planning process, and undertake the long-awaited and much needed carrying capacity study.

### **SUGGESTED WORDING FOR PAGE 117**

*Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area:* This is the most congested area of the park and is subjected to significant annual flooding. Virtually all of the area is within the designated Myakka River Area, which prohibits uses that are not water dependent. Conflicting goals [the desire to improve access versus greater protection of the critical viewshed of the Myakka Wild and Scenic River] complicate management. Since a recreational carrying capacity study was mandated by the Act and Management Plan (and none has been completed), before increasing traffic and recreational pressure on this area, a recreational carrying capacity study should be completed. This study will help determine whether recreational opportunities in this area should be increased, maintained, or decreased in order to improve safety, reduce congestion, and better protect the Wild and Scenic River resource values.

# CARRYING CAPACITY STUDY

Regarding the study, the inclusion of Action 1 on page 117 (making it an explicit goal to “*Support the efforts of the MRMCC to determine an appropriate recreational carrying capacity for segments of the Myakka River located within the park.*”) is deeply appreciated, and a big improvement, but seems inverted (and unfunded).

The MRMCC has no budget, no lobbying arm, and submits no Legislative Budget Requests – it is a public-private advisory body created by the Legislature that functions primarily in an advisory role. Instead of DEP supporting the efforts of the Council, shouldn't the Council be supporting DEP in this effort?

Objectives 6 and 7 from the Plan explicitly identify DRP as a lead entity on carrying capacity research. The current Myakka Wild and Scenic Management Plan was adopted by DEP in 2011, which seems tantamount to accepting the responsibility for the three actions listed below.

## **MATERIAL FROM THE ADOPTED MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **OBJECTIVE 6**

**Provide for the regulation, control and distribution of public access to the Myakka River where necessary to protect and enhance the resource values of the river area.**

Action 6.1 - DRP, DEP, DOF and Sarasota County should limit uncontrolled public access to the Myakka River on public lands to the extent allowed by the river's carrying capacity, and include toilets, designated campfire areas, and refuse containers with a suitable vegetated buffer from the river area.

**Status: Public facilities on public lands are located away from the river area. Only day use activities are allowed on public lands at this time with the exception of the primitive campsite along the river in the Myakka State Forest.**

Action 6.2 – Restrict additional public motorboat access on the Myakka River until a recreational carrying capacity is established and enforceable.

DRP shall restrict additional public access on the Myakka River until a recreational carrying capacity is established and enforced. Also, DRP shall monitor and regulate boat traffic in that portion of the Myakka River from State Road 72 to Border Road to study recreational/natural systems carrying capacity, as proposed for further research.

**Status: Access to the Myakka River within the Myakka River Wilderness Preserve from State Road 72 to the south boundary of the park is already restricted to 30 people per day. The natural features of the river from the south boundary of the park to Border Road are usually not conducive to motor boats [shallow depths and navigation hazards (palm logs, fallen trees, and limestone river bottom)].**

**The recreational carrying capacity has not been established however the DRP is currently performing a literature search on projects that have been completed for similar river systems in order to establish a methodology.**

**OBJECTIVE 7**

**Minimize the disturbances to natural resources of the Myakka River from river-related recreational uses.**

Action 7.1 -DRP shall undertake a comprehensive boat utilization study to quantify recreational carrying capacity by river segment.

**Status: Recreational use on the river is recorded by the Environmental Specialist during patrols of the river and on a monthly basis as part of the monthly wildlife survey.**

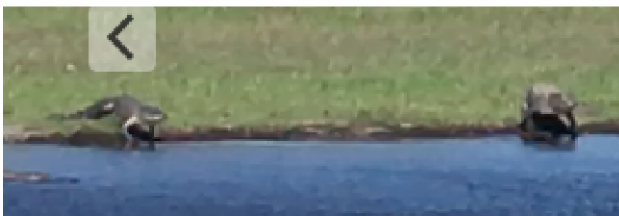
**Within the Myakka River Wilderness Preserve recreational use by all users (hiking, boating, and canoeing/kayaking) is limited to 30 people per day. Permits are issued by Myakka River State Park to regulate this recreational use.**

**A subgroup of the Council members held a preliminary workshop on October 11, 2000, to discuss the feasibility of a recreational carrying capacity study. Ten river segments were identified that had different physical characteristics, accessibility, and type of recreational use. The development of a map with unique characterization of each segment was proposed.**

## *Critique/review of Upper Myakka Lake Boat Tour*

On December 5, 2018, I experienced the Upper Myakka Lake Boat Tour. The temperature was 64°, there was a strong wind generally out of the north and the park gage was reading about 2.27'.

Due to the water level, passengers had to sit in the bow (and initially on the right, starboard side to facilitate leaving the dock). The tour lasted one hour as advertised, and, overall, I felt the information imparted was better than I expected. Content ranged from details about alligators to corny, trip-related jokes. Sample: "**What do you call a gator with GPS?**" Answer: "**A navi-gator.**" A claim of 30-40 pairs of ospreys in the park seemed high to me. Numerous bird species were identified, but several, including glossy ibis, limpkin, and blue-winged teal were not. Conditions were generally poor for seeing wildlife and the operators were clear that nothing was guaranteed. "**The gators are not on the payroll!**" The boat paralleled the north shore ("**I'm going to get you as close as I possibly can!**") resulting in several gators being flushed and entering the water, which was a big hit with those on board. The yellow star locates where we temporarily ran aground.



*Sunbathing gators entering the water in response to boat*

**1. Natural Communities definition should be modified.** MRSP is a dry prairie landscape rather than distinct natural communities.

**2. The Resource Management Story is outdated and inaccurate.** The plan ignores 40 years of restoration.

**3. Mechanical Treatment goals are not based upon needs of the park.** The plan calls for 2,000 acres of mechanical treatment without scientific method of determining the need.

**4. Invasive species objectives inadequate to prevent major ecological damage.** Treating cogongrass infestations every 2 years is inadequate.

**5. Add appendix 13, Instructions for Restoration Roller-chop**



**1. Natural Communities definition should be modified.** (The park does not contain 13 distinct natural communities.)

Why? Park personnel don't understand the Dry Prairie landscape concept. As is evident in recent burn prescriptions, misunderstanding of this concept leads to inappropriate burn objectives.

\*pg 36 The park contains 13 distinct natural communities, as well as 8 altered landcover types (see Natural Communities Map). A list of known plants and animals occurring in the park is contained in Appendix 5.

from(Orzell and Bridges 1999): Florida Dry Prairie Landscape

Florida dry prairie is a pyrogenic landscape found only in peninsular Florida, which historically covered approximately 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> (1,931 mi). Perennial warm-season C4 bunch grasses, rhizomatous evergreen low shrubs, and decumbent palms dominate this low shrub-grassland, dry to wet continuum of plant communities developed on poorly-drained uplands. Depression ponds/marshes, palm-hardwood hammocks, elevated scrubby sandy rises, pine "islands" (in areas with natural fire protection), and seasonally wet herbaceous-dominated drainages are also part of the Florida dry prairie landscape. (Orzell and Bridges 1999).

Suggested change: The park is a Florida dry prairie landscape. Depression ponds/marshes, palm-hardwood hammocks, elevated scrubby sandy rises, pine "islands" (in areas with natural fire protection), and seasonally wet herbaceous-dominated drainages are also part of the Florida dry prairie landscape. Eight altered landcover types also occur within the park. A list of known plants and animals occurring in the park is contained in Appendix 5.

## 2. The Resource Management Story is outdated and inaccurate.

Why? The story presented is that the park is severely degraded due to 40 years of fire exclusion and is in dire need of major restoration.

Cattlemen with leases continued to burn much of the park through the mid-1950s.\* (see Robert's note below) So there were 30 to 40 years of fire exclusion, but there has also been nearly **40 years of restoration**. Much of the prairie is in excellent condition (other than being several years over due for burning). I believe the implications in this plan can cause current and future land managers to choose inappropriate management practices with dire consequences, as seen recently in zones 11B, 11C, 15, 16, and probably other places I have not yet seen.

**RLD note:** The cattleman who had the lease on the area managed by the Division of Forestry, almost all of the current park east of the All Weather Road and east of the Myakka River south of SR72, burned until his lease was terminated in 1949 when the DOF ceded management to the Division of Recreation and Parks. An aggressive burning program was initiated in 1980 and by the end of 2012 the fire return interval had evolved to less than 3 years for all burn zones. The portion of the land leased by SWFWMD known as Myakka Prairie was consistently burned by lessees of the "MacArthur Tract" until purchase by the SWFWMD with subsequent leasing in 1996.

Examples are listed below:

Pg 15—~~Within 10 years have~~ **Maintain** 26,085 acres of the park maintained within optimal fire return interval.

Pg 57—Objective A: ~~Within 10 years, have~~ **Maintain** 26,085 acres of the park ~~maintained~~ within the optimum fire return interval.

Why? When I retired in 2012 we were maintaining the park within a 2 year burn regime. There is no reason not to continue to do so.

Note from R. Dye: The cattleman who had the lease on the area managed by the Division of Forestry, almost all of the current park east of the All Weather Road and east of the Myakka River south of SR72, burned until his lease was terminated in 1949 when the DOF ceded management to the Division of Recreation and Parks. An aggressive burning program was initiated in 1980 and by the end of 2012 the fire return interval had evolved to less than 3 years for all burn zones. The portion of the land leased by SWFWMD known as Myakka Prairie was consistently burned by lessees of the "MacArthur Tract" until purchase by the SWFWMD with subsequent leasing in 1996.

. . . Much of the prairie was in excellent condition as of 2012 although many burns in the Myakka Prairie portion are several years overdue and the prairie area within the park proper have not been burned at appropriate levels since then.

Pg 43. Dry Prairie

*"The species per square meter will range **from 16 to 40** species."...This corresponds with historical prairie descriptions such as those by Roland Harper (1927) and with research conducted by Steve Orzell and Edwin Bridges (1999).*

*It does not. Here is what Steve & Edwin say:*

Dry prairie is an exceptionally species-rich natural community type. A total of 240 vascular plant taxa were present in 590 m<sup>2</sup> (10.8 ft<sup>2</sup>) plots sampled to characterize dry prairie vegetation (Bridges 1997, Bridges and Reese 1998). The average number of species per plot for these 590 plots sampled at 17 sites is 22 (Bridges 1997, Bridges and Reese 1998). There is considerable variation in number of species per plot, with a low of 9 species per plot, and a high of 41 species per plot. **The largest number of plots contained from 16 to 28 species**, and relatively few plots were much lower or higher than this average.)

**Woody species cover will range from 10 to 50 percent.** There will be few, if any, large trunks of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) along the ground. South Florida slash pine (*Pinus elliottii* var. *densa*) may also be present but in extremely low densities. This corresponds with historical prairie descriptions such as those by Roland Harper (1927) and with research conducted by Steve Orzell and Edwin Bridges (1999).

This does not correspond with Orzell & Bridges. It does not conform with Harper who said 50% herbaceous, 50% woody with about half of that being palmetto.

or with FNAI:

*Dry prairie is a community of low shrubs and grasses occupying vast, level expanses in three major areas north and west of Lake Okeechobee in south-central Florida. Common shrubs are saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), which is often stunted, dwarf live oak (*Quercus minima*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), shiny blueberry (*Vaccinium myrsinites*), netted pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*), Atlantic St. John's wort (*Hypericum reductum*), dwarf wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera* var. *pumila*), and dwarf huckleberry (*Gaylussacia dumosa*). **These are mixed with about an equal proportion of herbs,** predominantly wiregrass (*Aristida stricta* var. *beyrichiana*), along with bottlebrush threeawn (*Aristida spiciformis*), hemlock witchgrass (*Dichanthelium portoricense*), broomsedge bluestem (*Andropogon virginicus*), lopsided indiagrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*), and cypress witchgrass (*Dichanthelium ensifolium*), plus numerous forbs, including narrowleaf silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), milkworts (*Polygala* spp.), meadowbeauties (*Rhexia* spp.), yellow-eyed grasses (*Xyris* spp.), and wild pennyroyal (*Piloblephis rigida*).*

*What should be emphasized from FNAI (as is obvious from the subsequent statement) is:*

FNAI: "Preserves with large acreages of dry prairie in isolated areas may need exemptions from general burning restrictions under dry conditions to be able to burn frequently enough."

Pg 58— Over the last 14 years (July 2003 – June 2017), the park has burned an average of 7,513 acres per year. This number is lower than the yearly minimum goal because of drought conditions **drought-inspired burn restrictions** during this timeframe. Prior to this plan update **the minimum**

**target acreage to burn was 7,700**, which was exceeded during eight of the 13 years listed above. **FALSE! The 2004 UMP stated: "Continue treating approximately 8,000 to 12,000 burnable acres per year with prescribed burning at appropriate fire frequency."**

Check the history—when the 12,000 acre goal was not achieved, it was due to burn restrictions, not site conditions! By 2012 every zone would burn on a less than 24-month burn return except 22B. That area has since been roller-chopped.

Pg 43—The desired future condition is to increase the cover of herbaceous plants while reducing the cover of shrubs **in shrub-dominated portions of the park**, allowing for a fire return interval of ~~one to two years (or less than 30 months)~~. **12 to 30 months.**

Why? Many zones conform to historical herbaceous/woody plant ratios.

Applying this statement to the park in general is false and irresponsible.

Pg 43—*Description and assessment:* ... The current composition of flora in the Florida dry prairie at the park is ~~dominated by~~ saw palmetto and shrubs such as gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), and low-lying blueberries (*Vaccinium spp.*) intermixed with various grasses (*Andropogon*, *Aristida*, *Schizachyrium*, *Sorghastrum*, *Dicanthelium* and *Eragrostis spp.*) and many forbs including *Pityopsis*, *Liatris*, slender flat-top goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*), purple false foxglove (*Agalinis purpurea*), a variety of goldenrod species....

Pg 43—Fire was actively excluded or suppressed in the park between 1936 and 1976, degrading the Florida dry prairie in varying degrees. As a result, oaks and South Florida slash pine ~~have become~~ **became** established in the Florida dry prairie, and overall tree and shrub density ~~has increased~~ (Huffman and Blanchard 1991)...

Pg 43—Shrub height has decreased considerably since the reintroduction of fire, ~~but~~ **though** shrub density is thicker than desired **in some areas**. The fuel conditions in ~~most of~~ the dry prairie will support fire after 18-20 months **in all management zones.**, however as grass and herbaceous groundcover increases, a fire return interval of one to two years (or less than 30 months) is desired. **A fire return of 12 to 30 months, predominantly in the growing season, is desired to maintain diversity of burn conditions and increase the ability to attain mosaic burns.**

pg 57— *There are multiple benefits to introduction* **the use** of fire as a management tool:

*(After 40+ yrs it is not longer an introduction).*



### 3. Mechanical Treatment goals are not based upon needs of the park

Pg 15—Conduct habitat/natural community restoration activities on 2,000 acres of dry prairie, mesic flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods communities over the next 10 years.

“The goal is to maintain the scrubby flatwoods close to optimal conditions through prescribed fire ~~and mechanical treatment~~ to increase the likelihood of Florida scrub-jays returning to Myakka River State Park if there is a population in the area.”

Where does the 2,000 acres come from? Is this based on any scientific basis? How many acres have been roller chopped already? Were the 2,000 acres surveyed and determined to need roller chopping? When Orzell & Bridges surveyed prairie at MRSP, they emphasized the importance of maintaining large tracts of unchopped prairie. Misunderstanding of how, when & where roller-chopping should be applied has already caused irreparable damage to an endangered ecosystem.

Scrubby flatwoods? A literature search and interviews with researchers and land managers experienced with managing scrub habitat reveals that roller chopping has more negative effects than benefits in xeric habitats like scrub and scrubby flatwoods. Also, mechanical treatment will cause the scrub to burn with less-than-natural frequency since it is embedded in a dry prairie landscape. The description on pg 40 “The park’s scrubby flatwoods are rated as being in fair to good condition,” lacks justification for why MRSP scrubby flatwoods was rated fair. This plan should not call for roller-chopping of scrubby flatwoods.

Additional Mechanical Treatment comments

Pg 58 —Natural Community Restoration

In some cases, the reintroduction and maintenance of natural processes is not enough to reach the desired ~~future~~ conditions for natural communities in the park, and active restoration programs are required. Restoration of altered natural communities to healthy, fully functioning natural landscapes often requires substantial efforts that may include **mechanical treatment**

~~of vegetation or soils~~ \*? and reintroduction or augmentation of native plants and animals. For the purposes of this management plan, restoration is defined as the process of assisting the recovery and natural functioning of degraded natural communities to desired future conditions, including the reestablishment of biodiversity, ecological processes, vegetation structure, and physical ~~characters~~ characteristics.

Examples that would qualify as natural community restoration, requiring annual restoration plans, include large mitigation projects, large-scale hardwood removal and timbering activities, roller-chopping, and other large-scale vegetative modifications. The key concept is that restoration projects will go beyond management activities routinely done as standard operating procedures such as routine mowing, the ~~reintroduction~~ use of fire as a natural process, spot treatments of exotic plants, and small-scale vegetation management. (JH comment = What is this? What is small or large scale?)

The following ~~are the~~ natural community/habitat restoration and maintenance actions ~~recommended~~ are prescribed to create the desired future conditions in the Florida dry prairie, and mesic flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods communities.

#### **4. Invasive species objectives inadequate to prevent major damage to park**

Pg 18—Implement annual work plan by treating 20-25 zones in park, annually, and continuing maintenance and follow-up treatments, as needed.

Cogongrass cannot be allowed to re-establish in treated areas for two years. This is the best way to develop imazapyr resistance, and if that happens, there is no hope for Myakka. PLEASE change this to 45-50 zones of the park.

When all known cogongrass sites were treated in the fall, they did not bloom. Ever. One of the biggest changes that occurred when Lisa switched to treating every two years was it allowed massive blooms, which increased cogongrass exponentially.

This also conflicts with "Coverage of invasive exotic plant species will be less than one percent," if only 20 -25 zones are treated for cogongrass, it won't take long for it to surpass one percent.

**Misc comments & false statements:**

Pg 17 & 66—Develop monitoring protocols for 3 selected imperiled animal species, including crested caracara, burrowing owl and sandhill cranes. — This objective is listed on pg 66, but while other listed species are discussed in this section, there is no mention of sandhill cranes. This would be a good place to point out that if Rx fire occurs in March, an unnatural time of year for fires at Myakka, large wetlands should be surveyed for crane nests prior to burning.

pg 94—The DRP will need to continue to monitor for Hamlet Planned Developments or Village Planned Developments that could be implemented in the area to the west and northwest of the park. —Could we add to participate in the planning process so as to statements about Rx fire in property deeds as Oscar Scherer has done?

pg 62—The nests tended to be located on old fence lines or on immediately adjacent private property. In 2002, the adjacent property owner removed vegetation along the fence line and around several of the wetlands. The scrub-jays were no longer observed in the park until 2004. They survived the hurricanes of the summer of 2005, but were last seen in December of that year. —Actually, the nest trees were along the line between 1A & 1B. They were all cut down by park personnel for widening fire lines (which was not needed).

*General management measures:*

pg 44—Prescribed fire will continue between January and July, with the ~~brunt~~ **majority** of it conducted from April through July. The current fire return interval is typically between 20 to 36 months with emphasis on the lightning season, but ~~as fuel conditions improve will~~ **should** be shifted towards more frequent fires.

pg. 54—The pastures have been abandoned for more than two decades, and as a result, native early... **over three** decades. They were all converted prior to 1987.

Spoil Area = dump. It is important to know there are buried cars and other large trash items when mowing the area. It is also adjacent to the old CCC dump that has coal, 1912 coke bottles, etc.

pg 56—Fire- dependent species such as the state-listed many-flowered grasspink and the pine lily were not able to survive the thick overstory that ensued. **False statement. If they had not survived, they would not still present.**

pg 56—It is unlikely that Florida grasshopper sparrows will return to the park due to their extremely low population and the immense (JH comment=NOT immense) distance from where they are currently found. —This line should be omitted. Habitats that harbor listed species should be maintained in optimal conditions for that species. Those conditions define BMPs for the community. Also, the park has participated in grasshopper sparrow working groups for many years with the possibility of using Myakka prairies for sparrows raised in captive breeding projects.

*pg 58—The Day of Burn Report is submitted after each burn, noting fire behavior, fire effects on wetlands, wildlife observed during the fire and issues that may have occurred during the fire. A copy of the report stays in the park and another is sent to the district. Reports are reviewed prior to the next burn. A six month and/or one year post-fire evaluation **that include landsat images (such as found in Google maps) documenting the actual area burned** would be a useful tool as well and should be incorporated into the program.—*

pg 59—In fiscal 2016-17 nearly 2,300 acres were roller-chopped, but additional chopping acreage is needed to move additional prairie and flatwoods towards optimum conditions. **Suggest removing this statement unless you add that at least half of that was mis-applied.**

Pg 59—When an area is designated as a potential restoration site, it is assessed more closely through vegetation transects. This practice will continue. **Areas considered for roller chopping must be burned within optimal intervals for at least two burn cycles before being evaluated for mechanical treatment.**

### **Turkey & black vulture nests**

There is much emphasis on reducing height and density of palmettos but no mention of reasons that this should not be a goal for the entire park. There

has always been a diversity of conditions throughout a landscape that managers must recognize now that they have the power to artificially transform natural communities into whatever they want. Turkey and black vultures are an important factor in the Myakka ecosystem and they rely upon patches of tall dense palmetto for nesting sites.



## **Appendix 13: Instructions for the use of Restoration Roller-chopping**

**History:** The roller-chopper had its debut in Florida State Parks in 1987 at Myakka River State Park. After much research and debate, this highly controversial activity was approved only with significant alterations to standard roller-chop practices and limitations to its use. "Restoration Roller-chopping" was introduced to counteract changes in saw palmetto vegetative structure that occurred as a result of 30 to 40 years of fire exclusion. **Saw palmetto, in many areas, had developed woody above and belowground trunks that prevented the survival of herbaceous plant species necessary to fuel frequent fires.** Permanent vegetation transects were set up in each management zone for long term monitoring. Vegetation transects and pre- and post-chop photos were also required for treatment sites.

**Definition:** Restoration roller-chopping differs significantly from other types of roller-chopping methods, such as forestry site-prep, site clearing, agricultural and pasture roller-chopping. The prescription calls for lighter, non-weighted drums, single-pass, single occasion, with little to no ground disturbance. Other types of roller-chopping are infamous for destroying native groundcover. The same risk exists for this process if it is misapplied by land managers lacking an understanding of how to use it.

**Goal:** The goal of mechanical roller-chopping at MRSP is to restore the aspect and woody/herbaceous ratio to within the range of non-fire-excluded prairie and flatwoods, while preserving existing original groundcover and opening up areas for colonization of herbaceous prairie plants. Shrub height in good condition prairie and flatwoods varies between one and four feet in height with the majority of shrubs between one and two feet high. Shrub height greater than 3 feet usually occurs naturally along wetland or hammock borders or in small patches of less than one-half acre, widely spaced over the landscape. One way we can surmise the historical random occurrence of small areas of 4'-high, dense palmetto is via the accounts of large populations of vultures encountered in the Myakka River region prior to fire exclusion. Turkey and black vultures utilize the tall palmetto thickets for nesting.

Roller-chopping alone does not increase species diversity in highly degraded prairie or flatwoods, but increases soil surface sunlight to allow herbaceous species to colonize when combined with other strategies and prescribed fire. These strategies include chopping sites adjoining those with adequate seed source, selecting chop sites upwind of the prevailing SE/SW winds, scheduling treatment to benefit from peak seeding periods, and collecting and planting seeds harvested from the same region.

**Assess the need:** **Restoration roller-chopping should only be prescribed for long fire-excluded dry prairie and flatwoods that has atypically high-density saw palmetto. Under this condition the palmetto excludes the natural diversity of shrubs, grasses and forbs.** The primary indicator that a site could benefit from the process is the presence of a near monoculture of palmetto with large trunks, often referred to as gator-back palmettos, along

and above the ground. This condition can prevent the reestablishment of a natural fire frequency and plant diversity. Roller-chopping should not be prescribed to reduce woody vegetation. It can actually increase the incidence of woody stems. Blueberries, gallberry, fetterbush, oaks and other characteristic flatwoods and prairie shrubs produce many additional stems when cut. The goal of restoration chopping is not to remove saw palmetto or shrubs, but rather to encourage herbaceous plants by decreasing cover of saw palmetto rhizomes. **woody growth**. Repetition of frequent growing season burns is the best prescription for decreasing shrubs and increasing the cover of herbaceous plants.

**Methodology—When considering use of restoration roller-chopping the following steps should be taken:**

1. Get more than one informed opinion (individuals skilled in evaluating undisturbed groundcover) before deciding to roller chop.
2. Establish monitoring protocols to track the results of management actions that include vegetation transects and photo-monitoring points.
3. Select an appropriate reference site to act as an example of the desired condition you want the restoration site to resemble.
4. Be sure that your site has been burned at least two times within the appropriate burn return of 2-3 years, but still has atypically dense palmetto with above-ground palmetto trunks.
5. Select appropriate equipment. A double, offset 24", unweighted spiral-blade aerator (with a few gallons of oil in the drums to prevent rust) has been shown to be most effective for better penetration of saw palmetto rhizomes **trunks** with less soil disturbance. Never use a heavier chopper than required for the job since it is more likely to cause destructive soil disturbance. **The key is to only cut the horizontal above and ground level trunks thus avoiding ground cover and soil disturbance.**
6. Select appropriate time:
  - A. Chopping < 1 year after a fire will minimize dead fuels on the ground so the next fire will have a faster rate of spread, lower temperatures at the soil surface, and prevent loss of the seed bank.
  - B. Research has shown that restoration roller-chopping provides the most favorable results when conducted during the growing season. The additional stress on saw palmetto when it is producing new growth can achieve greater palmetto reductions than dormant season chops. Additionally, sites chopped under wet conditions, though not so wet as to cause tractor tires to slip, result in better penetration of saw palmetto rhizomes, **trunks** with less soil disturbance.

7. Speed? The faster you can safely go, the better penetration of palmetto stems & rhizomes **trunks** and less ground disturbance because there is limited "kickout."

8. Never roller-chop through wetlands, or invasive plants.

9. Don't chop large areas at a time. Leave a mosaic of chopped and unchopped for diversity, just as you would ideally with a prescribed burn. There is no need to overlap passes.

10. Care must be taken not to double-chop, by chopping over previously chopped areas. Over chopping or re-chopping an area can result in irreparable damage to valuable and sensitive groundcover plants and cause soil disturbance that facilitates the establishment and spread of invasive plant and animal species.

Roller-chopping, in conjunction with a frequent fire return interval, can through time, greatly aid in regaining the low aspect and diversity of healthy Florida dry prairie such as was historically maintained by frequent lightning fires and an unimpaired hydroperiod.

\* **Note:** See Instructions for Roller Chopper Operators on next page.

## Instructions for Roller Chopper Operators

Plan your pattern so as to prevent double chopping (chopping repeatedly over the same area). Avoid sharp turns that cause unnecessary ground disturbance. Give pine trees plenty of clearance to avoid nicks in roots and bark that can lead to tree mortality.

Try to achieve a mosaic of chopped and unchopped area similar to the prescribed fire objective of a natural mosaic of burned and unburned. There is no specific mathematical formula for obtaining the right balance but rather a general guideline for mimicking natural processes. Leave unchopped islands of 1 to 4 acres per ten-acre parcel treated. Areas with lower saw palmetto height and greater diversity should have a higher proportion of unchopped islands than those with higher saw palmetto and limited diversity.

It is preferable to chop small patches of no more than 100 acres. The selected chop sites should be upwind of prevailing SE/SW winds and shaped as elongated ovals or strips to better receive seed dispersal.

Do not chop wetlands. When chopping wetland edges consider and preserve fire shadow effect. Fire shadow can be found on any side of a wetland (depending upon other natural features in the area) but occurs most frequently on the North side of wetlands. If you are not sure you can distinguish fire shadow from artificial effects of fire exclusion, ask someone knowledgeable to go out with you and show you specific examples before you begin chopping.

Be attentive for exotics such as cogongrass, tropical soda apple and climbing fern. The chopper can spread them to other areas. Chopping will open more surface area to sunlight and trigger growth spurts in many exotic plants. Keep flagging tape with you; flag and GPS exotics so they can be relocated and treated.

Fill out chopping observation forms on the first and last day of your assignment. Include maps so the information can be added to the chop map. Provide written notes for anything unusual you encounter such as animal sightings (burrowing owl, numerous gopher tortoises feeding during the day, strange animal behavior, etc) or plant associations not described on the chop field notes log (a large monoculture of runner oak or witch grass, 100% saw palmetto if you have previously described areas with more diversity, etc).

Chopping results are greatly influenced by how wet the area is when it is chopped. Better cutting of saw palmetto ~~rhizomes~~ **trunks** occurs when they are wet. The more cutting, the greater the reduction of saw palmetto cover and height. If the blades are not penetrating ~~rhizomes~~, the **woody growth**, check for sharpness. Carry an angle grinder in the field with a portable generator at least once per week to maintain sharpness.

**Survey Generated  
by  
Public Stakeholder**



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### Public Meeting January 24th 2019

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**Background** - Myakka River State Park is a 37,198-acre property located east of the city of Sarasota in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The park is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP).

Use the Unit Management Plan (UMP) to establish broad future goals for the Park, then work out the details in subsequent meetings with local stakeholders.

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
  Strongly Oppose

Adopt the UMP with no identified funding source for a recreational carrying capacity study.

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
  Strongly Oppose

WANT BOTH! REC. FUNDING PLAN IS CRITICAL -

Adopt a 166% increase in the number of boat tour trips on Upper Myakka Lake.

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
 Strongly Oppose

Increase the Park visitor capacity to 5,582, an increase of 1,380 over the June 2018 UMP draft.

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
 Strongly Oppose

Direct any additional recreational impacts away from the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

Strongly Support    
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 Strongly Oppose

Add more recreational opportunities at the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area.

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
 Strongly Oppose

Please provide any comments you may have by February 8, 2019.

You can provide your comments by calling (850) 245-3070, or by photogring or scanning this form and sending an email with Myakka Park in the subject line to:

Tyler.Maldonado@floridadep.gov, or by regular mail at the address below:

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*No additional Paved Roads or infrastructure*

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*Fix Backhoon Gully Bridge instead of Paving*  
Tyler.Maldonado@floridadep.gov, or by regular mail at the address below:

*Put shell on All wx Rd & Fill holes.*

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### Public Meeting January 24th 2019

**Purpose** - The purpose of this meeting is to receive public input on proposed improvements and facilities at Myakka River State Park.

**Background** - Myakka River State Park is a 37,198-acre property located east of the city of Sarasota in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The park is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP).

**Use the Unit Management Plan (UMP) to establish broad future goals for the Park, then work out the details in subsequent meetings with local stakeholders.**

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
  Strongly Oppose

**Adopt the UMP with no identified funding source for a recreational carrying capacity study.**

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
  Strongly Oppose

**Adopt a 166% increase in the number of boat tour trips on Upper Myakka Lake.**

Strongly Support    
  Support    
  Neutral    
  Oppose    
  Strongly Oppose

**Increase the Park visitor capacity to 5,582, an increase of 1,380 over the June 2018 UMP draft.**

Strongly Support    
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  Neutral    
  Oppose    
  Strongly Oppose

**Direct any additional recreational impacts away from the Wild and Scenic River corridor.**

Strongly Support    
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  Strongly Oppose

**Add more recreational opportunities at the Upper Myakka Lake Day Use Area.**

Strongly Support    
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  Neutral    
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Please provide any comments you may have by February 8, 2019.

You can provide your comments by calling (850) 245-3070, or by photogring or scanning this form and sending an email with Myakka Park in the subject line to:

Tyler.Maldonado@floridadep.gov, or by regular mail at the address below:

Office of Park Planning  
 Florida Department of Environmental Protection Division of  
 Recreation & Parks  
 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 525 Tallahassee, Florida  
 32399-3000

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PRIOR TO ANY "NEW" DEVELOPMENTS A  
VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS STUDY SHOULD BE  
DONE. NO BRAINER FORMAT WOULD BE  
SR CIT., ADULT < 65, CHILD COUNTED @  
VISITOR ENTRY BY RGR STA STAFF



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please make public aware of the  
dangers of ~~Fluor~~ Mosaic's phosphate mining  
for the environment.

Please do an exhibition about  
Phosphate mining in the visitor center;

and please expand the  
visitor support activities to raise money