



PUBLIC & INTER-AGENCY PARTICIPATION REPORT

Southwest District

Charlotte Harbor Region

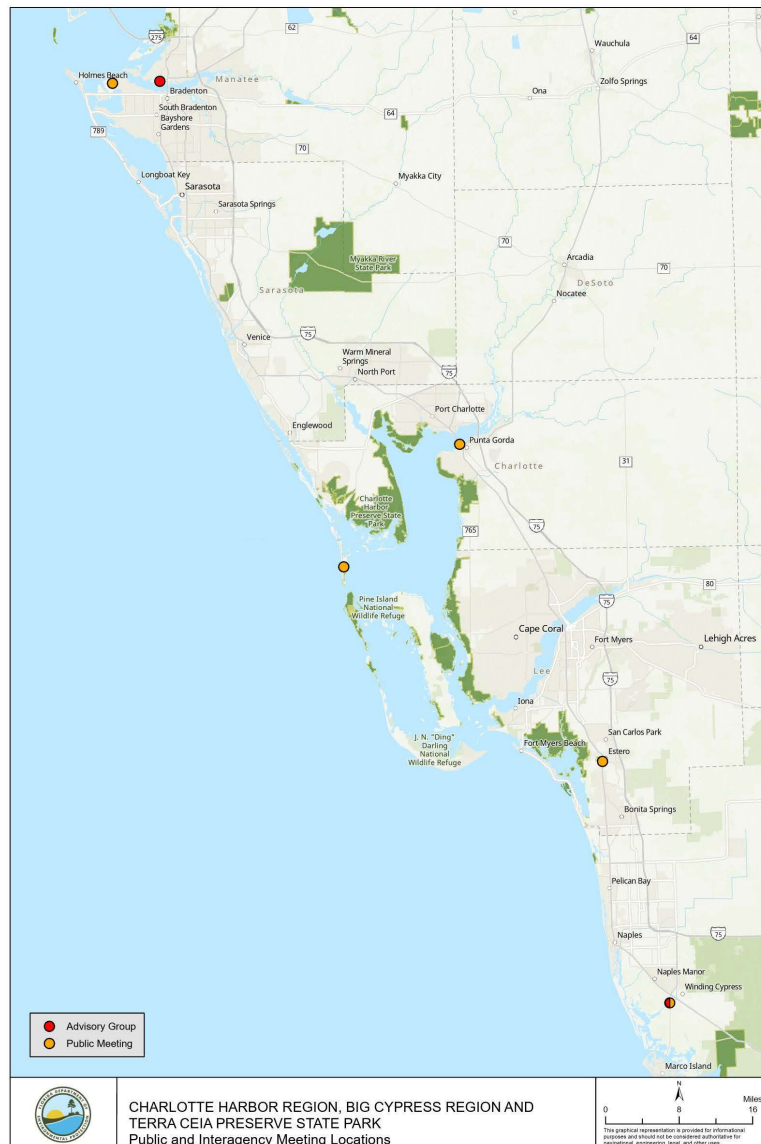
Big Cypress Region

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – LOCAL PUBLIC MEETINGS

DRP SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

2026 GENERAL PUBLIC & INTER-AGENCY MEETINGS	
County	City
Lee	Boca Grande
Charlotte	Punta Gorda
Collier	Naples
Lee	Estero
Manatee	Palmetto
Manatee	Bradenton



**Charlotte Harbor Region
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Advisory Group Members

Local Government

Jamie Scudera

Charlotte County Parks and Natural Resources

Sean Doherty

Charlotte County Tourism

Harry Phillips

City of Cape Coral

Boyd Lawrence

City of Punta Gorda

Jeff Anderson

Lee County

Justin McBride

West Coast Inland Navigation District

Partnering State Agencies

Becky Schneider

Florida Fish and Wildlife

Caroline Ritchey

Florida Forest Service

Eric Strickland

Florida Forest Service

Arielle Taylor-Manges

Florida Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection

Mindy Brown

Florida Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection

Felicia Hale

Southwest Florida Water Management District

Citizen Support Organization

Sharon McKenzie

Barrier Island Parks Society

Environmental Organizations

Ray Vinson

Big Waters Land Trust

Ashley Cook

Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center

David Abderhalden

Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center

Misty Nabers Nichols

Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement
Association

Adjacent Landowners

Margi Nanney

Cayo Costa

Recreational User Groups

Randy Johnson

Boater Interests

Dorsey DeMaster

Florida Paddling Trails Association

Steve Cournoyer

Florida Paddling Trails Association

Janice Hindon

Paddle Florida

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Advisory Group Meeting

The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans for Cayo Costa State Park, Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park, Don Pedro Island State Park, Gasparilla Island State Park, and Stump Pass Beach State Park was held on April 9, 2026, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. Twenty-two representatives from the following user groups and organizations attended: Charlotte County Parks and Natural Resources, Charlotte County Tourism, City of Cape Coral, City of Punta Gorda, Lee County, West Coast Inland Navigation District, Florida Fish and Wildlife, Florida Forest Service, Florida Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, Barrier Island Parks Society, Big Waters Land Trust, Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, Cayo Costa Landowner, Boater Interests, Florida Paddling Trails Association and the Florida Park Service.

Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association, Inc., Paddle Florida, and Southwest Florida Water Management District provided written comments, which are summarized below.

Organizations invited but unable to attend include 1000 Friends of Florida, Charlotte County Historical Society, Conservation Florida, Florida Native Plant Society - Coccoloba chapter, Florida Native Plant Society - Mangrove chapter, Florida Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (Beaches Inlets and Ports), Florida Trail Association - Alligator Amblers chapter, Friends of Bonita Estero Rail Trail, Friends of Cayo Costa, Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association, Paddle Florida, Peace River Audubon Society, Sierra Club - Calusa group, Sierra Club - Greater Charlotte Harbor group, South Florida Water Management District, Southwest Florida Water Management District, Trust for Public Land and US Geological Survey.

Attending Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) staff included Ezell Givens, Chris Becker and Karen Rogers from the Southwest District Office, Bryon Maxwell, Joseph Berger and Jacob Wozny from Cayo Costa, Don Pedro Island, Gasparilla Island, and Stump Pass Beach State Parks, Nicole Ross and Michael Stanfield from Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park and Daniel Alsentzer, Meghan Burke, Scott Groves, Melisa Balkcom and Gabrielle Trace from the Office of Park Planning.

Chip Turner also attended the meeting, representing the DEP Southwest District Office

Meghan Burke began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process and the Charlotte Harbor planning region. Scott Groves conducted roll call, and DRP representatives introduced themselves. Daniel Alsentzer explained the agenda and how the meeting will be conducted. Daniel Alsentzer introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

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Summary of Advisory Group Comments

Barrier Island Parks Society (BIPS) Sharon McKenzie inquired how long DRP would be accepting written comments and when advisory members would see the revised draft plans. Meghan Burke clarified that written comments will be accepted until August 10, 2026, and that the draft districtwide plan will be submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) in September 2026. Daniel Alsentzer explained that the next phase for the Charlotte Harbor Region will be submitting the ARC draft for final approval and that these drafts will also be publicly available online. Before submitting the draft, a summary of this meeting will be sent to the advisory members for review and potential corrections.

Sharon McKenzie commented on the boardwalk on the east side of the museum at the Gasparilla Island unit, noting that it is currently slated for replacement in the draft plan. BIPS would like this to be removed from the plan and not replaced to support dune restoration. Bryon Maxwell supported removing the structure in the interest of coastal resiliency and dune restoration. Daniel Alsentzer noted that repeated storm impacts have reinforced that some infrastructure, including this boardwalk, is not appropriate for barrier island parks. While the argument for removal is compelling, no firm decisions will be made at this meeting. He added that beach access in this area is vital and is achievable with at-grade accessible means such as natural materials or mobility mats.

Sharon McKenzie discussed the Amory Memorial Chapel restoration plan and requested the plan provision for visitor access to the building interior for a more immersive and contemplative visitor experience. Ideas included incorporating a meditation space, a museum component, and opportunities for visitors to better connect with the site's history and pay tribute to African American heritage on Gasparilla Island. Daniel Alsentzer noted that if the structure can be adequately stabilized, these concepts could be considered, with focus on passive, contemplative uses without electricity. He noted that stabilization may be challenging due to the chapel's fragile condition and wind-prone location. Raising the structure is not considered feasible and would undermine the historic integrity. Sharon McKenzie stated that BIPS would continue to support the effort by fundraising to secure stabilization funding if needed and providing docents for interpretation once restored.

Also discussed were ongoing flooding issues at the Gasparilla Island bathroom facilities. Sharon McKenzie asked whether an engineering study is planned to address the problem. Bryon Maxwell asked for clarification on whether her question related to the Belcher Road residences mentioned at the Tuesday public meeting and confirmed that no engineering study is planned at this time.

Sharon McKenzie supports bathrooms and picnic pavilions on Don Pedro Island. Daniel Alsentzer noted that the barrier-island setting makes such structures highly vulnerable to storm damage, including the potential for scattered structural debris and high repair costs. He added that increased visitor use of the park has been discussed, which would create a greater need for restrooms, however, cost and resilience concerns may prevail. Any new facilities would be required by code to be elevated.

Big Waters Land Trust (BWLTL) – Ray Vinson commended park staff for their natural resource restoration efforts given current resource limitations. He reported an Eckerd College study on predation of gopher tortoises, noting a recent mortality event at a nearby preserve where a significant number of older females were affected and coyotes were suspected. He also mentioned predation issues at a gopher tortoise recipient site in northern Florida. He highlighted successful oyster restoration work in the Manatee River and recommended evaluating oyster aquaculture leases in areas of the region where

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seagrass is absent. He also advised that BWLT is able to partner with the parks on land acquisition and mentioned some of the parcels along Don Pedro are for sale.

Charlotte County Division of Parks and Natural Resources Jamie Scudera noted that the prescribed fire goals are impressive and requested that Charlotte County continue to be notified of any management activities adjacent to their lands, as their county burn manager would like to participate. She expressed strong support for the proposed critical wildlife area at Stump Pass and offered assistance with species monitoring, noting that Charlotte County currently conducts eagle monitoring in collaboration with Audubon. Regarding invasive iguanas, she reported that the county employs three trappers and recommended updating the plan language from “Spiny-Tailed” to the more general “invasive iguanas,” as additional species such as green iguanas are now appearing in the area. For the Charlotte Harbor Preserve plan, she suggested monitoring ponds for tarpon and snook, observing that these systems are changing with sea-level rise, particularly near Burnt Store Road, CPCG29 and Rotonda West Meadows and Villages, and recommended partnering with NGOs for assistance. She also shared that Conservation Charlotte currently has funding available for land acquisition.

Charlotte County Tourism Sean Doherty reports their tourism strategy emphasizes outdoor activities and eco-tourism and the parks are important to this effort. The primary reason tourists choose Charlotte County is for the beaches, so water quality is very important. They have hosted alternative spring break students to work with Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC) to deploy vertical oyster gardens. He asked if there are any park initiatives on red tide prevention. Chris Becker replied that state parks do not lead on this issue and that it falls to other state agencies. Sharon McKenzie stated that Mote Marine has an app to monitor conditions and Fish and Wildlife Commission Harmful Algal Bloom (FWC–HAB) team conducts extensive research on the blooms.

Sean Doherty requests clarification on the status of the Stump Pass Beach interior nature trail and the natural accretion occurring on the island. Bryon Maxwell reports that the trail was destroyed by the hurricanes and this area, along with the shoreline, is being evaluated by biologists. Karen Rogers says that Milton Pass is narrowing and closing in quickly. Daniel Alsentzer clarifies that the plan does not call for the interior access trail to be reconstructed as it was seen as simply a mode of access to the south beach and it was determined that users preferred walking the shoreline. He asked if it is known that people enjoy the nature trail. Sean Doherty replied that he has no research on whether it was used or loved but that it is unique and requests clarity on status to ensure his marketing efforts are accurate. Jamie Scudera offered a citizen perspective that it is used to access the bay, which is calmer and nice for visitors/families. Sharon McKenzie agrees that the trail access to bayside is important and that it is a nice area with several small access points that are frequently used by visitors for seclusion and snorkeling. Ashley Cook reports that this trail was used by the Florida Master Naturalist training due to the wide variety of coastal vegetation, and it is important as an educational opportunity.

Sean Doherty comments that the Don Pedro Island restrooms were destroyed by the hurricanes and that they are important to visitors.

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Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC) David Abderhalden states that they have a great partnership with Park Manager Nicole Ross at Charlotte Harbor Preserve. There is a lot of fuel at the preserve, and they would like to partner to use prescribed fire as an educational opportunity. Information on a burn schedule was requested. He also reports that CHEC is active in oyster and mangrove restoration projects in the local area. They have funding, relationships with nurseries and can help the parks with these projects.

Ashley Cook expressed a sense of urgency around protecting imperiled species and asked for clarification on the plan's monitoring protocols, including how species progress through monitoring tiers and timeframes for tier changes. Karen Rogers reported that post-burn areas are the primary focus and noted that the park's extensive mesic flatwoods (over 5,000 acres) make comprehensive gopher tortoise studies difficult. Chris Becker added that FWC has updated gopher tortoise survey protocols to transects with burrow scoping for improved accuracy, and that FWC has contracted Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) to conduct surveys. Charlotte Harbor Preserve has not yet been surveyed but is on the list for a parkwide assessment. Cayo Costa maintains a healthy population. Ashley Cook clarified that her concern applies to all imperiled species (including indigo snake, wood stork, small tooth sawfish, and sturgeon). Chris Becker noted that monitoring resources are limited and mobile wildlife can be difficult to monitor. He explained that some species must be prioritized at the state level and that Tier 1 survey work may rely on opportunistic observations. Ashley Cook encouraged all partners present (park staff, FWC, and aquatic preserves) to work collaboratively to ensure monitoring needs are fully covered and to identify any gaps. David Abderhalden reiterated CHEC's willingness to assist.

Ashley Cook discussed their vertical oyster garden initiative, noting its success in creating habitat for marine life and as an interpretive educational program. The project is supported by grant-funding and helps raise awareness about water quality issues in Charlotte Harbor. She also indicated they are seeking partnerships within the region to expand the initiative.

David Abderhalden wants to both protect and educate people about the archaeological sites located in Charlotte Harbor Preserve and throughout the region (including Faulkner mound on Cayo Costa). Daniel Alsentzer suggested that some sites may be appropriate for on-site interpretation, while broader cultural interpretation could be offered at regional gateways (perhaps at CHEC), to avoid directing visitors to specific sites. Sharon McKenzie suggested Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) grants for interpretation. Margi Nanney noted looting at the Faulkner Mound, including shells being sold online, and stressed the need to obscure the site.

David Abderhalden requested to be kept informed about the proposed expansion of the front parking area at CHEC. He noted that boardwalks for trails may not be necessary as the area is dry in-season and off-season they offer "wet walks". He also stated that the bridge, which has been closed for three years, is expected to be rebuilt before this plan is approved.

City of Cape Coral Harry Phillips asked about the park effort to reforest after the hurricanes. Karen Rogers responded that the primary focus is on dune restoration, including planting sea grapes and large coastal tree species to rebuild the coastal strand. Mesic flatwoods experienced significant saltwater inundation and tree loss, and restoration practices in those areas will continue. Harry Phillips commented on the urban environment of Cape Coral and that rapid response is essential for effective invasive control. He reported that about half of captured Nile monitor specimens are female, making the removals beneficial for population control.

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City of Punta Gorda Boyd Lawrence stated he had no comments on the proposed plans and was participating in gathering information.

Florida Fish and Wildlife (FWC) Becky Schneider reported a new landscape conservation initiative in Charlotte County that will prioritize projects in collaboration with partners and restoration activities. She commended park staff for shorebird protection efforts and noted that these areas are among the only remaining habitat for the nesting shorebirds in the area. Daniel Alsentzer noted that the Stump Pass Beach plan includes exploring a critical wildlife area to support local shorebird populations. Becky Schneider noted FWC's strong commitment to predator management for nesting birds, including control of possums and raccoons. She thanked park staff for maintaining protective postings for shorebirds and offered to provide law enforcement support in return.

Florida Forest Service (FFS) Caroline Ritchey and Eric Strickland commended the parks on their barrier island pine management. They advised the FFS mitigation team as a resource for fuel management program at Cayo Costa. Bryon Maxwell reports they are in discussion with the mitigation team.

Florida Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection Arielle Taylor-Manges reported no comments on natural communities restoration but offered support with mangrove plantings if needed. Mindy Brown commended park staff, noting ongoing collaboration with aquatic preserves managers on seagrass monitoring. She reported no concerns at this time. Daniel Alsentzer added that although some seagrass beds lie outside park boundaries, many park destinations are accessed across aquatic preserves, so protection efforts continue. He noted past seagrass impacts caused by mainland visitors using the former Cayo Costa dock, which was destroyed by hurricanes and is no longer promoted. Arielle Taylor-Manges noted that water-quality requirements were not referenced in the plan. She highlighted volunteer efforts collecting water quality data and anchored vessels in Pelican Bay and has long-term data that can be shared with park staff. She also thanks the parks for allowing volunteer samplers to use the dock at Stump Pass Beach and Don Pedro (landbase). She added that there is a continuous water quality monitoring station near where the Ceitus boat lift was removed in central Matlacha Pass with long-term water-quality data that can be shared. She further noted that looting is an issue on cultural and historic sites within the aquatic preserves and promotes partnerships for cultural resource monitoring, suggesting that it may be beneficial to post signage that clarify statutes on looting/disturbance at sites where this occurs.

Florida Paddling Trails Association Steve Cournoyer introduced the organization and the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail, commonly known as the CT. He discussed difficulties with planning trips including state park campsites that are often booked up months in advance, leaving no options for paddlers who cannot predict exact arrival dates due to weather, variable daily mileage, and gaps between some designated state park campsites. This creates unsafe paddling distances for trail users and unfortunately encourages illegal "stealth" camping. Twenty years ago, the Office of Greenways and Trails designated state park campgrounds as overnight stops along the CT. At the time, it was easy to make campsite reservations, however, currently many of the coastal state park campgrounds are booked months in advance. He noted successful collaboration with seven state parks that offer non-reservation CT-designated campsites and requested that Cayo Costa establish a small, primitive or semi-primitive, water-accessible, non-reservation campsite for up to four paddlers in the unit management plan. He will provide draft language for consideration. Bryon Maxwell confirmed the request will be documented for

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review. Steve Cournoyer noted that most established CT sites are at state parks without campgrounds. Margi Nanney reports she has hosted paddlers on her property and fully supports the idea of a CT site. Dorcey DeMaster specified that the CT is a Florida legislatively mandated trail and a national recreation trail that was originally designed to incorporate state parks. She noted that usage is low (estimates 4-6 campers per year) and requests that a location on the bayside of the island be considered. She offered that the organization would help support the maintenance of the site if needed. She expressed thanks for being included in the forum and to the state parks for all their hard work.

Lee County Jeff Anderson expressed thanks and reported successful burn in partnership with the parks along Burnt Store Road. They will continue to be available for any management needs and appreciate firebreak management. He noted that predation on gopher tortoises has been observed in Lee County and coyote presence in Cape Coral. Their feral hog population is continuing to increase, and they have private contractors and added a USDA contractor to manage. He also advised that their Conservation 2020 program is looking at a couple of parcels on Pine Island and some infill.

Local Private Property Owner (Cayo Costa) Margi Nanney expressed concern about the planned controlled burns on Cayo Costa, noting high fuel loads following Hurricanes Ian, Helene and Milton and the last-minute cancellation of a planned burn project last year. She requested information on the burn schedule. Chris Becker responded that he conducted the most recent burn on the island and that resource limitations make planning difficult. The island's mesic flatwoods should ideally be burned every 2-4 years, but several factors restrict the available burn window, including bald eagle nesting, smoke management challenges, and rainfall deficits specific to the island. The previous burn resulted in three weeks of smoke and numerous complaints. He emphasized that completing the burn remains a priority, however operational constraints make it challenging. Margi Nanney thanked the park for the efforts and understands the challenges. She noted that the park's advanced communication with residents regarding the recent burn (which was cancelled) is the best way to quell concerns and encouraged the same outreach when future planned burns are scheduled.

She reports that Cayo Costa had a large growth of Australian pines 20-30 years ago but now the park is almost void of Australian pines. She commended the park on doing an excellent job of subcontracted invasive eradication but noted widespread Brazilian pepper and other invasives continue to grow and hopes that the park will be diligent in continuing these efforts.

Margi Nanney described the urgency of revegetating the Faulkner Mound area with red mangrove, sea grape, buttonwood and beach dune plantings to help protect and obscure the site. The mound was previously hidden by mangroves which were lost when Hurricane Milton washed over the site in 2024 leaving it fully exposed and creating a new "walkover" area which attracts many private boaters. Looting is frequent and seagrass is being damaged by this new activity. Park staff installed cameras and signs, but the increased human interference continues. She said Google Maps has Faulkner Mound listed as a way point on their map and asked DRP to assist in having it removed. She notes that a two-year, state grant-funded study completed in 2025 documented the site's conditions and significance and emphasized that it is an important cultural resource and should be protected by discouraging foot traffic through the area. She described a project that is underway to revegetate the "walkover" area and potentially close off the walkway to boat traffic. This effort will require working with the Florida Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection as well as other groups to obtain the plant materials.

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She reported concerns about the two ferry concessionaires who land with thousands of passengers annually at the south end of the island at Captiva Pass, a practice she says is not sustainable. Although ferry capacity is limited to 48 passengers, there is no limit on the number of daily trips or low tide condition landings. The boat pontoons cause shoreline erosion and seagrass disturbance and add heavy visitor use to an area without infrastructure. She noted many instances of non-compliant landings on private property by the concessionaire. The south point was heavily damaged by recent hurricanes and vegetation is severely compromised. She submitted documentation backing up these concerns and requests that ferry landings be rerouted to the purpose-built Pelican Bay docks, where restrooms, interpretive signage are available and large group concessions are available.

She raised concerns about ferry concessionaires cutting through south of Punta Blanca to get to the Pelican Bay docks. This practice has damaged seagrass beds and prop dredged a new channel which was never there before. She requested that ferry routes be defined in the concessionaire contract to avoid sensitive areas. She added that private boats often follow the same paths compounding impacts. Justin McBride noted that vessels should travel in water that is appropriate for their draft. This practice could help deter seagrass damage and propeller scaring.

Margi Nanney proposed establishing a critical wildlife area on Cayo Costa, possibly in the wider northern section or from Lover's Cut to the narrows. She also recommended a post-storm assessment of plant and animal material and suggested the Audubon or Native Plant Society could help.

She requested that contact information for other attendees be shared to support partnership opportunities. Daniel Alsentzer responded that planning staff will email information from organizations that consent to being included.

Local Recreation User (Boater Interest) Randy Johnson inquired about revegetating after hurricane damage and asked about replanting in strategic areas to protect the integrity of the islands. Karen Rogers responded that plans for Gasparilla Island, Stump Pass Beach, and Cayo Costa include active revegetation components. Randy Johnson remembers during past camping trips on Cayo Costa, he observed numerous social paths and recalled that Spanish swords plants had been installed to deter the use of these paths. He commented that this is an effective technique. Bryon Maxwell added that they are working with District and CSO to replant areas where restoration is most needed. Daniel Alsentzer noted that on Gasparilla Island, particularly at the Sandspur Use Area, plantings supported by BIPS and GICA were installed to eliminate social trails, though hurricanes have undone some of that progress.

Randy Johnson called for revegetation around archaeological sites to prevent public viewing Bryon Maxwell agreed and clarified that this work is included in the current plan. Daniel Alsentzer added that the plan may need to address this component more thoroughly.

Randy Johnson remembered a severe tick problem in the past and commended the park for successfully addressing this issue. He added that new invasive species are moving into the area like Monitor lizard issues in Cape Coral. He then asked how the park service monitors coyotes. Chris Becker explained that in terms of removal, priority is given to coyotes that destroy sea turtle nests, as opposed to animals living deeper within areas like Oscar Scherer. For other invasive species, significant effort is put in when a new species first appears. Although the park has largely lost the battle with spiny-tailed iguanas, they still work with USDA to manage them because these iguanas consume the same vegetation as gopher tortoises. He emphasized that staff continuously track new arrivals and expanding populations.

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Karen Rogers added that invasives actions are prioritized based on need, by park, and varies across the district. Randy Johnson added that proactive scouting is essential, because the problem becomes much harder to manage if you wait too long.

Randy Johnson noted that Cayo Costa remained closed for 2.5 years after Hurricane Ian and that the dock has been built and rebuilt three to four times over the past 10–15 years. He expressed concern that each reconstruction appears to follow the same design and footprint, resulting in continued loss. He added that there is no suitable place for paddlers to come ashore and tie up canoes or kayaks, and that mooring capacity is insufficient. Daniel Alsentzer responded that changing the dock's footprint is not considered a like-for-like replacement and therefore comes with added costs and regulatory challenges. Randy Johnson expressed concern that another major storm this summer could put the park in the same situation again, effectively turning the dock into a “disposable” structure.

Randy Johnson advised that boaters often do not know how to pay park fees, as there is currently no means to pay on the islands. Bryon Maxwell explained that visitors can pay online at floridastateparks.org and that the park is in the process of obtaining permits from CCL to install signage with QR codes to facilitate on-site payment.

West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND) Justin McBride provided an overview of his organization's work and raised concerns regarding long-term anchorage issues. He noted that the park boundary ends at the mean high-water line and asked about the extent of anchoring impacts within Pelican Bay. Bryon Maxwell stated he did not have specific survey data for Pelican Bay but the area experiences very heavy use from December through March. Justin discussed that while anchoring provides boater access to reach the park's uplands, it causes negative impacts on submerged aquatic vegetation. He referred to ALAs and SSL's as potential tools to manage the area and emphasized that active management of adjacent marine resources is critical.

Justin McBride offered potential partnership opportunities related to dredge coordination such as Jug Creek. He suggested consulting with the local county to determine whether an existing permit is already in place. By coordinating efforts and using the same contractor and permit, project costs could be significantly reduced. He also recommended checking with the county and the district regarding permitting requirements to support collaborative approaches. Bryon Maxwell added that he recently partnered with these entities on a yacht removal project.

Justin McBride explained a loophole in current derelict vessel statutes, where vessels pushed above the mean high water line during storms are no longer classified as “derelict vessels,” making them ineligible for associated funding. He stated that vessels located above MHW fall under tidal property protocols, which are more complicated to address. He suggests that a protocol is needed for vessels that land on the beach and that the first couple hours are critical.

Justin McBride emphasized the need to improve maritime and paddlecraft access across the parks and noted that his organization can assist with these efforts.

He also spoke from a citizen's perspective, noting Cayo Costa is a favorite camping location for his Boy Scouts group and expressed interest in a designated primitive group campsite. He also offered they would also be interested in volunteer work such as trail clearing.

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Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

West Coast Inland Navigation District In addition to verbal comments during the meeting, Justin McBride also provided written comments: Dredge Coordination - When a dredge project is planned and/or executed, efforts should be made to coordinate with County and WCIND entities. This could provide value-added opportunities for DEP in reduced costs and increase project options if dredging is planned by another entity nearby. Long-Term Anchorage Issues - WCIND is aware that several parks have seen impact from long term anchoring of vessels either in, on or adjacent to parks property. Several areas near the parks are listed online and in print publications as a 'safe harbor'. Long term anchorage creates issues of waste management and upland impacts. DEP should explore the following possibilities: First, possibly expanding the park boundaries to include sovereign submerged lands to control anchorage. Second, creation of a managed mooring field and third, creation of an anchorage limitation area (ALA). Both of the latter options have been employed in multiple areas around the state to manage long-term anchorage issues with high levels of success. Storm Vessels - As witnessed in recent years, the parks are vulnerable to vessels being pushed up into mangroves and recreation areas by storm events. Once a vessel moves above the mean high-water line it is no longer considered a derelict vessel under FL Statute 327.02. This means that after a storm event, FWC and FLDEM will not remove these vessels as it legally does not meet their definitions of a derelict vessel. Parks should create a policy to address these vessels so they can be removed. As they are on state lands abandoned property procedures could be employed or there may be other avenues that would provide a more expedient removal process. Group Campsites- Group campsites at Cayo Costa (and other parks) should be explored. Groups such as Scouts BSA, Girl Scouts, and ROTC find group camp sites much easier when they take trips to these parks. Reservations can be supplemented with service hours by these groups. This is done with great success at several other parks including Myakka River State Park and Koreshan. Educational Signage- WCIND and other entities are available to provide funding for educational signage through the park systems. Staff just needs to reach out. Coordination is key. Maritime Access – WCIND is charged with alleviating problems associated with navigation in the waterways within the district. Public access to public parks is part of that charge. WCIND would be happy to work with Park and DEP staff on helping improve maritime access to these parks.

Florida Forest Service (FFS) In addition to verbal comments during the meeting, Eric Strickland also provided written comments expressing that the Charlotte Harbor lands are being well managed, and he appreciated the implementation of timber management in the form of timber thinning. He stated that although not necessarily being done for big profit, it is a great way to improve timber stands and bring them into a healthy and more natural state (open pine flatwoods with a diverse ground story). He expressed approval of the park's prescribed fire planning and stated that it was mentioned during the meeting that fire and mechanical treatments are being used to improve timber stand quality and induce reproduction where needed. He liked that the parks are planting pine trees where necessary for restoration back to natural state (flatwoods that have been deprived of fire or converted to other). He commented that park planting spacing is pretty wide at 300-400 trees per acre, which is what is ideal in long run, however if survival is low may result in a failed planting and need to replant. He provided his organization's plans for planting projects require 600-700 trees per acre, which is really tight spacing on the top end but they have had really good survival and are moving to planting on the lower end of the planting requirement, knowing that getting timber stands thinned in South Florida has become increasingly hard due to lack of mills and loggers. He suggested that, depending on what parks have seen

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as far as survival, consider increasing trees per acre up to 300-500 to give that option. He also reported asking about timber inventory for planning purposes and was informed that this is contracted out, which he agreed is great to get this done. He thanked the park for including him and colleague Caroline in this process and hoped their comments were helpful.

Florida Paddling Trails Association In addition to verbal comments during the meeting, Steve Cournoyer and Dorsey DeMaster also provided written comments: Suggested Draft of UMP Action Plan: "Establish a semi-primitive or primitive campsite accessible from the water for Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail (CT) paddlers. The CT campsite shall support no more than 4 paddlers and be available on a non-reservation basis. CT paddlers shall notify State Park Manager prior to use."

"History: In 2005, the 1,515-mile CT was officially designated by the Florida Legislature (Title XVIII, Chapter 260 Florida Statutes) as part of the Florida DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails System (FL DEP/OGT). It has also been designated by the Department of the Interior as the longest National Recreation Trail in the country. The CT includes coastal State Parks that have been designated as overnight stopovers by FL DEP/OGT." It is essential that these State Parks offer a campsite along this trail for CT paddlers in order to provide safe travel distances between overnight stops, and for the trail to remain viable.

Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association, Inc. (GICIA) Misty Nabers Nichols provided written comments emphasizing that the deed restrictions tied to the GICIA must be consistently acknowledged and followed throughout the Gasparilla Island State Park Plan. She noted that several plan components conflict with these restrictions and that GICIA approval is required for the proposals in multiple areas, including the Dunes and Port Boca Grande Lighthouse Use Area, the hiking trail referenced under Existing Facilities and Infrastructure, the Seagrape Use Area, the Seawall Area, and the Support Facilities and Infrastructure Area.

Additionally, she requested the acquisition history section include a note about the State's acceptance of the property with deed restrictions at the time it was donated by GICIA (and reference that the restrictions are included in the Addendum).

She asked that the plan note that the Amory Chapel was restored by the GICIA and the Boca Grande Woman's Club in 1997. She further recommended that, as a cultural resource, the Amory Chapel's restoration should be considered, particularly given the current lack of space for staff, the museum, and meetings.

She suggested that optimum boundary parcels be reviewed with Lee County to confirm that zoning aligns with the intended uses.

She provided formatting suggestions and corrections to beach renourishment dates and prescribed fire language.

Local Private Property Owner (Cayo Costa) In addition to verbal comments during the meeting, Margi Nanney also provided written comments and supporting material including photos and letters written by other Cayo Costa residents for the following topics:

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Protection of Faulkner Mound Archaeological Site

Margi Nanney recommended enhanced protection measures for Faulkner Mound, including removal of the site location from Google Maps; incorporation of findings from the grant-funded Faulkner Mound Damage Assessment into the Resource Management Component; installation of signage identifying the site as a protected under Florida Statutes; and revegetation and closure of the area to obscure the site and discourage or prevent pedestrian access and walkover. Reference documentation including the following was also provided: Historical and current photographs documenting vegetation loss at the site. A map identifying the proposed closure area, along with template language for the proposed signage. Photographs of visitors at the site, as well as social media and internet postings referencing the site and artifacts, as documentation of public access to and awareness of the site. Excerpts from a 2021 draft DRP proposal about the South Dock area with an ecological concerns section that Margi Nanney states are also applicable to the Faulker Mound site.

Require concessionaires to route north of Punta Blanca when accessing Pelican Bay

Margi Nanny requested that concession boats be required to use the marked Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) passage north of Punta Blanca when accessing Pelican Bay. She reported that concessionaires and other commercial passenger vessels have damaged seagrass and prop-dredged a channel south of Punta Blanca to create a shortcut to and from the park's Pelican Bay docks. She noted that this practice is inconsistent with the protection and preservation objectives of the Pine Island Aquatic Preserve and recommended that the shortcut passage be eliminated. A map was provided illustrating the deep-water and ICW travel routes, proposed beach landing areas for concessionaires, and the location of the shortcut passage south of Punta Blanca.

Road closures/gates La Costa Isles

Margi Nanny reported that this is a volatile issue among Cayo Costa residents. She recommended additional meetings with Dan Trescott and other knowledgeable staff and residents to document historical roadway use, better understand beach access needs, and incorporate local knowledge of the area's roadway and access history. She requested an explanation of the Lee County rights-of-way and state-owned lands, as well as the rationale, for the DRP proposal. She expressed concern that there has been insufficient engagement and consensus-building with residents regarding the proposed road closures and gates. An emailed comment from a resident was included.

No large concessions boats landing on the south point or Narrows

Margi Nanny requested that no large concession boats be allowed to land on the south point or narrows and that large groups should exclusively land at Pelican Bay Docks. She states that Florida State Parks Director made a mistake by allowing the department to sign another agreement with a concessionaire last fall which allowed them to continue to land up to 8,000 passengers a year at the south point of Cayo Costa State Park. There is a second concessionaire with a similar agreement, and their contract is up this year. The contracts do not limit the number of trips/passengers per day, nor do they prohibit low tide conditions landings that cause even more seagrass damage. She stated that a group of Cayo Costa residents made an explicit and well documented appeal to the Department before the new contract signed but their voices were ignored.

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She reports that this is not a sustainable practice at this location and not an optimum visitor experience as defined by the DRP. She cited the following: 1.RESOURCE IMPACTS- The south end of Cayo Costa should have less human impacts. It is already visited by thousands of private boaters (seagrass damage, prop scaring). It is severely eroding (see aerials in document) and recent storms since Ian, Helene and Milton have taken "years" off the south end of the island. 2. TRESPASS ONTO PRIVATE PROPERTY- The majority of the Pine Island Sound side of the south point is privately owned. In spite of warnings and letters of NON-COMPLIANCE for landing outside of their designated areas, both concessionaires continue to land on private land and many times outside their designated area. 3. LOSS OF REVENUE AT THE PELICAN BAY LANDING AREA- If all of the large boats landed at the north end the park and Pelican Bay concessionaire would receive optimum income from all north end income-related sources. 4.SAFETY – Both concessionaires land passengers in inclement weather, there is no oversight once they leave the boats. These passengers walk several miles up the beach, they do not return to the boat to go to the bathroom, they go up in the dune areas to go the bathroom. They are unsafe when storms come. It is only a matter of time before someone gets hurt liability to the park kicks in.

Reference documentation including the following was provided: Photographs of visitors and boats at South Point and maps depicting concessionaire use areas. Comparative 1980's and 2024 aerials of narrows and Captiva Pass showing erosion over 30 years. Comparative 1994 and 2024 aerial imagery of erosion at the Narrows and Pejuan, the Narrows and South Pass Lake, the Narrows and South Pass and the Narrows before (March 2024) and after (October 2024) the 2024 storms.

Nine letters from Pejun Point residents were provided detailing why the large groups create unsustainable negative impacts to Cayo Costa's fragile southern resources.

Illegal Docks at Sellers Canal

Margi Nanney requests that DEP resolve the Sellers Canal illegal dock issue. She reports that for the past 25 years, she has been involved with Sellers Canal property owners regarding illegal activities/dock building without permits, mangrove cutting, construction equipment damages to roads and more. She states to date this has not been resolved. She reports that in May 2024 three illegal docks were built on a single weekend without permits.

She included a document that was previously prepared and sent to DEP/DRP and reported that after much time elapsed, she is now re-submitting it again as nothing has been done. She urged a conversation with the owners of the legal docks on that end to discuss this so that the DEP can get a complete picture of everything but that has not happened. She requests that DRP please commit to resolving this issue with Lee County not only for this Sellars canal area but for all of the other illegal docks being constructed without permits. She states that this is a violation of many policies and the DEP should remove the three docks.

Reference documentation including the following was provided: photographs of the three new docks, time stamped photos of the dock construction in May 2024, a map detailing the location, a background brief with photographs showing legal docks in relation to the illegal docks, Seller's canal easement document and recorded dedications and deeds.

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Paddle Florida Janice Hindson provided written comments based on recreational uses. They are pleased that Cayo Costa State Park is redeveloping the primitive campground, store/concessions, tram and support services as well as its interpretive information and see this as a benefit of reconnecting paddlers with the island. As the Pelican Boat Basin is developed, they would ask that a dedicated kayak launch or area is developed that is separate from the docks and the boat traffic. As the primitive campground is re-developed, they hope that as many of the original 30 sites as possible would be retained. They do appreciate the proximity to the bathhouse facilities. For Stump Pass Beach State Park, they agree with paddlecraft launch, entry system to limit visitors, restroom and parking area being reconstructed. For Don Pedro Island State Park, The mainland paddlecraft launch seems to serve the paddling community well and avoids a long carry as considered with the new tract of land. For Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park, they agree with paddlecraft launch/landing not warranted due to it being too shallow and unnavigable. For Gasparilla Island State Park, they support land use plan as presented.

Southwest Florida Water Management District Felicia Hale provided written comments confirming her review of the plans for Cayo Costa, Charlotte Harbor Preserve, Don Pedro Island, Gasparilla Island, and Stump Pass Beach State Parks. She provided specific comments for Cayo Costa and Charlotte Harbor Preserve and stated that the plans for Don Pedro Island, Gasparilla Island, and Stump Pass Beach State Parks are well written and effectively cover the pertinent information.

For Cayo Costa State Park, she reports it being one of her favorite areas in Florida and was pleased to see cultural resource protection identified as a priority, as well as the successful eradication of hogs from the island. She recommended placing additional emphasis on monitoring listed plant species within the Resource Management Component, rather than focusing primarily on animal species. She was also glad to see that the imperiled species list will be updated.

For Charlotte Harbor Preserve she reports participating in the Land Management Review for the preserve and was impressed by the extent of management activities conducted there, particularly prescribed burning given the challenges of the urban interface. She states that having worked as a land manager for Lee County, she understands both the increasing development pressures in the area and the challenges associated with implementing effective land management. Overall, she thinks the plan does a nice job of explaining the barriers to prescribed fire. She stated that her review as part of the advisory group does not constitute official District review or approval pursuant to Paragraph 7 of Lease No. 4134 (SWF Parcel No. 20-708-112X). Once the final draft is ready, it should be submitted to the District for formal review and approval.

Additionally, she noted that the 2007 Plan references the Cattle Dock Point Boat Ramp in the Recreation section (p. 17). In 2009, the District, Board of Trustees, and Charlotte County entered into a lease agreement (SWF Parcel No. 20-708-129X) for the construction, operation, and maintenance of this boat ramp. Condition 8 of the lease requires the lessee to prepare and submit a Land Use Plan for the leased premises in accordance with Section 253.034, Florida Statutes, with submission to the lessors through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands. She was unable to locate a record of this Land Use Plan, and Charlotte County staff are not aware of its existence and asked if this plan was ever submitted.

**Charlotte Harbor Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

Public Participation

From March 6 through August 10, 2026, the public was provided an opportunity to review and comment on draft unit management plans for Florida State Parks in the Charlotte Harbor region. During the public comment period, written comments were received. In addition, two public meetings were conducted, with a combined total of 28 attendees.

Public meetings details:

LEE COUNTY

*Tuesday, April 7, 2026, from 2 p.m. – 6 p.m.
Boca Grande Community Center
Boca Grande, FL*

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

*Wednesday, April 8, 2026, from 2 p.m. – 6 p.m.
Charlotte County Event & Conference Center
Punta Gorda, FL*

Summary of Written Public Comments

Cayo Costa State Park

- One commenter, a longtime visitor from Nebraska shares that they camped and stayed in the cabins with their family on 12 trips beginning in the early 1990s, describing Cayo Costa State Park as one of their favorite places. They support the plan's return of overnight camping and the proposed campground redesign with more space and natural separation between sites, emphasizing the value of the island's dark skies and overnight experience. They are disappointed that the cabins are not proposed for replacement, noting that the primitive cabins made family visits easier by providing shelter from the weather, sun, and insects. After hearing from a potential concessionaire that rental yurts might be considered, they ask why yurts are not included in the draft plan and suggest that, if cabins or yurts are not provided, former cabin sites could potentially be converted into additional campground sites. The commenter also supports consolidating former platted lands into the park, clearly defining park boundaries, controlling invasive species, and preserving the island's cultural resources. They fondly recall the ferry service and emphasize that maintaining Cayo Costa's undeveloped character and overnight opportunities will allow future generations to experience the island's unique natural setting. What they always enjoyed about Cayo Costa was the undeveloped nature of it all in the midst of all the sprawling development of coastal Florida and stated that to have a place to go to see what Florida looked like before development is priceless.
- One commenter proposes incorporating a small-scale, eco-resort style glamping retreat concept at Cayo Costa State Park. The concept would consist of a monthly experience held during the full moon. Proposed amenities include food service, wellness activities such as yoga, meditation, and massage, community gatherings including bonfires and drum circles, and resource-based recreational activities such as snorkeling, kayaking, and hiking. The commenter submitted a proposal package outlining the concept for consideration.
- One commenter, a private property owner on Cayo Costa, supports vacating the unused Lacosta Isles rights-of-way and incorporating them into Cayo Costa State Park for conservation, as well as the proposed easement providing access to their property. They suggest modifying the proposed easement alignment with an alternative. The commenter also requests clarification on how private property owners will access the island. They encourage the Department to consider designating a loading and unloading area (including construction materials) for private property owners.

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- Many commenters (nine) who are property owners on Cayo Costa Island expressed concern with concession boats on the southern end of Cayo Costa. They request that concession boats not be allowed to operate at the southern end of Cayo Costa until an environmental impact study is conducted. They cite a fragile area that has been damaged by multiple hurricanes, receiving a sharp increase in concession boat activity. They report personal observation of concession operators dropping off dozens of passengers at one time, sometimes multiple times per day, releasing customers directly onto overcrowded, unsafe shoreline areas, leaving the area for extended periods and removing access to required onboard restroom facilities and therefore allowing, or failing to prevent, customers from entering mangroves and wooded areas to relieve themselves. They report the concessionaire operating in and around private property boundaries, contributing to habitat damage including scarring of seagrass and shoreline, concentrated overuse of a very small, vulnerable stretch of land, directly adjacent to private homes, with no infrastructure, no signage, no enforcement, and no facilities. They state that this area cannot sustain this level of traffic, especially after hurricane impacts and that continued pressure will delay, or prevent, recovery.
- One commenter commented on the "Existing Roads to be Closed and Existing Inholding Access" section in the Cayo Costa State Park plan, requesting that instead of closing existing roads to private property and making new ones along road easement, it should be evaluated, as stated in the plan, whether new roads cleared would cause more impact than leaving existing roads open for access. A prime example is along the northern edge of the commenters property, where the map identified that the existing Lacosta Isles Road would be closed and a new one created through pristine uplands. This is completely unnecessary and will cause more harm than good.
- One commenter reported that one of her favorite State Park memories is staying in one of Cayo Costa State Park's former rustic cabins before Hurricane Ian. She requests that the park preserve a section of truly rustic cabins, simple, no-electricity accommodations much like those that existed before the hurricane. She described that for her, the charm of Cayo Costa was precisely that simplicity. Arriving by ferry, staying in a basic cabin, and spending a few days without the conveniences of ordinary life created a genuine "step back in time" experience. It was not a lesser version of camping that needed to be upgraded; it was a distinct experience worth preserving. She understands the appeal of adding glamping accommodations and has no objections to that. She believes that glamping and rustic camping can certainly coexist, and that offering both would allow Cayo Costa to serve a wider range of visitors while retaining some of the character that made the park so special before Hurricane Ian. She respectfully asks that traditional rustic cabins remain part of Cayo Costa's future.

Don Pedro Island State Park

- One commenter describes the draft management plan for Don Pedro Island State Park as inadequate, stating that it places too much emphasis on improvements to the mainland portion of the park, which they believe sees limited use beyond kayak access and rentals. They support the repair and replacement of boat slips, paddlecraft landings, access paths and interpretation on the island side, but note that the hurricane damage occurred several years ago and expressing pace of recovery as unacceptable. The commenter does not support the mainland parking improvements and asks if there are culverts on the island side. They question the need for proposed maintenance facilities, describing these improvements as unnecessary until the park is reopened. They state that the plan delays meaningful action and urge the state to rebuild the docks and reopen the beach park.

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- One commenter representing a group of Gasparilla Island residents proposed creating a ferry service from Placida Road to Don Pedro State Park, expanding parking capacity, and improving facilities at Don Pedro, noting potential private and county funding. They also recommend the state improve and repair facilities at Stump Pass Beach State Park.

Gasparilla Island State Park

- One commenter, a private property owner on Boca Grande, noted trespassing and unauthorized parking on their property. They request additional public beach parks to ease this issue.
- One commenter noted the issue of after-hours parking and partying at Range Light parking area in Gasparilla Island State Park. They requested better-placed sundown-closure signs, a formal after-hours permit system, and stronger enforcement.
- Multiple comments urge reconsideration of plans to convert Amory Chapel into an open-air structure, asking for full evaluation of restoration options that preserve its historic and cultural significance.
- One commenter requests dune restoration near Belcher Road in Gasparilla Island State Park and opposes paving the parking lot due to flood-risk concerns.
- GICIA raises concerns about conflicts with deed restrictions in the Gasparilla Island State Park plan (#2, 3, 5, 6, & 7 on CLUP Map), requests inclusion of those restrictions in the new plan, and asks to participate in dune and parking-area planning efforts.
- One comment requested clearer, more user-friendly signage and instructions for QR-code payment systems at the area parks.
- One commenter submitted a proposal package from Open Shores of Southwest Florida, Inc. for consideration. The commenter requests evaluation of a publicly owned parcel as a potential public parking facility to improve beach access on Gasparilla Island and asks that the proposal and supporting materials be formally reviewed as part of the planning process.

Stump Pass Beach State Park

- One commenter submitted materials for consideration regarding the proposed Manasota Key Resort, and requests that implications of such development on the Stump Pass Beach State Park be considered and addressed with Charlotte County BOCC.
- One commenter representing a group of Gasparilla Island residents recommended the state improve and repair facilities at Stump Pass Beach State Park.

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Agency Responses to Comments

DRP staff reviewed and considered comments received from the advisory group and the public during the advisory group and public meetings, as well as subsequent written comments submitted by mail and email. Staff's responses and analysis of the comments are provided below.

Cayo Costa State Park

- Non-reservation campsite for CT Paddlers was added to Cayo Costa State Park plan.
- Paddlecraft storage and mooring capacity was added to Cayo Costa State Park plan at Pelican Bay Use Area.
- The DRP evaluates various lodging types within campgrounds and cabin areas, including different models of tents (e.g., yurts, glamping, etc.). Decisions on lodging types are according to environmental conditions, expected maintenance and visitor demand. Accordingly, the cabins on Cayo Costa State Park are not currently under consideration for replacement, however, glamping is considered.
- Additional clarity was provided on the purpose of the Park and Private Lands Access Management Concept for Cayo Costa State Park.
- Numerous comments were received regarding Park and Private Lands Access Management Concept for Cayo Costa State Park. The current descriptions of the concept are general and subject to further consensus building. Subsequent community engagement, mapping exercises, and title determinations will be conducted pursuant to this plan.
- Cayo Costa State Park will seek park boundary expansion through an amended lease to ensure the protection of submerged natural and cultural features and safe water-based recreation. Potential boundary expansion seaward of the mean high-water line may also provide the necessary jurisdiction to implement a mooring field and anchorage limitation area.
- Habitat and natural community restoration objective was added to the plan for Cayo Costa State Park which includes the area of the sensitive cultural site known as Faulkner Mound.
- Although Cayo Costa State Park is comprised of substantial acreage, its interface with private parcels/platted roads and sensitive habitat, that in many places is pyric, camping outside of the one designated campground is considered to be a management hazard.
- Integration of a group campsite adjacent to the campground at Cayo Costa State Park has been considered, however, spatial constraints, limited capacity of amenities and compatibility preclude this option. Accordingly, a group camp is not recommended.
- All waters surrounding Cayo Costa State Park are heavily trafficked by boats, requiring particular caution among paddlers. The current location of the kayak landing/launch is to the south of most boat traffic and has the benefit of directly linking paddlers with park infrastructure. No alternative locations for paddlecraft landing/launch are feasible.
- Request for Cayo Costa State Park ferry routes to be defined in the concessionaire contract in effort to avoid sensitive areas was forwarded to DRP's Bureau of Operational Services.
- Request that Cayo Costa State Park ferry landings be rerouted from the south end of the island at Captiva Pass to the Pelican Bay docks, was considered, however, provision of direct access to remote and otherwise minimally accessible portions of the park is considered an essential public service.

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- Unpermitted private docks in Sellers Canal are constructed across a narrow shoreline segment of Cayo Costa State Park boundary. Such dock construction and maintenance has resulted in illegal mangrove trimming, other vegetation removal and soil erosion. Additionally, large volumes of solid waste have accumulated in this vicinity. Community engagement and, as needed, regulatory enforcement will proceed.
- Eco-lodge (NOVA) concepts for Cayo Costa State Park were relayed to the DRP business program for consideration. Scope of services and resource impacts are incompatible with Florida State Park's mission and current land use plans.
- DRP does not have a professional relationship with Google and is unable to influence the listing of Faulkner Mound on Google maps. Recommendation is for individuals with google accounts to submit a request accordingly.
- A Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) in the wider northern section or from Lover's Cut to the narrows is not appropriate due to the lack of nesting activity. However, the inland lagoon known as Murdock's Lagoon is included within the optimum boundary and could be evaluated for CWA designation due to the high density of nesting and resting birds, should it become incorporated into the park boundary.

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park

- At Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park, research (Tarpon and Snook) is currently being completed by FWC in coastal ponds throughout CHMA and PGMA including near Rotonda West Meadows and Villas and areas near Burnt Store Road. Plan was updated to more thoroughly capture that information.
- Language around iguana monitoring was updated to include green iguanas in addition to black-spiny tailed at all parks in this region.
- The request for the Cattle Dock Point Boat Ramp Land Use Plan in Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park was considered, however the site was found to be under county jurisdiction. The DRP does not have authority for this action.

Don Pedro Island State Park

- While reconstruction of shelter and restroom amenities on Don Pedro Island State Park - Island tract was considered, resilience priorities dictate that such infrastructure is not suitable for this vulnerable environment.
- Increasing visitor access to Don Pedro Island by way of ferries would necessitate additional infrastructure that is considered unsustainable and unsuitable for this vulnerable environment.

Gasparilla Island State Park

- Deed restrictions associated with the parcels of Gasparilla Island State Park deeded by GICIA have been noted and land use proposals were modified accordingly.
- Acquisition history section of Gasparilla Island State Park was amended to include language about the State's acceptance of the property with deed restrictions at the time it was donated by GICIA and reference that the restrictions are included in the addendum.
- Cultural Resources section of Gasparilla Island State Park was amended to include language about the 1997 restoration of Amory Chapel by GICIA and the Boca Grande Woman's Club.

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- Historically, beach access at Dunes and Port Boca Grande Lighthouse Use Area was largely provided by boardwalk. Such boardwalks that cross dunes consisted of extensive decking that has proven highly vulnerable to storm surge and contribute to post storm debris that complicates recovery efforts. Accordingly, boardwalks will not be reconstructed in this area.
- Cultural Sites Listed in the Florida Master Site File Table was reformatted to make significance column fully visible.
- Existing Natural Resource conditions and park accomplishment sections were updated to include information regarding 2025 beach nourishment projects.
- Reference to prescribed fire was removed from the Invasive Plant Treatment section as there is no prescribed fire at this park.
- Language regarding the paving of roads and parking areas within the Dunes and Port Boca Grande Lighthouse Use Areas was revised to remove references to pavement (solid concrete or asphalt materials), consistent with deed restrictions.
- Interior nature trail south of the support area will be discontinued in order to adhere to deed restrictions for the parcel that preclude use for trails or any format of natural landscape alteration.
- Full restoration of the Amory Chapel in Gasparilla Island State Park was considered, however, preservation of the historic structure with its original materials that would allow for continual occupancy is infeasible. Such restoration would also require climate control, onsite restrooms, and ADA-compliant parking that would conflict with other necessary land use changes.
- Plans for every unit of the Florida State Parks system are reviewed for compliance with local jurisdictional comprehensive plans including zoning and land use designations. Optimum Boundary parcels for the Gasparilla Island State Park Plan will be reviewed with Lee County through this process.
- Some comments received are concerning operational issues at Gasparilla Island State Park (i.e. Range Light Parking Area, QR-code payment system signage) that will be addressed outside of the scope of land use planning by park management.
- Deed restrictions associated with each of the parcels that comprise Gasparilla Island State Park preclude additional land clearing and construction of parking. The parcel suggested for parking by Open Shores of Southwest Florida, Inc is encumbered by these restrictions.
- Concession activity that might be contemplated at any location within Gasparilla Island State Park would not entail an infrastructural footprint. No such concession infrastructure is contemplated in the land-use plan. Concession activity, such as guided tours, may be facilitated without the use of new buildings, stands or other structures and therefore are a potential source of revenue generation.

Stump Pass Beach State Park

- Some bay-to-Gulf footpaths will remain/be reestablished to provide public access across the peninsula at Stump Pass Beach State Park. The number of crossings will be minimized to protect recovering and/or planted vegetation and prevent erosion.
- Dialogue between DRP and proprietors of the Manasota Key Resort is ongoing for the purposes of communicating natural resource sensitivities and potential operational challenges at Stump Pass Beach State Park.

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- The main interior island trail at Stump Pass Beach State Park will not be reestablished in order to minimize bisection of habitat and maximize dune accretion, allowing opportunity for this area to recover from storm events.

General

- DRP will develop a policy regarding derelict vessels that land above the mean high-water line within park boundaries.

**Charlotte Harbor Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

Advisory Group Members

Local Government

Andy Miller

Collier County - Coastal Zone Management

Ben Hammer

Collier County - Assistant Director, Sports

Melissa Hennig

Collier County - Conservation Collier Program

Steve Boutelle

Lee County Natural Resources

Nancy MacPhee

Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau

Ryan Eggleston

Village of Estero

State Agencies

Stephanie Erickson

Florida Department of Environmental Protection,
Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, Estero
Bay Aquatic Preserve

Brandon Ackermann

Department of State, Division of Historical Resources

Becky Schneider

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Daniel (Dan) Mitchell

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Marie Dessources

South Florida Water Management District

Federal Agencies

William (Bill) Leady

Big Cypress National Preserve

Lisa Andrews

Big Cypress National Preserve

Jared Franklin

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Tribal Organizations

Travis Kirk

Seminole Tribe of Florida

Victoria Menchaca

Seminole Tribe of Florida

Universities

Sara Ayers-Rigsby

Florida Public Archaeology Network

Citizen Support Organization

Terry Cain

Estero Bay Buddies

Francine Stevens

Friends of Fakahatchee

Heather Mitchell

Friends of Koreshan State Park

Environmental Organizations

Ray Vinson

Big Waters Land Trust

Chris Wittman

Captains for Clean Water

Tammy Ash

Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Robin Serne

Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)
Land and Water Trust

Sophie Carpenter

Florida Native Plant Society

Connie Nagele

Florida Native Plant Society

Adjacent Landowners

Ivo Nedelchev

Pelican Sound Golf and River Club

Recreational User Groups

Beth Courtright

Paddle Florida

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

Advisory Group Meeting

The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans for Collier-Seminole State Park, Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, Estero Bay Preserve State Park, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Koreshan Historic State Park, Lovers Key State Park and Mound Key Archaeological State Park was held on July 13, 2026, from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm (EDT) at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center in Naples, Florida.

Twenty-eight representatives from the following user groups and organizations attended: Big Cypress National Preserve, Big Waters Land Trust, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Conservation Collier, Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Land & Water Trust, Department of State/Division of Historical Resources, Estero Bay Buddies, Florida Native Plant Society, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Public Archaeology Network, Friends of Fakahatchee, Lee County Natural Resources, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Paddle Florida, Pelican Sound Gulf and River Club, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Seminole Tribe of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District.

Attending DEP Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) staff members from the Southwest District Office included Ezell (BJ) Givens, Zachary (Zach) Lozano, Chris Becker, Karen Rogers and Matthew Hodge. Cody Peters represented Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park. David Baniak and Cole Luttrell represented Fakahatchee Strand State Park. Michael Duey and Rebecca Thornhill represented Koreshan State Park. Darren Flickinger and Maulik (Moe) Patel represented Collier-Seminole State Park, and Katie Moses represented Lovers Key State Park. Staff members from the DRP Office of Park Planning included Daniel Alsentzer, Meghan Burke, Scott Groves, Melisa Balkcom, Gabrielle Trace and Liam O'Mara. Chip Turner also attended the meeting, representing the DEP's South District Office.

Audubon Florida, Audubon Western Everglades, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Conservation Collier, Friends of Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, Friends of Lovers Key, Friends of Fakahatchee and Lee County Natural Resources provided written comments, which are summarized below.

Organizations/persons invited but unable to attend include Audubon Florida, City of Everglades, Collier County Board of County Commissioners, Collier County Tourism Department, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services/Florida Forest Service, Department of Environmental Protection/Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, Department of State/Division of Historical Resources/National Register of Historic Places, Estero Historical Society, Everglades National Park, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Friends of Collier-Seminole, Friends of Delnor-Wiggins Pass, Friends of Lovers Key, Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida Paddling Trails Association, Florida Trail Association, Greater Estero Chamber of Commerce, Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, Lee County Board of County Commissioners, Lee County Parks & Recreation, Lee County Tourist Development Council, Lovers Key Resort, Marie Selby Botanical Garden, Port of the Everglades, Riverwoods Plantation, Sierra Club, Southwest Florida Archaeological Society, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Theresa Schober, Trust for Public Land, and United States Geological Survey.

Meghan Burke began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process and the Big Cypress planning region. She also conducted a roll call of the advisory group members, including those within DRP. Daniel Alsentzer explained the agenda and how the meeting will be conducted.

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

Daniel Alsentzer introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY) Lisa Andrews noted that Big Cypress National Preserve is a neighbor to Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, and as such, shares similar water interests and imperiled species overlap. Daniel Alsentzer responded that both units mutually benefit from conservation and highlighted the importance of supporting each other to achieve their respective missions. Daniel suggested Lisa consider bringing up interpretive programming/land use component topics during a later part of the meeting. Lisa also mentioned that BICY wants visitors to love and experience natural and cultural resources like Florida state parks, but it's difficult to draw the line [between recreation and conservation].

Bill Leady added that BICY is limiting the number of people that can use off-road vehicles (ORV) in the preserve. Bill elaborated that BICY does not have signage in sensitive areas that inform people where they are in an effort to protect sensitive natural and cultural resources.

Big Waters Land Trust (BWLT) – Ray Vinson stated that he and BWLT supports [conservation] land acquisition in the region and their organization can be more “nimble” than government entities at acquiring conservation lands. Ray added that inholdings within Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park are a good project for them to work on. BWLT can acquire small parcels for conservation when convenient. Ray noted BWLT's southern range as the Big Cypress region.

Conservancy of Southwest Florida (Conservancy) Tammy Ash expressed that, regarding Collier-Seminole State Park, the Conservancy is very concerned with water quantity/water quality entering the park and is happy to see it discussed in the draft plan. In addition, the Conservancy is concerned with invasives entering the park as a result of increased water flow. Tammy questioned that if park staff were to remove the berm in the “Bicycle Seat” area of the park, what does that do to nearby habitats? Moe Patel informed Tammy that restoration of the “Bicycle Seat” area has not yet begun and added that there are upland habitats south of the “Bicycle Seat” area which could influence a decision to leave berm(s) in place. Moe also stated there is gopher tortoise habitat in these uplands, so leaving certain sections of berm would keep upland areas intact.

Conservation Collier Melissa Hennig asked if there are models that depict water flow at Collier-Seminole State Park in regards to Picayune restoration (Picayune Strand Restoration Project [PSRP]). Chris Becker responded to Melissa, offering that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) did modeling surrounding this restoration project, but these models were limited, as they only extended to U.S. 41. Chris added that more recent models looked at culverts under U.S. 41, which showed expected water rise under certain scenarios. Chris stated that he reviewed these models when they were published.

Melissa also referenced royal poinciana trees at Mound Key Archaeological State Park, asking if it is not possible to remove the trees completely, then to at least cut them down and leave in place so they do not topple over and act as a seed source. Karen Rogers responded that Rebecca Thornhill has a project focused on the removal of this species in collaboration with the Division of Historical Resources (DHR). Karen elaborated that one viable management strategy is to cut the tree at its base and drop it.

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Rebecca added that trees greater than a 4-inch diameter at breast height (dbh) are felled. Under ideal conditions, Rebecca elaborated, trees are also mulched in place or removed.

Melissa shared her thoughts, regarding Mound Key Archaeological State Park, on guiding visitors to a sensitive destination, saying it can be a good or bad thing. She offered that if people want to go somewhere, they will find it. She questioned how much visitation does park staff want on the island? Daniel Alsentzer discussed the merits of visitor use management versus carrying capacity, adding that there is a fine line between helping curate an experience to the tourist but at the same time not draw too much attention. Daniel asked Lisa Andrews how the National Park Service (NPS) deals with visitor interactions around fragile orchids. Lisa responded that it is very difficult and that they try to educate visitors, with the inaccessibility of the swamp largely the controlling factor. Bill Leady added that they intentionally do not share where some of their most protected species are by removing defining background features from photos. Daniel concluded the topic by saying implementation of the visitor use management strategy by the Florida Park Service (FPS) was borrowed from NPS.

Melissa offered Conservation Collier's assistance with helping acquire adjacent conservation lands in Collier County, explaining that lands first need to be nominated to be eligible. She also stated that the inholdings within Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park would not be as appropriate for their program purposes.

Melissa shared her thoughts on the remote payment systems deployed at coastal parks, specifically mentioning Collier County's "pay by plate" method. She asked if park staff want to implement this system as well? BJ Givens responded that there is a pilot program at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park for implementing remote operating kiosks to accept payment for park entrance fees, etc., and if these work (they promise 90% compliance), they may be utilized elsewhere in the Florida state park system. Zach Lozano added that one of the huge benefits of these kiosk systems is their ability to be easily removed by two people in only 5-10 minutes in case of an impending storm.

Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Land & Water Trust (CREW) Robin Serne shared CREW's support of prescribed fire used in the park and staff having resources they need for effective management.

Department of State, Division of Historical Resources (DHR) Brandon Ackermann recognized the region as a "Panacea" for cultural resources in the greater statewide park system. He emphasized the need to ensure the cultural resource inventory is accurate in all draft plans after he noticed several outdated Florida Master Site File (FMSF) references during his review. Brandon explained that FMSF data is updated quarterly and, considering this information is updated regularly, encouraged DRP to reach out to DHR at least annually to ensure the best available data is included in the draft plans. He mentioned the reference to annual site evaluations in the draft plans as "good," but that Archaeological Resource Management training (ARM) is only mentioned in some plans and could be mentioned in all plans based on its importance. Brandon emphasized the requirement for DRP to consult with DHR when ground disturbing activities are to take place. Daniel Alsentzer responded that Park Planning regularly communicates internally with other program areas such as the Bureau of Natural and Cultural Resources (BNCR), namely Bill Stanton and Olivia Williamson, but could adapt protocol in an effort to improve communication within other DRP program areas. BJ Givens added that ARM training is currently meeting the needs of District 4 and that most park managers reach out to DHR directly to register for it.

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He added that usually two-three rangers per park are ARM-trained but recognized a backlog of staff that needs refresher training (done after five years have elapsed since first becoming certified).

Brandon also shared his appreciation for Florida state parks seeing cultural resources as an asset and not a burden and also recognized that DRP addresses resources differently than other state agencies.

Brandon brought up the late 1950s hunting cabins at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and their original status as ineligible for National Register listing. With the age threshold now surpassed, Brandon asked if reevaluation has begun to assess national eligibility. Cole Luttrell replied that the park is still in the assessment phase of the process. Brandon responded that, if there is difficulty in making progress internally, that DHR can help assist with this process.

Brandon complimented the cultural landscape at Koreshan Historic State Park and recognized that while he is aware the New Store is not open to visitors, it is in disrepair and asked what the plans are for it. Michael Duey responded that there are designs for a full restoration – it just needs funding to begin. Michael acknowledged the extent of structural damage to the building, adding that while it was internally stabilized, it remains the biggest restoration priority for the park. Michael stated there are multiple adaptive reuses being explored, and with designs drafted in 2016, the park is currently working to update the designs to comply with current building codes. Brandon recognized the lack of funding as a barrier to completing the project and suggested DRP apply for a DHR grant (similar to the small matching grant administered for the Membership Cottage) to complete some of the work. Michael responded that the park has been exploring DHR grants. Daniel Alsentzer expanded the topic to introduce the implications of the New Store restoration for the Village of Estero, recognizing the priority [of the Village] to connect the Bonita to Estero Rail Trail (BERT) and spur trails to the Koreshan settlement, possibly at the historic entrance.

Brandon recognized Mound Key Archaeological State Park as an incredibly important archaeological site and addressed the challenges associated with erosion and sea level rise. He asked how DRP can mitigate destruction to significant resources as a result of natural processes, suggesting FPAN can help respond to eroding shell mounds, etc. Brandon emphasized the need to protect the most vulnerable sections of the island at a point where we need to consider utilizing infrastructure [as opposed to other strategies] to protect cultural resources. Brandon suggested Park Planning could add language about additional research being done for all mounds but added that DHR discourages archaeological work that is unnecessary, instead supporting less invasive techniques. He went on to explain that archaeological research is inherently destructive and doing destructive work for the sake of learning and putting resources at risk is not best practice. Victoria Menchaca supported this sentiment. Brandon added that language in the plan suggests “DRP consult with DHR and FPAN,” but clarified that consultation is a formal process and should be done only in collaboration with DHR. He clearly stated that while FPAN assists DHR and Florida state parks, FPAN is not involved in consultation per se.

Brandon commented on language in the Lovers Key State Park plan regarding the Phase III archaeological survey on Black Island shell midden and asked where this recommendation originated, elaborating that Phase III is undertaken when there is risk of development and/or disturbance to the resource. Karen Rogers responded that Lovers Key State Park had a Phase II survey done and Phase III was recommended as a result of the survey. Brandon explained the different survey phases. Karen replied that the recommendation came from the contractor who did the Phase II survey, and that the midden had lost

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half of its size due to erosional processes. Brandon clarified that a Phase III is only appropriate if DHR has recommended it.

Brandon asked what carrying capacity actually means, elaborating that from a cultural resources perspective it is complicated and inherent with different federal and state regulations. He added that carrying capacity should be mentioned in certain scenarios where cultural sites may be overvisited and a “hard” number is needed to protect the resource. He elaborated that at Mound Key Archaeological State Park, carrying capacity should also allow staff to respond to disturbances, etc. He also stated that without additional legal requirements and staff, the ability to manage ancestral remains with additional visitation may be a concern.

Estero Bay Buddies Terry Cain said a new trail system at Mound Key Archaeological State Park may be needed to relieve old broken trails. She likes the idea to “give the old trails a rest,” but contends she doesn’t know how it could be done. Daniel Alsentzer replied that a lot more research must come, but generally speaking the use of fill material that does not mimic archaeologically sensitive materials could be utilized.

Terry asked what a reservation system for the Estero River Scrub trailhead entails, to which Daniel Alsentzer responded that because the park is classified as a preserve, it is a mechanism of visitor use management to treat the area similar to a wilderness area. Daniel elaborated that it would help ensure an appropriate amount of hikers use the trail system and also track who is using the trails and document causes of any observed issues or resource damage given the inability to establish wayfinding. Cole Luttrell replied to Daniel that at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, a permit system has been used in the past at the East River bird rookery area that limited the number of visitors to only 20 per day, but more recently it has not been necessary due to drought conditions. Moe Patel added that there were plans to limit motorcraft access to Mud Bay at Collier-Seminole State Park based on an advisory group recommendation from 2014. Zach Lozano explained that the trailhead at the end of Winkler Road contains sensitive salt marsh habitat and that electronic bikes (E-bikes) are a major issue there. He was referring specifically to the bird species that utilize this fragile ecosystem and the birdwatchers’ experience being negatively affected by E-bike disturbance. He articulated that a permit methodology grants access for visitors to enter an area while also explaining regulations when getting the permit. Rebecca Thornhill commented that the whole idea is to increase protection of the resources and inform visitors that there are impacts associated with seeing the resources. Marie Dessources asked more about the process and proposed using a QR code. Rebecca and Daniel replied that specific methodologies are to be explored. Lisa Andrews commented that BICY does not use a reservation system; instead, the preserve uses a permit system not based on carrying capacity but rather on providing access to certain otherwise inaccessible areas. Daniel introduced the concept of using walking beams in the Estero River Scrub trailhead.

Terry also asked if carrying capacity is not specifically addressed in the draft plan, what resources does the park manager have to close an area? Daniel Alsentzer responded that Chapter 62-D [Florida Administrative Code] gives a lot of latitude to call FWC law enforcement to address this visitor use issue and added that Park Planning can strengthen language to make up for not including a carrying capacity table in the plan, echoing language from Chapter 62-D. BJ commented that basic observations can be used to support the decision to close off an area when overuse is occurring. Terry asked whether carrying capacity can be mentioned in the draft management plan with reference to Chapter 62-D.

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Daniel replied that within higher-level plan documents, this might already be discussed, but if not, Park Planning can try to reference this.

Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) Connie Nagele expressed FNPS' appreciation for protection of imperiled plant species within parks, adding that she feels they are sufficiently covered within the draft management plans under discussion. She offered FNPS assistance with monitoring, suggesting this should be added to the plans where appropriate. Connie recognized the educational value of having FNPS members assist park staff in the field with monitoring and shared her experience observing native plants rebound at Collier-Seminole State Park.

Connie asked about storm mitigation efforts being done at Collier-Seminole State Park for the walking dredge and Barron Collier memorial. She asked if they were not as susceptible as the blockhouse structure. Darren Flickinger responded that nine of the cultural sites at the park receive an annual assessment by ARM-trained staff where they determine if there is water damage, rust, insects, structural damage, etc. and take photos annually to compare condition over time.

Connie brought up the Royal Hammock Trail at Collier-Seminole State Park and that it has been inaccessible since Hurricane Ian. She asked if the park is committed to using that trail system and if so, it deserves higher priority because it's the main trail used. Moe Patel responded that the trail is in the permitting process, with different options up for debate as to how to rebuild it (including an elevated boardwalk) considering repeated past infrastructure failures. Darren Flickinger added that the project is sitting with the DRP Bureau of Design and Construction. Connie acknowledged that park staff can't expect to rebuild the boardwalk every few years, so at what point "do we start looking at this and make a decision?" Daniel Alsentzer responded that trail design is done on a case-by-case basis, with no inherent matrix for decision making. He recognized that at-grade solutions, such as use of a mobility mat, sometimes work well and can be used seasonally.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Dan Mitchell expressed the importance of prioritizing prescribed burning and the associated maintenance and restoration of pyric communities with the parks.

Dan shared a priority of FWC is detection of chronic wasting disease (CWD). He also stated there have been two separate detections of CWD in the panhandle and that south Florida should be mindful of this, while acknowledging the challenges associated with small sample size in southwest/south Florida. He suggested that the parks could potentially help FWC with sampling sickly/dead deer, especially because this has implications for the Florida panther population. Moe Patel replied that the DRP District 4 office communicates research projects to park staff. Moe stated he has not observed many roadkill deer. Dan responded to clarify that he is referring more to sickly deer than dead deer, and that if park staff observes sickly deer, to coordinate with law enforcement to sample the deer to determine presence of disease. He added that FWC is struggling to meet sampling quotas in the southern portion of the state and therefore any additional assistance the parks can offer would be extremely helpful. Heather Mitchell asked what specifically the symptoms are associated with CWD infection. Dan replied to Heather symptoms typically manifest as stumbling, confused/disoriented, and malnourished deer.

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Dan expressed that, regarding Mound Key Archaeological State Park, one of the objectives is to acquire the McGee parcel and asked if the goats and infrastructure (i.e., fencing) have been removed from this parcel. Michael Duey responded to Dan, stating that most of the goats are no longer there but that the fence is still there, with no plans to remove it. He explained that this is because that side of the island is not accessible to the public.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Becky Schneider requested that DRP work closely with FWC to continue imperiled species monitoring, including birds, bats, snakes, sea turtles, crocodiles, etc. She shared her appreciation for continued collaboration. Becky asked that the Florida bonneted bat be added to the imperiled species section of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park draft plan.

Becky also shared results of a recent land management review (LMR) at Lovers Key State Park and suggested DRP staff look at comments regarding shorebird species for additional information. She commended staff for their management of imperiled species. Karen Rogers responded that nesting for Wilson's plover has increased over the past four years and that black skimmer nested last year. Becky added that Wilson's plover will be listed soon, which would strengthen protections similar to those for snowy plover.

Becky brought up the relationship between shoreline erosion and nesting habitat at Mound Key Archaeological State Park, commenting that monitoring can be helpful in establishing a wading bird zone. Rebecca Thornhill stated wading birds are not known to nest on the island. Daniel Alsentzer mentioned the partnership between the park and aquatic preserve. Stephanie Erickson shared that they [the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve] are more than happy to partner with park staff and can help monitor and provide data for multiple resource topics (oyster, seagrass, wading/diving birds, etc.) Daniel asked Stephanie to share some of the staff at the aquatic preserve with the group to which she responded that she has staff involved in water quality monitoring, sea grass monitoring, oyster monitoring, wading bird monitoring, etc.

Becky questioned whether the mowed pasture at Koreshan Historic State Park could support burrowing owls in the vicinity. Specifically, she suggested the possibility that if the former overflow parking area were to be left mowed, perhaps it could potentially support owls. She also suggested that DRP staff should consider unintended consequences with armadillo when restoring the former burn pile area into an orchard [inadvertently recruiting armadillo with the presence of fruit]. Rebecca Thornhill responded that the park has not observed any burrowing owls.

In response to a prompt from Daniel Alsentzer about implementing a critical wildlife area (CWA), Becky mentioned the importance of monitoring to support the establishment and the need to include interagency groups like the Southwest Coastal Scrub Working Group in the effort. She encouraged park staff to submit wading bird reports as documentation to begin the CWA process and offered assistance from FWC staff.

Florida Public Archaeological Network Sara Ayers-Rigsby stated she would defer to Brandon (Ackermann) on specific cultural resource recommendations and shared her appreciation to be invited to the advisory group meeting. Sara commented that overall, Florida state parks do not emphasize cultural resources as they should and suggested that more funding and staff could help improve this.

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She elaborated that even for this advisory group meeting, there is only 30 minutes devoted to the cultural resource discussion, whereas there is 60 minutes allotted for members to discuss natural resources.

Sara also shared the most recent archaeological excavation study included in the draft plans, a 2014 LIDAR report done by the University of South Florida and proposed that more recent studies should be included in the draft plans. In regard to Mound Key Archaeological State Park, she stated there is a void in research done by the University of Florida and University of Georgia included in the plan and surmised this may be attributed to a communication barrier and need to improve the feedback loop between DHR and DRP. She added that she has personally gone out with DRP staff to most of the parks and applauds them for their work, again adding the need to support ongoing work with additional funding and staffing. Sara mentioned that getting out to parks is a great resource for FPAN, specifically their program that documents impacts from sea level rise and looting. Michael Duey responded that, while the Mound Key Archaeological State Park draft plan does not cite specific excavations, the information from those studies is included, adding that the park has good communication with the universities and receives data back on a regular basis.

Daniel Alsentzer shared the recent closing of the Mirasol/Boomer Estate at Koreshan Historic State Park and explained the historical context of the house.

Sara also discussed the value of conducting an archaeological survey prior to moving a structure - before being lost to sea level rise and in an effort to further expand interpretive goals. She provided a specific example regarding the oldest standing structure in Palm Beach County, and how it was moved and reused as a visitor center. Sara then expressed her preference in doing an archaeological survey, moving the blockhouse at Collier-Seminole State Park, and interpreting the resource from a new location. Brandon Ackermann asked if moving the blockhouse is on the table, to which Daniel Alsentzer responded that while it has been discussed in the field at length, its translocation is not included in the draft plan for multiple reasons. Daniel asserts that while the blockhouse is beautiful and distinct and at risk being that the structure is in a very vulnerable place, it is (virtually) impossible to move or lift. Darren Flickinger added that at Collier- Seminole State Park, parkwide mitigation efforts for storm surge are in place, but acknowledged these don't specifically address the blockhouse. Moe Patel responded to Darren's comment saying that the blockhouse was there back when it was a county park in the 1940s. He added that the stone structure on the first floor was poured in place on site and, as such, is not sure if it could be moved. Darren responded by saying the blockhouse has historically experienced storm surge and flooded.

Sara initiated a discussion about limited public access at Mound Key Archaeological State Park based on existing infrastructure and asked for specificity surrounding the concept of "increasing visitation." She questioned whether that could be provided in numerical (quantitative) format. Daniel Alsentzer acknowledged that the resources themselves are at risk by the increased visitation from adding more trails. In addition, Daniel recognized the challenges with recording attendance on the island but anticipates visitation to be modest, especially since there are no amenities being proposed in the draft plan.

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Friends of Fakahatchee Francine Stevens commented that the concept of carrying capacity seemed to be missing from the draft plans and this concerns her. She elaborated by asking how the park manager determines if there's detriment at the East River [Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park] bird rookery and how do they balance visitors and protecting the environment? She acknowledged the concept of "tourism fatigue." Daniel Alsentzer replied that Florida state parks are at risk of being loved to death and there is a need to address gaps in data and how we defend against misuse and overuse. David Baniak replied to Francine, saying that with vast acreage it is difficult to determine carrying capacity, but it is something he will further explore. BJ Givens addressed David, saying park managers have the ability to close off an area if observations suggest overuse and detriment to the resources.

Lee County Natural Resources Steve Boutelle asked about sea level rise at Lovers Key State Park, specifically if there is more research going on that is not included in the districtwide draft plan? He mentioned the 10-year planning cycle timeline as reason to include something about sea level rise projections now versus wait for the next update. Daniel Alsentzer responded that natural community succession and sea level rise data is in the process of being included in the overall District 4 plan. Daniel added that Park Planning encourages input on parks like Lovers Key State Park regarding this topic. He elaborated that multiple successional events have resulted in sand accretion at units like Stump Pass Beach State Park and Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, which has significant implications for resource management (i.e., fire) in certain environments like Collier-Seminole State Park or Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Karen Rogers added by sharing that researchers are sending studies to help park staff understand how these natural communities will be shaped in the future. Karen emphasized the need to establish dune systems in an effort to promote resilience. She shared her observations as to a shift on the backside of these dune systems. Daniel responded to Karen, mentioning that at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park the changes to topography have led to the decision to allow the north end of the park to naturalize/accumulate sand. Cole Luttrell shared insight regarding fire regime dynamics. Specifically, he stated that south of U.S. 41, fire regimes are changing. Cole emphasized the importance of a good aerial survey to better calculate acreages and a need for more specific modeling as this type of data is difficult to predict, but he and others at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park are still surveying regardless. Moe Patel added that at Collier-Seminole State Park, most of the park contains mangrove swamp and that recent aeriels suggest salt marsh is transitioning to mangrove swamp. Moe added that north of U.S. 41, water depths are increasing as a result of PSRP although it is only one year post-project completion. Moe explained that while wet flatwoods remain healthy, gopher tortoise habitat is still a primary concern with water levels rising. Daniel commented on water quality concerns from offsite flow into Collier-Seminole State Park. Steve responded that saltwater intrusion is possible at groundwater level. Cole added to this thought, sharing his interest in learning how or if, at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, cypress trees north of U.S. 41 could be impacted from saltwater intrusion.

Steve also brought up the topic of nuisance animal predation, specifically coyotes on sea turtle eggs, emphasizing a need for standardized, consistent treatment across parks. He offered a method of first defining the level of predation need, which could then inform management actions, rather than selecting one predator species over another to focus on. Karen Rogers responded that in some plans, the predation threshold is 10% of nests on beach and added that when coyotes depredate nests, as many as 10-20 nests are lost per night. She mentioned that Lovers Key State Park and Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park are not currently affected by coyotes but shared that USDA contractors are removing coyotes on the beach at Cayo Costa State Park and agreed a statewide level standard might be necessary.

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Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau Nancy MacPhee shared her appreciation for being invited to the meeting, declaring Florida state parks a “crown jewel” of the area. Nancy mentioned “it’s not always a good beach day” and as such, diversified tourism opportunities are important to sustaining this type of economy. She proposed the idea of collaborating with DRP on marketing the parks, explaining that any video shoots done would be “controlled and authentic”. She encouraged citizen support organizations and volunteers to assist in this effort. She added that eco-tour operators need the kind of information presented in marketing videos when operating in the park (so they remain informed). She concluded by saying that she looks forward to continuing to partner with DRP.

Paddle Florida Beth Courtright mentioned Paddle Florida is about to conduct their 100th paddle trip in which members of the organization will bring people together for a week-long immersion on the water. She added that Paddle Florida works closely with Florida state parks. She also shared that her organization tries to build respect for the environment by inspiring people to care, adding that the organization is most concerned with water quality and public access.

Beth stated she has lived in Florida for 40 years and asked what DRP’s plan is when dealing with alligators, elaborating that when visitors throw food at them, alligators can attack. She mentioned the alligator attack at Kissimmee and shared her thoughts that the issue is starting to get worse and the alligator population is larger. Chris Becker replied to Beth that there are standards set up to evaluate and monitor “problem” alligators. He added that alligators near boat ramps may get fed (because these areas experience high-use). He explained that FWC manages alligator complaints, but that DRP surveys populations in the park. Daniel Alsentzer added that alligator management is more of an operational strategy than addressed specifically in unit management plans.

Pelican Sound Gulf and River Club Ivo Nedelchev shared his interest mostly in restoration efforts/updates at Lovers Key State Park.

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RBNERR) Jared Franklin shared his concerns about eco (tourism) tours at Collier-Seminole State Park and mentioned that RBNERR has similar issues. He asked how this will be managed and with what funding? Darren Flickinger responded that eco tours cannot be altogether excluded. Moe Patel added that in Mud Bay (Collier-Seminole State Park) a motor exclusion zone (MEZ) and speed zones are being designated in the park, which has been a decades long process, and that these regulatory areas are being managed and funded via FWC.

Seminole Tribe of Florida Victoria Menchaca advised that if a state park unit has questions on specific projects, they may reach out to the Tribe. Also, Victoria explained that with any project which involves ground disturbance, such as new trails or infrastructure, the general recommendation is to have it evaluated by a cultural resources professional.

Victoria also shared the requirement to consult tribes on specific federal projects (i.e, USACE) that have federal permits in place.

Travis Kirk mentioned he deals with external agency compliance in his position. He emphasized the importance of ensuring tribal rights are upheld and that resource management proposals shouldn’t interfere with water supply or natural resources.

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South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Marie Dessources explained the change in hydrology and water quality in the region, adding that saltwater intrusion is more frequent. She further stated a loss in herbaceous communities because of saltwater intrusion that may ultimately be inevitable and offered the possibility of prescribed fire to halt this successional transition. Marie also mentioned the extended hydroperiod is longer than fire type communities can handle and offered the need to focus on which fire type areas are highest priority. Chris Becker responded that DRP is monitoring what other agencies are proposing when it comes to this topic. He clarified that he and other District staff reviewed and commented on proposed options from the Department of Transportation (DOT) related to protecting park resources and hydrology from projects including levees or bridges. He also explained that PSRP will increase the amount of freshwater, which will help delay the transition to saltwater mangroves. He stated that U.S. 41 doesn't have enough culverts and bridges within Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park to convey the water as it should and warrants further discussion with engineers. Moe Patel shared insight at Collier-Seminole State Park surrounding wells that record saltwater intrusion, adding that SFWMD also records this data. Moe agreed with Chris that PSRP should delay saltwater intrusion but mentioned more conveyance features could facilitate saltwater intrusion. He added the importance of needing features to be added in the right place where water inflows and suggested a triage approach should be implemented, focusing on areas within the park already affected by saltwater intrusion. Cole Luttrell shared his insight at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park with observing a gradual transition of salt marsh into glades marsh. Marie concluded by sharing DOT involvement with U.S. 41.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

Audubon Florida

Grateful the updated draft plans focus on storm improvements and resilience. Appreciative of efforts to listen to comments when plans were in conflict with endangered species like Florida scrub-jay.

Audubon Western Everglades

Below comments relate to Collier-Seminole State Park:

Commends the Florida Park Service for updating the park's unit management plan. Fully supports the well-considered plans among the following high-priority measures:

- Monitoring the restoration water flows from PSRP.
 - Acquisition of parcels northwest of the current boundary near Fiddlers Creek and of the adjacent airboat tour operation.
 - Development of plans to address nutrient pollution in stormwater flows discharged from urban and agricultural development upstream of the park.
 - Restoration of the "Bicycle Seat" area.
 - Promote only passive recreation compatible with sensitive resources and wildlife.
1. While not found in the draft plan, Audubon Western Everglades understands DEP is considering implementing arthropod control measures in many or all Florida state parks. Audubon Western Everglades does not support programs that would alter or impact the ecological role these insects play in the greater Everglades. If control of urban invasive exotic mosquitoes such as *Aedes aegypti* or *Culex quinquefasciatus*, is necessary, then minimal control measures for urban parks may be measures to consider - but Collier-Seminole is not an urban park.

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2. Strongly supports the removal of the “Bicycle Seat” berm and hydrologic restoration of approximately 55 acres within that area. This area should not be used as a stormwater treatment area (STA). Instead, restoring natural water flow should be pursued to improve ecological function, enhance habitat quality and increase the resilience of the park’s wetlands and estuarine systems. Hydrologic restoration is a significant opportunity to improve natural resource conditions within the park and beyond. Stormwater treatment should occur outside the boundaries of the park. State parks should be managed first and foremost for the protection and restoration of natural resources, not as locations for regional stormwater infrastructure. Recommends acquisition of more appropriate locations for stormwater treatment - the fallow Lipman Farms property near U.S. 41 on the south side of the road is a prime prospect.
3. Supports the plans to monitor restoration water flows from PSRP. There are important changes to assess, including possible impacts to upland habitats and their wildlife such as gopher tortoises as well as water quality changes with new culverts under U.S. 41 and State Road 92. Monitoring will guide adaptive management measures.
4. Supports acquisition of the existing airboat tour operation adjacent to the park. Bringing this property under public ownership would improve management consistency, reduce potential conflicts with sensitive natural resources and provide opportunities for habitat restoration and long-term resource protection compatible with the park’s conservation mission. Similarly, acquisition of parcels northwest of the park near the expanding Fiddlers Creek and other developments offer resilience and buffering to these encroaching incompatible land uses.
5. As a designated wilderness area, the park’s waterways should continue to emphasize passive recreational uses that minimize disturbance to wildlife and protect the area’s exceptional natural character. Sensitive aquatic habitats support numerous species, including the endangered smalltooth sawfish, which depend upon relatively undisturbed conditions. Recreational management should prioritize wildlife conservation while providing opportunities for low-impact public enjoyment. We recommend installation of additional signage identifying applicable speed limits throughout the wilderness area. It is essential that all recreational uses remain passive and compatible with the protection of the park’s ecological resources. Maintaining this emphasis will help preserve wildlife habitat, protect water quality and sustain the healthy, balanced ecological systems that make this park one of Florida’s most important natural areas.

Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Below comments relate to Collier-Seminole State Park:

1. Supports the proposed restoration of the “Bicycle Seat” area in management zone CS-01.
2. Acknowledges that while the park has been consistent in its management plans since 2004, stating that “uses such as water resource development projects, water supply projects, stormwater management projects, linear facilities and sustainable agriculture and forestry are not consistent with this plan or the management purposes of the park and will be discouraged,” agencies continue to include it as a possible water quality improvement site. Water not meeting Outstanding Florida Water (OFW) standards should be treated off-site before entering the park so that it meets standards outlined in Florida Statute (F.S.) Chapter 62-302.700.

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3. Supports the park's efforts to monitor water quality and quantity from the copious flow into the park resulting from PSRP. Water entering the park needs to meet OFW water quality standards, and excessive flow prohibits park staff from fulfilling management activities required under the draft plan and F.S. Chapter 253.034(5). The Conservancy will continue to work with SFWMD and others towards an offsite solution for improving water quality as well as working with the park on solving the water quantity issue.
4. Supports the full removal or removal of sections of the berm ("Bicycle Seat" area) located within CS-01, but the plan should discuss any effects that this removal would have on drier habitats south of the berm and upland species such as gopher tortoises. Supports the approach of the berm being removed in sections to evaluate effects.
5. Requests additional language under the first restoration objective on page 26 of the draft plan regarding managing the flow of aquatic non-native plants from outside the park. Once the berm is fully or partially removed, it seems as if the depression marsh itself and the habitats south of the marsh may see more risk of non-native plants moving in, at least during the initial phases.
6. Supports implementing monitoring protocols for the gopher tortoise and Florida bonneted bat; however, the monitoring levels in the imperiled species inventory table should be updated to reflect this.
7. Strongly opposes any future use of park land which "could be repurposed into a stormwater retention and treatment area to handle increased water flow from northern restoration efforts and filter runoff from surrounding agricultural lands." This language in the optimum boundary section directly contradicts the consistent language in this plan and previous years' plans. Furthermore, "Acquisition of adjacent private lands by Collier County, state or a nongovernmental organization should be considered to divert the farm run-off and possibly create a STA before it reaches any OFW." Water coming into the park needs treatment before it enters the present or future expanded boundary of the OFW. Acquiring adjacent agricultural parcels would bring their associated problematic discharges inside the boundary of an OFW, which negates the purpose of designating the park as an OFW and could leave the burden of meeting OFW standards solely on park staff and budgets.
8. Strongly supports acquisition of the Lipman triangle by an entity other than the park and/or use the Lipman triangle to treat water prior to discharge into the OFW boundary as required by state statute. Strongly oppose the concept of the park considering a boundary expansion to include the Lipman triangle, as the Conservancy believes the parcel is the most appropriate location for the Picayune water quality treatment feature. Recommend deleting this language from the plan to remain consistent with previous plans and Florida statute.
9. The burden of constructing and maintaining a STA should not fall on the park.

Conservation Collier

General Plan Comments

Syntax and grammatical comments were provided for all parks in the region.

Collier-Seminole State Park

1. Clarify what "EOT means" on page iv.
2. Does the "Park Accomplishments" header on page 3 refer to accomplishments since the last management plan update?

**Big Cypress Region
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3. Do the Collier's still own the oil and mineral rights within the park?
4. Add monitoring wells and box culverts to a map within the plan.
5. Where are ditch plugs along County Road 92 located? Why these should be implemented?
6. Suggests adding "Bicycle Seat" area on a map within the plan.
7. Clarify whether the mesic hammock community could succeed to rockland hammock given continued fire exclusion.
8. What is the current percent coverage of non-native plants in the rockland hammock community?
9. Clarify whether percent coverage is either 2% or 5% in the depression marsh community.
10. Will agricultural rows be flattened in the "Bicycle Seat" area before planting native vegetation?
11. Suggests adding an optimal tree density interval when conducting slash pine thinning so that future staff can use this as a guide.
12. Is hydrological restoration north of the park completed? (page 29).
13. Is the Conservancy organizing a passive python eradication program?
14. Are there plans to reintroduce red-cockaded woodpecker? Would hydrological restoration kill the pine trees?
15. Has there been talk of wildlife crossings in addition to speed zone enforcement [to mitigate panther mortality]?
16. Are there issues in the park with poachers picking saw palmetto berries?
17. Can the Conservancy deploy male pythons to lure females into capture?
18. Is it possible to enforce limited use of the Grocery Place campsite? Would signage help inform visitors about erosion risks?
19. Are there any plans to try listing the entire park as a nationally registered historic site?
20. Are there plans to display the four bronze plaques that were on lime rock pedestals (Barron Collier Memorial)?
21. Clarify what "chinking" means on page 52.
22. Is there parking at the shared-use trails north of County Road 92 and U.S. 41?
23. Are RVs a possibility instead of homes for employee housing due to their ability to be moved?
24. Can the same system proposed for the Royal Hammock Trail (i.e., walking beams) be used on the trails north of U.S. 41, instead of boardwalks?
25. Can spreader swales be put in to improve movement of surface water through the park?

Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park

1. What is a mobile nursery?
2. What animal(s) were included in the contract with U.S. Department of Agriculture for nuisance animal control?
3. What does [AmeriCorps Project] ROAR stand for?
4. Were the additional trees that toppled from hurricanes Helene and Milton native or non-native species?
5. Will latherleaf be contracted out to avoid further spread?
6. Can a different approach be taken to improve efficacy of the stormwater swales?
7. Will there be a survey in 2026 for piping plover?

Estero Bay Preserve State Park

1. What is the appropriate fire return interval for scrubby flatwoods?

Big Cypress Region
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2. Describe Shell Point Use Area under “Existing Facilities and Infrastructure” heading.

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

1. Is the Conservancy of Southwest Florida’s method to remove Burmese pythons being used in the park?
2. Is the State of Florida still pursuing acquisition of the 900 inholdings?
3. Clarify the “Water Quantity” section – hydrological restoration is complete, but this section reads as if the information refers to past conditions.
4. What kind of vegetation was growing on the berm south of Well Grade Road?
5. What modeling was done as part of PSRP to see what happens to water conveyed to U.S. 41?
6. Would leveling the berms near Copeland flood that community?
7. Has sheet flow increased post-completion of Phase II of PSRP?
8. Are the opportunistic plants referenced in the borrow area native species?
9. Would shallow ditches be dug into the marl prairie, or would some that are already there be left to remain?
10. Do private inholdings also present a challenge with prescribed fire at the park?
11. Which four of the 67 plants on the FISC list have been eliminated?
12. Is it recommended to release additional Mexican bromeliad weevil fly into the park?
13. Targeting 15 acres of Brazilian pepper is low – is this species not bad at the park?
14. Are specimens still being added to the herbarium collection? If so, what is the ultimate goal?

Lovers Key State Park

1. Clarify what “EOT means” on page iv.
2. Have the breaches along the Gulf facing beach post Hurricane Ian recovered naturally or as a result of [restoration] projects?
3. Were the large trees within the coastal strand and mangrove swamp that toppled post storm surge removed or are they still there? Are the dune walkovers in these communities referring to boardwalks or just sand walkovers?
4. Is prescribed fire utilized in the park?

Mound Key Archaeological State Park

1. Have invasive plant treatments on the island targeted Sansevieria?
2. Clarify what “edge containment” refers to regarding trail stabilization.
3. Would you have to clear a lot of native shell mound vegetation to create a loop between the water courts?

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Collier-Seminole State Park

1. Not aware how prevalent gopher tortoises are at the park. Looks like park staff is doing a good job monitoring and managing tortoises.
2. Crocodiles are mentioned but it does not seem like there is any nesting habitat at the park. Not clear if park staff are monitoring them.

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Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park

1. The plan has a lot of information on gopher tortoise management, monitoring, habitat and status. Unfortunately, it looks like tortoises and their habitat have been impacted a lot due to hurricanes. Augmenting the population has been ruled out due to genetics and lack of habitat, but that may change in the future. Perhaps some of the habitat may return so they should not completely rule that out.
2. Least terns and black skimmers are mentioned, but they (least terns) have yet to nest since 1987. Aware they tried to manage and attract least terns there through vegetation management and maybe social attraction but have been unsuccessful. Encourages them to not give up, especially if storms or hurricanes create even temporary habitat.
3. Not clear how prevalent winter shorebirds are such as red knots and piping plovers, but if park does have them perhaps they can close core areas to avoid human disturbance.

Estero Bay Preserve State Park

1. On page 27, the draft plan addresses the upgraded listing of Wilson's plovers, which nest on the salt flats (as well as black-necked stilts). The limited success is attributed to flooding, feral hog predation and human disturbance (including E-bikes and scooters). The draft plan intends to implement measures to prevent E-bikes in this area.
2. Does the park have contractual services to remove predators such as wild hogs?
3. On page 26, the draft plan addresses bald eagles and FWC guidelines. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now has a general permit that covers take of a nest via prescribed fire and FWC's recommendation is to obtain the general permit if there is need to burn within 660 feet of the nest. Other minimization measures, such as clearing fuel and creating a fire break, is still recommended.
4. Consider establishing eastern indigo snake monitoring in coordination with the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute and FWC because it is mentioned in the draft plan that the species was historically present.
5. On page 44, erosion and watercraft use/speeding issues are discussed. Does park staff need assistance with establishing new slow speed zones?
6. Recommends staff participation in regional and statewide working groups (e.g., Southwest Estuarine Restoration Team, Statewide Scrub Working Group).

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

1. There is no mention about monitoring or management for Florida bonneted bat.
2. Everglades mink, Florida panther, and American crocodiles are mentioned, but they don't talk about protection of and location of their habitats.
3. Wading bird colony management and monitoring is mentioned which is a good thing.
4. The draft plan mentions creating wading bird nesting habitat. Wouldn't waste my time and money on that. Don't know of anyone who has successfully done that to date. Not sure if park staff is documenting or tracking wading bird nesting populations, status and productivity – but if not, they should be. A few years back, it was encouraged to monitor these colonies more frequently and report findings to SFWMD (Mark Cook) so it could be included in their annual South Florida Wading Bird Report. Happy to assist with that if it is not currently being done.
5. The draft plan addressed black rail monitoring, but not on management (prescribed fire) per se.

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

6. Gopher tortoises are mentioned in the draft plan, but there is no information on status, locations, monitoring or management. Not aware they were even at the park. Seems like there isn't much habitat for them.

Koreshan Historic State Park

1. The draft plan mentions a gopher tortoise survey is required but they should also work to establish a long-term monitoring program to see how tortoises are responding to their prescribed fire programs and mechanical management actions (similar to the 10-year monitoring goal mentioned in the Lovers Key and Estero Bay Preserve draft plans).
2. Bats are not mentioned in the draft plan. Bat conscious management could also provide talking points for interpretive sessions.
3. Florida burrowing owls could begin to occupy the mowed "developed" areas as well as portions of the "abandoned field/abandoned pasture." Many calls are received regarding burrowing owls in Estero near the park and this is not mentioned in the plan.
4. Nuisance armadillo removal is mentioned as a common task, but turning a portion of the "abandoned field/pasture" into an orchard seems counterproductive.

Lovers Key State Park

1. Suggests referencing Janell Brush's comments from her field visit during the recent land management review.
2. The draft plan mentioned that genetic inbreeding and gopher tortoise loss from hurricane disturbance threatens the gopher tortoise population. Action should be taken to actively monitor the population – current language is not firm in the plan (page 23 and 29).
3. Minimizing sea turtle and shorebird nest depredation should be prioritized with more long-term solutions.
4. Dune restoration appears to be a priority item, which is a good thing.

Mound Key Archaeological State Park

1. The draft plan mentions American oystercatcher and least tern observations and focuses on education/outreach and opportunistic monitoring.
2. Wading bird monitoring could be beneficial to establish buffer zones for watercraft.

Friends of Delnor-Wiggins Pass Preserve State Park

Below comments relate to Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park:

Park Background

1. Joe Wiggins' contributions to the park are insignificant, whereas Lester and Dellora Norris deserve more mention.

Natural Resources

2. The West Coast dune sunflower (*Helianthus debilis subsp. vestitus*) has never been officially vouchered in Collier County. Recent plantings identified as these in the plan were not correctly identified; instead they are likely either East Coast subspecies or hybrids between East and West Coast subspecies.
3. Crowfoot grass cannot be controlled by hand removal – doing so inadvertently disperses the seed efficiently.

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4. The maritime hammock natural community referenced on page 11 of the draft plan changed not from Hurricane Ian itself, but instead during the cleanup after the hurricane.
5. The one wild lime (*Zanthoxylum fagara*) in the park previously was located between parking area 3 and the road and thought to be introduced into the park due to its location.
6. Change West Indian mahogany to “American” or “Florida” mahogany since there are no vouchered reports of native West Indian mahogany in Collier County.
7. The Florida butterfly orchid was seen growing on trees in the park prior to Hurricane Ian but has been removed from the imperiled species table despite there being known locations of the plant within one mile of the park.
8. Suggest targeted propagation of the rare plants listed on page 24 of the draft plan, instead of only monitoring existing populations.
9. Include crowfoot grass on the invasive species table on page 25 of the draft plan.
10. Propose an additional kiosk at the entrance to the North Point Trail and expand access to anglers by adding a walkway from the end of the trail to the beach.
11. Cages are no longer being used to protect sea turtle nests but are mentioned in the draft plan. Express concern with the current method to demarcate a nest that uses loosened stakes and caution tape and potential for causing harm to nesting turtles.
12. Include mention of Dellora’s garden in the draft plan. There were designated funds for the establishment and maintenance of the garden, but the garden was bulldozed by the clean-up company after Hurricane Ian. Re-establishment of the garden should be a high priority.

Infrastructure

13. Opposition to the parking garage/multi-level parking facility concept due to the fragile coastal environment.
14. Opposition to the “up to 80 parallel parking spaces” along the main road concept – incompatible due to safety and visual aesthetic concerns.
15. Support for entrance area remain as is (no mid-day gating), or open park one hour earlier on busy holidays to ameliorate early morning congestion.
16. Encourage off-site parking (Connor Park), or consider as an added park concession in cooperation with Collier County.
17. “Commercialization” of park operations is unwelcome by park visitors.
18. Include mention of carrying capacity in the draft plan – include a study to guide any parking changes.
19. Provide explanation as to what a “stabilized walkway between the parking facility and beach access” would include and potential impacts associated with this concept. If this is proposed in conjunction with the parking garage/multi-level parking facility, opposition due to destruction of natural spaces and marina/boat ramp.
20. Include mention of reconstruction of maintenance buildings including a park office, equipment storage, CSO/all-purpose meeting room, and permanent restrooms previously present but destroyed by Hurricane Ian. Current storage options that employ collapsible sheds is unsustainable.
21. Include a fourth bathhouse to accommodate four parking areas.
22. No mention of park concessionaire (including refreshments, beach furniture, and paddlecraft).
23. Removal of the entrance station has reduced park revenue, and the current kiosk system is not seeing consistent visitor use. Ensure park visitors are paying entrance fees.

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24. Include mention of coastal resilience considering the park's vulnerability to catastrophic weather events (other than removing parking lots). Hurricanes will increase in frequency and intensity – need to consider resilience safeguards. Consider applying engineering principles to dune restoration and coastal dune/strand/hammock revegetation.
25. Implement cogent plans for park evacuation of people, equipment and portable property.

Friends of Fakahatchee

Below comments all relate to Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park:

1. Should the Oil Well Road Compensation Parcel Fund Agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Friends of Fakahatchee (Friends), and language regarding management of the parcel, be included in the draft plan?
2. Why is recreational capacity [carrying capacity] absent in the draft plan?
3. Why is the implementation schedule not included in the draft UMP? What guidance is provided to park staff, and how are the manpower and expense costs justified for park management?
4. Recommends an increase in site management and manpower at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.
5. Why mention action items under the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk objective that have already been completed?
6. Why mention action items under the Southeast Entrance and Day Use Area objective that have already been completed?
7. 990 inholdings are mentioned in the 2015 approved plan. Confirm whether only 90 inholdings have been turned over to the State of Florida since 2014.
8. Recommends removing reference to Highway 84, since signs identifying this road were removed and replaced for I-75 in 1993.
9. Recommends adding this park as part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor under "Other Designations" section.
10. Recommends reinstalling a plaque currently in the park manager's office "Big Cypress Bend has been designated a Registered Natural Landmark – 1966" to the original location at the start of the boardwalk. Add this language under "Other Designations" section.
11. Suggests revising "Park Accomplishment" statement referring to instructional kiosks – five, not six, were constructed, funded by the Friends.
12. Suggests revising "Park accomplishment" statement referring to the chickee hut – the structure is located by the original Boardwalk and was built in 2018, not 2021.
13. Suggests the following language be added to the "Park Accomplishments" section:
 - a. The Friends funded the reconstruction of the visitor center located on Coastline Drive, the main entrance of the park, completed in 2023.
 - b. The Friends funded the construction of a 72 foot by 84 foot pole barn next to the park office, completed in 2022.
 - c. The Friends funded the construction of a chickee hut on Janes Scenic Drive at gate 12.
14. Is the historic hunting cabin on East Main Trail, often referred to as "Fakahatchee Hilton," listed as a historic structure? If so, what is the historic structure site name and FMSF number in the draft plan?

Big Cypress Region
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15. Suggests revising statement about park visitation – visitation is not higher during the months of April through November, it is lower.
16. Suggests revising statement about the network of trails included in the “Existing Facilities & Infrastructure” section – Equestrian use is not offered at the park. How will the 13-mile East Main Trail be kept clear for hikers and cyclists? As per previous years’ trend, it is unlikely that the 13-mile hike from Jones Grade to Janes Scenic Drive will be kept clear for hikers and cyclists. Furthermore, the draft plan proposes discontinuing public access to Jones Grade (page 67).
17. Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk linear feet is incorrect in “Facilities Inventory” table – the new boardwalk (Glades Marsh section) from the parking area has a sign indicating its length at 0.26 miles.
18. Suggests adding the kiosk near the Miccosukee village entrance to the “Facilities Inventory” table.
19. Suggest adding the two existing volunteer sites (at the boardwalk end of parking site) to the “Facilities Inventory” table.
20. Suggests moving the language in the “Conceptual Land Use” section that refers to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk to the “Park Accomplishments” section, since the objectives have already been completed.
21. Regarding the East River Paddle Launch objective, commercial tour operators on the East River impact visitor access to the river as well as parking. Requirements for a commercial use agreement for all commercial tour operators at the East River and throughout the park will provide better control to protect the natural resources. What is the recreational [carrying] capacity for the East River? What document will support the park manager’s decisions to implement measures for the protection of natural resources?
22. Regarding the Southeast Entrance Area objective, a four-panel wayfinding kiosk was installed at the entrance in March 2022. Suggest removing this statement and adding it to the “Park Accomplishment” section. Would a centralized entry fee station be a staffed booth for the collection of park admission? If so, where would it be located? The small visitor center building was already repurposed in 2023 – suggests removing this statement and adding it to the “Park Accomplishments” section.
23. Suggest revising text for accuracy pertaining to the need for directional signage at the Southeast Entrance Area. There is already a four-panel wayfinding kiosk there. A one-panel, not four-panel, wayfinding kiosk is located at the gated end of Janes Scenic Drive.
24. Suggests removing bubble 1 from Conceptual Land Use Plan map referring to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk since this objective has already been completed.
25. The “Existing Facilities” map depicting the hiking trails does not adequately reflect all of the trails kept open for hiking and cycling 365 days a year. Recommends revising the map to depict these trails. On this same map, what does “90” refer to (as U.S. 41 continues west of the park boundary)?
26. Provided comment regarding the Conceptual Land Use Summary One-Page Document (not the draft unit management plan) – Replacement of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk and connection has already been completed in November 2025.
27. A 17-minute documentary video from 2024 was also submitted for context.

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Friends of Lovers Key (FOLK)

Below comments relate to Lovers Key State Park:

1. Appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the draft unit management plan and commends DRP for producing a thoughtful, comprehensive plan that reflects both the ecological significance of the park and the evolving needs of a high-visitation coastal park recovering from multiple storm events. FOLK fully supports the plan's emphasis on resource protection, ecological restoration, cultural preservation and sustainable recreation and is committed to partnering with park management to help implement the priorities outlined in the plan.
2. FOLK supports hydrology and shoreline resilience, natural community restoration, imperiled species protection, invasive and nuisance species management and cultural resource protection priorities as included in the resource management section of the draft plan.
3. FOLK endorses proposed land use and facility improvements, including a redesigned ranger station, replacement of the concession building and improved interpretive elements, reconstruction of the middle-beach boardwalk bridge and restroom, evaluation of ferry access feasibility, and flood-resilient upgrades to maintenance facilities and staff residences. Encourages continued integration of interpretive messaging and ADA-accessible design throughout all new facilities.
4. FOLK appreciates the plan's recognition of park accomplishments.
5. FOLK recommends the following:
 - a. Prioritize resilience projects that protect both natural resources and visitor infrastructure.
 - b. Strengthen community engagement through expanded volunteer programs and public education.
 - c. Ensure interpretive integration across all new facilities and visitor touchpoints.
 - d. Support staff capacity through improved housing, maintenance facilities and operational resources.
 - e. Maintain wildlife protection as a guiding principle in all development decisions.

Lee County Natural Resources

General Plan Comments

1. All Florida state parks would benefit from having a plan to deal with storm debris, especially marine debris in coastal parks and preserves. There seems to be a gap in the state emergency response plan that should be considered more closely in the draft unit management plans.
2. All Florida state parks that consider ditch filling as part of hydrology objectives should include a fisheries assessment prior to project development.
3. Several unit plans state: *"Beach renourishment is preferable over any type of engineered stabilization (e.g., seawall, jetties, breakwaters, etc.) but should only be considered in situations where park operations are fully hindered."* How is "fully hindered" determined? Consider if this phrasing is appropriate given that coastal parks face future sea level rise.

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Lovers Key State Park

- Water quality, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and bank erosion are potentially related to depths of the historically dredged interior waterways. If there has not been a thorough assessment of the bathymetry, it would be helpful to collect that data for future planning and restoration applications.
- Consider separate targets for the natural communities in the objective referring to revegetation of ±15 acres of beach dune, coastal strand and mangrove swamp.
- The prior structural viability rating for the south beach bridge was greatly beneficial for beach nourishment. Recognizes the bridge is currently being re-evaluated.
- Consideration of a ferry service needs very careful evaluation given that it could have both direct and indirect effects. The draft plan refers to interest from the City of Fort Myers – given proximity, is the Town of Fort Myers Beach what was intended?
- Regarding the “Coastal Erosion/Sedimentation” section, overall regional transport is generally north to south; however, the sediment budget for the park indicates transport both north and south and from a central nodal point. Also, the most recent nourishment used offshore sand from a federal lease area, not Big Carlos Pass (San Carlos is an incorrect reference) ebb shoal. While it is a mechanical operation, it is more specific to say that the sand was dredged and placed hydraulically.
- Interested if targeted surveys demonstrate any use by American crocodiles given their reclusive nature and range of sitings elsewhere in Lee County.
- Is it standard policy to relocate feral cats? If so, where are they relocated to? Don’t want to create a new problem elsewhere.
- Little attention given to boat ramp operations in the draft plan. While it may be an accessory use, it is certainly related to access and use of other state park areas including Mound Key Archaeological and the buffer and aquatic preserves.

**Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

Public Participation

The public was provided an opportunity to review and comment on draft unit management plans for Florida State Parks in the Big Cypress region. During the public comment period, written comments were received. In addition, two public meetings were conducted, with a combined total of 31 attendees.

COLLIER COUNTY

*Tuesday, July 14, 2026, from 2 p.m. – 5 p.m.
Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center
Naples, FL*

12 attendees signed-in

LEE COUNTY

*Wednesday, July 15, 2026, from 2 p.m. – 5 p.m.
Koreshan Historic State Park – Art Hall
Estero, FL*

19 attendees signed-in

Summary of Written Public Comments

Three members of the public provided the following written comments during the two general public meetings:

Mound Key Archaeological State Park

- Keep the fenced section on the island to help protect the historical artifacts and keep future trails away from the historical artifacts.

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

- Offer more backcountry camping opportunities (raised platforms, maintained sites) in the preserve, particularly near the upland trails in the northwestern section.
- Support for Alternative B to the Copeland entrance area – from State Road 29.
- Opposition to discontinuing public access at Jones Grade trailhead. If public access here is to be discontinued, then provide more staff and equipment to maintain East Main Tram.
- Support for habitat restoration within the former quarry lakes and surrounding uplands at Jones Grade. This use area can feature both restoration and public access/recreation.
- Support for public access to all portions of the preserve.

Summary of Verbal Public Comments

Attending members of the public shared the following verbal comments:

Collier-Seminole State Park

- Would like to see a water treatment plan that is focused outside of park.
- Fiddler’s Creek is an approved conservation covenant west of the park and has had successful crocodile nesting for years. When juvenile crocodiles are relocated, they come back to this area. Male crocodiles are dispersing north across U.S. 41.
- Request to add additional optimum boundary parcels north of U.S. 41 that include Lipman Farm.
- Reference to the U.S. 41 Collier Resilience Study done by the Florida Silver Jackets Team (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) and its infeasibility to raise U.S. 41 for 90 miles, further adding that south of U.S. 41 could be two meters underwater by 2100.

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- There has been a drastic reduction of marsh rabbits in recent years and there are no more white-tailed deer herds south of U.S. 41 being that fawns are main prey for invasive pythons.
- Earthen levee (~30 feet wide) along Picayune Strand State Forest prevents flow into farms to the west.

Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park

- A member of the Friends of Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park reviewed and addressed a list of written comments they compiled in advance regarding draft plan edits before several DRP staff. Those comments are captured in the Appendix: "Big Cypress Advisory Group Members Report."

Koreshan Historic State Park

- Recommendation that a welcome center, similar to the one at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, be considered at the park.

Lovers Key State Park

- Recommendation that a welcome center, similar to the one at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, be considered at the park.

Mound Key Archaeological State Park

- Suggest ADA compliance to mound 2, water court trail, staircase up to mound 1 and cistern loop to east.
- The berm was a part of the rail trail (on spur trail to west) when they shipped fruits off island.
- Canal to the south was the original entrance of Menendez. Potential to consider this as an entrance for non-motorized vehicles, being that it was 30 feet wide at one time.
- Emphasize the need for a sense of arrival at the park.

Summary of Emailed Public Comments

The following comments were emailed to the Office of Park Planning:

Audubon of Southwest Florida

Below comments all relate to Estero Bay Preserve State Park:

Supports the draft plan, specifically the proposal to make the Winkler Point tract accessible by permit only. The preserve is important habitat for 36 imperiled bird species and is an important stopover point for migrating and wading birds including Wilson's plovers, black necked stilts, willets and more.

Shares the concerns mentioned on page 27 of the draft plan regarding unauthorized vehicular activity including E-bikes on salt flats. Board members have witnessed this damage firsthand during breeding bird surveys and Christmas bird counts. The scars in the mud flats can last for years, change hydrology across the landscape and damage the vegetation, thus disturbing birds.

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

To protect the salt flats, Audubon of Southwest Florida supports the draft plan language on page 50 implementing the multiple measures to prevent unauthorized access by vehicles and E-bikes and the adoption of the permit-only access system referred to on page 50. Additionally, supports investing in additional fencing around the trailhead to complement the permit system because of the remote nature of the trailhead and associated difficulty in monitoring for unauthorized users and the proposed trail improvements which include adding fill, improving trail markers and installing walking beams.

Expects that implementing a permit-only access system will create a healthier balance of users, enable people to enjoy and appreciate the preserve, lessen further damage from off-trail E-bike usage, mitigate disturbance to wading birds and shorebirds and protect the vulnerable coastal marsh and mud flat ecosystems.

Jenny's Eco Everglades Wilderness Tours

Direct observations across nearly 13 years of continuous operation indicate that the active (East River) bird rookery, which originally prompted the strict 20-person user capacity limit, has significantly diminished. Currently, active nesting and avian presence have dropped to approximately 20% to 25% of historical baselines. This severe decline is tied to environmental factors (hurricanes and storm surge). Because field conditions and habitats have shifted so fundamentally due to these natural events, the new 10-year management plan needs to recalibrate these rigid capacity restrictions to reflect current data rather than outdated baselines. Fully supports protecting the preserve's diverse ecosystems but the current rigid 20-person user capacity limit on the East River poses a management conflict. It enforces a restrictive ceiling to protect a localized resource that has drastically declined, without offering any operational flexibility to reflect that shift. This arbitrary cap creates an artificial barrier for low-impact, educational eco-tourism. Tour groups provide essential environmental stewardship and monitoring, yet ability to operate sustainably is severely penalized by an outdated policy that does not account for long-term changes in resource use.

The upcoming 10-year management plan should formally codify standard operating hours for the East River access point that align with regional climate realities and visitor safety. A rigid 8:00 a.m. launch in a Southwest Florida mangrove swamp during high-heat months poses a distinct heat exhaustion and dehydration risk to visitors. Launching at first light is a critical climate mitigation strategy that allows educational tours to conclude safely before peak daily temperatures and afternoon thunderstorms develop. Because the East River has experienced high administrative turnover with many different park managers over the years, relying on informal, verbal understandings for early morning access introduces severe operational instability for local small businesses.

Formally requests that DEP implement a site-specific operational variance in this 10-year plan, designating the East River day use hours as sunrise to sunset. This common-sense exception mirrors the safety standards already utilized by the state for linear trail parks, ensures long-term administrative continuity across changing leadership and directly protects visitor health.

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

In addition to resource management, the 10-year plan must address critical public safety and access issues regarding parking. For over a decade, there has been a severe deficit of available parking. With restrictions preventing parking on the kayak launch road, operators and visitors are frequently forced to park along the shoulders of U.S. 41, creating a distinct traffic hazard. Because the immediate launch area is tightly bounded by high-resource mangrove habitats, constructing new parking lots directly at the launch would cause unnecessary environmental impact. Requests that DEP explore an interagency agreement with the Florida Department of Transportation to utilize existing parking capacity at the nearby rest area along U.S. 41. To make this viable and safe, the plan should include the construction of a dedicated pedestrian boardwalk connecting the rest area parking lot directly to the East River kayak launch. This utilizes an already impacted footprint for parking while completely removing pedestrians from the high-speed traffic hazards of the U.S. 41 shoulder.

Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation

Below comments all relate to Estero Bay Preserve State Park:

Supports the proposed updates to the draft plan, specifically for the Winkler Point property. Coordinates monitoring and protection of beach nesting birds at several sites in Lee County. Visited the park in 2017 for the first time with a volunteer and identified territorial Wilson's plovers at the site. Since then, have confirmed nesting for both Wilson's plovers and black-necked stilts. Coordinated with Florida state park staff to document nesting activity and coordinate data entry into the Florida Shorebird Database, making the information available to DEP and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for future conservation planning.

The last ten nesting seasons have demonstrated the importance of the site for both nesting and migratory shorebirds. Supports the proposed implementation of a permit-only access system and monitoring of visitor use and impacts. The actions will balance the recreational use of the landscape with protection of the sensitive natural resources of this preserve. Managing visitor access will help limit disturbance during the nesting season, as well as for thousands of migratory shorebirds who rely on this habitat to rest and refuel after traveling sometimes thousands of miles.

These proposed changes are well-timed given the current consideration of the Wilson's plover for state-threatened species in Florida. Conserving important breeding habitats such as the mudflats at Winkler Point will serve to bolster the recovery of this species.

Encourages incorporating interpretive signage along designated trails. Winkler Point offers incredible wildlife viewing opportunities and educational signs would promote responsible recreation and help foster public appreciation.

Recognizes the efforts of state park staff. Impressed with their willingness to learn about shorebird conservation, collaborate with partners and monitor when their schedules allow. Fully supports the proposed measures for visitor management and improvement of recreation experiences.

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

Agency Responses to Comments

DRP staff reviewed and considered comments received from the advisory group and the public during the advisory group and public meetings, as well as subsequent written comments submitted by mail and email. Staff's responses and analysis of the comments are provided below.

Collier-Seminole State Park:

- Added language to how the park will minimize negative impacts on upland species like gopher tortoises associated with the berm removal referenced as the "Bicycle Seat" area.
- Added language in the optimum boundary section to clarify the identified STA contradiction.
- Updated the monitoring levels for Florida bonneted bat and gopher tortoise, with additional language added to complete gopher tortoise surveys every 5-10 years.
- A statewide effort is in progress to map all of the monitoring wells within the state park system. Bridges and box culverts are listed in a statewide facilities inventory.
- Future maps will reference specific features of parks that are essential to land use and resource management planning.
- Having analyzed the hydrological benefits of additional acquisitions to the west of Picayune Strand State Forest and north of U.S. 41, this agricultural acreage has been added to the optimum boundary section of Collier-Seminole State Park.
- While it was recommended to install additional signage identifying applicable speed limits throughout the wilderness area, it was determined there was sufficient language within the Land Use Component section of the plan [i.e., Blackwater River objective] addressing this.
- While additional language was requested to be added regarding managing the flow of non-native aquatic plants from outside the park to the first restoration objective on page 26, it was determined that this area represents just one section of the greater acreage identified for non-native plant treatment parkwide. As such, alternating areas throughout the park are prioritized on a yearly basis. The frequency and duration of non-native plant treatment is based on funding sources available.

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park:

- Acknowledgement of the need for evaluation of parking expansion at the East River Paddling Launch at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park has been written into the plan for this use area.
- Carrying capacity pertaining to the East River bird rookery at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park will be further evaluated with next-level planning initiatives. Access hours may also be evaluated under visitor use management planning; however, if operating as a concessionaire, then gate access prior to sunrise can be contractually negotiated with the Bureau of Operational Services.
- The Park Accomplishments section was updated to reflect the Friends of Fakahatchee's contributions.
- Added language about the use of aerial surveys to determine more precise acreage targets for managing invasive plants. Preserve staff is currently in the process of updating coverclass acreage, but this takes considerable time given the size and navigability of the preserve.

Big Cypress Region
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- It was confirmed that the Florida bonneted bat is already included in the Imperiled Species table.
- It was confirmed that higher-level plan documents already contain language pertaining to carrying capacity and the broader visitor use management framework.
- Backcountry camping has been considered at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, however, due to natural resource sensitivities, extensive wet terrain and large-scale fire regime such camping is not currently considered feasible.
- While it is acknowledged that closure of Jones Grade at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park to public recreational access would extend the necessary mileage of hiking trail circuits (i.e., no shortcut access), such mileage is consistent with the preserve unit classification and wilderness area overlay. Regardless of public access, naturalization of the borrow pits and other habitat improvement activities will be prioritized at Jones Grade.

Delnor-Wiggins State Park:

- Removed contradictory language about gopher tortoise augmentation. Further augmentation of this population with additional tortoises should not be considered given that suitable habitat is not available at the park and that coastal tortoises have been found to be genetically distinct from insular populations.
- Added language about the Norrises' role in conserving the land from development before it became a state park.
- While correct that the west coast dune sunflower has not been officially vouchered in Collier County (per the University of South Florida Plant Atlas), District 4 staff confirms that the plants received in August 2025 originated from seeds collected at Rookery Bay by the Naples Botanical Garden and were of the subspecies *vestitus* before being planted on site. District staff will collect voucher samples from the park not involved in the planting effort to reconfirm that the species is not a hybrid or other species entirely.
- Added language about herbicide application as a treatment method for managing invasive Durban crowfoot grass (*Dactloctenium aegyptium*) and added this species to the Invasive Plant table.
- Added language to clarify that screens/cages to protect sea turtle nests will be used in the future if depredation exceeds 10% per FWC guidelines.
- Added language about additional permitting requirements involved with rare plant propagation as part of the mobile nursery.
- Added language about beach access points along the North Point Nature Trail in response to the comment to add a walkway connecting the trail to the beach that could accommodate anglers.
- The provision of up to 80 parallel parking spaces is a concept to consider if the current parking becomes unsustainable and would be done in conjunction with, as opposed to separate from, the long-range multi-level parking facility.
- Off-site parking at Conner Park is already addressed in the draft plan as an option to off-set parking congestion issues within the park. The potential alternative entry solution of an online reservation system has been successfully demonstrated as a practical means to handle excessively high visitation at several Florida state parks.
- It was confirmed that higher-level plan documents already contain language pertaining to carrying capacity and the broader visitor use management framework.

Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation

- While it was commented that the mesic hammock community changed during the cleanup after Hurricane Ian, and not from the hurricane itself, it was determined based off of photos and discussion with prior park staff that the community was changed as a result of hurricane damage.
- While it was suggested to add back the Florida butterfly orchid to the Imperiled Species table, it was confirmed that this species is currently not state listed according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the University of South Florida. Additionally, as it is unclear whether West Indian mahogany at the park was planted or are cultivars (the species is known to be planted at nearby Lovers Key State Park), District 4 staff will proceed with collecting a voucher and potentially list as having been cultivated.
- The site of the former garden was compromised by repetitive hurricane events that also destroyed park infrastructure and natural communities. The trailhead that is now proposed from this site is intended to emphasize the restored natural communities. Long-term land use planning intentions are to minimize infrastructure along the peninsula such that all built features will eventually be located along the bayside and at the park entrance. Memorial and ornamental features will be installed in those more resilient spaces where recurring storm impacts are anticipated to be less frequent.
- While it was suggested to add a kiosk to the entrance to the North Point Nature Trail, it was determined that the draft plan sufficiently addresses signage for interpretation in this use area.
- While it was suggested that the park open one hour earlier to accommodate increased visitation during holidays, it was determined this is incompatible with operations statewide of Florida state parks opening at 8:00 a.m.
- A stabilized walkway between the multi-level parking facility and beach access is conceptual and long-range in nature. As such, there is no identified path.
- The parking garage concept vetted in 2009 is different than the one proposed in the draft plan. The 2009 concept was to be placed on beach front and in addition to the parking already existing in the park. The long-range parking alternative included in the draft plan would be to consolidate parking in an effort to maximize resilience. This is a concept to continue exploring in the event current parking becomes unsustainable.
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**Big Cypress Region
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

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Estero Bay Preserve State Park:

- Consistent with the unit's preserve classification, the trails extending from the Winkler Trailhead at Estero Bay Preserve State Park are intended for a natural landscape aesthetic without signage. Hydroperiods, fire regime and maintenance challenges further preclude installation of signage.

Koreshan State Park:

- While welcome centers were proposed at Lovers Key and Koreshan Historic, it was determined that existing infrastructure, such as the visitor center at Lovers Key, already meets this need and would make additional facilities redundant.

Lovers Key State Park:

- Added language regarding a bathymetric assessment of the dredged canals around Black Island.
- Revised language in the "Coastal Erosion/Sedimentation" section regarding regional transport.
- Added language about incorporating resilience into existing park infrastructure and new construction projects.
- Added language about integrating interpretive elements parkwide.
- Added language about the Town of Fort Myers Beach and the City of Fort Myers having expressed interest in the potential ferry service.
- Added clarification as to how feral cats are managed within the park.
- Added language to the "Existing Facilities and Infrastructure" section regarding boat ramp operations.
- While welcome centers were proposed at Lovers Key and Koreshan Historic, it was determined that existing infrastructure, such as the visitor center at Lovers Key, already meets this need and would make additional facilities redundant.
- While American crocodiles have been documented in other parts of Lee County, including Cayo Costa State Park, there have been no confirmed sightings within the park. Furthermore, DRP does not have the ability to complete targeted surveys over waterways. The DEP Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection's Aquatic Preserve Program may be more appropriate to be involved in surveying, if future planning warrants.

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- While it was recommended to strengthen community engagement through expanded volunteer programs and public education, it was determined that this initiative is more operational in nature. Park staff prioritizes these objectives as part of their staff performance plans.
- While it was recommended to support staff capacity through improved housing, maintenance facilities and operational resources, it was determined that the plan contains sufficient language regarding staff support in the Support Areas section.
- While it was recommended to maintain wildlife protection as a guiding principle in all development decisions, it was determined that this initiative is already well immersed into operations, being reflected in both staff performance plans and the overall Florida State Park mission statement.

Mound Key State Park:

- The fenced section at Mound Key Archaeological State Park is to remain as is.

**Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

Advisory Group Members

Local Government

Keenan Singleton

Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

State Agencies

Claire Tamburello

Southwest Florida Water Management District

Felicia Hale

Southwest Florida Water Management District

Rebecca (Becky) Schneider

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Stefaney Pover

Florida Department of Environmental Protection -
Southwest District Office, Submerged Lands and
Environmental Resource Permitting

Tribal Organizations

Kevin Cunniff

Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

Universities

Edna Fernandez-Figueroa

University of Tampa (and Local Landowner)

Environmental Organizations

Cory Snyder

Conservation Florida

Jeff Leichty

Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, Audubon Florida

JoEllen Wilson

Bonefish Tarpon Trust

Kerry Flaherty Walia

Tampa Bay Estuary Program

Kimberly Wehrmann

Terra Ceia Island Preservation Foundation, Inc
(and Local Landowner)

Ray Vinson

Big Waters Land Trust

Recreational User Groups

Rachel Cato

Local Fishing Guide

Tom Hammond

Florida Trail Association - Suncoast Chapter

**Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

Advisory Group Meeting

The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans for Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve was held on August 24, 2026, from 9:00 am to 12:40 pm (EDT) at the Palmetto Historical Library, Carnegie Basement.

Representatives from the following user groups and organizations attended: Big Waters Land Trust, Bonefish & Tarpon Trust, Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Conservation Florida, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) - Southwest District Office Permitting, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Florida Trail Association - Suncoast Chapter, Local Fishing Guide, Audubon Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP), Terra Ceia Island (TCI) Preservation Foundation and the University of Tampa.

Attending DEP Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) staff included Ezell Givens, Zachary Lozano, Chris Becker and Tracy Muzyczka from the Southwest District Office, Kevin Kiser and Kathryn (Kate) Smithson from Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Daniel Alsentzer, Melisa Balkcom, Gabrielle Trace and Hanna Perry from the Office of Park Planning.

Attending DEP Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection staff included Alex Reed, Earl Pearson, Jeffrey Carter, Melynda (Mindy) Brown, Randy Runnels, Alexandra Farraj and Angelique Kremer.

Brian Humphreys also attended the meeting, representing the DEP Southwest District Office.

Audubon Florida, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, DEP Southwest District Office Permitting and the TCI Preservation Foundation provided written comments, which are summarized below.

Organizations/persons invited but unable to attend include the 1000 Friends of Florida, Department of State/Division of Historical Resources (DHR), Florida Native Plant Society - Serenoa Chapter, Manatee County Board of County Commissioners, Manatee County Historical Society, Paddle Florida, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Hillsborough County Soil and Water Conservation District, Manatee River Soil and Water Conservation District, SWFWMD Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Program and the Trust for Public Land.

The session opened with Daniel Alsentzer presenting a concise overview of the unit planning process. He went over the agenda, outlined the structure for the upcoming discussion and clarified that the advisory meeting addressed both the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve and Terra Ceia Preserve State Park simultaneously due to their overlapping boundaries. Following this, Gabrielle Trace presented the updated management proposals for the preserve state park, while Jeffrey Carter outlined the goals and management plan revisions for the aquatic preserve. Daniel Alsentzer then introduced the discussion topics and invited members of the advisory group to share their feedback on the draft management plans.

**Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve
Public and Inter-Agency Participation**

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

Big Waters Land Trust Ray Vinson inquired if there are plans to remove pines from upland restoration plans (e.g., old agricultural land). Tracy Muzyczka responded that the entire footprint is mapped as ruderal and that park staff attempted to create groups of land cover types. Kate Smithson mentioned that defining natural communities in the preserve helps prioritize projects. Jeffrey Carter also stated the use of the Resist, Accept, Direct (RAD) strategy would be helpful for responding effectively in the near and distant future to environmental changes resulting from rising sea levels.

Ray stated that he would like to help the preserve with their acquisition needs. He also mentioned that he likes the primitive access the Stotz Road Paddling Launch provided and supports retaining access. Daniel Alsentzer responded that we may seek a compromise if there's additional feedback echoing this. Gabrielle Trace mentioned that redirecting access to the boat ramp is being considered to minimize illegal activities happening in this area (i.e., mangrove trimming, unauthorized access to cultural sites, and erosion). Tracy stated that she knows other visitors appreciate this access point too; however, current erosion issues need to be addressed. Daniel mentioned that DRP needs to gather more user data about the distance of paddling excursions and how visitors desire to experience the park.

Bonefish Tarpon Trust JoEllen Wilson confirmed the presence of juvenile sport fish within the state park and aquatic preserve. JoEllen emphasized that protecting this habitat is beneficial for both snook and tarpon. She also asked if staff gathered the data from a literature search or actual catch. Kate Smithson responded that some of the coastal ponds were netted for sport fish with FWC. Kerry Flaherty Walia referred to several ongoing projects that could be referenced in the plan.

Conservation Florida Cory Snyder recalled that the Terra Ceia Preserve State Park Draft Management Plan states that groundcover restoration in upland areas wasn't successful. Tracy Muzyczka replied that the preserve inherited the land from the SWFWMD and clarified that staff treated areas mechanically and chemically with no success. She mentioned numerous restoration efforts undertaken by preserve staff and stated several challenges over the years. Kate Smithson stated that preserve staff were starting with small experimental restoration treatments and expanding from there. Kate inquired about expanding restoration treatments with in-house resources. Tracy mentioned that preserve staff have the formula, and they're now seeking funding to scale up restoration. Kevin Kiser mentioned that preserve staff was actively treating non-natives but is still unsure of what replaces the restored groundcover. Randy Runnels mentioned that it is important to plant a maintainable amount of local, native seed stock. Jeffrey Carter mentioned that DEP Regional Aquatic Preserve Coordinator, Mindy Brown, is co-lead of the Southwest Ecosystem Restoration Team (SWERT), where partners convene to identify knowledge-gaps and funding needs, as well as share resources. He mentioned that SWERT partners with local nurseries to support local restoration projects and emphasized the significance of activities that include targeting the collection of seed/cuttings (genetic materials) of local species of flora vulnerable to erosion and other changing environmental conditions. Jeffrey suggested that the state park partner with the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve and a local botanical garden.

Cory inquired how the preserve weighs the benefits between resource management and cultural resource protection. Tracy stated that new firebreaks are required to be approved by DHR before being constructed. Jeffrey Carter mentioned aquatic preserve staff have completed Archaeological Resource Management (ARM) Training. Jeffrey also mentioned future pursuit of a small-matching grant with DHR to resurvey and assess all known cultural sites and create a geodatabase. Alex Reed also mentioned DEP's Coastal Management Program and the availability of funding through a NOAA partnership to enhance cultural resource surveys and mapping.

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Public and Inter-Agency Participation

Cory supports land acquisition to support the fire management program. He stated that expanding the park boundary could create a buffer around the main part of the park and allow fire management practices as needed.

DEP Southwest District Regulatory Stefaney Pover inquired about public access to data. Kate Smithson mentioned that the Tampa Bay Water Atlas is a good resource; Alex Reed and Randy Runnels both stated that Statewide Ecosystem Assessment of Coastal and Aquatic Resources (SEACAR) data is publicly available. Stefaney agrees that there are many resources, however finding them can be difficult. She suggested a centralized site that is user friendly for regulatory agencies and the public would be helpful.

Stefaney mentioned that Senate Bill 1388 was passed for redefining energy sources for watercraft and that this limits agencies from banning specific energy sources. She inquired if this affects the aquatic preserve and if this is stated in the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan. Tracy Muzyczka clarified that there are no motorized exclusion zones in the aquatic preserves - only slow manatee zones. Tracy suggested signage may need to be updated.

Stefaney inquired if the preserve is improving stormwater infrastructure and if the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan discusses the stormwater protection act that passed in 2024. She mentioned that the act is stringent for stormwater systems discharging into the aquatic preserve. Daniel asked if Stefaney could send us an email with additional details.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Becky Schneider stated that her focal area is wading and shorebirds. She stressed this is important habitat for these species and a high priority for monitoring. She commends all the monitoring discussed in the plan and thanks the park for allowing FWC to install a bat monitoring station within Terra Ceia Preserve State Park. She mentioned that marine debris is an issue in the area. She commends the long tenure of staff at the aquatic preserve and state park. Randy Runnels explained how the aquatic preserve manages marine debris. Becky emphasized that staff should be mindful of cleanup during nesting season. She also mentioned that the Wilson's plover and wood stork listing statuses may need to be updated in the plans.

Becky inquired if there are any cultural resource impacts with the in-water buoy markers for the rookery islands. Randy clarified that staff received agency approval and there were no impacts.

Becky advised that the most significant issue is human disturbance. She explained how human disturbance directly affects bird productivity and the secondary impacts from predators that follow humans. She mentioned a shorebird and wading bird database for staff to utilize. She advised that it would be beneficial to track visitation utilizing newer technology (e.g., via cell phones, remote off-grid kiosks, etc.). Mindy Brown advised that aquatic preserves don't manage direct access and referred to a visitor use study conducted by the University of Florida's Taylor-Stein REC LAB in 2022. The study utilized different methods (i.e., counting trailers at boat ramp, drones, etc.) to determine estimated visitation counts. Jeffrey Carter added that the visitor use study determined that the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve receives an annual visitation of over 500,000 people and 6.5 million visitors for the greater Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserve complex of four aquatic preserves. Also, this study determined that collectively statewide the Florida Aquatic Preserve system sees over 100 million visitors every year. Mindy clarified county, state and other municipalities typically manage a portion of access points into the aquatic preserve while other points of access include public marinas, privately owned marinas and single-family docks. Kevin Kiser stated that trail counters will be installed at Terra Ceia Preserve State Park soon.

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Public and Inter-Agency Participation

Florida Islands Coastal Sanctuaries Jeff Leichty emphasized that commitment to conserving the islands are paramount for significant bird species. Jeff mentioned that the buoys installed by the aquatic preserve have been effective around the rookery islands. He also inquired what the difference between listed and priority species was in the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan. Earl Pearson responded that priority indicates species like terrapin which are not federally or state listed. Daniel Alsentzer mentioned the use of bird stakes for seagrass restoration. Mindy Brown replied that bird stakes are an effective solution in the Florida Keys where nutrients are needed; however, unlike the Florida Keys, the Terra Ceia estuary is higher in nutrients, and this wouldn't be advisable.

Jeff supports strategic acquisition where it makes sense. He stated that Audubon supports public access and emphasized that staff consider impacts to wildlife at preserve access points and areas that may be more accessible because of this access.

Florida Trail Association (Suncoast Chapter) Tom Hammond stated that his priority is education and outreach, and that environmental education promotes tourism. He also stated that he's seen more improvements in the state parks.

Tom expressed concerns with improving the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp and that he likes that the boat ramp is small. He also suggested that a restroom is needed on the Hightower Trail System and that a portable restroom would be adequate. He also stated that the trails along the Hightower Trail System are boring and don't feel like trails considering the gravel road base. He highlighted that it is a great spot for bird watching. Tom recommended an elevated platform, although it would need to be elevated enough to see over the mangroves. Gabrielle Trace clarified that the Terra Ceia Preserve State Park Draft Management Plan proposes an observation platform and birding blind along the Hightower Trail System.

Tom inquired about the private property on Hightower Road before the preserve gate. Kevin Kiser responded that the parcel is in our optimum boundary and that we will acquire it if resources are available. Daniel mentioned that we follow a willing seller program and that there are currently no active purchases.

Local Fishing Guide Rachel Cato expressed concern regarding some of the data in the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan. She expressed having difficulty finding the data referenced in the plan and mentioned water quality data should be more accessible through additional reports or real time dashboards. She emphasized that the pulse of the preserve is water quality. She stated that she has observed declining seagrass bed and mangrove habitat. She inquired if the water quality monitoring sites are getting adequate funding and that she needs access to this data. Mindy Brown referred to the SEACAR data and Tampa Bay Water Atlas as the best resources for water quality data.

Rachel stated that marine debris and derelict vessels (i.e., abandoned and submerged) are common and increase following hurricanes. She expressed concern about people living on these boats and not disposing of their waste properly. Alex Reed referred to legislation regarding sewer discharge into no discharge zones and explained that the aquatic preserves are in the process of transitioning to no discharge zones.

Rachel inquired what proactive measures are being taken to impede the commercial development of adjacent non-conservation properties. Daniel Alsentzer stated that the Florida Forever program is the state's main funding source for acquisition and is a willing seller program. Alex referred to Senate Bill 302 and stated that one of the leadership objectives is to review the administrative ruling in conjunction with this new legislation. Alex indicated this will include a public engagement process. Randy Runnels advised that property between Port Manatee and Terra Ceia Preserve State Park is in a conservation easement.

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Public and Inter-Agency Participation

Gabrielle Trace asked about Rachel's observations of boating use near the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp. Rachel indicated that the boat ramp at Terra Ceia Preserve State Park is adequate and enlarging it would be inappropriate. Tom Hammond mentioned that the ramp is suitable for shallow-draft boats.

Miccosukee Tribe Kevin Cunniff appreciated the collaborative opportunity of the joint state park and aquatic preserve advisory group meeting. He explained that the Miccosukee Tribe approaches land management and stewardship holistically, with water quality identified as the top environmental concern throughout Florida. For Terra Ceia, he stressed that substantive improvements to water quality will require going beyond the state park and aquatic preserve boundaries and considering the broader landscape. He emphasized that the Miccosukee Tribe does not distinguish between natural and cultural resources, rather, all resources are viewed as cultural and interconnected, with no one considered more important than another.

Over the next 10 years, Kevin identified, sea-level rise and continued land development will be significant challenges. He encouraged patience in restoration and resource management, noting the Miccosukee Tribe's concept of "bittering of the soil" to describe the impacts of invasive species. He cautioned that restoration efforts may not always produce immediate or expected results and noted that ruderal species can sometimes serve as precursors that help prepare soil for subsequent plant communities.

Kevin discussed the importance of maintaining and improving water connectivity throughout the preserve and upland areas. Development should be carefully evaluated to ensure it does not disrupt the natural movement of water between the land and the Gulf, as well as the reverse direction. He noted that the Miccosukee Tribe does not fear hurricanes and other episodic storm events because they are important for bringing sediment into the system and creating opportunities for new vegetation to establish. He advised there are natural cycles of erosion and deposition and compared hurricanes in coastal ecosystems to wildfire in other environments. Tracy Muzyczka explained that the Terra Ceia restoration project was intended to restore natural hydrologic connectivity. Although the restoration was not perfect and historic agricultural berms remain (they were breached, not destroyed due to the presence of imperiled species), the restoration project was important.

Kevin highlighted the cultural richness of the area due to its centuries of continuous human occupation. He explained that the Miccosukee Tribe is a mound building culture, as are many others. Further explaining that there is valuable information to be gleaned about land building and development from the process of mound building, including how to build dry land in aqueous areas. Mounds served a variety of purposes, including as places for people to be laid to rest. He cautioned against unnecessary excavation or disturbance of potential cultural sites and recommended assuming that uplands, hammocks and the aquatic preserve contains cultural resources rather than excavating to confirm their presence. He emphasized the focus should be on protecting the habitat and through that, the ground and cultural resources will be protected as well. He explained that if storms, flooding, or other natural processes expose a cultural resource, the preferred approach is generally to leave it in place and follow the appropriate notification process (SHPO/THPO). He contrasted natural disturbance with human-caused alterations to hydrology, noting that artificially changing water levels or flow in ways that disturb burial sites is inappropriate. He stated that it very much matters how remains are treated and suggested it be compared to how it would feel if this occurred at a more modern cemetery. Randy Runnels referenced a previous 40-foot canoe excavation and noted that the entire Tampa Bay area should be understood as a significant pre-Columbian cultural landscape. He stated that this is taken into consideration during discussion of potential pipelines, cables and other linear infrastructure that has been requested to be installed in the aquatic preserves. He emphasized that the location of cultural

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resources is an important consideration when evaluating such projects and mentioned other technologies that may be able to be used for location without digging or disturbance.

Kevin pointed to opportunities to interpret and share more recent Indigenous history. He discussed connections between Cuban ranchos, the Miccosukee, and other Indigenous communities and noted that these stories demonstrate that the Miccosukee are not people of the past but remain a living community today. He encouraged the park service to embrace opportunities to interpret these connections and highlight positive stories.

Kevin encouraged long-term thinking, explaining that the Miccosukee Tribe considers the impacts of current decisions seven generations into the future. He suggested leveraging development and local grants with opportunities to restore hydrology. He advised that the Miccosukee Tribe stands ready to be a partner.

Southwest Florida Water Management District Felicia Hale supported the plan initiative to remove spoil piles and inquired if DRP has discussed this proposal with the SWFWMD SWIM program. Kate Smithson confirmed that DRP is working with the SWIM program and stated that they were required to do routine evaluations.

Felicia mentioned SWFWMD experiences security issues near cultural sites they manage. Tracy Muzyczka discussed the challenge of whether to mark cultural sites considering it may draw attention to a site. Daniel Alsentzer reiterated the classification of the unit as a preserve, and stated because of this classification, less signage may be installed. He also mentioned that because of Terra Ceia's location, visitation might increase and signage may be needed then. Randy Runnels suggested installing boundary signage near sensitive areas to prevent disturbance/signage indicating sites.

Felicia appreciated the land acquisition history stated in the plan. Gabrielle Trace stated that we may need to include the SWFWMD Frog Creek Tract in Terra Ceia Preserve State Park Optimum Boundary, and that OPP will continue discussing this with preserve staff.

Southwest Florida Water Management District Claire Tamburello inquired about the proposal for a self-serve paddlecraft rental kiosk at the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp. Tom Hammond mentioned that they are great and they allow water-based access for people without access to a kayak. Claire noted public safety concerns and suggested that there might be novice paddlers out on the water alone. Daniel Alsentzer agreed that there may be wayfinding and safety issues.

Tampa Bay Estuary Program Kerry Flaherty Walia mentioned that the TBEP meets multiple times per year to coordinate with restoration practitioners through TBEP Habitat Restoration Consortium. She mentioned there's updated data for seagrass mapping, hardbottom mapping and fish monitoring that should be included in the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan. She stated the aquatic preserve draft management plan should also clearly state what agency is monitoring water quality and with what device. She stated the aquatic preserve draft management plan has a spatial map but not temporal (i.e., time intervals for monitoring). Additionally, there is a real time water quality monitoring station in Bishop Harbor as of September 2025 maintained by the University of South Florida. She also noted that the smalltooth sawfish may warrant being included in the plan, as well as relevant research regarding sharks.

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Kerry stated that sea level rise projections for Tampa Bay were updated recently (TBEP Tech Report 14-25) and should be referenced. She emphasized that the TBEP mission is to restore and protect Tampa Bay through implementation of a scientifically sound, community-based management plan (Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan). She advised that the program's Habitat Master Plan has specific targets and goals for restoration by habitat type and it could be used to guide restoration and acquisition plans. She will provide it to staff with her written comments.

Kerry mentioned that recent legislation provided an exception for dredging for marinas, public boat ramps, piers and docks, but that these activities and types of development should be closely monitored and advised upon regarding impacts. However, she was happy to hear that the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp will be used for appropriate watercraft to prevent additional propeller scarring.

Terra Ceia Island Preservation Foundation, Local Landowner Kimberly Wehrmann inquired how DEP is monitoring quality. Randy Runnels responded that Manatee County monitors water quality and staff utilize their data. He stated that the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan mentions that there were stations along Frog Creek and at the mouth of Bishop Harbor, and the possibility of restoring these monitoring stations since they provide a baseline to help identify major changes in the broader bay. He explains that maintenance was expensive and additional resources are needed; staff only monitor during episodic events. Randy referred to the Tampa Bay Water Atlas and SEACAR database that DEP published on the portal. Kate Smithson explained that the preserve is partnering with FWC to monitor the coastal ponds to gather baseline data. She explained that this is a two-year project and the most comprehensive study since SWFWMD's SWIM program's restoration project. She mentioned preserve staff are investigating large areas of mangrove die-off and determining next steps.

Kimberly stated that she started the TCI Preservation Foundation and is establishing a local heritage trail with virtual resources. She mentioned the historical markers in town should be identified along the trail. She also mentioned that she started a coffee company to raise funds for Terra Ceia and share information about historical coffee production in the area. Keenan Singleton replied that the Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau are interested in collaborating to facilitate the development of this trail and that they are interested in the agricultural side of the area. Randy mentioned there are still mule-drawn extruded concrete pipes on the preserve property and that this is something that was done in the area historically. He suggested this could be an opportunity for interpretation. Kate Smithson mentioned that there's not enough staff time to create interpretive programs, however, they would appreciate the opportunity to discuss and review this concept with Kimberly.

University of Tampa, Local Landowner Edna Fernandez-Figueroa inquired if there's a plan to do a study to prioritize septic tank removals in Terra Ceia. Alex Reed said they're providing grant information from DEP program areas (Division of Water Restoration Assistance and Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration) to remove septic tanks; however, removal is not within the aquatic preserve purview. Kevin Kiser mentioned the Haley House is currently on septic; however, the Terra Ceia Preserve State Park Draft Management Plan proposes a connection to the municipal sewage system when possible.

Edna noted that the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan displays cultural sites in the plan. Earl Pearson clarified that no pre-Columbian sites are mapped in the draft management plan (except Madira Bickel Mound), and that only historical structures are shown in the draft management plan map.

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Edna inquired about the proposal for Bishop Harbor Road. She expressed confusion regarding what is being proposed (i.e., expansion or something else). Gabrielle Trace clarified that the draft management plan only proposes incorporation of the road into preserve management. Daniel Alsentzer further explained that negotiations with Manatee County would be necessary. He mentioned that the preserve is bisected by this road, and that incorporating this road will help create a better sense of arrival. Edna asked if this is the reason for closing the Stotz Road Paddling Launch and Gabrielle confirmed that this is part of the reasoning. Edna agreed with the closure of the Stotz Road access and stated that visitors are confused about the exact access point for this facility. Tracy Muzyczka stated that the preserve has limited space available for parking. Randy Runnels emphasized that paddlers desire peaceful areas and recommends keeping paddlers away from the boat launch to have separate “traffic sheds”.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

Audubon Florida Jeff Liechty provided several grammatical corrections within the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan. He extends his appreciation on behalf of the organization given to protection of wildlife and the habitats they rely on throughout both draft management plans. Jeff commends the ongoing efforts that aquatic preserve staff have taken to help protect Terra Ceia’s wading bird colonies from disturbance. Additionally, he supports the strategic acquisition of land within the optimum boundary as opportunities arise.

Regarding the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan, Jeff recommends revising the language on page 65 to expressly identify fishing piers as entanglement hotspots (in addition to what is already included in the draft management plan regarding “public fish cleaning benches”). He elaborates that research documents the significant risk of bird entanglement at fishing piers, and facilities such as Skyway Fishing Pier State Park contribute to this issue within Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve.

Updates in listing statuses may affect the following birds in Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve: Wood storks have been federally delisted, but FWC is currently undertaking a biological review process to determine if state listing is appropriate. Wilson’s plovers are a candidate species for listing as state threatened.

DEP Southwest District Office Stefaney Pover provided several comments for the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan regarding the removal of language regarding non-motorized areas (not applicable here), clarification that a central site for reference projects is needed, and that enhanced coordination with regulatory agencies is required for projects within the aquatic preserve.

Supports public education regarding natural characteristics of the aquatic preserve to improve informed decision-making regarding restoration initiatives in the public interest. She also suggests improving public education on the benefits of living shorelines and identifying areas where living shoreline implementation would provide the greatest ecological and community benefits. To replace paper brochures, she suggested displaying a QR Code that links to information in the brochure when educational signage needs to be replaced.

Tampa Bay Estuary Program The TBEP provided written comments for the Terra Ceia Preserve State Park Draft Management Plan and the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan. The comments for the state park draft management plan are summarized below.

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“TBEP’s feedback primarily focuses on preventing unnecessary development within the preserve and incorporating up-to-date scientific data. Regarding the Conceptual Land Use Plan (CLUP), TBEP expresses concern over planned infrastructure additions (stabilized parking areas, seating and shelters, potential housing adjacent to the trail network, low-water crossings, footbridges across Frog Creek and the Terra Ceia River, [too much signage,] and the adaptive reuse of the Haley House) arguing that these proposals risk over-developing an area intended to remain a primitive natural sanctuary. Additionally, TBEP suggests referencing the restoration targets outlined in TBEP’s Habitat Master Plan to support coastal and native upland protection, updating seagrass mapping citations to reflect 2024 SWFWMD data, incorporating recent studies on seagrass scarring, and acknowledging active University of Florida and FWC restoration research. Notable TBEP-related milestones recommended for inclusion consist of paddle clean-up initiatives at Bishop Harbor and Mariposa Key, along with the launch of a continuous real-time water quality monitoring station in September 2025. TBEP also provides feedback on the Support Area actions, proposing alternative site selections for the support facilities and native plant nursery. Integrating existing regional frameworks, such as the Habitat Master Plan, will further strengthen commitments to safeguarding the preserve’s undeveloped habitats.”

Additionally, for the Resource Management Component in the state park management plan, the TBEP recommends including a reference to the research FWC is conducting with the Coastal Wetlands Program and how the research will support science-backed restoration planning in the preserve. The smalltooth sawfish should also be included in the Imperiled Species section of the management plan.

Lastly, the TBEP emphasized that the state park continue to pursue acquisition and protection of the identified optimum boundary parcels south of Interstate 275 and abutting Tampa Bay (i.e., Paradise Island, Skeet Key, Eds Key, Sisters keys, Knott-Cowen Tract and Rattlesnake Key).

Terra Ceia Island Preservation Foundation Kimberly Wehrmann expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the advisory group meeting. She emphasized that the TCI Preservation Foundation would like to serve as a resource or partner with the state park and aquatic preserve, particularly with historical research, preservation, education, and interpretation of Terra Ceia’s history.

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Public Participation

The public was provided with an opportunity to review and comment on draft unit management plans for Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve. During the public comment period, written comments were received. In addition, one public meeting was held, with a total of 30 attendees.

MANATEE COUNTY

Wednesday, August 26, 2026, from 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Palma Sola Botanical Park in the Galleria Building, Bradenton, Florida

Summary of Written Public Comments

Five members of the public provided the following written comments during the general public meeting:

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park

- Support to designate the Haley House as a historic site and restore the structure to serve as the new park entrance.
- Support to restore the Haley House and improve the maintenance area here.
- Emphasis on the importance of preserving the area of lowland that's proposed for the port. Passive public access helps with volunteers and community commitment.
- Support for signage and accessibility improvements to facilitate public use of the preserve. Improvements should include displaying historical, botanical, and cultural information; improve parking areas at trailheads and improve ramp access at the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp. Identified an area adjacent to the boat ramp that is filled with sand and mud that becomes difficult to use during low tide.

Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve

- Support to acquire and preserve 2,900 acres for the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve.
- Opposition for the port proposal since it will impact a widespread, delicate ecosystem that needs protection and preservation. Opposition for dredging in the entire aquatic preserve area.

Summary of Verbal Public Comments

Attending members of the public shared the following verbal comments:

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park

- Emphasis on keeping visitor trails and infrastructure outside of wildlife habitat and maintaining the primitive nature of the preserve.
- Concerns for over-signage along preserve trails; recommended using virtual trail data and/or trail blazes like the Hillsborough County nature preserves.
- Concerns for over-development of the preserve include paddlers traversing under potential trail bridges, the demand for additional trails, lack of staff for sufficient maintenance and expanding additional facilities into undeveloped wildlife habitat. Additional disturbance to wildlife was noted.
- Concerns that the number of parking spaces proposed at the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp will expand the existing developed footprint and encroach on wildlife habitat.
- Disapproval of the closure of the Stotz Road Paddling Launch. Many paddlers use this launch to avoid larger boats at the boat ramp, and the secluded paddling experience is unlike other areas of the preserve.
- Support for incorporating a section of Bishop Harbor Road into park management to prevent the illegal dumping that currently happens.

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- Concern was expressed regarding peoples' daily commute along Bishop Harbor Road and explained the impediment it would cause if the state park manages a section of it.
- Addressed the potential length of low water crossings that will be required to hike the northern management roads (if improved as trail) during the wet summer months. Organic saturated soils here may present challenges to construction.
- Encouraged additional recreational infrastructure to draw visitors to the preserve and educate them about the resources, including a pedestrian connection between the Haley House, Hightower Trail System, and Frog Creek.
- Improve educational opportunities by installing a bird blind along the trail system.
- Recommendations for a restroom in the preserve.
- Noted the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp is utilized by commercial fishermen seeking oyster/shellfish hatcheries.
- Inquiry about what is done differently in an Area of Critical State Concern (e.g., management, protections, regulations, etc.) and how this designation could be expanded to include Tampa Bay. The history and purpose of these designated areas was discussed, as well as the bay's ecological value and vulnerability to development. It was determined additional research needs to be conducted to evaluate if Tampa Bay could be designated as an Area of Critical State Concern.
- A potential Citizen Support Organization for Terra Ceia Preserve State Park was discussed. Resources were shared to help create this group and to improve volunteer support and park operations.
- Inquiries regarding how the public can receive notifications when the ARC Draft is posted on the Division of State Lands website and available for review. Suggested sending out email notifications to people who submitted public comments (via written and emailed).
- Immense support for the acquisition and protection of all the identified optimum boundary parcels in the plan and queries for how to feasibly acquire them.
- Confusion that there were two different management plans posted on two different websites; the public noticing wasn't clear.
- Requests to add additional parcels east of the railroad tracks and west of U.S. Highway 41 to the optimum boundary in the preserve given that they contain the headwaters to the wetlands and creeks that enter the park.
- The Mangrove-Coastal Pond Assessment and Report conducted in collaboration with FWC, TBEP, and SWFWMD should be included in the plan.

Summary of Emailed Public Comments

Below comments all relate to both Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve:

- Stated the open house presentation was comprehensive and informative, and there were little questions left to discuss. Expressed appreciation for the positive, welcoming, and professional atmosphere created by DEP staff. Further stating that the enthusiasm and commitment displayed throughout the meeting encouraged meaningful public engagement. Expressed that it was encouraging to see the stewardship of this part of the bay and appreciated that these matters were addressed with care, transparency and dedication. Commended DEP staff for their commitment to protecting and preserving this remarkable natural resource for current and future generations.
- Emphasized the state park and aquatic preserve are the last strongholds of biodiversity in Tampa Bay.

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- Stated public involvement is essential, along with educating visitors about this natural area.

Below comments all relate to Terra Ceia Preserve State Park:

- Emphasized that areas of greenspace are seldom in northern Manatee County, and to avoid disturbing habitat within the preserve as much as possible. Emphasized not developing the northeast corner of the park between the railroad tracks and Bishop Harbor Road.

To prevent people launching paddlecraft from the Terra Ceia Bridge (steep embankment makes this dangerous), developing a paddling launch past the bat boxes and east of the Haley House was recommended. Another launch could be considered in the northwest corner of the preserve, accessed by the road, near Citrus Place. Promoted improving the paddlecraft launch on Stotz Road, stating that the path is wide and level enough to access the bay here. Recalled the investment the State made to dredge this area; however, improvements were never completed. Emphasized that there is sufficient space for parking along the road at this location, and other locations should remain undisturbed.

Recommended installing periodic benches in the shade, along the existing trails within the preserve. Clarified that Manatee County doesn't have a strong demand for additional hiking trails; the older population considers the existing trail mileage adequate, and much of the younger population have little interest in hiking. Underscored not interrupting wildlife and not constructing bridges or additional trails within the preserve.

- Requests three additional parcels be included in the optimum boundary in the preserve. One parcel is part of the Port Manatee Ecological Preserve, and acquisition by the state park could improve management. The two other parcels are privately owned and have significant hydrological and ecological values for the preserve.

Identified that funding and staffing are significantly inadequate for the resource protection and visitor management in the preserve.

Clarified there is no need for a shelter and/or seating at the Hightower Trailhead since most visitors will be parking and hiking into the preserve from here. Suggested that some shelters or seating along the trails may be appropriate.

Expressed support for the improvements to the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp.

Stated that the three possible footbridge locations in the plan should be removed due to the cost, permitting, and redundancy. Although, one footbridge between management zones TC-16 and TC-28 would be acceptable to link the trails for visitors who are interested in additional trail mileage.

Provided several comments regarding the potential support area locations:

1. Option 7A would encroach on habitat that can be restored. This should remain a low priority.
2. Option 7B could provide a reasonable maintenance area, noting that once Bishop Harbor Road is transferred from Manatee County to the park, this facility would be adjacent to the entry gate.
3. Option 7C is not a viable location given it is immediately adjacent to a swallow tail kite rookery that's been productive this past summer.

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4. Option 7D is too far removed from the two main access points of the preserve (i.e., Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp and Hightower Trail System).
- Encourages the restoration of the Haley House in Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and stated it should serve as the primary entrance into the state park.
- Supports a management plan for the state park that prioritizes protection and restoration of the preserve's natural resources above incompatible development and/or intensive recreational uses.

Emphasized the significance of the habitats within the preserve, stating that the submerged, wetland, and upland habitat provide essential refuge for fish, birds, and other wildlife, as well as protect water quality and strengthen coastal resilience. Additionally, the preserve helps filter pollution, store carbon, absorb floodwater, reduce erosion, and provide a buffer against storms and sea-level rise. Stressed that much of Florida's coastline is under development pressure and protecting intact and recovering habitat is important.

Recalled that the habitats within the preserve have been restored from agricultural lands to healthy, ecologically diverse natural communities and that this investment should be protected. Emphasized the management plan should prioritize continued habitat restoration, native vegetation, water-quality protection, wildlife corridors, invasive-species control, and the preservation of mangroves and wetlands.

Agreed that public access is important, however recreation should remain low-impact and compatible with the preserve's purpose. Hiking, paddling, fishing, birding, wildlife observation, and environmental education allow people to enjoy the preserve without sacrificing the resources within it. Emphasized that new infrastructure or development should remain minimal and essential, and avoid fragmenting habitat, damaging wetlands, increasing pollution, or interfering with restoration.

Encouraged that the management plan includes strong, enforceable protections for the preserve's natural communities, and ensure that decisions are guided by science, habitat needs, water quality, and long-term resilience. Emphasized that the management plan should include adequate protection measures considering it will shape the landscape for future generations.

- Enthusiastic about the planned improvements within the preserve. Stated that the proposed observation platform is long overdue, low impact, and a feature for all visitors to enjoy. Recommended that it provide a wheelchair accessible ramp. Stated that archaeological resources should be protected and that they are growing in importance and location.

Clear maps with effective color coding for trails need improvement. Noted that there have been several encounters with visitors who were lost. Support for at least one trail that does not repeat itself "inbound and outbound".

Supports a campsite for park staff and volunteers, stating it is overdue and suitable for the preserve, especially during prescribed burns and possible unforeseen threats to public safety.

Commended the leaders, preserve staff and volunteers for their management efforts. Mentioned invasive plant maintenance and habitat preservation remain difficult work, although it is carried out by dedicated, educated and capable personnel.

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- Agrees with expanding the units' boundaries, including preserving additional mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, fish habitat/estuaries and bird nesting habitat. Agrees with the monitoring plans for the two units (i.e., for water quality, erosion control, imperiled species). Agrees with making the Haley House the entrance to the state park and connecting the house to the municipal sewer system.

Below comments all relate to Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve:

- Several improvements were identified for the management plan:
 1. The draft is comprehensive and well-structured covering ecological, cultural, administrative, and public-use components.
 2. A single, concise statement of the overarching management challenge early in the document would improve clarity and unify the plan's purpose.
 3. While objectives and actions are well described, the intended condition the plan aims to achieve is not always clearly defined.
 4. The draft includes many performance metrics, but should more clearly separate what was done from what results those actions produced.
 5. The plan should better distinguish between actions that are currently funded and those dependent on future, uncertain resources.
 6. For major objectives, the plan should identify responsible parties, key partners, and the nature of those partnerships.
 7. A concise summary of the most significant risks affecting plan success would help with prioritization and mitigation.
 8. The plan should highlight the most important knowledge gaps and link each directly to the management decisions it affects.
 9. More explicit principal review points—where monitoring results or changing conditions prompt adjustments—would enhance adaptability.
 10. As development and recreation pressure grow, it is important to clearly articulate how cumulative impacts will guide future management decisions.
 11. The plan could be strengthened by improving the connection among desired outcomes, objectives, resources, accountability and measurable results more explicit.
- The Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Draft Management Plan was incorporated into a Jigsaw model to illustrate how many facets (legal authority, budget, submerged habitats, volunteers, public access, etc.) work effectively when the pieces are together. To accomplish the goals listed in the plan, all the pieces in the Jigsaw model need to be accounted for (identifies potential holes in the plan).
- Agrees with expanding the aquatic preserve boundary to help protect habitat and estuaries and to make Tampa Bay more storm resilient. Emphasized the importance of monitoring water quality and sea level rise mentioned in the plan. Stressed the importance of educating the public on the management of the preserve. Appreciated the opportunity to provide public input and emphasized the importance of preserving this last frontier of wild spaces in the region.

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- Supports strengthening the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve statute language to include recent legislative restrictions that prohibit alterations within the area. Emphasized that the aquatic preserve is sensitive to water quality for marine and aviary species to thrive and that it functions as a buffer for nearby runoff.

Supports continued efforts of acquiring and annexing private parcels within the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve that warrant these additional protections.

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Agency Responses to Comments

DRP staff reviewed and considered comments received from the advisory group and the public during the advisory group and public meetings, as well as subsequent written comments submitted by mail and email. Staff's responses and analysis of the comments are provided below.

- Regarding feedback about partnering with local nurseries and planting native seed stock, additional language was added to the Natural Communities section to explore additional partnerships to facilitate restoration advancement.
- To address concerns regarding protection and adaptive management of cultural resources, additional language was included in the Cultural Resources section of the plan, including that all preserve staff complete ARM Training. Additionally, trails that are currently aligned over cultural sites will be realigned to avoid sensitive resources when possible.
- Regarding imperiled species listing statuses, several documents were updated including the Imperiled Species Table and narrative in the park chapter and the Imperiled Species Matrix in the Southwest District Appendix.
- Regarding multiple interpretive recommendations from advisory group members, the Parkwide section of the CLUP was updated to include additional themes including living shorelines, cultural resources on preserve property (e.g., mule-drawn extruded concrete pipes) and a connection to the longstanding intersections between the Cuban fishing ranchos and Indigenous communities. Additionally, an interpretive program in partnership with local organizations was recommended.
- Regarding the installation of remote off-grid kiosks unit for fee collection and tracking visitation, it was determined that at this time a payment kiosk in the preserve might attract vandalism issues if not installed behind preserve gates. A remote off-grid kiosk could be feasible if a central trailhead is developed (e.g., Haley House proposal). Regarding the addition of a QR Code on trailhead kiosks, this has been recommended in the Parkwide section of the CLUP.
- It was determined that due to factors like impact to water quality, diminished aesthetics, lack of demand, maintenance costs and the proximity to multiple publicly available amenities in the vicinity, a portable restroom is determined not appropriate for the preserve. Instead, if a central trailhead and support area is determined (e.g., Haley House proposal), a restroom may be installed here.
- Regarding the Stotz Road Paddling Launch proposal:
 - It was determined that numerous visitors support retaining this paddling launch for a variety of reasons, although sensitive ecological and cultural resource sensitivities require this current location to be restored and protected. It is proposed that contingent upon establishment of a potential alternative paddling launch, to prevent further disturbance of sensitive resources, the park gate, access path and paddling launch should be realigned approximately 60 feet to the southeast. Additionally, if through subsequent planning processes, an alternative launchpoint is implemented, the Stotz Road Paddling Launch will be closed and restored to natural conditions.

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- Received feedback that visitors seeking the Stotz Road Paddling Launch are frequently confused about where the access point is and that there is limited parking space along Stotz Road. Until an alternative launchpoint is established for the preserve, to address these issues, the CLUP proposes that stabilized parking spaces will be provided on the right-of-way along Stotz Road and a small park sign will be installed near the pathway to the launch site.
- Concerns regarding expanding infrastructure and clearings into restorable wildlife habitat were expressed. To prevent wildlife displacement and caution against overdevelopment in the preserve, additional language was added to the CLUP to provide guidelines and restrictions for additional development, including:

- Regarding the demand and rationale for additional trails, continued population growth in surrounding communities has increased the demand for accessible and well-connected trails throughout the preserve. Trail expansion is a forward-looking strategy to ensure recreational infrastructure meets the growing user demand of the increasing surrounding population. Although additional trail mileage may prevent future congestion and/or overuse of trails, if additional staff resources are not provided, additional mileage may be limited to avoid maintenance backlogs.

A consistent challenge with trail construction is the organic wetland soil throughout much of the preserve. With heavy visitor and operational use, such potential low water crossings may require stabilization to mitigate erosion and sedimentation of the adjoining water features. To avoid trampling vegetation and erosion, additional trails should be narrow-gauge and utilize existing altered landcover.

Proposals for footbridges are heavily contingent upon further evaluations of natural and cultural resource sensitivities and recreational demand for such access within the preserve. Additional planning studies will be conducted accordingly.

- A new objective to study existing and project future visitation was added to the Visitor Use Management section of the Land Use Component to address current rates of visitation, collect additional visitation data, and provide contingencies for additional infrastructure investments.
- Adjusted language in the CLUP to clarify that the footbridge proposals along the hiking trail network are being considered as options to extend the hiking trails and additional data is required prior to implementation.
- To prevent over-signage within the preserve, additional language was added to clarify the type of signage at each use area. Educational and interpretive information should be installed at each trailhead to provide introductory information, and trail blazes should be considered on trees and/or on small markers along trails as wayfinding guides.
- Regarding the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp, the language was adjusted to state, parking should not be provided outside of the developed footprint; instead, perpendicular and parallel parking spaces should be configured to provide the maximum number of spaces and maintain ingress and egress.

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- To negate the need for additional developed footprints in the preserve and avoid habitat fragmentation (i.e., new support area locations, residence at Hightower Trailhead, etc.), the utilization of *existing* clearings and ruderal areas will be prioritized. Additional rationale was included utilizing the Haley House Administration Area as the central trailhead and main entrance for staff/visitor interface given its existing altered landcover disturbance footprint and available space for parking behind preserve gates. Additionally, rather than developing a new footprint for a residence, the Haley House could be a potential alternative for staff housing. Added the concern that the proposed support area in Management Zone TC-31 would be located near an active bird rookery and that restoration could be expanded into Management Zone TC-33 to improve habitat, rather than remove it.
- Numerous people supported the concept of the Haley House becoming the preserve's central trailhead that includes a point of embarkment for paddlers and hikers. It is proposed as an alternative paddling trailhead/launchpoint to the Terra Ceia River Bridge Paddling Launch and the Stotz Road Paddling Launch. Although, concerns for retention of this staff support area/potential visitor use area include how far away and disjunct the location is from the rest of the preserve; therefore, the bridge concept (described in the plan) would still be needed to connect small utility vehicles and pedestrians to the hiking trails. Alternatively, additional assessments may evaluate and determine other viable low-impact access routes to the trail system. Additional language was added to the CLUP to address these details.
- Additional details regarding the investment in the Haley House (e.g., asbestos abatement, lead paint remediation, utilities installation, etc.) were included in the CLUP.
- To address public safety concerns about novice paddlers using the self-serve paddlecraft rental kiosk, additional language was added to identify potential safety concerns. Additionally, to improve visitor orientation before paddling along the trails, a map will be displayed at the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp interpretive kiosk and paddling trail signage will be installed along paddling trails where feasible.
- Additional language was added to the Hydrology and Natural Communities sections to reference the multi-agency hydrological study between FWC, SWFWMD and TBEP, including that additional assessments and data may help identify a solution to the declining conditions of mangroves and coastal ponds in areas of the preserve.
- Updated references to 2024 SWFWMD seagrass mapping data, including the in-text citation in the Coastal Erosion/Sedimentation section and the citation in the References Cites Appendix.
- In the Park Introduction, additional Park Accomplishments were added referencing the partnership with the TBEP, including that several paddle clean-up events in Bishop Harbor/Mariposa Key (2022-2025) have occurred and that in 2025, as well as a real-time water quality monitoring station was initiated in collaboration with partners.
- Given the ecological significance of the properties, additional optimum boundary parcels to the east of the railroad tracks and west of U.S. Highway 41 were included in the proposed additions for the Optimum Boundary in the preserve. The Optimum Boundary map and narrative were updated to reflect this.

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- Regarding concerns for management of Bishop Harbor Road, DRP reiterates that no action will be taken until a thorough evaluation of impediments to traffic patterns and access to private lands along this corridor are conducted. This is reflected in the plan.
- Regarding the designation of Tampa Bay as an Area of Critical State Concern, interagency review will be conducted to determine applicability.