



Flamingo after Hurricane Wilma © National Park Service

The Future of Flamingo in Everglades National Park

A Vision and Guiding Principles for Redevelopment

BACKGROUND

In 2005, hurricanes Katrina and Wilma devastated the area of Everglades National Park known as Flamingo. All existing structures, including a visitor's center, lodge, restaurant, and cabins were severely damaged or destroyed. The only overnight accommodation in the park, Flamingo has long been a popular destination for anglers, boaters, birders, campers and paddlers, and the public reaction to the destruction of the area was swift and decisively in favor of rebuilding the area.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FUTURE OF FLAMINGO

Funding Opportunities and Public Support

Redeveloping Flamingo, an area particularly vulnerable to hurricane damage and destruction, will be a costly endeavor. The cash-strapped National Park System already suffers from an annual system-wide operations funding shortfall of nearly \$750 million. In FY08, Congress provided a \$122 million increase in park operations, and a \$161 million increase for FY09 is now moving through Congress. In addition, the proposed "National Park Centennial Challenge" program would create a 10-year-long partnership between the federal government and private philanthropic sources to fund important projects across the park system. As the National Park Service prepares for its Centennial in 2016, private sector partnerships will be necessary to make the redevelopment of Flamingo possible.

Resource Protection and Restoration

Flamingo is the gateway to the most ecologically sensitive part of Everglades National Park. The park has suffered for years from funding shortfalls and staff turnover. An increase in funding is needed to ensure that the park's law enforcement and educational programs are commensurate with the expected level of visitors to the park. In addition, the park must be provided or must develop the tools necessary to address the problem of staff turnover.

Furthermore, the redevelopment of Flamingo represents a chance to restore and protect parts of the natural environment that were altered or destroyed by earlier development. The newly developed area should leave a reduced footprint, while at the same time offer a variety of recreational opportunities and educational programs for all visitors to enjoy.

In its previous layout, Flamingo was a sprawling expanse of asphalt and concrete, where lodging is separated from commercial activity by distances that are best traveled by bike, although many actually choose to drive their cars. NPCA would like the new Flamingo to concentrate its development into a much smaller area where cars are not necessary, and where a visitor can easily walk from their room or tent to the boat ramp or restaurant. Not only will this enhance the experience of visitors, but it will maximize



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the extent to which natural habitats in Flamingo can be restored.

Finally, Everglades National Park should take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the current reduced condition of Flamingo to institute a robust boater education program. This program could include instructor-lead formats offered at Flamingo and/or web based formats available for all users of Florida Bay. Early next year, NPCA will launch a boater educator program to educate the public on protecting the natural resources of Florida Bay.



NPCA's vision for Flamingo will enhance the visitor experience, include green building technologies, and restore natural habitats.

A Unique Opportunity to Reconnect with History and Surrounding Communities

The redevelopment of Flamingo offers the opportunity to establish a “sense of place” that is tied to the history and culture of the region and of Flamingo itself. Its historic character should be reflected in choices of architecture, landscape design, and available services. In addition, the redevelopment of Flamingo represents an opportunity to create connections to the communities surrounding Everglades National Park. The park should explore opportunities to foster a sense of connection between Flamingo and these communities.

NPCA'S VISION FOR FLAMINGO

NPCA recognizes that the redevelopment of Flamingo will depend on many factors and challenges including limited funding and high insurance costs. Clearly, public-private partnerships will be necessary for the success of the project, as well as a commitment from Centennial funds. The park's Preferred Alternative D appears to go in the right direction, however dividing the project into phases will delay benefits for both the public and potential partners. We hope the park will move ahead with Alt D, but revise the timeline so that we may all enjoy a “New Flamingo” by the National Park Service's 100th birthday in 2016. For more information, visit: www.npca.org/southflorida/redeveloping_flamingo.

Guiding Principle for Redevelopment

- ✓ *A reduced footprint:* The new Flamingo should produce a considerably smaller footprint on the land than currently exists. We believe that if the site planning process focuses on a “walkable” development, *increased* services and opportunities for visitor experience could be provided in a much smaller area.
- ✓ *Restoration and protection of natural habitat:* The redevelopment process must include elements of restoring natural habitat and protecting the habitats that could be impacted by visitors. There may also be opportunities for achieving some protection from storm surge by restoring mangrove habitats as a buffer between Florida Bay and the developed part of Flamingo.
- ✓ *“Green” design and architecture:* Everglades National Park should take advantage of the considerable thought, imagination, and progress currently being made in the area of green architecture. Structure design should maximize passive cooling and resistance to wind and storm surge and utilize recycled materials. There may be opportunities for new technologies to be showcased at the new Flamingo.
- ✓ *A variety of visitor experiences:* Flamingo is most famous for fishing, and fishing will likely always be a centerpiece of visitor services offered at Flamingo. The potential for a wider variety of experiences, however, including canoeing, birding, hiking, biking, and walking is tremendous. The old Flamingo offered all of these opportunities, however, the design of the place made them less than optimal. Other services, such as storytelling, campfires, and children's activities could also enhance Flamingo's appeal as a destination for families.
- ✓ *Creating a “sense of place”:* The new Flamingo should reflect the history and culture of the area and the region. Part of the mission of the National Park Service is to preserve cultural and historic resources. This mission has not been particularly emphasized at Everglades National Park in the past, but could be at Flamingo. Choices of architecture, landscape design, and services could capture a sense of “old Florida,” which would be unique in the south Dade region.
- ✓ *Connect with Gateway Communities:* Everglades National Park should explore opportunities to form connections between Flamingo and the surrounding gateway communities of Homestead and Florida City.



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1300 19th Street NW • Suite 300 • Washington, DC 20036
202.223.NPCA(6722) • Fax 202.659.0650 • npca@npca.org • www.npca.org