

American Sportfishing Association
B.A.S.S., LLC
Center for Coastal Conservation
Coastal Conservation Association
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
International Game Fish Association
National Marine Manufacturers Association
The Billfish Foundation

October 31, 2011

Via U.S. Mail and Electronic Submission

Mr. Mark Lewis, Superintendent
Biscayne National Park
9700 SW 328 Street
Homestead, Florida 33033

**Re: Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
for Biscayne National Park**

Dear Superintendent Lewis:

The undersigned organizations are pleased to submit the following formal comments on the draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP) for Biscayne National Park (BNP). Our organizations represent the overwhelming majority of recreational boating and angling interests in the United States, collectively a \$200+ billion industry. We have been closely following the development of the GMP and the Fisheries Management Plan, which will greatly affect anglers and recreational-fishing dependent businesses in the area and have implications for the broader sportfishing community at large.

While we fully support improving the health of the park's fisheries resources, we are opposed to fisheries management activities that unnecessarily close areas to fishing activities with little scientific basis and when other fisheries management tools can effectively support healthy and sustainable fisheries. We believe that Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 prescribe onerous closures prior to other fishery management tools being applied and thus we do not support these alternatives with the additional closures included.

We strongly believe that there is not sufficient basis for implementing marine reserves at this time given the range of appropriate and effective alternatives that can be employed. Marine reserves are just one tool among the suite of resources available for effective fisheries management, and should be considered only after more conventional

and less restrictive management strategies (e.g., size limits, bag limits, quotas, gear restrictions) have failed. The most significant concern facing BNP's natural resources is inadequate enforcement of current regulations. If adequate resource management measures are currently in place, but not being enforced, recreational anglers and boaters should not be penalized because park managers view marine reserves as a quick and easy fix.

It is our understanding that the ongoing development of a Fisheries Management Plan set up a partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to manage fisheries within the BNP. That partnership is defined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between BNP and FWC, in which the FWC states their belief that marine reserves are overly restrictive and that less-restrictive management measures should be implemented in the park. On page 16 of the GMP, it clearly states that fisheries management will not be addressed in the GMP. However, based on the abundant references to accomplishing better fisheries through the closures in the GMP it is clear that BNP is using the GMP to supersede the MOU and partnership with FWC. This type of end run maneuver is simply not acceptable and destroys any level of trust between stakeholders and park officials. The fishing community trusts the FWC to effectively manage fisheries throughout Florida and they are recognized as one of the preeminent state fisheries management agencies in the country. We recommend that the GMP be modified to re-emphasize that FWC will partner in decision making that results in either direct or indirect impact to the recreational fishing community and that decisions be science-based rather than simply assumptive.

We note that there is a caveat in the MOU that acknowledges that the BNP may have interests in closures beyond fisheries management. However, the GMP results in a long list of closures purported for other reasons, including fisheries management, that essentially close off some of the best fishing areas. These include the large area closure in Alternatives 3-5, enlargement of no-access areas that are the only places for prime bonefish access, and creation of pole and troll areas that act as de facto closures due to their large size.

We do not support a permitted access program for fishing. This is an open water system with many points of entry and thus impractical and burdensome on fishers. In addition, it would seemingly give Park staff the ability to regulate fishing through the permit process.

In conclusion, we are generally disappointed in the GMP relative to fishing access and the disregard for the Fisheries Management Plan and the MOU with FWC. We urge you to uphold the guidance provided by the FWC and the long-standing policy of the federal government to allow sportsmen access to public lands and waters for recreational purposes consistent with sound conservation. We believe that conventional, equally

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effective and less restrictive fisheries management strategies should be evaluated and enforced before considering the implementation of marine reserves or other overly restrictive options. We ask that the issues we have raised in this letter be addressed prior to the final development of the GMP.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike Nussman, President and CEO
American Sportfishing Association

Jeff Crane, President
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Noreen Clough, Conservation Director
B.A.S.S., LLC

Rob Kramer, President
International Game Fish Association

Jeff Angers, President
Center for Coastal Conservation

Thom Dammrich, President
National Marine Manufacturers
Association

Pat Murray, President
Coastal Conservation Association

Ellen Peel, President
The Billfish Foundation