

general management plan
development concept plan
wilderness study and
environmental assessment

january 1983

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and
Statement of Findings 7/83

BISCAYNE



NATIONAL PARK / FLORIDA

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STATEMENT OF FINDINGS
BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN/DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN

RECOMMENDED: James H. Sanders 6/8/83
SUPERINTENDENT, BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK DATE

CONCURRED: Bob Zehner 6/17/83
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, SOUTHEAST REGION DATE

APPROVED: Russell E. Dickerson 7/13/83
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DATE

SUMMARY

The National Park Service proposes a general management plan for the recently enlarged Biscayne National Park that expands visitor use and preserves the existing natural and cultural features of the park. The plan proposes the following actions:

establish a public boat system that will provide an opportunity for the nonboating public to experience the park by traveling on the water and visiting the keys and the coral reefs

improve the interpretive program, with particular emphasis on participatory interpretation at the Elliott Key Harbor complex

maintain the present park development sites on the keys without significant change

maintain the undeveloped areas of the keys and mainland in a natural state

return the Ragged Keys and Soldier Key to a natural state and allow access for the boating public

designate Boca Chita as a day use area for the boating public and provide minimal necessary development

allow established recreational pursuits to continue with appropriate controls to minimize visitor use conflicts and resource damage

prepare a cultural resource preservation guide to aid day-to-day management and systematic monitoring of impacts upon cultural resources; institute an integrated program to reduce visitor impacts upon submerged archeological resources

increase monitoring of air and water quality and recreational and commercial impacts upon marine and terrestrial natural resources; take necessary action to preserve and protect the park's resources, placing particular emphasis on protection of endangered and threatened species and environmentally sensitive sites

The proposed development concept plan for the Convoy Point (headquarters) developed area calls for construction of new facilities including a visitor contact/waiting station, an administrative building, an employee residential duplex, and a maintenance building. The harbor facilities will be rehabilitated to better serve the tour boat system and park operations/maintenance craft. The existing boat ramp will be closed to public use once the proposed new boat ramps are available at the neighboring Homestead Bayfront County Park.

Four categories of alternatives were considered in arriving at the draft plan: (1) continuation of existing conditions, with no public tour boat system after July 4, 1983 (no-action alternative); (2) implementation of

the 1978 general management plan, which provided for expanded development within the old monument boundary and a public tour boat system, but included no provisions for new areas authorized in 1980; (3) preservation and minimum development, with a limited public tour boat system; and (4) intensive visitor use and expanded development.

The current proposal is not expected to cause any significant environmental consequences, and neither would any of the alternatives considered except alternative 4. The significant impacts that would occur under that alternative would be associated with dredging and filling on Convoy Point.

A separate wilderness study evaluates the suitability of the park's lands and waters for wilderness designation. Four areas are determined to be possibly eligible, but because of the limited sizes of these areas and the obtrusiveness of surrounding land and water uses, the National Park Service proposes no wilderness designation.

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PLAN APPROVAL AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN/DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN/
WILDERNESS STUDY

BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK
FLORIDA

RECOMMENDED: James H. Sanders 6/8/83
SUPERINTENDENT, BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK DATE

CONCURRED: Bob Baker 6/17/83
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, SOUTHEAST REGION DATE

APPROVED: Russell E. Dickerson 7/13/83
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DATE

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) is in the process of preparing a new general management plan (GMP) for Biscayne National Park. The plan will provide guidance for the preservation, use, development, and operation of the park for the next 5-10 years. In concert with the GMP, a development concept plan (DCP) is being prepared for site development at Convoy Point, and a separate wilderness study has been conducted in order to evaluate suitability of parklands for wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act. Issued in January 1983, Biscayne National Park General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Assessment (GMP/EA) describes the proposals for GMP, DCP, wilderness designation, and assesses alternative planning strategies and potential environmental impacts of implementation.

The purpose of this document is to record the selection of plan proposals and a "finding of no significant impact" pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (43 CFR 1500). This document should be attached to the GMP/EA.

THE PROPOSAL AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The GMP/EA contains detailed descriptions of the proposed plan for the park and for alternative planning strategies. In summary, the proposal contained in the GMP/EA calls for the following actions:

establish a public boat system that will provide an opportunity for the nonboating public to experience the park by traveling on the water and visiting the keys and the coral reefs

improve the interpretive program, with particular emphasis on participatory interpretation at the Elliott Key Harbor complex

maintain the present park development sites on the keys without significant change

maintain the undeveloped areas of the keys and mainland in a natural state

return the Ragged Keys and Soldier Key to a natural state and allow access for the boating public

designate Boca Chita as a day use area for the boating public and provide minimal necessary development

allow established recreational pursuits to continue with appropriate controls to minimize visitor use conflicts and resource damage

prepare a cultural resource preservation guide to aid day-to-day management and systematic monitoring of impacts upon cultural

resources; institute an integrated program to reduce visitor impacts upon submerged archeological resources

increase monitoring of air and water quality and recreational and commercial impacts upon marine and terrestrial natural resources; take necessary action to preserve and protect the park's resources, placing particular emphasis on protection of endangered and threatened species and environmentally sensitive sites

The proposed development concept plan for the Convoy Point (headquarters) developed area calls for construction of new facilities including a visitor contact/waiting station, an administrative building, an employee residential duplex to replace temporary housing, and a maintenance building. The harbor facilities will be rehabilitated to better serve the tour boat system and park operations/maintenance craft. The existing boat ramp will be closed to public use once the proposed new boat ramps are available at the neighboring Homestead Bayfront County Park.

Four categories of alternatives were considered in arriving at the proposed plan: (1) continuation of existing conditions, with no public tour boat system after July 4, 1983, (no-action alternative); (2) implementation of the 1978 GMP, which provided for expanded development within the old monument boundary and a public tour boat system, but included no provisions for new areas authorized in 1980; (3) preservation and minimum development, with a limited public tour boat system; and (4) intensive visitor use and expanded development, with a tour boat system.

The wilderness study determined that four areas of the park are possibly eligible for designation. However, because of the limited sizes of these areas and the obtrusiveness of surrounding land and water uses, the NPS proposes no wilderness designation.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC RESPONSE

In November and December 1981, a planning information and response form was distributed to the public as part of the scoping process in preparing the GMP, DCP, and wilderness study. One hundred-sixty forms were returned, mostly from people in the Miami/Homestead area. This information was used in the development of the proposal, alternatives, and environmental consequences.

The GMP/EA was made available to the public in February 1983, and a public hearing on the GMP and wilderness study was held March 10, 1983, in South Miami, Florida. Approximately 150 persons attended and 11 speakers represented seven organizations and six individuals. Written comments were accepted until April 11, and were received from 64 individuals, three businesses, three organizations, 13 government agencies, and two members of Congress. In addition, two petitions were received. The majority of respondents were from the region surrounding the park, and most described themselves as boaters, fishermen, sport divers, or environmentalists.

The overall response was very favorable to the proposal with a strong emphasis on protecting the park as a natural area. There was considerable support for the proposed public ferry service to Elliott Key and tour boats to the reef tract and southern keys, although some commenters expressed concern that ticket costs could be prohibitively high or cautioned that the capacity of the service should be strictly controlled to avoid overuse of park resources.

There was general agreement with the proposed resource management plan. Many respondents emphasized protection of water quality in the park. Several commenters called for an end to commercial fishing in the park, and continued spear fishing was opposed by several commenters including the Florida Department of Natural Resources. Three speakers at the public meeting, one representing a diving club and a few written comments requested stronger assurances in the plan that spear fishing would not be further restricted or prohibited.

There was some opposition to specific proposals in the plan. Several boaters opposed refilling the dredged canal on Sands Key in order to retain the "keyhole" as a boat basin. Other proposals receiving more limited opposition (less than 10% of the total responses) included limiting visitor use of Boca Chita to daytime hours, removing the Stiltsville development at the termination of the current lease, removing the public boat ramps at Convoy Point, and restricting boat use in environmentally sensitive waters.

Wilderness designation within the park was not a major issue. None of the speakers at the South Miami hearing addressed wilderness, and there were few written comments concerning the subject. Of those written comments specifically addressing wilderness, most favored the proposal for no designated wilderness areas. Those comments favoring designation were divided among designating the entire park, the submerged portions of the park, the southern keys, or the mangrove shoreline as wilderness.

PROPOSAL REVISIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

After reviewing the comments and reconsidering the proposed actions, the NPS has revised the proposal to permit overnight primitive camping on land and in boats within the harbor at Boca Chita. Providing boat-related camping at Boca Chita is consistent with the planning objectives stated in the GMP/EA and would not result in any additional environmental impact in the park nor significantly increased operating costs. Although the site will be patrolled, NPS personnel will not normally be present for a full 24-hour day. However, it is anticipated that there may be such a need during high use periods, and personnel will be temporarily stationed on site as necessary.

As a result of questions raised regarding the carrying capacity of Boca Chita and the replacement of the harbor bulkhead (pages 22 and 31 in the GMP/EA), the following clarification is provided. The NPS will not have an opportunity to fully assess the social carrying capacity of Boca

the park's resources are coastal; consequently recreation and operational facilities are functionally dependent on close proximity to water, and development within the coastal high hazard area is unavoidable.

The proposal and the alternatives vary in the extent of existing developments retained in floodprone areas and in the degree of floodproofing of structures. Alternative 1, the no-action alternative, would perpetuate the highest risk of property damage because of the vulnerability of existing structures to storm damage and the continued existence of structures on the Ragged Keys and Soldier Key. Alternatives 2 and 4 would present the next highest risk, because although many existing structures would be replaced or floodproofed, some development on the Ragged Keys and Soldier Key would remain. The proposal and alternative 3 would present the least risk of property damage, because in addition to providing for floodproofing of existing and new structures where practicable, all structures would be removed from the Ragged Keys and Soldier Key. Risks to human safety under the proposal and each alternative would be mitigated by the provisions of the park's hurricane evacuation plan.

Impacts on wetlands will be the same among the proposal and alternatives with two notable exceptions. Under alternative 4 construction of a new boat basin at Convoy Point would require destroying approximately 0.3 acres of existing mangrove wetlands; this is an adverse effect under E.O. 11990. Secondly, the proposal and alternative 3 call for filling the artificial canal at Sands Key in order to restore the island's interior salt pond for its wetland value, a benefit under the executive order.

CONCLUSION

The National Park Service concludes that there is no practicable alternative to locating facilities at Biscayne National Park in the 100-year floodplain and coastal high hazard area. However, under the proposal no new floodplains or wetlands will be occupied and visitor safety and property protection from flood damage will be improved. Floodplain and wetland values will be enhanced by proposed interpretive, research and resource management actions, and by removal of structures and restoration of natural conditions on Sands Key, Soldiers Key, and the Ragged Keys. The NPS finds the proposal to be acceptable under executive orders 11988 and 11990.

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN
WILDERNESS STUDY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK
Dade County, Florida**

Biscayne National Park, located just south of Miami, Florida, contains 175,000 acres of land and water. It comprises an extensive undeveloped mainland mangrove shoreline, much of middle and lower Biscayne Bay, the northernmost chain of coral keys in the United States, most of which are undeveloped, and 20 miles of submerged coral reefs. The proposed general management plan for this area combines a philosophy of resource protection with that of assuring visitor enjoyment through interpretation and the continuation of established recreational activities. A critical part of the plan is a public transportation system that will make the park more accessible to the nonboating public. The proposed plan would have no significant impact upon the environment. Four alternatives to the proposed plan are presented and assessed. In response to a congressional request to study the area for its suitability for wilderness designation, the National Park Service proposes to recommend no wilderness.

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INTRODUCTION

Biscayne National Park is located in southeastern Florida, a region of extensive flood prone areas. It was established to preserve, protect, and interpret an extensive undeveloped mainland mangrove shoreline and associated wetlands, much of middle and lower Biscayne Bay, the northernmost chain of coral keys in the U.S., and 20 miles of submerged living coral reefs. The establishment also provides appropriate public recreation.

The National Park Service (NPS) is in the process of adopting a new general management plan for the park and has recently published Biscayne National Park General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Assessment (GMP/EA). Executive Orders 11988 ("Floodplain Management") and 11990 ("Protection of Wetlands") require the NPS and other Federal agencies to evaluate the likely impacts of actions in floodplains and wetlands. The objectives of the Executive Orders are to avoid to the extent possible the long-term and short-term adverse impacts associated with occupancy, modification, or destruction of floodplains and wetlands and to avoid indirect support of development and new construction in such areas wherever there is a practicable alternative.

The purpose of this Statement of Findings is to present the rationale for locating proposed actions in the floodplain and to document the anticipated effects on floodplain and wetland values.

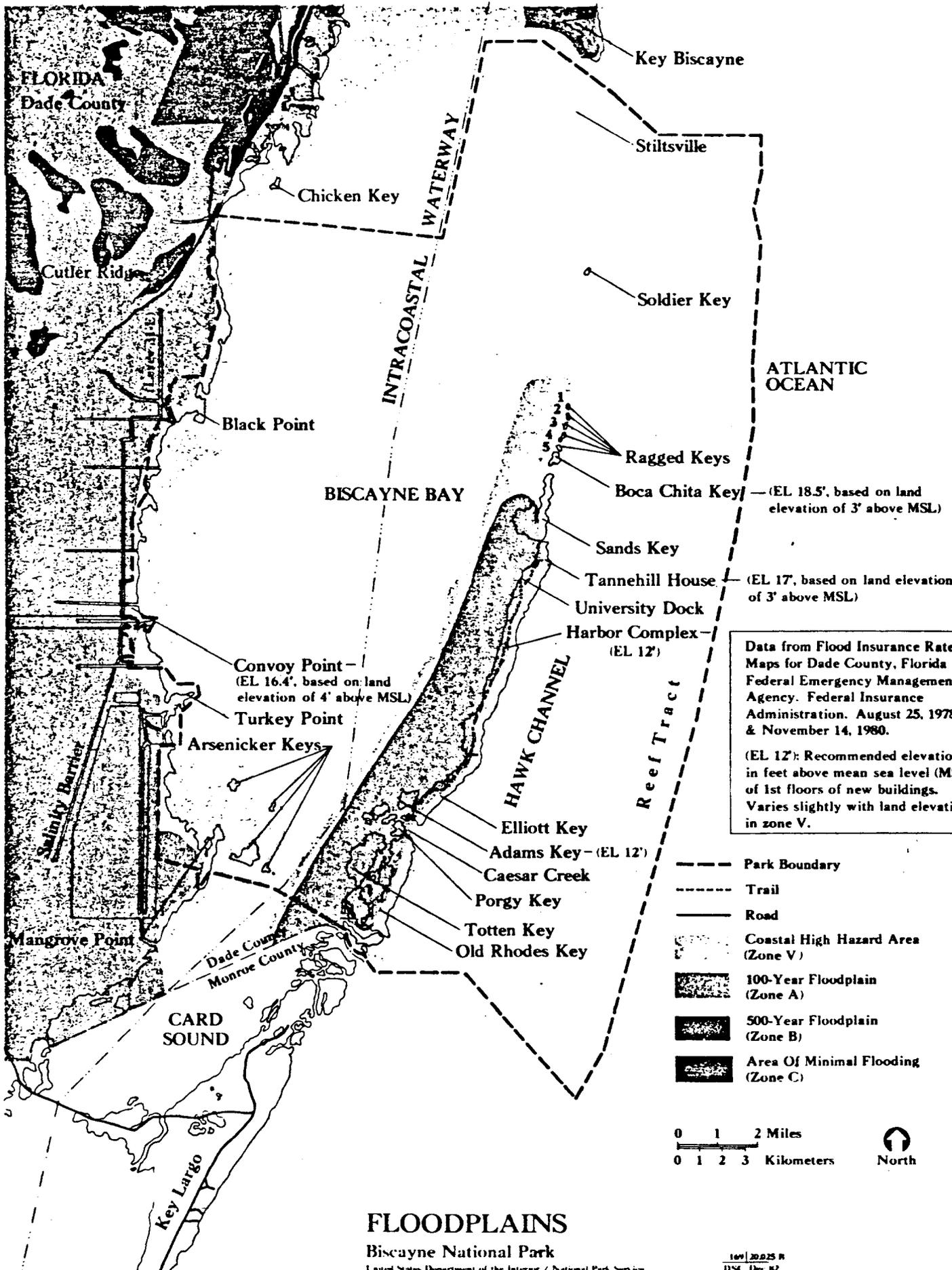
FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS IN THE REGION

The floodplains of Dade County were mapped in 1980 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. With the exception of limited areas of higher ground near Cutler Ridge and Homestead, the 100-year floodplain extends well over 10 miles inland from Biscayne Bay. As shown on the Floodplains map, the entire park is within the 100-year floodplain. Further, lands along the eastern shore of the keys and the mainland are within the coastal high hazard area because of exposure to storm wave action. Existing developed sites within the designated coastal high hazard area include Convoy Point, the Tannehill house, Boca Chita, the Ragged Keys, Soldier Key, and Stiltsville; sites within the 100-year floodplain include Adams Key, Porgy Key, the Elliott Key Harbor complex, and University Dock.

With the exception of the hammocks and the built-up land on Elliott Key, Adams Key, Convoy Point, Boca Chita, and other scattered sites, almost all the emergent land in the park is classified as wetlands according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetland Inventory maps.

THE PROPOSAL IN RELATION TO FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS

The proposal and the four alternative strategies are described in detail in the GMP/EA. Since publication of the GMP/EA, the proposal has been revised to permit overnight primitive camping at Boca Chita with no change in the proposed development there. Proposed parkwide developments provide the facilities necessary for a quality visitor experience while



Data from Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Dade County, Florida . Federal Emergency Management Agency. Federal Insurance Administration. August 25, 1978 & November 14, 1980.

(EL 12'): Recommended elevation in feet above mean sea level (MSL) of 1st floors of new buildings. Varies slightly with land elevation in zone V.

- Park Boundary
- - - Trail
- Road
- Coastal High Hazard Area (Zone V)
- 100-Year Floodplain (Zone A)
- 500-Year Floodplain (Zone B)
- Area Of Minimal Flooding (Zone C)

0 1 2 Miles
 0 1 2 3 Kilometers

North

FLOODPLAINS

Biscayne National Park

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

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 DSC, Dec. 82

INTRODUCTION

In June 1980 Congress increased the size of the former Biscayne National Monument by 71,000 acres and redesignated the area Biscayne National Park. The legislation that expanded the park, Public Law 96-287 (reprinted in appendix A), called for a revision of the 1978 general management plan and for a study to determine the suitability of the park's lands and waters for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

This document presents comprehensive planning and environmental compliance information for these projects.

Part one presents the preliminary proposal for a general management plan, including a development concept plan for Convoy Point, and an associated environmental assessment. It describes the alternatives that were considered and the environmental consequences of the proposal and alternatives. Part two of the document contains a separate wilderness study and proposal, also with an environmental assessment.

The proposed general management plan combines actions from four planning alternatives that were presented to other agencies and the public in November and December 1981. The National Park Service solicited comments on the four preliminary planning alternatives and on the issue of wilderness through a planning information and response form. More than 500 forms were distributed, and 160 responses (32%) were returned by the January 1, 1982, deadline. The public comments are summarized in appendix C. The preferences expressed by the public were considered during the development of the proposed general management plan and the wilderness study.

The purpose of this document is to inform NPS officials, other agencies, and the public of the plan proposals and the conclusions of the wilderness study so that comments and concerns can be addressed prior to final decisionmaking. Following the review of this document, the regional director will decide if the proposed plan or wilderness study should be revised and will determine whether or not an environmental impact statement is required. Once all the required environmental compliance has been completed, the general management plan/development concept plan will be finalized, and a wilderness recommendation will be submitted to the president and Congress.

minimizing impacts on the park's resources. A number of existing structures will be rehabilitated, and new structures will be built only in those areas already impacted by existing development. All developed areas are within the 100-year floodplain, and developments at Convoy Point, Tannehill, Boca Chita, and Stiltsville are within the coastal high hazard area. Options for placement of facilities outside the 100-year floodplain are nonexistent in the park, and they are extremely limited or unavailable within 10 miles of the park boundaries. Moving park facilities out of the 100-year floodplain and the coastal high hazard area would be impractical, expensive, and costly in terms of efficiency of operations, resource and visitor protection, and energy conservation.

In both the 100-year floodplain and the high hazard area, the design of new structures or rehabilitation of existing structures will incorporate methods for minimizing storm damage as contained in the National Flood Insurance Program's "Floodplain Management Criteria for Flood-Prone Areas" (Code of Federal Regulations, title 44, sec. 60.3). Accordingly, new major structures will be elevated on pilings above the projected flood hazard elevation.

Further, the park staff will continue to maintain an active hurricane evacuation plan. The plan details responsibilities of individual park employees for advanced preparedness measures at the onset of the hurricane season (June-October); removing or securing park property, records, and utility systems during a hurricane watch; evacuating the public and staff during a hurricane warning; monitoring communications during a hurricane; and conducting rescue and salvage operations following a hurricane. The hurricane plan has proven effective in reducing property damage and maintaining safety during storms, and it will be annually reviewed and updated.

Natural resources management will emphasize perpetuation of floodplain and wetland values. The park will actively assist private landowners and federal, state, and local regulatory agencies in protecting wetlands that are outside the park boundary, but whose use may affect park resources. Moreover, wetlands and floodplains will be used for their educational, recreational, and scientific qualities through expanded interpretive programs and research emphasis.

The NPS has determined that the proposed action conforms to state and local ordinances concerning floodplains, wetlands, and coastal zone management. This determination was confirmed by state agencies' responses to the GMP/EA in April 1983.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Four alternative strategies are described in the GMP/EA. Another alternative of removing all buildings from the coastal high hazard area was considered during the planning process but was rejected as infeasible because it would not provide even the minimum requirements of visitor use and resource protection as intended in the park legislation. All of

Chita until the island is open to the public. After the site is open to public use, and before the harbor bulkhead is replaced, visitor satisfaction and other impacts will be further assessed to determine the optimum number of people (and in turn, the number of boats) using Boca Chita. The bulkhead and docking facilities will be redesigned accordingly. In any event, docking capacity will probably not exceed 60 boats, and no boats will be allowed to anchor in open water within the harbor, except for emergency.

The proposal to fill in the artificial channel on Sands Key will not be changed. Filling in the channel will have two important effects in keeping with management of the park as a natural area. First, it will restore a natural salt pond, a wetland habitat protected under executive order 11990 and important to many native wildlife species. Secondly, closure of the channel will further protect nearby nesting habitat for loggerhead and hawksbill sea turtles, both federally listed endangered species. Providing public use of Boca Chita harbor, and the continued public use of the reconstructed University Dock will mitigate the loss of Sands Key as a protected and overnight anchorage.

The proposed resource management program will be adopted, as stated in the GMP/EA. Commercial fishing and spearfishing will continue to be permitted in the park unless state fishing regulations are revised or research and monitoring of park marine resources indicate a need to change park regulations in consultation with the state. Such revisions would be documented in the park resources management plan and would include opportunities for public comment.

As a result of questions raised regarding backcountry camping, clarification of the second paragraph on page 40 of the GMP/EA is needed. Backcountry camping will be allowed with an authorized permit. Locations open to backcountry camping will be specified in the park's resource management plan. The system of free permits will ensure a quality backcountry experience and protection of natural resources. The current park resources management plan permits this use at Elliott and Sands keys, as noted in the GMP/EA. This designation is expected to continue for the foreseeable future but could be changed if needed for resources protection or visitor safety by revising the resources management plan.

SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The potential environmental consequences of the proposal and the alternatives are described in detail on pages 82 through 96 in the GMP/EA with the exception of the aforementioned revision to permit overnight camping on Boca Chita Key. Permitting overnight use will require no additional developments beyond those already proposed for the site, and no additional significant environmental consequences are expected.

The GMP/EA documents compliance with the Endangered Species Act (pages 85 and 122-128), executive orders 11988 and 11990 concerning floodplains