

# Beyond Soundbites: Navigating Complex Permitting Challenges

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Attorneys help oil company navigate complex permitting process, then win third-party lawsuit

Our client, an out-of-state oil company, wanted to conduct a seismic survey of oil and gas deposits within a 110-mile-square section of Florida's Big Cypress National Preserve. The Big Cypress National Preserve is a unit of the National Park system, where most of the oil and gas interests are privately owned. To conduct the survey, our client needed National Park Service (NPS) approval. We represented the oil company in the contentious permitting process, which lasted more than two years. Outside third-parties, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, opposed granting our client a permit. Ultimately, the NPS approved the survey, finding that it was unlikely to cause any significant or lasting environmental impacts. Several environmental organizations then filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida. In that lawsuit, which challenged the legality of the NPS's approval, we represented the oil company as intervening defendant. In a lengthy opinion, the U.S. District Court ruled for the defendants on all issues. The court found that, in granting its approval, the NPS complied with all applicable laws —its own regulations, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Endangered Species Act. It also rejected the opponents' arguments that the survey would cause significant harm. This was a significant victory given the prevalence of adverse media coverage that sought to reduce the complicated legal issues involved to soundbites. The matter demonstrated our ability to represent companies in complex and challenging environmental permitting processes, and then successfully defend the permit approvals against third-party challenges.

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