

Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



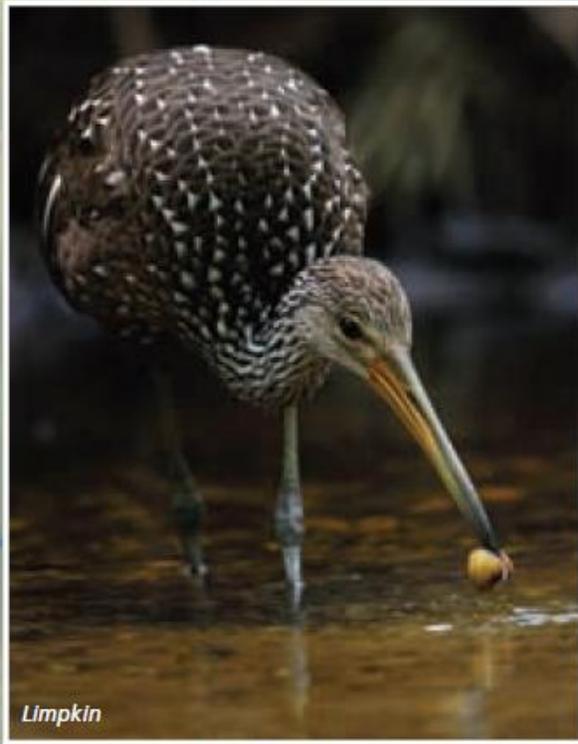
March 2011



Wekiwa Spring



Black Water Creek



Limpkin



Above SR46 Bridge

Environmental Assessment for the Comprehensive River Management Plan

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
WEKIVA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER SYSTEM**

Florida

The Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System was designated by an act of Congress on October 13, 2000 (Public Law 106-299). The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 USC 1247) requires that each designated river or river segment must have a comprehensive river management plan developed. The Wekiva system has no approved plan in place.

This document examines two alternatives for managing the Wekiva River System. It also analyzes the impacts of implementing each of the alternatives.

Alternative A consists of the existing river management and trends and serves as a basis for comparison in evaluating the other alternative. It does not imply that no river management would occur. The concept for river management under **alternative B** would be an integrated program of goals, objectives, and actions for protecting and enhancing each outstandingly remarkable value. A coordinated effort among the many public agencies and entities would be needed to implement this alternative. Alternative B is the National Park Service's and the Wekiva River System Advisory Management Committee's preferred alternative.

Implementing Alternative A would result in some continuing adverse impacts on scenic values, recreation values, wildlife and habitat values, historic and cultural values, and water quality and quantity values from the continuation of existing situations and conditions. Implementing the preferred alternative (B) would result in coordinated multiagency actions that aid in the conservation or improvement of scenic values, recreation opportunities, wildlife and habitat, historic and cultural resources, and water quality and quantity. This would result in several long-term beneficial impacts on outstandingly remarkable values.

This *Environmental Assessment* has been distributed to other agencies and interested organizations and individuals for their review and comment. The public comment period for this document will last for 30 days after distribution of the document to the public. Readers are encouraged to give us their comments via the National Park Service Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at www.parkplanning.nps.gov; send written comments to Jaime Doubek-Racine, National Park Service, 5342 Clark Road, PMB#123, , Sarasota, FL 34233. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

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SUMMARY

The Wekiva River System, composed of the Wekiva River, Rock Springs Run, Wekiwa Springs Run, and Black Water Creek, was designated by the U.S. Congress as a national wild and scenic river in October 2000. Five outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) have been identified for the river system: scenic, recreational, wildlife and habitat, historic and cultural, and water quality and quantity. In accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (PL 90-542), these values, the river system's free-flowing characteristics, and its immediate environment "shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations" (section 1(b) Wild and Scenic Rivers Act). Unlike most rivers in the national wild and scenic river system that are managed exclusively by either a federal or state agency, the Wekiva River System is considered a partnership wild and scenic river, meaning that it is jointly managed by a consortium of local stakeholder groups referred to as the Wekiva River System Advisory Management Committee (the advisory management committee) with oversight and coordination provided by the National Park Service (NPS).

Section 3(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that a comprehensive management plan be developed to serve as the basis for protecting a designated river's values. The *Comprehensive River Management Plan* developed by the Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Advisory Management Committee through collaboration with the NPS (summarized as the preferred alternative in this document) fulfills the requirement of section 3(d)(1).

The Wekiva River System is in central Florida, including parts of Lake, Orange, and Seminole counties. The river system is just north of Orlando,

one of Florida's principal metropolitan areas with a rapidly growing population. Approximately two million people reside in the tri-county area according to 2006 estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau. During the past 30 years, human actions and an increasing population have created challenges to managers of the Wekiva River System's outstanding values. Wildlife habitat has been fragmented, and numerous exotic species have invaded natural areas. Diverse recreation demands have created conflicts between users and threaten the ecological integrity of the natural resources people come to enjoy. Water quality and quantity have also been affected by land use within and around the Wekiva River System. Important cultural resources have been degraded by visitors who are unaware of their value or who deliberately seek to loot artifacts.

Despite these challenges, resources of the Wekiva River System remain relatively intact. Resource managers, the public, and all those who enjoy the river system must be diligent in protecting these resources. Without adequate protection, areas of the river system may lose their values when the sights and sounds of modern life intrude on the back country of the Wekiva River System.

This environmental assessment explores two alternatives for future management of the Wekiva River System.

ALTERNATIVE A: CONTINUE CURRENT MANAGEMENT (THE NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE REQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT)

Alternative A would continue existing management efforts in the Wekiva River System. The so-called "no-action" alternative does not imply the

cessation of ongoing activities but provides a baseline for comparison in evaluating the changes and impacts of the other alternative. Government agencies, including those on the advisory management committee, would continue to manage the river system as it is currently being managed. Existing agency operations and visitor facilities would remain in place.

A comprehensive river management plan required by Section 3(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would not be approved under this alternative and so it would be in violation of the act.

Alternative A includes the continuation of several actions and activities that benefit outstandingly remarkable values. It would not include specific actions that result in adverse impacts to these values, but would continue other ongoing trends that may be causing adverse impacts. The key impacts of existing management conditions and trends would include the continuation of some adverse impacts on scenic values, recreation values, wildlife and habitat values, historic and cultural resource values, and water quality and quantity values.

Alternative A corresponds to the continuation of current management activities, therefore is *not likely to adversely affect* special status species (per compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act).

**ALTERNATIVE B:
THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

This alternative proposes an integrated program of goals, objectives, and actions for protecting and enhancing each outstandingly remarkable value. A coordinated effort among the many public agencies and entities would be needed to implement this alternative. Fortunately, public agencies and local governments of the

river basin have a long history of partnership and cooperation that will provide a solid foundation for implementing the plan.

The goals, objectives, and actions are separated into five categories, one for each outstandingly remarkable value as well as a sixth category covering educational needs. The following summarizes the goals identified for each outstandingly remarkable value.

Scenic Goals

Maintain and enhance healthy native plant and animal communities in the Wekiva River System.

Maintain and enhance the wild and scenic character of the Wekiva River System by limiting the intrusion of the visual and auditory aspects of human development and activity.

Recreational Goals

Provide opportunities for recreation on the Wekiva River System that are compatible with the area's natural and cultural features and management objectives.

Ensure that river recreation minimizes environmental impacts and user conflicts and is compatible with the preservation of natural and cultural qualities of a national wild and scenic river.

Wildlife and Habitat Goals

Protect aquatic and aquatic-dependant organisms and their habitats throughout the Wekiva River System and its associated wetlands.

Maintain habitat quality, landscape diversity, and ecosystem connectivity within the Wekiva basin area and associated ecosystems with an emphasis on the black bear as an umbrella species.

Reduce the impacts of invasive species and exotic species on native species and habitats throughout the Wekiva River System and its associated wetlands.

Historic and Cultural Resource Goals

Identify, protect, and preserve historic and cultural resources from human-related and natural threats.

Foster an understanding among the public of the significance of the historic and cultural resources of the Wekiva basin.

Water Quality and Quantity Goals

Protect instream water quality of the Wekiva River System.

Protect flow regimes of the Wekiva River System.

The key impacts of implementing alternative B would include beneficial impacts from the coordination of multiagency actions that contribute to the protection of scenic values, recreation values, wildlife and habitat values, historic and cultural resource values, and water quality and quantity values.

Alternative B also includes a strategy for implementing a user capacity program that would involve the identification of potential impacts from resource use and an impact monitoring program to determine if the level of change is in an acceptable range.

The description of the preferred alternative appearing in this environmental assessment is a summary of the *Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Management Plan* prepared for the Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Advisory Management Committee, which is available from the advisory management committee.

Alternative B corresponds to the continuation of current management activities in addition to several new or enhanced initiatives protective of wildlife, therefore is *not likely to adversely affect* special status species (per compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act).

THE NEXT STEPS

After the distribution of the *Environmental Assessment*, a 30-day public review and comment period will be held. The NPS planning team will then evaluate comments received from other federal agencies, tribes, organizations, businesses, and individuals regarding this environmental assessment and incorporate appropriate changes into a decision document – a “Finding of No Significant Impact” – that will document the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation. With the signed decision document, the plan can then be implemented by the various agencies and organizations under the auspices of the Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Advisory Management Committee. However, this approval does not guarantee that funding will be available for implementation.