



Everglades Coalition

August 3, 2015

U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources and U.S. House Committee on Small Business

Chairman Bishop, Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Grijalva, Ranking Member Velazquez, and members of the committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the hearing titled, *“Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for Fishermen, Small Businesses, the Local Economy and Environment.”* We represent numerous non-profit environmental organizations that work together to protect Florida’s natural treasures, including the incredible natural resources of Biscayne National Park. Collectively, our organizations represent millions of Americans who are committed to environmental conservation and sustainability.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to you to express our strong support for the creation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park to protect the park’s incredible but severely threatened coral reef ecosystem.

Located in the backyard of the city of Miami, Biscayne National Park is a national treasure, home to one of the largest barrier reefs in the world and the only living coral reef in the continental United States. It is one of our country’s largest marine national parks and offers visitors the opportunity to explore a unique underwater world that they might never otherwise be able to discover. Biscayne National Park was created to protect “a rare combination of terrestrial, marine, and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty” for present and future generations. In addition to its great ecological value, the park is a significant economic generator, supporting a variety of economic and recreational activities, including diving, snorkeling, boating, and fishing. According to the National Park Service, over half a million visitors to Biscayne National Park in 2014 spent more than \$32 million and sustained 459 jobs in the local area. Unfortunately, Biscayne’s resources have rapidly deteriorated in health over the last few decades and scientists warn that some species populations within the park indicate “imminent resource collapse.” Immediate action needs to be taken to ensure the long-term health of Biscayne National Park and to guarantee that the local economy does not suffer from an absence of healthy fisheries and coral reefs.

Marine reserves are one of the quickest and most effective science-based solutions for conserving the future health and sustainability of Biscayne’s coral reef ecosystem. Creating a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park would help to improve the health of the park’s coral reefs, and increase fish size, diversity and abundance. Marine reserves implemented at Dry Tortugas National Park and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary have shown substantial benefits in the protection and restoration of degraded resources. Studies have documented increases

Committed to full protection and restoration of America’s Everglades

1000 Friends of Florida
Arthur R. Marshall Foundation
Audubon
Audubon Florida
Audubon of the Everglades
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Audubon of the Western Everglades
Caloosahatchee River Citizens
Association / Riverwatch
Center for Biological Diversity
Clean Water Action
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Defenders of Wildlife
“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society
Earthjustice
Environment Florida
Everglades Coordinating Council
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Law Center
Everglades Trust
Florida Conservation Alliance
Florida Defenders of the Environment
Florida Keys Environmental Fund
Florida Native Plant Society
Florida Oceanographic Society
Florida Wildlife Federation
Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall
Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Everglades
Hendry Glades Audubon Society
Institute for Regional Conservation
Izaak Walton League Florida Division
Izaak Walton League Florida Keys Chapter
Izaak Walton League Mangrove Chapter
Izaak Walton League of America
Last Stand
League of Women Voters of Florida
Loxahatchee River Coalition
Martin County Conservation Alliance
Miami Waterkeeper
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Ocean Research & Conservation Association
Reef Relief
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
Save It Now, Glades!
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Broward Group
Sierra Club Calusa Group
Sierra Club Central Florida Group
Sierra Club Florida Chapter
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group
Sierra Club Miami Group
Snook and Gamefish Foundation
South Florida Audubon Society
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Tropical Audubon Society
The Urban Environment League of
Greater Miami

in the size and abundance of once over-exploited species within the reserve areas and spillover of more and larger fish outside of reserve boundaries. Furthermore, an economic study prepared by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration indicated that no financial losses were reported by recreational or commercial fishers in the area and commercial catches of reef fish actually increased in the region. Similar protections are urgently needed to protect the threatened resources of Biscayne National Park.

The National Park Service is legally required to protect the resources of our spectacular system of national parks unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Their decision to create a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park is critical to preventing impairment of Biscayne's resources. The marine reserve does not unreasonably restrict access to the park as visitors to Biscayne will still be able to fish recreationally in the majority of park waters and boating, swimming, and diving are permitted within reserve boundaries. Therefore, we strongly support the creation of a marine reserve to protect Biscayne National Park's treasured system of threatened reef fisheries and coral reef ecosystems.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

Sincerely,

Cara Capp

Cara Capp
National Co-Chair



Jason Totoiu
State Co-Chair

Committed to full protection and restoration of America's Everglades