

January 15, 2012

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United States Department of Agriculture
National Forest Service
Lake George Ranger District

In response to your “Public Scoping Letter” “Silver Glen Springs Recreation Enhancement Project” dated November 1, 2011, listed below are comments to your proposal. Comments are noted in red and expanded below:

Portion of proposal pertaining to boaters:

3. The project area lacks a clearly defined and hardened portal for recreationists originating from watercrafts.

Silver Glen Springs has traditionally been a popular destination for boaters during the summer holidays. *1 Currently, the area lacks a defined area for boaters to access facilities and services offered on site. *2 Boaters enter the site from various locations. This lack of designation has resulted in increased erosion, the trampling of eel grass and increased sedimentation. *3 The spring is utilized by the manatee, a federally listed species, during the winter months. *4 Continued unmanaged portals by boaters have the potential to threaten the safety of the animals as well as the overall habitat. *5 The lack of designation of an entrance for boaters has also caused management issues for the concessionaire. This is due to the fact that patrons accessing the area via land pay at a clearly defined entrance station. The lack of a defined boat access portal limits efficient collection of entrance fees from boaters. *6

3. Design a portal for boaters located in an area that minimizes resource damage and is compatible with the surrounding use and atmosphere of the project area.

Reduce user conflicts by designing and installing a designated egress and ingress area for boaters separate from the swimming area. This area will minimize resource damage and improve enforcement capability by limiting the entrance points to the area via water. *7

Responses:

*1 Silver Glen Springs has been a popular destination for boaters 365 days a year for as long as there have been boaters.

*2 The area DOES have a defined area for boaters to access facilities and services offered on site. Two sets of wooden steps are easily identifiable as access to the park facilities. One set of steps is located past the two buoy lines and outside the general spring swimming area. The only assumption that can be made is that it is for the use of boaters.

***3** Boaters enter the site from the same designated locations the park attendees use when they swim in the springs, since the only access the boaters have is to swim from their boats to the spring. If there is any indication of increased erosion, trampling of eel grass or increased sedimentation, it is due to inadequate controls on all swimmers, NOT just boaters.

***4** The spring is NOT utilized by the manatee. The manatee seeks warm clear water in the winter in which to swim. Unfortunately, Silver Glen Springs run has an average depth of 3-4 feet. This makes it too shallow for the manatee to swim. The manatees like to converge on the source of the warm water. Currently, access to the mouth of the spring itself is less than 1 foot in depth which makes it impossible for a manatee to reach.

***5** There are no unmanaged portals (as mentioned in #3) and there is NO potential threat to the safety of an animal that chooses not to inhabit the area.

***6** The majority of boaters visiting the spring do not utilize the services provided by the park. In almost all instances, **if** the boater has to use the park facilities, they are more than willing to pay the park fee. Current signage at the swim out areas of the park notifies the boater of the required fee. Any “management issues for the concessionaire” are process and procedure issues that won’t be solved by the project proposal.

***7** As addressed in prior responses, “installing a designated egress and ingress area for boaters separate from the swimming area” seems to be unnecessary. According to the project plan, providing a path of considerable length as well as a dock that is located nowhere near the springs solves nothing. Boaters use the spring the same as “land” park patrons. They come to swim. Restricting access to boaters only with the proposed project plan appears to be unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

As for the current 3 year policy of relocating the buoy lines between the months of November and April and restricting boater access, the policy was enacted to provide manatees additional areas in which to spend the winter months. As stated previously, the manatees DON’T utilize Silver Glen Springs because of the shallow waters. The policy of moving the buoy lines is vehemently opposed and should be rescinded.