



Final Management Plan Released for Everglades National Park

Plan makes strides to improve habitat conservation while maintaining reasonable boating and fishing access

Washington, DC – September 1, 2015 – The National Park Service recently released the final General Management Plan (GMP) for Everglades National Park, which includes several changes that will affect recreational boating and fishing access and habitat conservation in the park. The recreational fishing and boating community expressed its collective appreciation to Everglades National Park officials for meaningfully addressing concerns that were raised during the GMP development process.

“Covering much of the southern tip of mainland Florida and nearly all of Florida Bay, Everglades National Park is home to some of the best recreational fishing opportunities that Florida has to offer,” said Trip Aukeman, director of Advocacy for Coastal Conservation Association Florida. “Given that this GMP will guide management actions for the next 20 to 30 years, it’s critically important that we get it right. Overall, we believe the GMP strikes an appropriate balance of management measures to safeguard resources while allowing for reasonable boating and fishing access.”

Everglades National Park officials have been working on the GMP update for several years. After serious concerns were raised over the draft GMP and the potential for reduced public access to the park’s waters, park officials worked closely with members of the recreational fishing and boating community to identify ways to better facilitate access while minimizing boating impacts to important habitat, namely seagrass. As a result of those discussions, many significant changes were made from the draft GMP to the final GMP.

“The recreational fishing community recognizes pole and troll zones are an important management tool to conserve shallow water habitat, but these zones must be established at a reasonable size and with access corridors to allow anglers to still reach the area,” said Mike Leonard, Ocean Resource Policy director for the American Sportfishing Association. “In working with the recreational fishing community, Everglades National Park officials modified tens of thousands of acres of the park’s waters to better facilitate boating access, and included 29 new access corridors in the final GMP compared to the draft GMP. The level of responsiveness of Everglades National Park officials to our community’s input is reflective of how good public policy should be developed.”

One significant change that boaters in Everglades National Park will experience in the future is a mandatory boater education and boating permit system. Operators of motorboats and

non-motorized boats, including paddled craft, would complete a mandatory education program to obtain a permit to operate vessels in the park.

“We are pleased to see a cooperatively developed plan that protects our natural resources as well boater access in a balanced manner,” said Nicole Vasilaros, vice president of Federal and Legal Affairs for the National Marine Manufacturers Association. “While we believe that boater education is best administered on the state level, we appreciate the collaborative work the Park has done to include stakeholders in this process and we agree that education is the best way to ensure a safe and fun day on the water. Utilizing state of the art technology, including updated maps and navigational charts, we hope boaters will have an improved experience operating within park waters while ensuring visitors maintain robust access.”

“It’s hard not to recognize the clear contrast between the degree to which stakeholder input was considered for Everglades National Park’s GMP compared to that of [Biscayne National Park, where the recreational fishing community was resoundingly ignored](#),” noted Leonard. “By recognizing that habitat conservation can be achieved while still allowing the public to get out on the water and enjoy our public places, Everglades National Park officials set a positive example that we hope other National Park Service units will follow.”

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