

Written Statement of
Scott Salyers
Fishing Group Publisher
Bonnier Corporation
Before the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on Small Business
“Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for
Fishermen, Small Businesses, the Local Economy and Environment”
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Hello Members of Congress and guests, my name is Scott Salyers. I'm a second generation Miamian who has fished all my recollecting life. Of those hundreds, maybe even thousands of fishing trips, most have involved Biscayne National Park in one form or another. Whether it be catching bonefish, permit, tarpon, snapper, grouper or simply driving through the park on my way to another fishing destination, Biscayne is a vital part of almost every trip I make in Miami.

I consider myself one of the luckiest people on earth having been born in Doctors Hospital just up the road in Coral Gables and having a mother and father who loved to fish. Having a family that fishes together brings a closeness that is far and away better than any make believe cyber world we live in today. I believe this to my very core as I wake up my 9 year old son (Zach) who hates to get up before the sun is up, but is reminded of the great times that lie ahead once we push away from the dock. It's through him and my 6 year old daughter (Abbey) that reminds me of the wonders and experiences that can only be had by enjoying the park.

I hope my son is able to take me fishing as I did my father after he retired. My father and my then girlfriend, (who is now my wife) would never miss an opportunity to go fishing. You know you are in pretty deep when your father who was raised Southern Baptist is going fishing with your black girlfriend. True story! The relationship with my father and my future wife was galvanized by those fishing trips. I also remember one of the last trips I had with my father in that he caught a 36 pound permit on the flats right outside Black Point Channel in Biscayne. It was one of the few pictures that my father kept in his hospital room until he passed.

Fast forward to today. As I load up the family from which ever local marina I'm departing from, be it Matheson Hammock, Black Point or Homestead Bayfront Park, I'm often reminded of how we got to this point. You don't have to look hard to see folks that might not have bad intentions, however they just don't know any better than what they know. There is a distinction between folks that are just on the water and those that know how to use our resources responsibly. Again, most of the folks mean no harm, they just don't know any better. Of course there are also those users

that intend on and will continue to break the laws until they are caught or stopped. For those I have zero tolerance.

However it's those folks that mean no harm or ill will to Biscayne that can unintentionally do some harmful things to the park. But what if they were properly informed of the laws and best practices within the park? Why not teach them how to use the park responsibly and to help their experience be a successful one. Whether we need to educate them in English, Spanish or Creole, as I stated, most of these folks mean no harm to the park, we just haven't done a good job of telling them how to use it responsibly. Simply kicking them out sends the wrong message and prevents the responsible users and their families from enjoying the park as well.

I should also mention that I'm the Fishing Group Publisher for three national fishing magazines in Sport Fishing, Salt Water Sportsman and Marlin Magazine. Our readers are some of the most active anglers on the planet. They are conservationists at heart. As I do, they want sustainable fisheries throughout the US and globally. So as a group publisher and hearing that the Biscayne closure was looming, I decided that I needed to attend as many functions as I could involving Biscayne.

Back in December 2013 I attended a workshop on Biscayne, which I thought had a great turnout in that there must have been a few hundred attendees that participated. About half of the room were men and women who fish that did not want to see the closure happen. Instead of endorsing the closure (alt 4 at the time), most of the fishermen agreed, with caveats, to one of the less restrictive alternatives (6 or 7). I still came away feeling like regardless of these management approaches, we are not doing our part in educating the end user.

As a part of the General Management Plan, I do believe the Park Service is committing to establish kiosks to help inform users of park usage and news. What if we did this without closures? Or better yet, give this information to all those attending the parks, through all access points. It's possible to reach the masses more efficiently now than ever, be it print digital or social media. I believe that better educating users, combined with responsible management actions that allow for continued access, can be effective in restoring the parks fisheries and habitat if given the chance.

If we do have the closure there will be more pressure on the surrounding areas. That's a fact. That means there is even more reason to educate and when needed, enforcement. I'm also not sure how another user group in divers and snorklers (which I fit into also) are able to enjoy the park under this new rule, when there is science that states that this group can be as hard if not harder on the environment. How can the park pick one user group over another?

So any way you slice it, barring no action, a plan will affect someone somewhere down the line. The real key in my opinion is education, enforcement and good

science. If we can get all three of these working together then we should be able to feel pretty good about our outcome. At a recent meeting with our local Congressmen and Congresswoman, Capt. Ray Rosher made a great analogy in that he sees the current plan going from 0 meaning no action to 5 meaning closures or the death penalty. The park service has chosen 5, the death penalty. He felt that there should be intermediate steps taken first before taking such drastic actions. I must concur.

Based on past history, there is no chance of a retrial. Once an area is closed we never get it back. I've heard Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen state so eloquently "Biscayne National Park should not be like a great library that won't let anyone check out any of the books."

Again, we fishermen want sustainable fisheries for years to come. We want our children and their children to enjoy the same fishing experiences that we have. We need good science to support decisions that affect us not only in our wallets, as recreational fishing is big business, but also our hearts. I humbly ask that you engage the park service in bringing a plan that doesn't build barriers, but enlightens everyone. Let's "teach a man to fish" as f I will brin a hard ish don't know borders and what the National Park Service is attempting to do here doesn't solve the bigger issues.

Thank you.