



For Immediate Release
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Donalds Leads Bipartisan Initiative To Protect Big Cypress National Preserve From Destructive Biden Admin. Meddling

WASHINGTON – Today, Congressman Byron Donalds (R-FL) led a [bipartisan letter](#) alongside Representatives Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Scott Franklin (R-FL) and 15 additional colleagues from across the Sunshine State in demanding that the Biden administration does not proceed with any proposed wilderness designation at Big Cypress National Preserve.

Federally-designated wilderness areas are defined as areas "where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor and does not remain." Any wilderness designation of Big Cypress by Biden administration officials would not only restrict the free movement of the local Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes, but it would supercharge the spread of invasive species, destroy local small businesses, and restrict wildfire response capabilities.

Representatives Byron Donalds (R-FL), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) and Scott Franklin (R-FL) were joined in support by Representatives Aaron Bean (R-FL), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Kat Cammack (R-FL), Matt Gaetz (R-FL), Carlos Giménez (R-FL), Laurel Lee (R-FL), Brian Mast (R-FL), Cory Mills (R-FL), Jared Moskowitz (D-FL), Bill Posey (R-FL), John Rutherford (R-FL), Maria Salazar (R-FL), Greg Steube (R-FL), Michael Waltz (R-FL), and Daniel Webster (R-FL).

"Big Cypress National Preserve is an iconic fixture of our Southwest Florida community that must be protected from debilitating federal overreach," said **Rep. Donalds (R-FL)**. "I proudly stand with my constituents, local stakeholders, and environmental officials from across the Sunshine State in demanding that the Biden administration does not proceed with any wilderness designation of the preserve. It is imperative that we block this disastrous and completely unnecessary potential action by out-of-touch bureaucrats in Washington."

"As we approach the 50th Anniversary of the Big Cypress National Preserve, it is crucial to continue protecting this outstanding natural and sacred land for future generations," said **Rep. Diaz-Balart (R-FL)**. "As the first-ever National Preserve in the National Park Service, this land stands as one of the most ecologically diverse areas of our country. Any proposed wilderness designation by the Biden Administration would pose significant threats to the sacred cultural sites of the Miccosukee Tribe and Seminole Tribe, and way of life enjoyed by the Tribes, constituents and tourists who visit America's first Preserve for camping, fishing, and hunting. As the Member of Congress representing a majority of the Preserve, I remain steadfast in my commitment to safeguarding its future."

"In Florida, we know no one is better at preserving our state's natural beauty than the locals who have lived with and alongside the land for generations," said **Rep. Franklin (R-FL)**. "If the Biden Administration finalizes this determination, it will be in vehement opposition to the will of our state's agencies, Tribal Nations and the affected counties in my district. I thank my Florida colleagues for joining the effort to stop this overreach from the federal government."

"I'm glad to join Rep. Donalds and my Florida colleagues in opposing a wilderness designation for Big Cypress National Preserve," said **Rep. Cammack (R-FL)**. "The wilderness designation will restrict access for the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes which rely on this area for cultural, ceremonial, and burial significance, along with hunters and fishermen who work to manage invasive species. This most restrictive designation isn't good for the Sunshine State."

"Designating Big Cypress National Preserve as a wilderness area would undermine the efforts to protect the sacred lands of the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes," said **Rep. Mills (R-FL)**. "A wilderness designation would restrict fishing, hunting, and camping, which are important to both the local culture and economy. We will continue to support the local tribes and protect the integrity of their sacred land. We must respect their rights and heritage while ensuring responsible use of the preserve."

"There's plenty of legitimate concerns about the impact of designating Big Cypress National Preserve as wilderness," said **Rep. Moskowitz (D-FL)**. "Not only would it complicate our ability to manage invasive species, but it would also restrict access to tribes who have long called this area home. For those reasons, I would urge the Interior Department not to rush towards any new designation."

"Maintaining access to this land is important for conservation and environmental management, as well as religious significance for Native Americans," said **Rep. Posey (R-FL)**.

- See social media graphics roll-out [HERE](#)
- Read the full text of the letter [HERE](#) or below:

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We write today to express our concern and opposition to any proposed wilderness designation for Big Cypress National Preserve (the Preserve). The Preserve has been home to the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida for centuries, and these sacred religious lands must be protected. As America's first nationally designated preserve, the State of Florida and the federal government have, and will continue, to make critical investments to ensure the protection of the Preserve's wildlife, water resources, and sacred Tribal lands, while maintaining access throughout the entirety of the Preserve for all visitors.

Within the Preserve, the Miccosukee Tribe and Seminole Tribe are stewards to their homeland. With fifteen active traditional villages that are now cultural sites, and multiple ceremonial and burial grounds, the Preserve is sacred land and must remain entirely accessible. If the Preserve were to be designated as a wilderness area—which is defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964 as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor and does not remain"—this would restrict Tribal citizens' right to move freely about their homeland, limit access for hunters and fisherman, and lead to unnecessary restrictions for land management to properly respond to fires within the Preserve.

Big Cypress National Preserve welcomes roughly one million visitors every year and it is vital to the surrounding small businesses who rely on environmental tourism in South Florida. The Preserve serves as a realistic mechanism to spread important conservation education to all who visit. In Florida alone, it's estimated that there are over 900 established non-native plant and animal species. To note, not every invasive species constitutes a major concern, but the accumulation of several invasive species can create ecological devastation—as we've seen with the Burmese python in the greater Everglades region. Consequently, python hunting is a positive solution that addresses this challenging issue. However, under a wilderness designation, python hunting would be severely impacted due to the prohibition of vehicles and other hunting restrictions in wilderness areas. Additionally, various types of technology that may be used to track invasive species—including the use of drones—would be prohibited under the proposed wilderness designation.

Hendry County, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tribal Nations, and many of our constituents have made their voices heard in vehement opposition to this proposed wilderness designation at Big Cypress National Preserve. Congress worked alongside these stakeholders to ensure critical protections were in place when establishing the Preserve in 1974, and any proposed wilderness designation would swiftly undermine these previous efforts.

From sacred cultural sites, to fishing, to hunting, to camping, the Preserve is a unique and beautiful area for individuals to visit and enjoy all that it has to offer. For these reasons, we request that you do not proceed with any proposed wilderness designation at America's first national preserve, Big Cypress National Preserve.

Sincerely,

Byron Donalds (R-FL) Member of Congress
Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) Member of Congress
Scott Franklin (R-FL) Member of Congress
Aaron Bean (R-FL) Member of Congress
Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) Member of Congress
Kat Cammack (R-FL) Member of Congress
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Maria Salazar (R-FL) Member of Congress
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Michael Waltz (R-FL) Member of Congress
Daniel Webster (R-FL) Member of Congress

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