

Chapter 21: Resource and Visitor Protection

What is now known as the park's Division of Resource and Visitor Protection has evolved from a chief ranger supervising a staff of four or five rangers circa 1949 to a division with five major areas of responsibility and a year-round staff of about 75, supplemented by up to 25 seasonals.⁹⁸⁴ In the park's early years, the division faced the challenge of achieving basic resource protection goals in an area where many residents viewed the taking of fish, game, and plants as necessary and customary activities. Beyond the tasks common in all parks, such as protecting visitors, patrolling roads and waterways, providing emergency medical assistance, search and rescue, and resource management, rangers at Everglades have encountered special challenges arising out of the park's location at the tip of the Florida peninsula. These have included dealing with major agricultural and military inholdings and coping with the smuggling of drugs and refugees from other countries. As of today, the division's responsibilities are: law enforcement, fire and aviation, special park uses, the fee program, and dispatch.

Operations in the Early Years

On January 29, 1948, Earl Semingsen entered on duty as the park's first chief ranger, remaining in that position until August 1951. Among the early cadre of rangers were Paul Barnes, James B. Earle, Edward Stephanic, Ralph Maxwell, Erwin Winte (who retired from Everglades in 1974), and Barney Parker. Parker had been an Audubon warden and a warden in the Everglades National Wildlife Refuge. Ralph Miele, who started in winter 1951/1952 as a GS-2 fire control aid, retired from the park in 1980, having held a number of positions, including ranger-pilot. In the winter of 1949/1950, the park brought on four seasonal rangers. By summer 1950, the park had a chief ranger and six permanent rangers.⁹⁸⁵ Rangers in this period were wide-ranging generalists, handling law enforcement, resource management, visitor assistance, and anything else that arose. The Service had not yet distinguished interpretive rangers from law enforcement rangers, although some positions were classified as ranger-naturalists, which roughly paralleled the later interpretive ranger position.

At the time of his selection as park superintendent, Dan Beard envisioned three administrative districts for the park:

⁹⁸⁴ Previous names have included Ranger Services Division and Division of Law Enforcement and Visitor Protection.

⁹⁸⁵ SMR, Oct. and Nov. 1947, Jan. and Sep. 1948, Apr., Aug., and Nov. 1949, Apr. 1951; RDR1 to Dir., Aug. 16, 1950, NARA II, RG 79, NPS Dir. Recs., Drury, box 7; Miele interview.

Everglades land area, with headquarters at Royal Palm Lodge.
Cape Sable/West Coast, with headquarters in existing buildings at Coot Bay.
Florida Bay, with headquarters at Tavernier on Key Largo.

Beard hoped eventually to have a district ranger in each location, but acknowledged that initially the chief ranger would also serve as district ranger for the Everglades land area district (now known as the Pine Island District). The park rapidly established the Coot Bay and Royal Palm ranger stations, but did not find a headquarters location for the Florida Bay District until 1954, when it was established between mile markers 98 and 99 on Key Largo, several miles north of Tavernier. In January 1952, the park established a fourth district, the Tamiami District, locating its headquarters on the former Szady property, a service station and restaurant at the 40-mile-bend of the trail. The park also set up a patrol cabin on Lostmans River, at first in a houseboat borrowed from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. By January 1950, the park had built its own small structure there. After acquiring additional acreage in the northwest extension, the park in 1959 established a fifth district, the Gulf Coast District, with headquarters at Everglades City.⁹⁸⁶

Since 1959, there have been only minor adjustments to this arrangement of five administrative districts. Notably, the Tamiami District has at times been a subdistrict of the Pine Island District. In the early years after the East Everglades addition, there was an East Everglades District, but in 2004, the East Everglades was combined with the Tamiami District to form the Northeast District.⁹⁸⁷

As of this writing, the park is divided into the following five districts (figure 21-1, law enforcement districts):

- Pine Island District. This district includes the headquarters area, Long Pine Key, and the main road up to Mahogany Hammock.
- Flamingo District. The largest district, it extends southwest from Mahogany Hammock, including the Flamingo developed area and most of the backcountry that is accessed by water, and runs up the Gulf Coast to the south bank of Wood River.
- Gulf Coast District. This covers the west coast from Wood River north. The district is based at Everglades City and is a water-based district.
- Northeast District. The district includes the Tamiami Trail, the Shark Valley developed area, and the East Everglades.

⁹⁸⁶ Daniel B. Beard, A Proposal for the Protection and Administration of the Everglades National Park, Mar. 15, 1947, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-58-A-360; SMR, Sep. 1949, Jan. 1950, Jan. 1952; "Resource Management & Visitor Protection & Safety, FY80," June 1979, EVER-01741.

⁹⁸⁷ "Resource Management & Visitor Protection & Safety, FY80," June 1979, EVER-01741; Bonnie Foist, interview by author, Oct. 10, 2011.

- Florida Bay District. Based out of Key Largo, this is almost wholly water-based.⁹⁸⁸

As of December 1, 1951, the United States assumed exclusive jurisdiction from the state of Florida over the lands, submerged lands, and waters included in Everglades National Park. This meant that park rangers became the law enforcement officers in the park, having responsibility for enforcing U.S. laws and departmental regulations. Local and county law enforcement officers would be called in only when they possessed special expertise that rangers lacked. Early in 1952, Thomas Hodson of Homestead was appointed U.S. commissioner for the park. Most violations in the park were brought before Hodson and his successors; more serious cases were handled by the U.S. attorney's office in Miami. In March 1952, Hodson handled the first case from the park, fining two men for using illegal fishing nets.⁹⁸⁹

In the 1980s, it became NPS policy to move to concurrent jurisdiction, where federal and state officers share jurisdiction within a park's boundary. After lengthy discussions with the state, an agreement was reached, and legislation was signed in Tallahassee on June 5, 1986, authorizing concurrent jurisdiction in Everglades National Park and the other NPS units in the state. Governor Bob Graham acknowledged the state's acceptance of concurrent jurisdiction by letter on October 27, 1986. When new lands come into NPS ownership, the park exercises proprietary jurisdiction until its agreement with the state can be amended to cover the acquired property.⁹⁹⁰

In the early years, Everglades rangers concentrated on asserting NPS authority over the lands and waters of the new park and protecting park resources (figure 21-2, rangers & staff, 1951/1952). Superintendent Beard noted that previously, protection had been given only to rookeries and not consistently. He described his job as "bringing a large area of difficult terrain under complete protection." Prior to 1947, the taking of alligators, deer, fur-bearing animals, frogs, sea turtles, tree snails, and plants had been almost wholly uncontrolled. NPS Regional Director Thomas Allen observed that the state of Florida had fish and game regulations on the books "which none of their men were brave enough to even attempt to enforce in the present Everglades National Park area." For local residents, taking deer and turtles for home consumption or alligators and frogs as marketable commodities was a long-established way of life. The NPS's mission was to end all of this activity in the new park. Park staff would accomplish this by education and warnings if possible, but would make arrests and seek convictions where necessary. As a new park, Everglades also had to buy boats, patrol cars, and other

⁹⁸⁸ Foist interview; Tom Iandimarino, personal communication, June 26, 2013.

⁹⁸⁹ Supt. Beard to Glenn C. Mincer, States Attorney, Miami, Feb. 11, 1952, EVER-01741; SMR, Feb., Mar. 1952.

⁹⁹⁰ 52 Fed. Reg. no. 22 (Feb. 3, 1987); SAR, 1986, Bruce Ganttt, personal communication, Nov. 29, 2012.

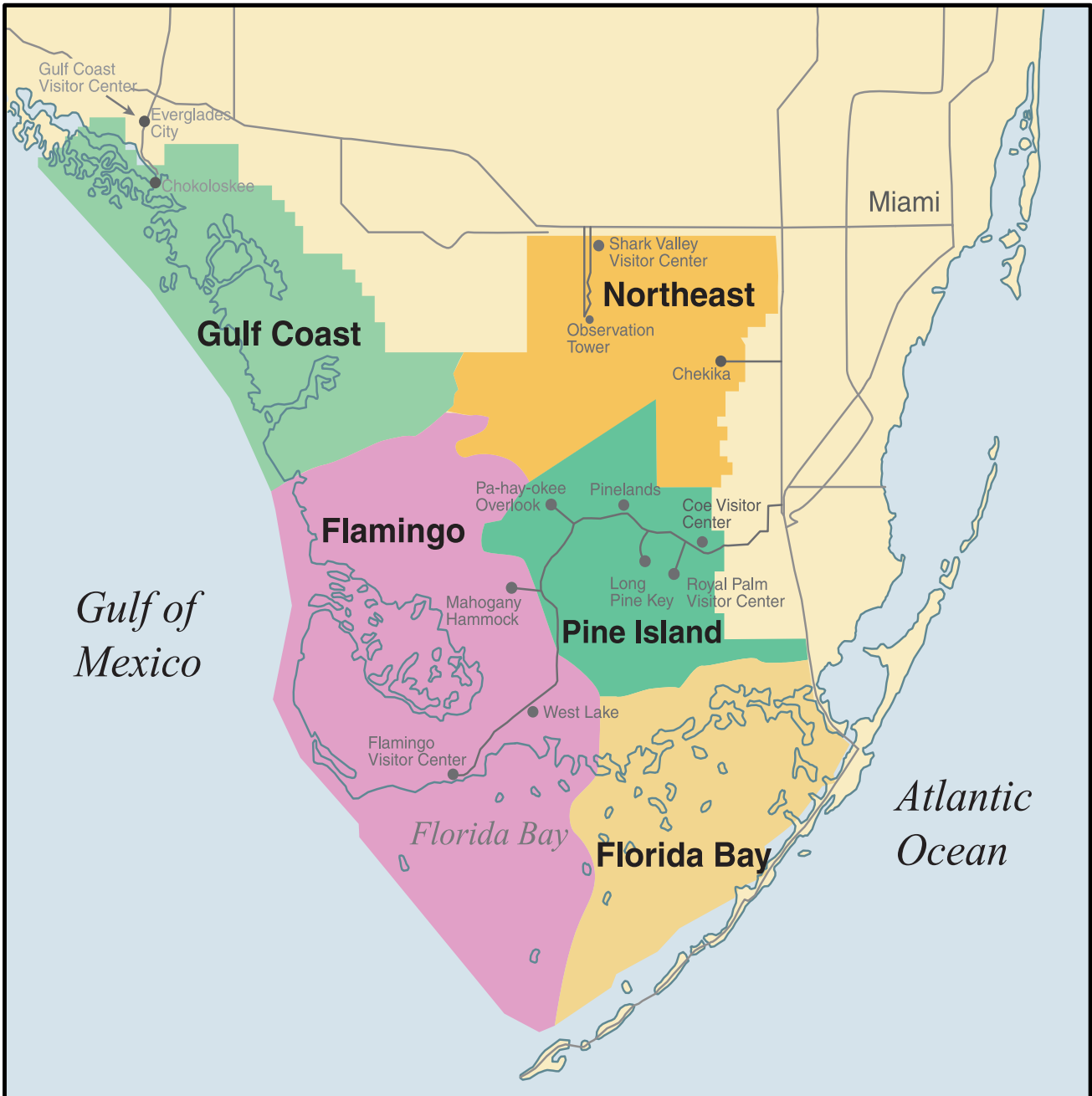


Figure 21-1 Law Enforcement Districts



Figure 21-2. Rangers and staff, winter 1951-1952

vehicles for its rangers. At first, hunters and trappers had vehicles specially adapted to the environment—airboats and swamp buggies—that the NPS lacked. Superintendent Beard moved to get this equip-

ment. By fall 1950, the park was running regular airboat patrols. Another early task was posting signs along the park boundary. These served as a warning to those who wanted to exploit resources and kept them from claiming they didn't know they were on park land.⁹⁹¹

The superintendents' monthly reports for the park's early years are full of references to rangers finding evidence of hunting in the park and sometimes confronting the hunters. Local residents, for example, were accustomed to taking sea turtles for food. In June 1948, Ranger Willard Dilley came upon seven Flamingo residents "turning turtles" on the Cape Sable beaches. Both sides were armed; after words were exchanged, the residents reluctantly returned to their boats and abandoned the hunt. Deer hunting was also quite popular. Superintendent Beard put a stop to some organized deer hunting that involved airplanes to spot the prey, airboats to bring the hunters in, and trucks waiting on the Tamiami Trail to haul away the carcasses. In 1951, rangers reported that locals were astonished that they were enforcing the state's stone crab season in park waters. In fall 1954, four men were found in the park on airboats with rifles and other accoutrements of the deer hunter. As the case moved forward, it emerged that the police chief of Homestead would have been in the party had he not been back at their base camp nursing a hangover. The four men were found guilty by a federal jury in Miami. Even after deer hunting had largely been stopped on federal property, it remained legal in season on the private inholdings in the Hole in the Donut. Hunters had to bring their rifles through the park's main entrance, requiring park staff to issue dozens of weapon permits each year. Rangers also had to patrol to make sure hunters stayed on private property.⁹⁹²

⁹⁹¹ Beard, "A Proposal"; RDR1 Allen to Dir., Aug. 16, 1950, NARA II, RG 79, NPS Dir. Recs., Drury, box 7; SMR, Feb. 1949, Jan. and Oct. 1950, Sep. 1951.

⁹⁹² SMR, June 1948, Apr. 1951, Dec. 1954, Nov. 1960.

Initially, the taking of alligators for their marketable hides was perhaps the most widespread resource violation that the NPS tried to stop. Selling gator hides to be used in purses and luggage historically was one of the few reliable sources of cash income for Everglades residents. Airboats and float planes made gator hunting considerably easier after World War II, and some hunters in the early 1950s even cleared primitive airstrips for small planes in the park. The valuable portion of the gator was the hide covering the belly. After cutting that away, the hunters left the carcasses, making it relatively easy for rangers to see where poaching had taken place. Much gator hunting took place at night, and it was very difficult to catch hunters in the act.⁹⁹³

The park banned private airboats as one protective step, and conducted day and night patrols, as staffing permitted, to stop gator hunting, sometimes using airplanes. Often the patrols were done in conjunction with Florida game wardens, who seemingly were emboldened by having federal officers to back them up. Much of the hunting was organized and supported by one major buyer of hides. Superintendent Beard learned his identity and put him out of business. As he put it, “The ringleader of the market hunters for alligators was smoked out in February [1950]. These ‘phantom’ hunters, swamp wise and army trained, have bothered the Service along west coast areas since the park was created.” Beard believed the regular operations of market hunters in the park had ended and noted with satisfaction: “The poaching fraternity plays cops and robbers with other people now, not with us.”⁹⁹⁴

Alligator hunting receded as an issue for park rangers until, paradoxically, Florida banned it. Florida prohibited all hunting of alligators as of July 29, 1961, causing prices for illegally obtained hides to skyrocket. In 1965, Ranger Richard Stokes told a reporter that hides were going for a minimum of \$5 a foot (2014 equivalent of \$38). In the 1960s, the park stepped up its enforcement efforts, as staffing allowed. By August 1962, the park was again using night patrols to try to stop poaching. From August to October 1965, it launched “Operation Protection,” which involved fielding four, two-man ranger teams to patrol against poachers. No hunters were caught, but the operation was felt to be a deterrent. Incoming Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel in 1969 flew to the Everglades and announced a war on alligator poachers. Hickel promised the park a \$100,000 budget increase and 10 additional law enforcement rangers. Illegal taking of alligators largely ended after 1969, when Congress placed the species under the protection of the Lacey Act, making it a federal offense to transport the hides across state lines. As described in chapter 12, alligator populations grew

993 SMR, Oct. 1947, Apr. 1948, Sep. 1951.

994 SMR, Feb. 1950; Supt. Beard to park staff, May 19, 1952, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-58-360.

tremendously after 1970, and Florida in 1986 instituted a limited hunting season on private lands.⁹⁹⁵

Resource protection in the park's early years sometimes involved practices that are today not sanctioned by NPS policy. In winter 1947/1948, park staff were very concerned that the large rookery at Rookery Branch in Shark River had failed to form for two consecutive years. Superintendent Beard received permission from Director Drury for his rangers to shoot vultures and crows in the vicinity with small caliber rifles.⁹⁹⁶

Evolution of the Division

Staffing in Resource and Visitor Protection increased gradually through the 1960s, surged in the 1970s, then held largely steady through the late 1990s, and has since receded (figure 21-3, ranger with fishermen, 1967). In 1962, the division had 17 per-



Figure 21-3. Ranger with fishermen, 1967

manent employees, all commissioned rangers except for a fire control aide and a clerk-stenographer. Eight years later, in 1970, the number of commissioned rangers was 14. By 1990, the park had 36 permanent rangers and nine seasonals. In recent years (2008 to 2010), limited funding has allowed the park to fill just 24 or 25 of 33 authorized full-time law

⁹⁹⁵ *Washington Evening Star*, March 17, 1965 [article title cut off], EVER 42054; Martha A. Strawn, *Alligators: Prehistoric Presence in the American Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 121, 142; SMR, July 1961, Aug. 1962, Oct. 1965; "Hickel Orders War on Gator Poachers," *Miami Herald*, Mar. 9, 1969; South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/mrri/acechar/specgal/gator.htm>.

⁹⁹⁶ Dir. Drury to RDR1, Dec. 30, 1947, EVER 22965.

enforcement ranger positions and six to eight seasonal ranger positions. In the mid-1970s, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida established a police department. Until July 2000, the members of the Miccosukee force carried federal deputations, under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the NPS. This gave them the authority to enforce federal laws and DOI regulations in the Miccosukee permit area. The last five-year memorandum of understanding was signed in July 1995. In October 1998, the passage of the Miccosukee Reserved Area Act gave a new status to the tribal members living in the permit area, and the MOU was not renewed.⁹⁹⁷

The park's location next to a major metropolitan area means that urban crime at times spills over into it. In 1958, the superintendent noted that "riff-raff from the Miami area continue to be law enforcement and nuisance factors." The more serious crimes in the park have mostly been theft, vandalism, and bringing in banned weapons. Crimes against persons have typically been quite rare. The park had 22 larcenies from automobiles and 46 burglaries in 1974, but in 1986, just 30 crimes were reported to staff; more undoubtedly occurred but were not reported. Because of the number of areas within the park where visitors may park their cars, car clouts are difficult to prevent. Vandalism has fluctuated; 10 cases were noted in 1990, but as rangers began patrolling newly acquired lands in the East Everglades, vandalism spiked. To deter thefts from autos, the park in 1999 installed video cameras in the parking lot at the main visitor center. In 2002, rangers issued citations or made arrests for one burglary, 39 larcenies, and one case of arson. Through the years, speeding and unsafe driving on the main park road have been an issue. The road is shared by fishermen who often want to head expeditiously to Flamingo and nature lovers who brake for bird sightings. In recent decades, the road's speed limit has been 55 mph, with lower limits at intersections and congested areas. In 1988, the average speed of a ticketed violator was 74 mph. The speed limit on research road was reduced from 45 mph to 35 mph in 2008, largely to protect wildlife, which can enter the road suddenly. Yearly traffic incidents in the 2000s ranged between 900 and 1600. Rangers in recent years have stepped up safety inspections of private boats. Boating incidents in the 2000s ran from 1,200 to 3,400.⁹⁹⁸

The addition of some 107,000 acres in the East Everglades in the 1990s added substantially to the division's workload. The situation in this area in some ways resembled the situation prevailing throughout the Everglades when the park was established

⁹⁹⁷ ENP Master Plan, 1962; SAR 1974; Bruce Gantt, personal communication, July 29, 2013; NPS and Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, Memorandum of Understanding, July 13, 1995; Reed E. Detring, ENP Chief Ranger, to Anthony G. Zecca, Chief of Police, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, ENP R&VP files.

⁹⁹⁸ SMR, July 1958; SAR, 1974, 186, 1988, 1999, 2003 through 2008; Superintendent's Compendium, 2008 and 2011, EVER 1827; Foist interview. Reported ranger contacts (incidents) with boaters and motorists are, of course, affected by available staffing; rangers are often called away from routine patrol for other duties.

in 1947. The area was on the western fringe of Dade County, and existing laws were not consistently enforced. Once the land was acquired, rangers would have to eliminate a number of incompatible uses. Pine Island District Ranger Bob Panko observed that the area “had been used for satanic rituals,⁹⁹⁹ paramilitary training, target practice, drug cultivation and importation, and the dumping of all kinds of trash.” Hunting and frogging were other common uses. He projected that the division would need at least eight additional commissioned rangers to police the new acreage. The 1993 superintendent’s annual report noted “East Everglades continues its tradition of presenting unusual and challenging enforcement situations. This includes investigation of 100 incidents of vandalism and malicious mischief to government property.” After all of the East Everglades acreage was acquired, law enforcement problems lessened.¹⁰⁰⁰

Search and rescue and the provision of emergency medical care are major division responsibilities. Almost all search and rescue efforts are water-based; few visitors venture very far into the backcountry on foot. Canoeists overdue in the backcountry and boaters who run out of gas or run aground in Florida Bay are the most common situations to require search and rescue operations. Search and rescues operations ran as high as 153 in 1980, but more recently have averaged 30 to 60 per year. The division has had an EMS coordinator position since at least the mid-1980s, and most rangers are certified emergency medical technicians. Medical emergencies range from visitors falling off bicycles to heart attacks. The division has a good working relationship with Miami/Dade Fire and Rescue, which dispatches medical evacuation helicopters when needed.¹⁰⁰¹

Natural Resource Management

In the early decades, the division had more resource management duties than it does now (figure 21-4, Moving a gator, 1960s). These included duties such as trapping and relocating raccoons that threatened turtle eggs, removing exotics like Australian pine, and monitoring and recording wildlife populations. After the 1976 creation of the South Florida Research Center, the center took on more of these responsibilities. At this writing resource and visitor protection continues to take part in field-level resource management activities. Some rangers find the opportunity to work with wildlife especially rewarding. Flamingo District Ranger Tony Terry has described his work with sea turtles in these terms:

⁹⁹⁹ It is unclear whether this is a value judgment or perhaps a misconstruction of the practices of the Santeria religion.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Robert A. Panko, Pine Island District Ranger, Funding Alternatives for East Everglades: A Report to Identify Problems and Recommend Funding Alternatives for FY92, EVER -00777.

¹⁰⁰¹ SAR, 1980, 1988, 1990, 2002; Foist interview.



Figure 21-4. Moving a gator, 1960s, photo by C. A. Mitchell

I called it a turtle rodeo back then. We used to go out and catch the loggerhead sea turtles by diving off the front of the boat and bringing them up to the surface, putting them on the john boat, cutting tumors off of them, taking a blood sample, and weighing them. I thought it was the most awesome thing--I can do this and arrest people in the same job?

Another example of ranger staff involvement in natural resource protection is curbing the commercial harvesting of saw palmetto berries. In 1993, law enforcement staff issued 40 citations to berry collectors, who were receiving up to 32 cents a pound (2014 equivalent of 53 cents) for the berries.¹⁰⁰²

Dispatch

The dispatch function, which entails maintaining and facilitating radio communications among park staff, is one of those vital but routine areas where documentation often is not retained. Superintendent Beard reported in January 1949 that the park's radio communications system was operating satisfactorily. The park's system has relied on repeaters placed on towers at Pine Island, Flamingo, Shark Valley and other locations. For a number of years, dispatch and fee collection at the main entrance were the responsibility of the Pine Island Ranger District. In 1988, the Chief Ranger's Office became responsible for the dispatch function, and in 1990 an operations center with new equipment for dispatch opened in the headquarters building. Dispatch handles radio communications for all four South Florida park units. It also handles occasional requests for assistance from other park units, notably Virgin Islands National Park. At this writing, dispatch has six full-time employees, so that the operations center can operate continuously. A former chief ranger, the late Bonnie Foist, described the dispatch staff as the park's unsung heroes.¹⁰⁰³

Special Park Uses/Permitting

The park issues commercial use authorizations (formerly known as incidental business permits),¹⁰⁰⁴ commercial filming/photography permits, and special use permits for certain activities occurring within its boundary. Commercial use authorizations cover guide fishermen who charge customers and guides who bring bird-watching or other organized groups into the park. Anyone wishing to film in the park for a project

¹⁰⁰² SAR, 1993.

¹⁰⁰³ SMR, Jan. 1949; SAR, 1980, 1988, 1990; Foist interview.

¹⁰⁰⁴ The NPS makes a distinction between commercial uses that typically begin and end outside of the park and concession activities, which generally involve a permanent presence within the park. The former are covered by commercial use authorizations and the latter by concession contracts.

aimed at a market audience needs a commercial filming/photography permit. Special use permits cover activities like weddings or charity events that benefit an individual or organization rather than the public at large. Requests for permits and authorizations must be reviewed for compliance with park policy and evaluated for their impact on resources and visitors.

All of these permitting activities are the responsibility of Resource and Visitor Protection Division at this writing. In 2008, the park established the position of special park uses program manager. This position oversees the issuance of permits and commercial use authorizations. As of this writing, a part-time permit examiner is on the staff, largely occupied with guide fishing permits. Processing the fishing guide permits, which recently have totaled 300 to 325 per year, occupy considerable staff time. All other commercial uses generally run to 25 to 40 per year. The park is a popular location for the filming of documentaries, advertisements, and other types of videos aimed at a market audience. In 2010, the park issued 31 filming permits. In February and August 2004, crews from Ken Burns's production team were in the park filming for his documentary. Because Burns was filming in multiple parks, the NPS Washington Office largely established the guidelines for his work. Ranger staff, of course, needed to be on hand to monitor the film crews.¹⁰⁰⁵

Fees

The park instituted modest fees for commercial vehicles (e.g., tour buses) that carried visitors in 1959, charging \$3.00 per passenger seat for a yearly permit. The park had no entrance fees for visitors in private automobiles or for camping until 1966. As of July 1, 1966, the park began charging a daily fee of 50 cents for an individual and \$1.00 per private vehicle entering at the main entrance. A 30-day pass was \$1.50 for an individual and \$3.00 for a vehicle. An annual pass was \$7.00 per vehicle. The daily fee for a vehicle was raised to \$2.00 within a year or so and in March 1987 became \$5.00 at the main entrance and \$3.00 at Shark Valley. In 1996, Congress established the fee demonstration program, which allowed parks to retain 80 percent of fee collections to address backlogged repair and maintenance needs. In the wake of this legislation, Everglades National Park in May 1997 established a daily vehicle fee of \$10.00 at the main entrance and \$8.00 at Shark Valley. In 2004, the fee at Shark Valley became \$10.00. At this writing, the vehicle fee for being in the park for from one to seven days remains \$10.00, with a fee of \$5.00 for a pedestrian or bicyclist. Yearly park passes are currently \$25.00. There has never been a fee at the Everglades City visitor contact point. The initial fees for camping in 1966 were \$2.25 per day for a drive-in campsite

¹⁰⁰⁵ SAR, 2008, 2010; Foist interview.

and \$1.50 for a walk-in site. In 1991, the fee for sites at Flamingo was \$8.00 a night and at Long Pine Key, \$10.00 a night. At present, a campsite at Long Pine Key or Flamingo costs \$16.00 per night; a site with an electrical hook-up at Flamingo goes for \$30.00.¹⁰⁰⁶

When the park began collecting a \$1 entry fee per car in 1966, seasonal rangers collected it, and the ranger division became responsible for this aspect of operations. For a number of years, it appears that fee collection was a responsibility of the Pine Island Ranger District. For a period in the 1990s, the park's administrative division handled the monetary aspects of fee collection. In 2003, a fee programs manager position was established within the Resource and Visitor Protection Division. As of this writing, the full-time fee program manager supervises seven permanent fee collectors and six to eight seasonal campground fee collectors. Revenues received from fees have to be weighed against the costs, chiefly personnel costs, of collecting the fees. Prior to fiscal year 2007, the main entrance station was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, resulting in a high cost of collection. The hours were reduced to 16, then to 13 hours per day. As of fiscal year 2010, the park's cost of collection was 37 percent.¹⁰⁰⁷

Fire and Aviation

The park's extensive wildland fire program is a Resource and Visitor Protection Division responsibility and is covered in chapter 15. A fire management officer has charge of the fire program. Airplanes and helicopters are important tools in patrolling and conducting resource management and monitoring activities in the park. The division has had aircraft operations as a responsibility for the greater part of the park's history. In the early 1950s, the park rented aircraft when needed. Ranger-pilot Ralph Miele was responsible for getting the park its own airplane. Late one afternoon in 1958, Miele noticed that a Piper Super Cub PA-18 based in Salt Lake City had appeared on a list of surplus federal property. He interrupted a conversation between Superintendent Beard and Assistant Superintendent George Fry to alert them of the opportunity. When Beard said he would write a letter about it, Miele observed that another agency surely would have claimed the plane by the time the letter arrived. After carefully considering the effect on his budget, Beard decided to incur the expense of sending a telegram, and Miele was soon on his way to Utah to fly the plane to Florida

¹⁰⁰⁶ 24 Fed. Reg. 2643 (Apr. 7, 1959); *The Anhinga*, Nov. 1966; SMR, July 1966; "New Entry Fees Announced for National Parks and Historic Sites," *Chicago Tribune*, Apr. 17, 1988; "Everglades National Park Reopens," NPS media release, Dec. 15, 1992, HFC; "National Parks Raise Fees for '97," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 31, 1996; Everglades National Park, <http://www.nps.gov/ever/planyourvisit/feesandreservations.htm>; "Concessioner to Operate Campgrounds at Everglades National Park," DOI press release, Dec. 22, 1968, HFC; Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions and Appropriations Act of 1996; Tenia Fleming, personal communication, July 30, 2013, based on files in EVER chief ranger's office.

¹⁰⁰⁷ SAR, 2003, 2008, 2010; Foist interview.

(figure 21-5, the park's first airplane). On March 11, 1961, this plane was burned in an arson fire at its hangar at a civil aviation airport outside the park. The FBI, the Dade County Sheriff, and the Dade County Arson Squad investigated, but no suspects were ever identified. Ralph Miele, who was the park's ranger-pilot at the time, remained convinced that disgruntled park neighbors set the fire.¹⁰⁰⁸



Figure 21-5. The park's first airplane

The park got a replacement for the burned aircraft in July 1961, a four-seat Lake Aircraft amphibious airplane, which was based at Homestead Air Force Base, where it had more security. By 1981, the park had the Lake aircraft and a Widgeon plane. Within a few years, the Lake needed extensive repairs and the Widgeon became very costly to maintain and operate. In 1984, the NPS Office of Aircraft Services studied the air operations at EVER and BICY. Following its recommendations, the park sold its aircraft and began contracting for fixed-wing and helicopter flights.¹⁰⁰⁹

Policing the Activities of Inholders

Nike Missile Base

As related below in chapter 22, the U.S. Army opened a Nike Hercules surface-to-air missile base in the Hole-in-the Donut in 1965. The arrival of 100 to 125 mostly single young men at the base another dimension to ranger responsibilities. Bored soldiers are liable to create mischief, and surviving records indicate that those stationed inside the park occasionally did. In December 1966, two GIs were court-martialed and reduced in rank for driving the wrong way on the park entrance road and nearly causing an accident. The next month saw the following incident:

The Chief Ranger assisted ranger personnel in breaking up a drag race on the Long Pine Key Road. The 6 men involved, from the Missile Site in the Hole-in-the-Donut, were turned over to their Commanding Officer who reduced them in rank, gave them extra duty and restricted the men to the base.

¹⁰⁰⁸ SMR, Mar. 1961; Miele interview.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Miele interview; SMR, Mar. 1958, June 1961; SAR, 1981 and 1984.

Things remained lively up to the end of the Army's use of the site. In 1978, rangers responded to two case of soldiers reported away without leave. When the park later drained the pond in the borrow pit at the base, they discovered a number of automobiles dumped there by servicemen. Many of these appear to have been vehicles damaged in crashes within the park. If those same vehicles were then reported to insurance companies as stolen, who would know any better?¹⁰¹⁰

After the missile base became NPS property, law enforcement personnel began to use the berms at the launch area for target practice. It is also possible that Army personnel previously had used the berms for the same purpose. NPS personnel used the firing range from 1984 to 2000. This resulted in the accumulation of a significant amount of bullet fragments containing lead. An evaluation conducted in 2011 showed that two of three berms (Berms A and C) contained lead-impacted soil to the depth of two feet. The NPS contracted with PRC Environmental Corporation to conduct remediation at the site. In September 2012, the firm removed 250 tons of contaminated soil from Berm C and treated it with a reagent mixture containing phosphate and magnesium oxide. The original scope of work called for the treated soil to be removed to a landfill outside the park. Because some needed compliance documentation had not been prepared, the NPS directed the contractor to leave the treated soil at the site. When funding becomes available, the treated soil will be removed, the profile of the historic berms will be restored by laying down gravel, and further remediation at berm A will be undertaken.¹⁰¹¹

Iori Farms

The tomato-growing activities of the Iori brothers in the Hole in the Donut brought another contingent of mostly young men to the park. From late 1955 until the middle 1960s, farm laborers lived on-site in a bunkhouse and others commuted from outside the park, adding to traffic and weapon possession issues. In January 1959, rangers helped prevent an attempted hold-up of the payroll for the Iori farm workers. The chief ranger described the incident:

An attempted holdup of the Iori payroll was thwarted when advance notice leaked out. An off-duty Dade County deputy sheriff followed the payroll car and when the two hi-jacking cars attempted to force the payroll car off the road, the deputy moved in and drove off the "bandits." One of the holdup cars was caught in a Park Ranger road block thrown up and its occupants taken before the U.S.

1010 SMR, Dec. 1966, Jan. 1967; SAR, 1978; Steve Hach, *Cold War in South Florida Historic Resources Study* (Atlanta: NPS, 2004), 82.

1011 Ken Quinn, Mike Amstadt, and Mark Shoaf, TRC Environmental Corp., to Robert France, PRIZIM, Inc., Dec. 28, 2012, Categorical Exclusion Form, Characterization and Mitigation of Everglades National Park Small Arms Firing Range, July 13, 2011, ENP maintenance files.

Commissioner. Since these people could not be definitely tied in with the holdup, one of the men, found with a revolver on his person, was fined \$150, suspended on the condition that he stay out of the Park, and firearm confiscated.¹⁰¹²

In January 1961, the state health department temporarily closed the Iori camp for sanitation violations, and the chief ranger noted that the move lessened poaching and traffic problems until the camp reopened.¹⁰¹³

Running Illegal Drugs

Park rangers dealt with relatively few serious crimes until drug running emerged as a serious challenge in the late 1970s. Demand for marijuana as a recreational drug in the U.S. soared in the 1960s and 1970s. When U.S. and Mexican authorities cracked down on imports from Mexico in the 1970s, growers along the Caribbean coast of Columbia stepped in. By the late 1970s, an estimated 70 percent of the marijuana coming into the country originated in Columbia. The run across the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico from Columbia to Florida was a relatively easy one, and Southwest Florida was an ideal transshipment point. In some cases, boats from Florida went to Columbia to get cargoes; in others, large “mother ships” from South America rendezvoused offshore with smaller boats dispatched from the Florida coast. Private planes were also used in the trade. “Square grouper,” as the bales of weed were known locally, became a far more lucrative commodity than grouper that had fins. Marijuana was landed from Cape Sable to the Fort Myers area and many trips ran through or ended in the park (figure 21-6, Rangers with “square grouper”). As one superintendent observed, the park had 130 miles of unpatrolled coastline and uncounted numbers of inlets where illicit cargoes could be off-loaded. The park never had sufficient funding to maintain regular drug interdiction patrols, but routine patrolling for other reasons led to a significant number of seizures and a few arrests. Park rangers also worked with other law enforcement agencies to tackle a problem that affected the whole region.¹⁰¹⁴

The growing drug trade was reflected in the number of marijuana bales confiscated by park rangers. In 1978, marijuana with a street value of \$6 million was seized within the park, and the following year, the superintendent reported that “drug traffic is intensifying at an alarming rate.” He also made what became a common complaint—that drug runners had better vehicles, boats, radios, automatic weapons, night scopes, and radars than rangers. From 1980 through 1984, rangers seized between

1012 Monthly Narrative Report of Ranger Activities, Jan. 1959, EVER 28442.

1013 SMR, Sep. 1955, Jan. 1961.

1014 Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz, eds., *Colombia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1980), <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/59.htm>; SAR, 1985.



Figure 21-6. Rangers with “square grouper”

700 and 900 marijuana bales annually. They made only a handful of arrests, because smugglers usually abandoned their cargoes and even their boats when discovered.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰¹⁵ SAR, 1979, 1980, 1981; Jason Houck, Chief Ranger's Office, to Supt., Oct. 29, 1984, EVER 58222.

A February 1982 memo from the Everglades City district naturalist gives some insight into this period. The naturalist and his colleague Ben Bailey were canoeing up Deen's Creek in the mangrove zone and reported this incident:

[A]bout half a mile up the creek, around the first bend, two T-boats were parked, and had about \$500,000 in bales. The tide was too low for the boats to move out. . . . Bailey and I backpedaled the Hell out of there – double time – and told the rangers. . . . Later that day, they arrested 2 of [sic] local natives & with the help of the deputies, etc., brought the boats back to the station. You'll probably read about it all in the *Miami Herald*.¹⁰¹⁶

Many of the fishermen and other mariners of Everglades City and Chokoloskee succumbed to the lure of easy money promised by the marijuana trade. Residents with an average annual income of \$17,000 could make \$10 to \$30 thousand for a single night's work running marijuana. Those with bigger boats and the nerve and canniness to sail to Columbia could make many multiples of those amounts. The live-and-let-live atmosphere of the area was conducive to tacit acceptance of the drug trade. Some in the tightly knit community of Everglades City, with its extensive kinship networks, saw marijuana running as no more serious an offense than rum running during prohibition. In any event, no one was going to turn his neighbor or his cousin in to authorities. Area residents became increasingly cavalier about flaunting their newfound wealth. When men who used to wear jeans and drive beat-up pickup trucks started sporting heavy gold necklaces and driving Lincolns, no one had much doubt about the source of the cash. U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and local officials began an undercover investigation, with help from law enforcement rangers from the park's Gulf Coast District.¹⁰¹⁷

The beginning of the end of Everglades City's marijuana-fueled prosperity came on July 7, 1983. At 3:00 that morning, local, state, and federal authorities set up a roadblock on State Route 29, the only road to the city. They arrested 200 people and seized 14 fishing boats, two airplanes, 350,000 pounds of marijuana, and \$5 million in other assets. Smuggling did not immediately stop, and authorities patiently worked up additional evidence, then conducted more mass raids in summer 1984. In 1987, the state attorney's office operated a fish house in Everglades City and used it to build relationships in the community and gather information on smuggling. Over time, by plea-bargaining with lower-level operatives in exchange for information on others and imposing sentences of up to 40 years on those who wouldn't inform, authorities largely ended organized drug running in and around Everglades City. Among those who refused to turn state's evidence was legendary Gladesman Loren "Totch" Brown. He

1016 District Naturalist, Everglades City, to Al, Karen, Feb. 15, 1982, EVER 22965.

1017 Lori Rozsa, "The Town That Dope Built," *Miami Herald*, Dec. 16, 1990; SAR, 1983.

forfeited cash and property worth more than \$3 million and served 18 months of a three-year sentence. Brown told a reporter, “I would die before I would testify against my friends.” Community distrust and anger toward government were heightened by the tactics used by the authorities in combating the drug trade. As described previously in chapter 19, there was already considerable animosity over prior bans on commercial fishing and alligator hunting. To some in the community, the drug busts added to a sense of ill-usage by the authorities.¹⁰¹⁸

Closing down the Everglades City operations, increased patrols by the U.S. Coast Guard and Customs Service, and changes in American drug use patterns made drug trafficking a significantly smaller issue for the park by 1990. More high-quality marijuana began to be grown in the U.S., and recreational users turned increasingly to cocaine. Cocaine is a lot less bulky than marijuana and often was flown in on airplanes to airstrips strung across the country. There was no particular advantage in landing it in Southwest Florida. As of today, ranger involvement with illegal drugs is largely limited to the occasional citation for private use at campgrounds or elsewhere in the park.¹⁰¹⁹

Running Refugees

Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, refugees traveling through park waters or landing on park lands became an issue for the ranger force. The superintendent noted in June 1962 that U.S. Border Patrol agents were in the park consulting with ranger staff on refugee issues. Over five decades, the flow of Cuban immigrants has fluctuated largely based on changing conditions in Cuba. Since 1995, U.S. law has granted special status to Cuban immigrants once they are on American soil. This provides a strong incentive for smugglers to land immigrants in a safe and prominent place and then high-tail it.¹⁰²⁰ People smugglers have generally preferred other landing spots in Florida rather than areas in the park, but the Cape Sable beaches are sometimes used. A group is dropped on the beach in the early morning, and usually a fishing boat captain notices them at first light and contacts the park. In the 2000s, the park averaged one or two human trafficking events per year. Each year from 2006 through 2009, one group of migrants ranging in size from 26 to 46 were landed at Cape Sable. Park rangers primarily provide humanitarian assistance to refugees. As one former chief ranger,

1018 SAR, 1983; “Everglades City Residents Tire of Town’s Reputation as Drug Smuggling Haven,” *Miami Herald*, Nov. 25, 1984; “48 Named in Smuggling Indictments,” *Miami Herald*, Oct. 13, 1989; “Hush Puppies Replace Drugs in Florida Town,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 9, 1995.

1019 SAR, 1988.

1020 It is illegal to smuggle aliens from any country into the United States. Individuals who are caught in the act of bringing in Cubans are not often prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney in Miami because many in the local community support running refugees from Cuba and it is difficult to convince a jury to return a conviction. 8 U.S.C. 1321; Melissa Memory, personal communication, June 28, 2013; Bruce Gantt, personal communication, July 29, 2013.

Bonnie Foist, put it: “We bring them to Flamingo, make sure they’re safe, give them water, contact the Border Patrol, and they come down and take them off our hands and process them.” Smugglers of people and drugs watch the activities of rangers in the Flamingo district closely, hoping to detect patterns of activity, so that they make runs when they are least likely to encounter a patrol. For this reason, the district ranger does his best to alter the schedules and reduce predictability.¹⁰²¹

Notable Accidents

Everglades National Park lies near Key West Naval Air Station, Homestead Air Force Base, Miami International Airport, and several civil aviation airfields. From time to time, aircraft go down in or near the park, requiring a response from park staff. Traveling Ingraham Highway, the only route to Flamingo for staff and visitors until 1957, could be hazardous and automobile accidents were not uncommon. Some of the more noteworthy plane crashes and automobile wrecks in the park are described below.

In June 1950, Park Biologist Joseph Moore was injured in a plane crash.¹⁰²²

On February 1, 1952, the park’s Chief Clerk James Smith was killed in an automobile accident that also took the life of the driver of the other vehicle. Smith was driving to the park in a government car when he collided with a truck at an unmarked intersection. Superintendent Beard called Smith the de facto executive officer for the park and lauded his contributions in getting the park up and running.¹⁰²³

In July 1952, a U.S. Marine Corps Hellcat fighter plane crashed in the park, killing the pilot, Captain Richard E. Otto. Rangers located the crash site and removed the pilot’s remains.¹⁰²⁴

In February 1953, three visitors from California were killed in car crash on Ingraham Highway, ending up in the canal alongside the road. Superintendent Beard and rangers helped recover their bodies.¹⁰²⁵

In June 1954, alert park staff helped rescue the sole survivor of the crash of two Marine Corps dive bombers over the Shark River portion of the park. Two single-engine Douglas Skyraiders from the Opa-Locka Marine Corps Base in Miami collided at an altitude of about 4,000 feet. Private William G. Collier was thrown from one plane and was able to pull the ripcord on his parachute. Smoke from the crash was seen by several park rangers. Acting Chief Ranger Ralph Maxwell sent a plane over the scene

¹⁰²¹ Everglades National Park Human Smuggling Activity, PowerPoint file, circa 2009, EVER 22965, SMR, June 1962; Foist and Terry interviews.

¹⁰²² SMR, June 1950.

¹⁰²³ SMR Feb. 1952.

¹⁰²⁴ SMR, July 1952.

¹⁰²⁵ SMR, Feb. 1953.

and the pilot saw a flare launched by the injured Collier from his life raft. A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter brought him out and park rangers helped remove the bodies of Lieutenant Ray M. Holton, Lieutenant Harry Proodian, and Private John Costa. Some of the wreckage from this crash was never removed from the park, and the crash site has been recognized as an archeological site.¹⁰²⁶

On March 13, 1958, a six-engine B-47 Stratojet from Homestead Air Force Base, said to be on a routine training mission, exploded and crashed just east of Pine Island, killing the four crewmen on board. Debris from the crash was scattered over about a mile. The plane's crew were Major Leon F. Hatcher Jr., pilot; Lieutenant James Pennington, co-pilot; Major Frank H. White, instructor-pilot; and Captain George E. Reid, navigator. The March superintendent's report observed: "Rangers and Fire Control Aides assisted the Air Force by bringing out the bodies of the four airmen who were killed and transporting the investigating committee to the crash site in glades buggies." B-47s were the major carriers of American atomic bombs in this period. It is not known whether this plane was carrying them; the presence of an instructor on the flight suggests it probably was not.¹⁰²⁷

A major crash of a commercial airliner in the park occurred on February 12, 1963. Northwest Orient Flight 705 was a Boeing 720 jetliner bound for Portland, Oregon, with stops in Chicago, Spokane, and Seattle. The plane crashed in stormy weather 17 minutes after take-off from Miami International leaving a 10-mile debris field from just south of the seven-mile tower westward. All 43 passengers and crew on board were killed. Securing the site and assisting investigators from the Civil Aeronautics Board and the FBI put a heavy strain on ranger staff during the busy winter season. Rangers used swamp buggies to remove victims. Investigators were on the scene for some weeks as they partially reconstructed the plane.¹⁰²⁸

In August 1966, a private Cessna aircraft crashed in Florida Bay, with rangers assisting in the recovery of the bodies of the three passengers.¹⁰²⁹

On March 14, 1974, Earl Duvall, a pilot of the Miami Helicopter Service, and park biologists James Kushlan, and James Tilmant were severely burned in a helicopter crash in Shark Valley not far south of the Tamiami Trail.¹⁰³⁰

1026 SMR, June 1954; "Blast Blows Marine Clear as Planes Hit," *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1954; Ben Morgan, personal communication, Sep. 22, 2011; Everglades National Park, Archeological Sites Management Information System (ASMIS) database, EVER00246.

1027 SMR, Mar. 1958; "5 Airmen Are Killed in Bomber Explosions," Associated Press story in Oklahoma State University's *Daily Collegian*, n.d. [Mar. 1958].

1028 SMR, Feb. and Mar. 1963; Monthly Narrative Report for Ranger Service Division, Feb. 1963, EVER 28442; "43 Killed in Chicago Jet!," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 13, 1963.

1029 SMR, Aug. 1966.

1030 "3 Men Burned in 'Copter Crash," *South Dade News Leader*, March 15, 1974; Kushlan interview.

In September 1981, the son of a high-ranking Venezuelan official was killed in a crash in the park.¹⁰³¹

On February 2, 1982, two private planes, apparently returning from the Everglades Seafood Festival, collided over the park at around 5 pm, killing eight. This has been described as the worst private aviation disaster to that date in Florida.¹⁰³²

Three men were killed in February 1985 when their Piper Apache went down in Chokoloskee Bay shortly after taking off from Everglades City Airport. The victims were Peter Haines, Robert Anderson, and Kim Thompson.¹⁰³³

In April 1987, an apparently intoxicated student pilot took off from Key West in a Piper PA-28. He was killed when the plane crashed in the park, setting off a fire that burned 20 acres before park staff extinguished it.¹⁰³⁴

Four people were killed in two private plane accidents with a few days of each other in September 1989. On the 22nd, rangers on a routine helicopter patrol found the wreckage of Cessna 150 in Shark Valley. Killed in the accident were Faras Simi and Liliana Salamanca. Two days later, two Miami doctors, Irwin Lighterman and George Daniel, died in the crash of their Cessna 172 about a mile from the Shark Valley tower.¹⁰³⁵

On November 9, 1990, a twin-engined private plane crashed inland of Cape Sable, killing the three persons on board. The site was accessible only by helicopter, and park rangers assisted the Coast Guard in recovery operations.¹⁰³⁶

At the end of January 2004, a private twin-engined Beechcraft turboprop airplane went down in a densely vegetated section of the park about 30 miles southwest of Homestead. Saul Zadick and his 15-year-old son Timor were killed.¹⁰³⁷

Two major commercial plane crashes occurred in the Water Conservation Area 3B north of the park boundary. On December 29, 1972, just before midnight, a Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, Eastern Flight 401, en route from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York to Miami, crashed, killing 101, with 75 surviving. The plane was on its final approach into Miami International Airport when the pilots apparently became distracted by a warning light and failed realize they were losing altitude. The plane came down some 300 yards from the Tamiami Trail. Many volunteers in airboats brought survivors from the crash scene. In the afternoon of May 11, 1996, Valu-Jet

1031 SAR, 1981.

1032 "2 Planes Crash in Everglades," Associated Press story in *Spokane Chronicle*, Feb. 8, 1982.

1033 "Bay Waters Stall Probe of Crash," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 16, 1985.

1034 "Crash Kills Pilot, Burns 20 Acres," *Miami Herald*, Apr. 18, 1987; "Flying High," *Miami Herald*, Aug. 30, 1987.

1035 "2 Doctors Killed in Glades Plane Crash," *Miami Herald*, Sep. 25, 1989.

1036 SAR, 1990; "3 Minnesotans Missing after Plane Crash in Florida," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Nov. 11, 1990.

1037 "2 Believed Dead in Plane Crash," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 1, 2004; "NTSB Official Says Weather May Have Been a Factor in 'Glades Plane Crash,'" *Sun-Sentinel*, Feb. 3, 2004.

Flight 592 went down killing all 110 on board. Early in the DC-9's course from Miami International Airport to Atlanta, smoke appeared in the cockpit and cabin. The pilots were on the way back to Miami when the plane went down about 12 miles from the airport and only about two miles from the site of the Eastern 401 crash. The crash impact created a large crater in the limestone underlying the marsh, making recovery of the fuselage and human remains very difficult.¹⁰³⁸

¹⁰³⁸ "93 of 171 Aboard Jumbo Jet Survive Crash in the Everglades," Associated Press story in the *Merced Sun-Star*, Dec. 29, 1972; "Crater Yields Largest Pieces of ValuJet Wreckage," Associated Press story in *Beaver County Times*, June 4, 1996; William Langewiesche, "The Lessons of ValuJet 592," *Atlantic*, Mar. 1998.