



# 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

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