

Chairman Rob Bishop
Opening Statement
Oversight Field Hearing
*“Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for
Fishermen, Small Businesses, the Local Economy and
Environment.”*
Homestead, Florida

August 3, 2015

Today marks the first field hearing held by the House Committee on Natural Resources this Congress. We are here to discuss the final General Management Plan for the Biscayne National Park and the process by which this final plan came to be. Our goal is not to refute the Service’s plan; rather it is to enforce the necessity of the Service working in full consultation and cooperation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, who seem to have been shut out of the process in the final stages. Not only does this proposed plan have significant impacts on the State of Florida, but Florida Fish and Wildlife are partially responsible for enforcement within the park as this new management plan will be in effect in state waters and will trump state fishery management in those state waters.

This is not a new issue for Florida, nor is it for my Committee. The final General Management Plan marks the end of a fifteen year process, and today is the second time my Committee has looked into this process in as many years. The most contested part of the final General Management Plan for Biscayne National Park is the creation of a Marine Reserve Zone – closed to both commercial and recreational fishing – that encompasses more than 10,000 acres of pristine reef fishing habitat in the “fishing and boating capital of the world.”

I am concerned that the federal government has exercised its will over the concerns of the Florida Fish and Wildlife and others when it comes to recreational and commercial access in Biscayne National Park. Local fishermen who enjoy the park should not be excluded from full access, particularly when the local community does not feel that they have been heard on such a significant resource management decision. The Federal Government should not be coming into a state and telling them what to do on their lands or in their waters.

Unfortunately, this is an issue we see far too often in my state of Utah and all across the west. A similar situation played out in Nevada just last month when President Obama again used the Antiquities Act to create a 700,000 acre National Monument in Nevada. Not only does this decision by the President not have to go through any sort of public process, but there was an actual, locally-driven planning process that has been totally disregarded by the Administration. Sounds familiar...

In an effort to prevent situations such as this one right here in Biscayne bay, Representative Ros-Lehtinen introduced H.R. 3310, with 30 original cosponsors including Representatives Curbelo, Diaz-Balart, and Jolly, all of whom are here today. I don't think Mr. Beyer has signed on yet, but there is still time! Mrs. Ros-Lehtinen's bill would prohibit the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior from restricting fishing access to any State or territorial marine waters within the jurisdiction of either the National Park Service or Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, unless those restrictions were developed in coordination with and approved by the appropriate state agency. If that were the case here in Biscayne Bay, we wouldn't be sitting here right now.

The repercussions of the National Park Service's new General Management Plan for Biscayne National Park will be severe to Florida's residents, visitors, and economy. That is why this decision should have been should have been developed in full consultation with, and agreed to by, the State of Florida and its residents. I want to thank my Congressman Curbelo, Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen, and Congressman Diaz-Balart, who rightly asked for this field hearing. I look forward to hearing from them and the Floridians on our panel today on the impact on the local economy, which is driven in large part by fishing and recreation in Biscayne Bay.