

Notice of Intent

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) committed, in spring 2014, to provide limited land-based public access to the Three Sisters Springs National Wildlife Refuge (3SSNWR), a unit of the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge (CRNWR) in Crystal River, Florida). The Service is currently on schedule to provide access via a gate, improved road, and access to the 3SSNWR boardwalk by 15 November 2014.

CRNWR is soliciting a proposal(s) from a local business or group of businesses to provide land-based public access services. If this process results in a successful contract, it is envisioned that limited public access services to the 3SSNWR boardwalk will be granted through a Special Use Permit (SUP), a legally-binding contract between the CRNWR and a single entity from November 15, 2014 through March 31, 2015 (potentially longer), except for four or less Refuge Open House Event dates.

The Service will not charge for the SUP nor collect any fees associated with the cost of entry to 3SSNWR. All proceeds are intended to go to the SUP holder (with a fraction going to the City of Crystal River) to cover the cost of providing the specified public access services and to realize a reasonable profit.

This one-time SUP is intended to be a trial period for the Service setting the stage for future management of public access by a single vendor and is intended to provide lessons-learned for the future of public access to the 3SSNWR. Meanwhile, the Service is beginning the more formal process to secure a sole-source public access concessionaire for the 2015-16 season.

The SUP holder will need to have adequate capacity (a physical building or kiosk and Americans with Disabilities Act parking) to provide a staging area with a local business location, coordination with business partners (if this is more than one vendor), off-site bathroom facilities, the ability to safely transport the public from a proposed staging area or local business address to the 3SSNWR site, suitable insurance, and capacity to manage the necessary logistics of a paying-public operation that complies with city, county, state, and federal requirements. The vendor will be required to provide a presentation to each member of the public on manatee dynamics, or a similar public education program, prior to entry to the boardwalk.

The SUP will have conditions that specify the following:

- 1) Access via a small or midsize bus/shuttle for a maximum number of days per week within a set time period.
- 2) A set maximum number of trips per day.
- 3) A physical suitable location to sell tickets, with sufficient public parking, that is open from 9:00AM to 3:30PM.
- 4) Provisions of: off-site parking and bathroom facilities, transportation requirements, legal requirements, and insurance.
- 5) Safety and sanitary conditions of shuttles/buses and on-site and off-site restroom facilities.

- 6) Reporting, communication, and coordination requirements.
- 7) Limits of access to designated areas only on the property.
- 8) Interpretation and environmental education for visitors.
- 9) Advertising and information provided to the public.
- 10) And other provisions necessary to ensure a safe and enjoyable wildlife observation experience for the public.

The CRNWR is working with the Crystal River City Council and will hold a public meeting on 28 August, 2014 at 6:00 PM at the Crystal River City Hall. All interested parties are required to attend this meeting which will provide greater details to the proposal submission and SUP process. This is a mandatory meeting and the successful party or their representative must attend and sign in at this meeting. Interested parties will be expected to submit a creative proposal (or Letter of Interest) to supply these public access services for the period specified 15 September 2014. The proposal will address the 10 items above as well as criteria discussed at the mandatory meeting.

The Service intends to select a single SUP holder by 1 October 2014 and finalize the SUP by 15 October 2014.

Interested parties can visit <http://www.fws.gov/crystalriver/> or contact Ivan Vicente at 563-2088 extension 211, for a current draft of the SUP's specific conditions.

If you have any further questions please phone the refuge at 563-2088 (Public Use Specialist, ext. 211; Refuge Manager, ext. 202; Assistant Refuge Manager, ext. 205).