

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

March 18, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We write to express deep concern and opposition to any proposed wilderness designation of the Big Cypress National Preserve that impedes management of the preserve and public access. Big Cypress is a cherished natural resource, and its proper management is crucial to preserving its ecological integrity while maintaining access opportunities for the public. We are deeply concerned about the potential hindrance of natural resource management, especially in regard to prescribed fire, invasive species control, and the maintenance of native fish and wildlife habitats.

We have heard from stakeholders who have raised valid concerns that the proposed wilderness designation would unnecessarily impede effective management of invasive exotic species and the preservation of native fish and wildlife habitats, while also restricting access to the public and tribes. One such stakeholder, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, shared with our offices the attached correspondence. The Tribe opposes the wilderness designation in areas within the Big Cypress National Preserve. The landscape of the Big Cypress National Preserve has been successfully managed and has been a home for humans for centuries and should continue as such. The Department of Interior should appropriately address stakeholder concerns and ensure that the management of the preserve effectively addresses actual challenges for the benefit of the ecosystem and the public.

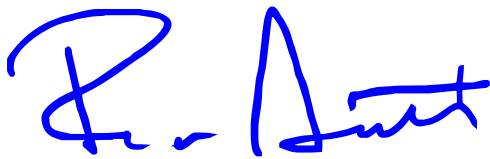
Furthermore, we share the concerns raised by stakeholders that the proposed wilderness designation would unduly restrict public access, falling far below the appropriate and sustainable levels required to maintain a healthy balance between conservation and recreational opportunities. It is vital that any access restrictions are carefully considered to ensure they do not impede responsible and sustainable recreational activities that contribute to the local economy and foster a connection between the public and nature.

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In light of these concerns, we respectfully request that you do not move forward with any proposed wilderness designation that will hinder the proper management of public access and natural resources within the Big Cypress National Preserve.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator

Attachment