



PUBLIC & INTER-AGENCY PARTICIPATION REPORT

Southwest District

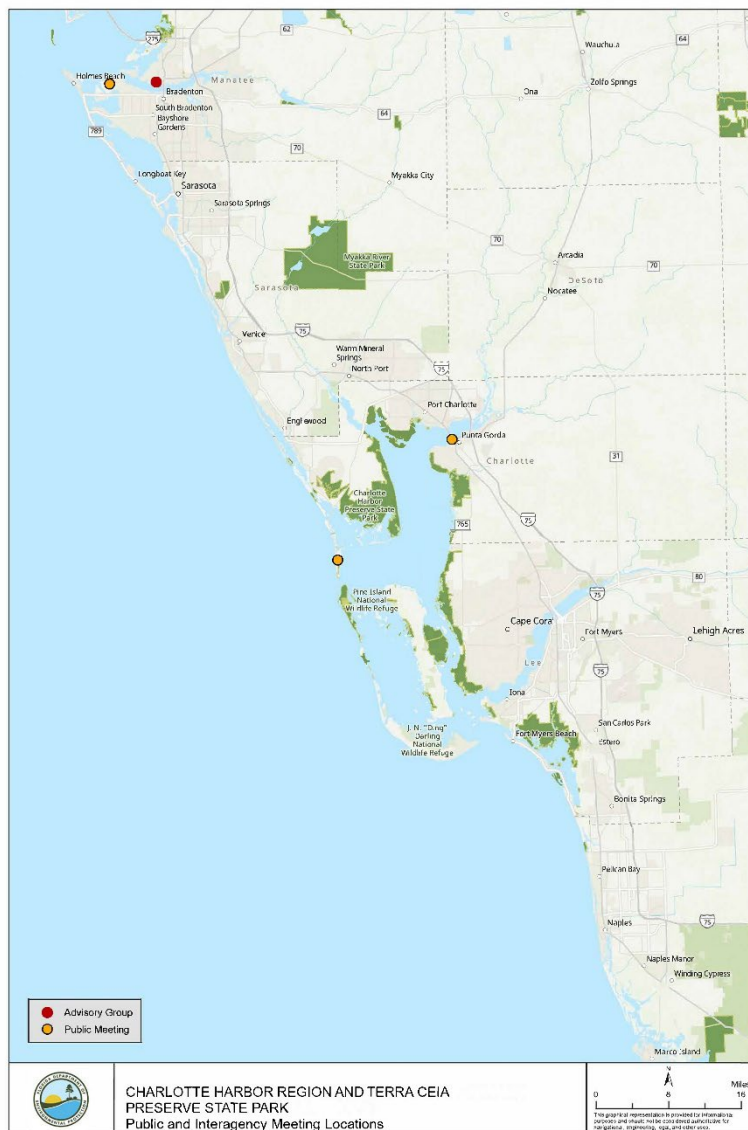
Charlotte Harbor Region

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
Manatee	Palmetto
Manatee	Bradenton



General Public Open House Meetings

Public Meeting Date	Public Meeting County	Public Meeting Venue	Region	Park Unit Within County (as required by statute)	Included Parks - Adjacent Counties (for regional context)	FAR Publication Date	FAR Publication Reference
04/07/2026	Lee	Boca Grande Community Center 131 1 st Street, West Boca Grande, FL 33921	Charlotte Harbor	Cayo Costa State Park Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park Don Pedro Island State Park Gasparilla Island State Park	Stump Pass Beach State Park	03/02/2026	Issue 52/41
04/08/2026	Charlotte	Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center 75 Taylor St, Punta Gorda, FL 33950	Charlotte Harbor	Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park Stump Pass Beach State Park	Cayo Costa State Park Don Pedro Island State Park Gasparilla Island State Park Stump Pass Beach State Park	02/27/2026	Issue 52/40
08/26/2023	Manatee	Palma Sola Botanical Park - Galleria Building 9800 17th Avenue NW, Bradenton, FL 34209	Central Gulf*	Terra Ceia Preserve State Park	N/A	08/12/2026	Issue 52/156
*Additional parks within the Central Gulf region will be brought to public engagement at a future date.							

In-person Regional Advisory Group Meetings

Advisory Group Meeting Date		Region/Park	Park Unit	FAR Publication Date	FAR Publication Reference
04/09/2026	Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center 75 Taylor St, Punta Gorda, FL 33950	Charlotte Harbor	Cayo Costa State Park	03/02/2026	Issue 52/41
			Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park		
			Don Pedro Island State Park		
			Gasparilla Island State Park		
			Stump Pass Beach State Park		
08/24/2026	Palmetto Historical Park Carnegie Library Basement 515 10th Ave W. Palmetto, Florida 34221	Central Gulf*	Terra Ceia Preserve State Park	08/12/2026	Issue 52/156
*Additional parks within the Central Gulf Region will be brought to public engagement at a future date.					

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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
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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.

**Charlotte Harbor 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.

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.

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

- 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.

**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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

**Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve
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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.

**Terra Ceia Preserve State Park and Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve
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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.

**Terra Ceia Preserve State Park
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.

- 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.