



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

January 25, 2008

Everglades National Park
Attn: Fred Herling, Flamingo CSP
40001 State Road 9336
Homestead, Fl 33034

Re: Everglades National Park, Flamingo Commercial Services Plan

Dear Superintendent Kimball:

On behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), I am pleased to submit comments on the Draft Flamingo Commercial Services Plan (CSP)/Environmental Assessment (EA) released by Everglades National Park in November 2007. NPCA is a leading voice in protecting and enhancing our National Park System for present and future generations. NPCA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, parks advocacy organization with more than 340,000 members, including 19,000 in Florida. NPCA supports Alternative C because it best embodies our vision for a "New Flamingo". We applaud the park's efforts and recommend that the planning continue to be bold, innovative, resource-focused and supportive of the diverse interests of the park users.

Before it was devastated in the summer of 2005 by hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, Flamingo had a long history of settlement and provided the only overnight accommodation, beyond tent and RV camping, in the park. It continues to be a popular destination for a variety of visitors including anglers, boaters, birders, campers, and paddlers. Public reaction to the destruction of Flamingo was swift, decisive, and overwhelmingly in support of rebuilding Flamingo.

Redeveloping Flamingo, an area particularly vulnerable to hurricane damage and destruction, will likely be a costly endeavor. As the National Park Service prepares for its Centennial in 2016, private sector partnerships will likely be necessary to make the redevelopment of Flamingo possible. While we recognize that the redevelopment of Flamingo will depend on many factors and challenges including limited funding and high insurance costs, we remain positive and excited about the possibilities this opportunity creates.

NPCA believes that the redevelopment of Flamingo represents an opportunity to reflect the history and culture of Flamingo and of south Florida, to create a high quality visitor experience at Everglades National Park, to restore and protect sensitive natural resources, and to improve the sense of connection between the park and its gateway communities. By using sustainable building practices and materials (such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified) and partnering with the most innovative green designers of the time, Everglades National Park can build a new Flamingo that exemplifies the National Park Service's commitment to climate friendly building and planning. It can also serve as a model for the rest of the park system for how to establish successful public-private partnerships, and can enhance its image as a world-class eco-tourism destination.

NPCA believes Alternative C is a critical step in the right direction. We look forward to working through the planning process with the park and other stakeholders to further refine the design and create a final site plan that addresses some of the specific recommendations laid out in this proposal. We recognize that some of the elements of this plan are running in parallel with the broader work on the park's General Management Plan (GMP) revisions, and appreciate that the park is moving this important project ahead on a separate and expedited track. Working within the framework of this alternative is only the first step in rebuilding Flamingo, and NPCA recommends that our six basic principles continue to guide the redevelopment.

1. A reduced footprint

The new Flamingo should produce a considerably smaller footprint on the land than currently exists. The planning process should focus on “walkable” site design, which could provide increased services and opportunities for visitors in a much smaller area. We support the park's effort in Alternative C to create a design that reduces visitor dependence on cars and supports increase walking and biking.

We support Alternative C because it creates the most bike trails to wildlife viewing and other natural areas, as well as to the visitor center and other developed areas, and otherwise maintains connectivity throughout the park. We recommend that the park keep only the critical sections of roadways needed and expand walking and biking paths through the park, specifically along the bay. We further recommend that the final plan strategically place the lodge, cabins, RV sites, parking and other structures closer to the road, so that a greenway or trailway could be created on the bay side of the park that connects from camping loop A to the visitor center. A final site plan that exhibits the prioritization of connectivity, safety, view shed, and efficiency could help create the Flamingo experience that we all envision.

We also support the idea to institute a “yellow bike” system for all overnight guests, as in Alternative C and B. We think this provides visitors a unique experience, while also assisting the reduction of the overall footprint of the site. The final number of bikes should be determined during the process of final implementation, so as to ensure that the system will be fully functional and that a “biking culture” at Flamingo is successfully created.

2. Restoration and protection of natural habitat

The redevelopment of Flamingo represents a chance to restore and protect parts of the natural environment that were altered or destroyed by earlier development. 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. NPCA supports Alternative C's plan to restore 87 acres of previously damaged or destroyed wetlands, including the restoration of Eco Pond to its natural coastal prairie habitat. To restore as much land as possible, while also providing expanded services, smart planning will be essential.

3. “Green” design and architecture

Everglades National Park, one of eleven parks in the National Park System's climate-friendly parks program, should take advantage of the considerable thought, imagination, and progress currently being made in the area of green architecture. We support the park's plan in Alt C to incorporate structural designs that maximize passive cooling, resistance to wind and storm surge and the utilize recycled materials.

NPCA recommends that the park continue to incorporate in the planning process the use of locally produced, hurricane resistant, and ecologically sustainable materials and energy efficient designs and

best practices to create a Flamingo that showcases that best climate friendly building and planning tools of our time. We are pleased with the park's use of solar power and porous paving techniques, and encourage the park to aim for a LEED certification of Silver or higher on all project elements. More of these "green" design parameters should be incorporated into the final site design and planning process once a final alternative is approved. NPCA looks forward to working with the park and other stakeholders who have specific expertise in these areas, such as the Urban Land Institute, the U.S. Green Building Council, and other groups. We recommend that such experts be convened to produce a professional, knowledge-based set of advice.

4. A variety of visitor experiences

Flamingo is most famous for fishing, which should 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 and at times dangerous for pedestrians. Other services, such as storytelling, campfires, and children's activities could also enhance Flamingo's appeal as a destination for families.

NPCA supports the park's plan, as best demonstrated in Alt C, to create a wider range of overnight options, ranger-led tours and family-friendly activities. Although this may be covered in the park's Long Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP), we ask the park to fold educational tools into all structural designs and program plans (to help visitors learn more about green building practices, climate change, the Everglades ecosystem and what they can do in their daily lives to help protect our shared natural resources) and ensure that signage, interpretive displays and programmed activities are offered in multiple languages to accommodate a wide range of visitors.

Additionally, we think it is important to provide a multitude of opportunities for visitors of all abilities to enjoy the water. We support the park's Alt C because it improves the boat tours at Flamingo by offering more guided tours to more locations in Florida Bay and the backcountry. We also like that Alt C provides visitors the opportunity to rent houseboats again, and creates canoe and kayak launches by the visitor center as well as near the camping areas.

Fishing and exploring Florida Bay will always be the backbone of the Flamingo experience and we need to give people the tools, resources and education they need to be able to safely and enjoyably experience those resources. The park's Alt C provides for meeting space(s) to be available in the lodge, and we recommend the park make these spaces suitable to accommodate the potential technological needs of classroom instructors or scientific presenters. We believe that this is a great opportunity for Everglades National Park to create a space that could be used to educate the public on their role in protecting the surrounding natural resources, potentially through a resource based boater education program. Such a space could even be designed to incorporate the goal of supporting research efforts at the park, a concept in Alt C that NPCA also supports.

5. 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 should be particularly emphasized at the new Flamingo in Everglades National Park. Choices of architecture, landscape design, and services could capture a sense of "old Florida," which would be a unique and defining characteristic in the south Miami-Dade region, encouraging connectivity to the surrounding community and a distinctive experience for visitors.

We believe that the structures at Flamingo, like the visitor's center and gas station, are not in keeping with the sense of "old Florida" we think should be recreated at Flamingo. The current structures are concrete block-construction, stark, and do not adequately fill the anticipated needs of the park. We recommend that the park have the structures documented by a qualified architectural historian, as referenced on page 2-27, demolished, and replaced with more current and appropriate structures. We believe that the structures should be recreated with a more efficient and historically integrated design. For example, rebuilding the visitor center and office headquarters perpendicular to the bay would create a green space where visitors could enjoy an unobstructed view of the bay, a local marketplace, day-use picnic areas, and interactive interpretive displays for children. We also recommend either removing the unused gas station so that the land could be restored, or finding an appropriate use that would not incur significant costs or require additional parking. One possible plan for the old gas station is to convert it into a museum that honors the Mission 66 era and houses pictures of the time and structures (one of which might be the old visitor's center). NPCA supports NPS initiatives, like Mission 66 and the Centennial, to increase the funding, capacity and quality of services and resource protection at our national parks, and we recommend that the park find a way to honor those efforts without sacrificing the opportunity to create an innovative and appropriate site plan for Flamingo.

We also support the park's plan, as referenced in Alt C, to maintain the historic and ecological character of the area by using native landscaping and rustic looking design elements. While it is very important that the visitor experience is comfortable and enjoyable, we think this could be accomplished with simple designs that keep the focus on the natural qualities of the area. NPCA is indifferent to whether or not a pool is part of the facilities at Flamingo, and thinks that public opinion and further detailed site planning with expert involvement should help inform that decision. If rebuilding the pool is part of the future Flamingo, we recommend that the design be complimentary to the natural surroundings. One way of achieving this could be by using salt-water filtration instead of chlorine, and incorporation of natural landscaping materials. We urge the park to create a final site plan that ensures that all structures at Flamingo successfully "blend into" or compliment the surrounding environment, while at the same time, provide the best visitor experience possible.

6. Connect with Gateway Communities

Everglades National Park should explore opportunities to improve connections between Flamingo and the surrounding gateway communities of Homestead and Florida City. As the CSP mentions, the economic stability of Flamingo and the surrounding businesses are irreplaceably linked. We recommend that the park planners connect with local business and community leaders to ensure that designs chosen and services provided reflect both the culture of the area and the history of the region, and provide the most opportunity to increase the economic vitality of the park and region.

NPCA supports the park's plan, in Alt C, to make transportation easier and more ecologically friendly within the Flamingo area (with the use of a walkable site design, the yellow bike system and a seasonal circulator shuttle). We also recommend that the park include ways to increase the public's ability to access Flamingo by making available bike lanes, shuttle or tram service from the park's main entrance. The park could partner with neighboring attractions, communities and cities to create a system of public transportation that demonstrates the connectivity necessary to give a wider range of visitor access to Flamingo and the rest of the park. The ongoing activities related to the development of the Biscayne-Everglades Greenway, from Biscayne National Park, through Homestead and Florida City to Everglades National Park, could be a conduit through which public transportation and community engagement are improved and increased.

We recognize that some of our recommendations may involve elements that are addressed in the GMP. Boater education, transportation issues and park signage are mentioned in these comments and we ask that the park consider these points again, as we cross the somewhat grayed boundaries between the GMP, LRIP and Flamingo CSP/EA. All of these planning tools should be closely coordinated to ensure attention is paid to improved access and options for visitors.

NPCA thanks Everglades National Park for accepting comments from stakeholders about the rebuilding of Flamingo and the development of a Commercial Services Plan. Workshops and listening sessions have been a constructive method of engaging interested members of the public to provide advice and input on Flamingo redesign.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate and are committed to being involved in all phases of the redesign and rebuilding of Flamingo. NPCA will continue to share our ideas and recommendations with Everglades National Park and to partner with other stakeholders and organizations to assist in convening experts in the field of green technologies, potential concessionaires and local businesses, to plan a final site design that incorporates these basic principles.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Adornato III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "A".

John Adornato III
Director
Sun Coast Regional Office
National Parks Conservation Association



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May 15, 2008

Everglades National Park
Attn: Fred Herling, Flamingo CSP
40001 State Road 9336
Homestead, Fl 33034

Re: Everglades National Park, Flamingo Commercial Services Plan

Dear Superintendent Kimball:

On behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), I am pleased to submit comments on the Flamingo Commercial Services Plan (CSP)/Environmental Assessment (EA) Preferred Alternative (Alt D) released by Everglades National Park in April 2008. NPCA is America's leading voice in protecting and enhancing our National Park System for our children and grandchildren. NPCA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, parks advocacy organization with more than 340,000 members, including 19,000 in Florida. NPCA supports the park's preferred alternative and appreciates the inclusion of many of our principles and vision for a "New Flamingo" in Alt D.

We applaud the park's efforts and recommend that the planning continue to be bold, innovative, resource-focused and supportive of the diverse interests of the park users. We are especially appreciative of the inclusion of a more diversified set of activities and overnight experiences offered, increased trails and tours available, a focus on sustainable design and alternative transportation, and the vision of Flamingo as a place to support scientific study and stewardship based education.

There are some differences between Alt C and the preferred Alt D, specifically, in Alt D less land is restored and the site plan is less consolidated. We don't know what the best site plan should be for the proposed facilities, but it does seem that Alt D has taken a step back from Alt C in consolidating services and reducing car use. This approach appears to reduce the initial impact to park resources, though may not reduce the long-term impact to the resources. We recommend that the park leave the site plan as open and flexible as possible in the final CSP, and that experts in energy efficiency and alternative transportation be consulted to further refine the site plan as the process moves forward.

Based on the information in the CSP Financial Analysis, NPCA is uncertain as to the benefits of the phased approach that the park is considering taking. We understand that the first phase of the project aims to maximize existing capacity, which we support. However, it is unclear as to the additional costs and benefits of constructing the rest of the project in phases. Although we do realize that there will be funding challenges associated with the rebuilding of Flamingo, we are not sure that splitting the project into phases is the correct approach, nor are we confident in the order in which these phases have been prioritized. For instance, would the project be more attractive to potential contractors, funders and concessionaires if the lodge was build sooner rather than later? We recommend that a financial analysis be done and considered in which phases 2, 3 and 4 are combined and implemented shortly after phase 1 is complete. This would solve the problem found in the current analysis, in which there is a lack of

information regarding the change in visitation rates throughout the four phases, and might be a more realistic and attractive plan for potential contractors, funders and concessionaires to consider.

We are concerned, as well, at how far in the distance – 2013 – the park anticipates initiating the big construction steps; without moving this project forward the visitors and the business community may become disenchanted with the idea of redeveloping the area, or worse, think that it is economically unfeasible. We recommend that the park look at the project in its entirety, so that the public and our potential partners might better conceptualize and commit to the immediate implementation of the full project. We also recommend that experts in public-private partnerships be consulted to further analyze the project and make suggestions regarding feasibility and appropriate timeframes. NPCA would like to see the facilities rebuilt and services provided at Flamingo in the quickest and most cost-effective manner as possible.

NPCA believes that the redevelopment of Flamingo represents an opportunity to reflect the history and culture of Flamingo and of south Florida, to create a high quality visitor experience at Everglades National Park, to restore and protect sensitive natural resources, and to improve the sense of connection between the park and its gateway communities. By using sustainable building practices and materials (such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified) and partnering with the most innovative green designers of the time, Everglades National Park can build a new Flamingo that exemplifies the National Park Service's commitment to climate friendly building and planning. It can also serve as a model for the rest of the park system for how to establish successful public-private partnerships, and can enhance its image as a world-class eco-tourism destination.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate and are committed to being involved in all phases of the redesign and rebuilding of Flamingo. NPCA will continue to share our ideas and recommendations with Everglades National Park and to partner with other stakeholders and organizations to assist in convening experts in the field of green technologies, potential concessionaires and local businesses leaders to help create a final site design that is consistent with our vision for a "New Flamingo".

Sincerely,



Jill Horwitz
Senior Program Coordinator
Sun Coast Regional Office
National Parks Conservation Association