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Coopertown

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Community Background Report

Coopertown

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Tamiami Trail

South: Tamiami Trail

West: Western boundary of Water Conservation Area 3B (L-67 extension)

East: Krome Avenue

Community Type

Neighborhood

History

Coopertown is not a Miami-Dade County municipality, but rather an outlying settlement with a resident population of less than 20 persons. Coopertown is located 5 miles west of Krome Avenue on Southwest 8 Street, which is nearly 7 miles west of Miami-Dade County's Urban Development Boundary. This place has become a landmark because of the establishment of a store, restaurant and airboat ride rental. It has maintained its history by promoting airboat tours in and around the Everglades National Park's Shark Valley. Osceola Camp, Everglades Safari, the Airboat Association, Frog City and Gator Park are other settlements and businesses located along Tamiami Trail and west of the Urban Development Boundary in the Everglades.

Coopertown was founded by John Cooper and his family in 1945 and has remained with the Cooper family since. The site that Coopertown occupies was originally a Native American village where the family of Jimmy Osceola lived in the early part of the 1900's. The Cooper family lived in tent dwellings until 1947 when the original John Cooper home was built. The Coopers originally came from White Oak, Missouri, where the family of 10 children farmed. James Cooper, one of the Cooper brothers, went into the military service for a five-year period. John went on to establish the Coopertown Airboat Tours.

Community Dynamics

The community of interest in Coopertown and the surrounding businesses and settlements are members of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, persons interested in airboat tourism, hunters, environmental scientists, park rangers and park visitors.

The Everglades Protection and Expansion Act of 1989 authorized the federal government to acquire 107,000 acres of private property south of Tamiami Trail. The National Park Service considered the expansion crucial to a federal and state effort to restore the Everglades' natural water flow, long disrupted by canals and highways and polluted by agricultural chemicals. Coopertown and other tourist destinations on Tamiami Trail between Krome Avenue and Shark Valley sold their property to the federal government. The only exception to private property owners in this stretch of park property is ten acres just a few miles west of Gator Park that belongs to the Airboat Association of Florida (AAF). Dave Balman, president of the AAF, was able to convince legislators to let the association keep ten acres of land in 1989. Motorized vehicles including airboats are restricted from entering the Park except for research purposes.

There are tens of thousands of airboats in South Florida and most airboats can reach speeds of 60 miles per hour or more, though generally go much slower in the dense, boggy Everglades. Airboats must be registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles, but as is the case with any boat in Florida, no license is required to drive one. The AAF does not view airboats or those who use them as harmful to the environment, nearly a 1.5 million acres of swampland are off-limits to hunters and tourists which using airboats.

Business Landscape

Coopertown and nearby businesses depend on tourism to the Everglades. Major activity in this area is also dependent upon Everglades restoration and related legislation. In 1989, the Everglades Protection and Expansion Act passed and the Federal Government acquired additional acreage to protect the Park. One of the programs contributing to restoration involves the irradiation of exotic and invasive species of trees, including melaleuca trees. The purpose of restoration projects in the Everglades is to “restore more natural water flow to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay and [to restore] habitat within the Park and the ecological connectivity between the Park and the Water Conservation Areas.” Agricultural interests have contributed to the pollution of the Everglades and are interested parties to events and activities in and around Coopertown.

The 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act directed the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service to evaluate the feasibility of additional bridging for the Tamiami Trail. The National Park Service responded by publishing an environmental impact statement in December 2010. The key finding is that an additional 6.5 miles of the 11 mile corridor between Krome Avenue and the western boundary of Water Conservation Area 3B should bridge over water.

Current restoration efforts focus on building a series of bridges and raising Tamiami Trail to allow unconstrained water flow north and south of the roadway. Currently the National Park Service estimates \$260 million for construction of this project plan, \$25 million for land acquisition and \$9 million to compensate businesses for their losses.

Sources

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