



64%
of reef fish species decreased in frequency occurrence over the last 30 years

6%
of coral remains alive within the park due to a number of human-related impacts



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Protecting Biscayne's Coral Reefs

Biscayne National Park is a national treasure and is one of our country's largest marine national parks. Home to part of the third largest barrier reef tract in the world, Biscayne protects some of the only living coral within the continental U.S. However, the health of the park's reefs and fisheries has declined dramatically in recent years. **The National Park Service, after more than 15 years of scientific analysis and public engagement, has announced plans to create a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park to protect the park's ailing reefs, improve the visitor experience and help bring back more fish to Florida.** Unfortunately, government bureaucracy stands in the way of the actual creation of the marine reserve. The Obama administration must act soon if Biscayne's marine resources have a chance at recovery.

Visitors to our national parks expect to see the highest quality conditions; the aquatic equivalent of Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. Unfortunately, the health of Biscayne's reefs and marine life has declined dramatically over the last several decades. The approximately 6% of Biscayne's reefs that remain alive continue to be stressed by derelict fishing gear, water pollution, warming seas and the absence of a healthy ecological food web resulting from overfishing. Once flourishing with native species like mutton snapper and black grouper, population numbers of sizes of native fish species in the park are at historic lows.

Biscayne National Park is a significant economic driver for the state and the region and healthy coral reefs and fish stocks are at the heart of it. Supporting a variety of economic and recreational ac-

tivities, such as fishing, diving, boating, and snorkeling, **over half a million visitors to Biscayne National Park spent more than \$32 million and sustained nearly 460 jobs in the local area.** The viability of these economic activities depends on the health of the reefs.

Marine reserves are areas that prohibit fishing and the extraction of resources. The marine reserve in Biscayne National Park is small— just 6% of a park that is 95% water—but it will have a big impact and still allow recreational fishing opportunities throughout much of the park. Creating a marine reserve is the quickest, most effective science-based method to protect coral reef habitat.

Why a marine reserve?

- Marine reserves are based on science. They protect fish and coral reefs and can create better fishing opportunities when increased numbers of fish “spillover” into areas outside the reserve.
- They reduce impacts from marine debris and damage to coral reefs from boat groundings and anchors.
- A marine reserve will provide an area where certain types of recreation use— such as diving, snorkeling, swimming, and boating—can be enjoyed without interference from other activities.
- Other management alternatives do not provide enough protection. A marine reserve is the only way for the park to comply with the legal mandates that govern how it should be managed.

WATER

Marine reserves in the Dry Tortugas, located just 70 miles off the shores of Key West, provide significant protection to coral reef ecosystems. A 2012 report, completed just years after the reserves were implemented, showed evidence of more and larger fish with increased spawning rates within the reserve, including red grouper, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper. Furthermore, according to an economic valuation study conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, no financial losses were reported by regional commercial or recreational fishers.

Widespread Support for a Marine Reserve

The National Park Service worked closely with the State of Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to develop a range of alternatives to best protect Biscayne's threatened marine resources. The plan, 15 years in the making, incorporated science-based research and a transparent public process, including 22 public meetings with over 1,000 attendees and multiple opportunities for public comment. The Park Service received 43,000 pieces of correspondence related to the plan.

There is overwhelming public support (over 90%) for the creation of a no-fishing marine reserve zone. Numerous recreational users—from anglers educating their peers on the benefits of marine reserves to divers who enjoy Biscayne—agree that a marine reserve makes the most sense for protecting fisheries and coral reefs. **Miami-Dade County, environmental organizations, dive shops, local fishing experts, and world-renowned scientists all support the creation of a marine reserve.**

Next Steps

This decision comes after 15 years of advocacy by NPCA and our members and supporters, with more than 20,000 NPCA supporters lending their voices in support of the creation of a marine reserve. Unfortunately, government bureaucracy and red tape are now blocking its implementation. If the marine reserve is not enacted soon, it may be too late for remaining corals and fish populations to recover.

The Obama administration must deliver on its promise to establish the marine reserve in Biscayne National Park within the next year. Biscayne's beautiful but severely threatened coral reefs cannot afford to wait.

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“If someone were chopping down Redwood trees or giant Sequoias in our national parks, there would be a public outcry. The same should be true here in Biscayne, where our iconic coral reefs and marine life are on the verge of collapse.”

