



Mr. Chairman, Commissioners,

We are excited to present final rules for the Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA) that would open approximately 147,000 new acres for public hunting. Staff is seeking approval to include this area, commonly referred to as the Addition Lands, as part of the BCWMA and provide rules to help administer hunting.

We want to thank the National Park Service, especially Superintendent Pedro Ramos, for their help with this process.

This background report details the proposed changes and staff recommendations for moving forward.

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## History and Background

- 1974 – Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) established
- 1976 – Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA) established
- 1988 – Addition Act
- 2010 – Addition General Management Plan
- 2011-2014 – Hunting Management Plan / Environmental Assessment



This map shows the location of BCNP in south Florida, north of Everglades National Park, and east of Naples.

### History:

**1974** – The BCNP was established as the first national preserve. The preserve differs from a national park, as traditional uses are allowed such as hunting, fishing, and off-road vehicle (ORV) access.

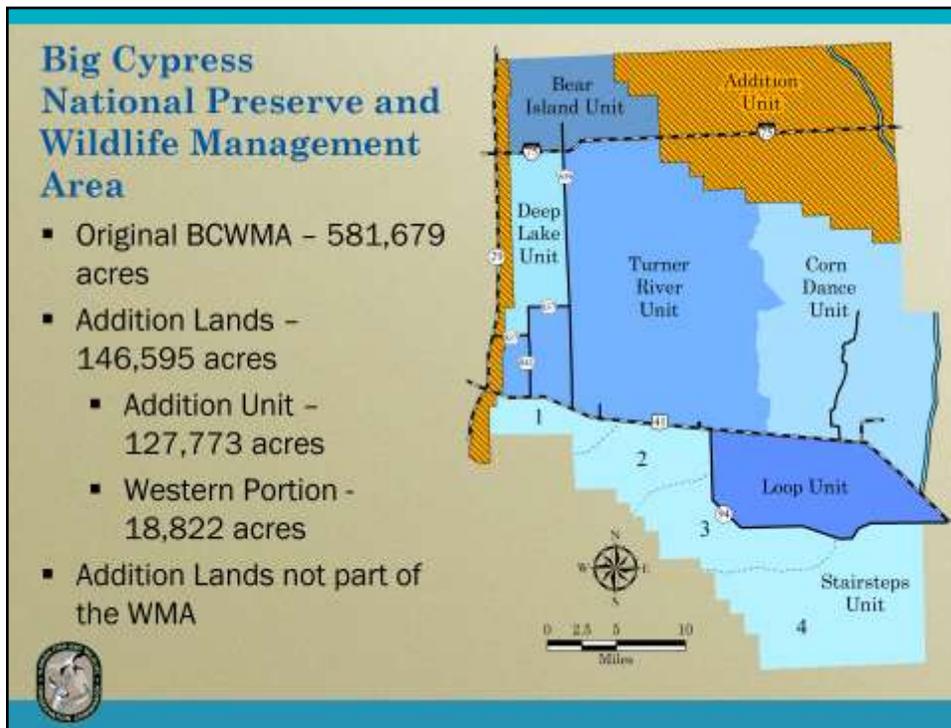
**1976** – NPS partnered with FWC’s predecessor agency, the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, to establish BCWMA with hunting, fishing and ORV access.

**1988** – US Congress passed the BCNP Addition Act, enlarging the preserve, although most of the land transfer did not take place until 1996. This acreage was not included in the BCWMA and was not opened to public hunting.

**2010** – The Addition General Management Plan was completed. The document required development of a Hunting Management Plan before public hunting could be allowed. Development of this plan required an Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

**2014** – In May of 2014, the Hunting Management Plan for BCNP was completed and approved by NPS.

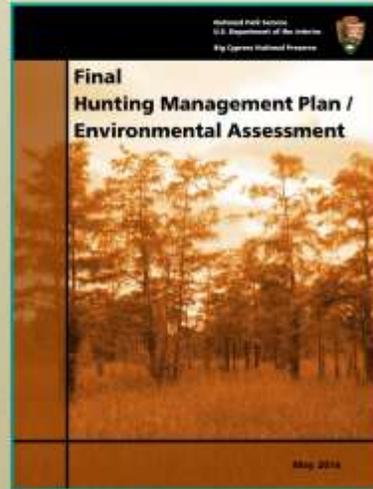




This is a map of the BCWMA with the Addition Lands (146,595 acres) highlighted and cross-hatched. The original Preserve and current BCWMA Units (581,679 acres) are shown. The Addition Lands are not currently part of the BCWMA.

## Hunting Management Plan

- A collaborative process for managing hunting
- National Park Service (NPS) and FWC, in consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to meet annually
- Review survey and harvest data and consider stakeholder input
- Consider potential management actions
- Maintain viable hunting program with sustainable harvest



The Hunting Management Plan / Environmental Assessment describes a preferred alternative for a collaborative process that allows FWC and NPS, with input from USFWS and stakeholders, to manage hunting within the BCWMA, including the Addition Lands. Agencies will meet annually to review existing data, consider potential management actions, and discuss stakeholder input and potential regulation changes.

The plan describes in detail what data to consider as well as management tools to maintain a viable hunting program with sustainable harvest while considering other species that are not hunted.

**The NPS conducted five public meetings throughout four public comment periods.**

## Current Hunt Framework

### Seasons

Archery	Muzzleloading Gun	General Gun	Small Game	Spring Turkey
30 days	16 days	51 days	28 days	37 days

### Legal to Hunt

- Antlered deer, wild hogs, turkeys, gray squirrels, quail, rabbits, raccoons, coyotes, and migratory game birds

### Quota Permits

- Bear Island Unit - 200 each, muzzleloading gun and general gun (first 9 days only)
- Turner River Unit - 500, general gun (first 9 days only)



The current hunt format and species legal to take are shown here.

This includes archery, muzzleloading gun, general gun, small game and spring turkey seasons.

Species popular to hunt include deer, wild turkeys, small game, and migratory game birds. Bag limits for deer, wild turkeys, and wild hogs are 1 per day and 2 per year.

**There is no antlerless deer harvest allowed on BCWMA. Deer are polygamous and one buck will mate with many does. The buck only harvest is appropriate and should have little impact on the deer population.**

Currently, quota permits are required in the Bear Island Unit for the first 9 days of muzzleloading gun and in the Bear Island and Turner River Units for the first 9 days of general gun season.

## Proposed Hunt Framework – Addition Unit

- Walk-in hunting by quota permit for antlered deer and turkey seasons
- Quota of 30 each season, no exemptions
- No quota for small game season
- Hunting regulations would be similar to Bear Island Unit



The 127,773 acre northeastern addition will be established as the Addition Unit. Because access is walk-in only, low quotas are necessary for the initial antlered deer and turkey seasons. The quota for archery, muzzleloading gun, general gun and spring turkey seasons will be 30, no exemptions. Quota permits will not be required during the small game season (January 5 through February 1).

Legal to take, season lengths and bag limits will be consistent with the current framework in the Bear Island Unit.

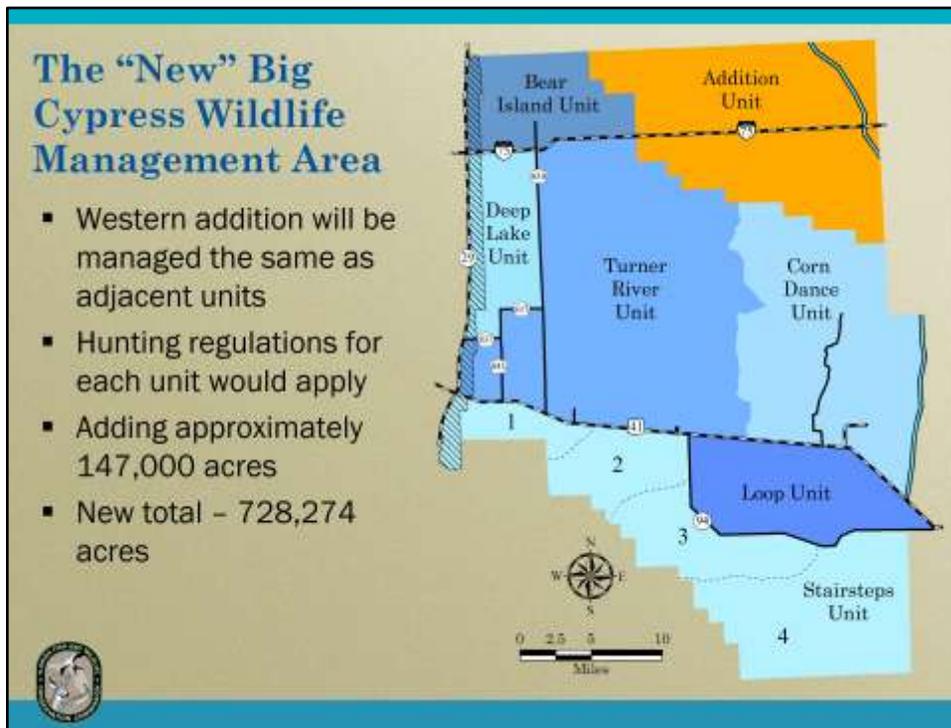
If approved, staff would facilitate as much hunting opportunity as possible starting this Fall (2014).

## Access – Addition Unit

- Limited parking available
- Two major access points at rest areas on I-75
  - Mile marker 63
    - Rest area under construction
  - Mile marker 51
    - Hunters may disperse along the L-28 Interceptor Canal levee



Access to the Addition Unit is limited. Currently, off-road vehicles (OHVs) are not allowed because the management plan for OHV trails within the Addition Lands has not been implemented. For now, access for hunters is limited to walk-in only from two major access points at rest areas off I-75. However, at the mile marker 51 rest area, hunters will be able to disperse by vehicle along the L-28 Interceptor Canal levees, park, and walk into the area. Vehicle access is restricted to the portion of the L-28 Interceptor Canal levee north of I-75 with walk-in access to the south.



The NPS has requested that the remaining portion of the addition be managed the same as the adjacent management units. Initially, there will be walk-in access only, as ORV access has not been approved. Upon establishment, the new map for the BCWMA would appear as shown. The new WMA would total 728,274 acres, an increase of 146,595 acres.

If approved, quotas and new acreage additions would be established through Executive Order.

## Requested Action

- Approve rule amendments as advertised
  - Establish seasons
  - Walk-in only from designated access points
  - Prohibit take of wildlife from L-28 Levees
  - Establish new area and quotas



Following publication of the proposed rule amendment, staff have received supportive comments from stakeholders. There has been some opposition to hunting in the Addition Lands in the past; however, the NPS concluded that allowing hunting was appropriate and supports this approach.

We would like to ask the Commission to approve the rule amendments as advertised. This would establish the new area, establish hunting seasons similar to Bear Island, designate walk-in only access and prohibit taking wildlife from the L-28 levees.