

HEARING

AUGUST 3, 2015



**SMALL
BUSINESS
COMMITTEE**

**Opening Statement of
Rep. Carlos Curbelo
“Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for Fishermen, Small
Businesses, the Local Economy and Environment”
Committee on Small Business and Committee on Natural Resources
Homestead, FL
August 3, 2015**

Located between Miami and the Keys, Biscayne National Park is unique among our country’s national parks. Ninety-five percent of the park is covered by water. The park’s beauty, cultural heritage, and natural resources make it an urban oasis for local residents and tourists. Biscayne National Park is used for a variety of recreational and commercial activities, including fishing, boating, scuba diving, snorkeling, and observing wildlife.

Strong stewardship is needed to preserve and help restore Biscayne National Park’s coral reef system and to effectively manage the park’s natural resources. However, this must be done in a responsible way that does not negatively affect fishermen, small businesses, and the local community. Furthermore, the park should be managed so as not to put increased pressure on surrounding resources.

While I share the National Park Service’s commitment to protecting Biscayne National Park’s coral reefs and fishery resources, I am concerned that the final General Management Plan will unnecessarily restrict the public’s access to the park and negatively affect fishermen and other small businesses. The marine reserve zone will prohibit fishing in over 10,500 acres of the park’s most popular and productive fishing waters. This plan will affect the livelihoods of fishermen and local small businesses.

I am also concerned that the National Park Service is proceeding with the General Management Plan despite strong opposition from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Under federal law, the National Park Service must consult with the state of Florida on any fishery management decisions in Biscayne National Park, so the Commission’s opposition to the plan should be given serious weight and consideration.

Biscayne National Park is a treasured recreational area for South Florida. When the public visits the park, they spend money at small businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and bait and tackle shops. Charter and guide fees and revenues from sustainable commercial fishing operations also provide vital income for local job creators. Those expenditures allow small businesses, their employees, and the families they support to put a roof over their heads and food on their tables. That is why it is so critical that we are having a conversation about the restrictions this plan will impose on access to the park and the ramifications for our community, fishermen, small businesses, and consumers that rely on fresh, domestically caught seafood.

I want to thank Chairman Bishop and Chairman Chabot of the Committee on Small Business, who could not join us today, for agreeing to hold this important hearing. I also want to thank each of our witnesses for their participation. I look forward to your testimony. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.