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FLORIDA GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Vic Heller, Asst Bureau Chief, Bureau of Wildlife Land Management
FROM: David *Core* Plant, Biologist, Big Cypress
SUBJECT: Deer Population Estimates on the Big Cypress

Since 1978 personnel on the Big Cypress have been conducting annual track counts to establish trends in the deer populations. Track counts were chosen because they exhibited considerably more consistency than the other methods we have tried (spotlight counts, 1% kill). Of course we are aware of the many variables encountered when doing track counts, such as tracking conditions, time of year, experience of counter, etc, but we feel this is our best indicator of trends at the present time. Hopefully we can augment the track counts with aerial surveys, particularly in the area south of Loop Road where the habitat is more conducive to this type method. Starting in 1982 we will be doing the counts and surveys twice a year, immediately following the hunting season (late January and early February) and again approximately three months after the peak fawning period (June). I believe this will be consistent with the rest of the management areas.

Inclosed is a table showing the population estimates and density estimates of white tailed deer, based on track counts, from 1978 to 1981. It must be noted that 1981 was the first year in which a census was done on the Monument Unit. The low density on that Unit was responsible for lowering our overall density from 1 deer per 118 acres in 1979 to 1 deer per 144 in 1981. Considering all the variables involved in the census method and the normal fluctuations in wildlife populations, I can see no significant trends, upward or downward in the population.

I think what is significant when looking at our population estimates is that the deer are not distributed evenly over the area, but as expected are concentrated in the areas containing the best habitat. A good example is the Loop Road Unit. The western portion of the area is primarily a large cypress strand with a pretty good density. The eastern portion, on the other hand, is primarily dwarf cypress prairie, poor habitat, thus a low

deer density, but both areas are included in the density figures for the Loop Road Unit.

Hopefully, we're getting better at censusing deer, minimizing the variables, improving the techniques, and most importantly, interpreting the results.

DBP/dp

cc: Maj Kelly
Bob Ellis
Reading File

Enclosure

Population Estimates and Density Estimates of white tailed deer on the Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area, based on track counts, for the years 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1981.

Unit	Population Estimate				Density Estimate (acres per deer)			
	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Bear Island	656	627	630	584	56	58	60	62
Deep Lake	435	330	323	338	110	145	140	133
Monument ¹				1620				185
Stairsteps	740	1102	954	1013	190	128	147	140
Loop Road	<u>542</u>	<u>515</u>	<u>483</u>	<u>471</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>116</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>123</u>
Total	2373	2570	2390	4026	120	111	118	144

¹The Monument Unit was brought under Management Area starting with the 1980-81 hunting season