



Save Biscayne's Coral Reefs

Located in the backyard of Miami's sprawling metropolis, Biscayne National Park protects an abundance of unique creatures and diverse marine habitats. Of particular importance are its majestic coral reefs, part of the world's third largest barrier reef and the only living reef tract within the continental United States. Coral reefs are home to some of the highest levels of biodiversity on the planet and provide the breeding and feeding grounds for about a quarter of all marine life.

Unfortunately, the health of coral reefs and fish populations within Biscayne National Park has been declining for decades due to water pollution, warming seas, marine debris, and over-fishing, leaving some species on the verge of collapse. In response to concerns about the future health and sustainability of Biscayne's marine resources, park managers released several different alternatives for better managing the park's threatened reefs. Among these alternatives is a proposed marine reserve zone, covering 7 percent of the park and about 30 percent of its reef tract.

continued on page 3

Progress for Tamiami Trail Bridging

Good news for Everglades National Park! Federal and state decision-makers have come together to prioritize funding for a critical project that will help restore America's "River of Grass."

Tamiami Trail is a roadway that runs across the state connecting Tampa to Miami, and acts as a dam that restricts the historic north-south flow of water into Everglades National Park. This obstacle to water flow is causing significant deterioration to the park's wading bird populations and wetlands. The solution? Bridge the road to restore water flow and connect critical habitat.

NPCA has long supported efforts to bridge Tamiami Trail and celebrated the completion of the first one-mile bridge section in 2013. Now with a strong funding commitment from the federal and state governments, bridging the next 2.6 miles of the road is on the horizon.

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently awarded a \$20 million Transportation Infrastructure Generating Economic Revenue (TIGER) grant jointly to the National Park Service and the Florida Department of Transportation to move forward with construction. This grant comes on the heels of Florida Governor Rick Scott's commitment of \$90 million

from the state budget to bridge Tamiami Trail over the next three years.

NPCA expects a groundbreaking of this next bridge section in early 2016 and will continue to work toward full bridging of Tamiami Trail to facilitate full ecosystem restoration—America's Everglades can't wait!



Top: Alligator in Everglades National Park © Mark Kostich | ISTOCKPHOTO **Above:** Great Blue Heron in the Everglades National Park © Brian Lasenby | Dreamstime.com

FIELD REPORT

Spring 2015

Florida, Louisiana, Coastal Mississippi and Alabama, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

Sun Coast Regional Office

450 North Park Road • Suite 301
Hollywood, Florida 33021
954.961.1280
suncoast@npca.org

John Adornato, III

REGIONAL DIRECTOR
jadornato@npca.org

Alyssa Barton

LEGAL FELLOW
abarton@npca.org

Cara Capp

EVERGLADES RESTORATION
PROGRAM MANAGER
ccapp@npca.org

Jacqueline Cruet

REGIONAL PROGRAM ANALYST
jcruet@npca.org

Michelle S. Davis

SENIOR MANAGING DIRECTOR,
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
mdavis@npca.org

Caroline McLaughlin

BISCAYNE PROGRAM ANALYST
cmclaughlin@npca.org

NPCA Membership Services Team

800.628.7275 • npca@npca.org

Newsletter Design by
kelleyalbertdesign.com



npca.org

REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S LETTER BY JOHN ADORNATO III

Before we get too far into the new year, I'd like to reflect on a successful 2014 in the Sun Coast Region. NPCA staff here took part in many great projects on behalf of our national parks last year. Our successful partnership with the City of Homestead and other players resulted in a free trolley from Homestead to Biscayne National Park and Everglades National Park that runs on the weekends during the winter season. Our team continues to work with local, state, and national players to keep power lines out of Everglades National Park and to establish a desperately needed marine reserve zone in Biscayne National Park. We educated the community and shared our concerns with officials about the proposal to conduct seismic testing for oil in and around Big Cypress National Preserve. 2014 also brought a federal TIGER grant to support the Tamiami Trail Bridge project, which will eventually send clean and much needed water to Everglades National Park. The groundbreaking is slated for 2016—the year of the National Park Service centennial.

Looking ahead, one exciting new opportunity in 2015 is the possibility of adding a new unit to the system: a park and padding a new unit to the system: a preservation and heritage area in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta and Bluff region in Mobile, Alabama. Our office is working with the Mobile community to explore bringing additional layers of natural resource protection and cultural preservation to the area through a national park designation.

Nearly nine in ten voters, irrespective of political party, do not want park funding to be cut further.¹

We're busier than ever protecting our parks for future generations and NPCA needs your help. Our parks have been suffering in light of compounded budget cuts over recent years. The 2014 fiscal year federal budget brought some relief, but it has been insufficient to bring our parks back to where they were and where they need to be. The operations account for the National Park Service has declined by 7% or \$173 million in today's dollars over the last five years. National parks also suffer from an annual operations shortfall of more than a half-billion dollars.



The National Park Service is a treasure trove of the very best America has to offer. Congress needs to increase the Park Service's funding so the staff can carry on with their responsibilities. It should be an easy decision since voters across the ideological spectrum see National Parks as a legitimate and important federal responsibility. Nearly nine in ten voters, irrespective of political party, do not want park funding to be cut further.¹ We also urge you to support our parks by becoming a member of NPCA today and spreading the word about why national parks are important to you.

In September of last year, a judge found BP to be grossly negligent in the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. NPCA is tracking this issue and continues to pursue funding opportunities in part through the implementation of the RESTORE Act, which ensures that 80 percent of Deepwater Horizon civil and administrative penalties under the Clean Water Act will go to Gulf restoration. We hope that the preservation projects resulting from this tragedy will bring back critical habitat and restore the beauty of parks along the Gulf.

It will be another exciting year and we look forward to sharing it with you.

Above: John Adornato III in Big Cypress National Preserve © Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA

1. Strong Bi-Partisan Support for National Parks: Findings From A National Survey Conducted On Behalf Of The National Parks Conservation Association and National Park Hospitality Association By Hart Research Associates and North Star Opinion Research, July 2012. Available online at: <https://www.corpsnetwork.org/sites/default/images/advocacy/Strong-Bipartisan-Support-For-National-Parks.pdf>. Last accessed February 24th, 2015.

NPCA's New Fellow

Meet Alyssa Barton, NPCA's newest legal fellow and an attorney of five years. Alyssa joined the Sun Coast Region in February 2014.

Q: What did you do before you joined NPCA?

A: After graduating from the University of Miami School of Law in 2009, I worked as an attorney focused on property insurance law. After four years of litigation experience, I began to reflect on what I really want to do. I've always been a passionate environmental advocate and decided to pursue a career in environmental law.

Q: What does a legal fellow in NPCA's Sun Coast Region do?

A: A lot. I research issues affecting national parks in the region and advocate for Everglades restoration in

Tallahassee. I write group and public comment letters. Much of what I do is spotting an issue, tracking it, and addressing it. One major project I continue to work on involves a company's proposal to perform seismic testing for oil within a large part of Big Cypress National Preserve. I researched the situation, met and spoke with experts and stakeholders, and even toured an existing oil pad in the park. I then helped craft a group comment letter identifying legal issues and concerns that was sent to the National Park Service.



Save Biscayne's Coral Reefs

continued from page 1

A marine reserve is a no-take, no-fishing area that protects ecosystem health and biodiversity, while also providing valuable recreational opportunities for snorkelers and divers. "Marine reserves are science-based and are the best, most-effective way to protect Biscayne's severely threatened

coral reef ecosystem," says NPCA's Biscayne Program Analyst Caroline McLaughlin. NPCA is working extensively with partner organizations, anglers, scientists, scuba divers, and the National Park Service to support the creation of a marine reserve within Biscayne National Park. The Park Service is set to make a decision on the issue sometime this year. We hope the

agency will create a marine reserve, prioritizing conservation and upholding its mission to protect our nation's most cherished resources for present and future generations.

Top: Alyssa Barton in Big Cypress National Preserve © Barton | NPCA **Above:** Shoreline of island key in Biscayne National Park © Benkrut | Dreamstime.com

Young Advocates Find Their Voice and Protect Parks

In 2013, NPCA's Sun Coast Region launched a successful civic engagement project, entitled Civic Voice Lessons. Supported by The Batchelor Foundation, this program is a primary component of NPCA's national Find Your Voice initiative, which focuses on inspiring and activating urban youth, deepening alliances with local community groups, and increasing the number of young, active NPCA members. As an experiential pilot project, Civic Voice Lessons has proven to be a successful journey of exploration and self-expression for a promising group of urban youth determined to make a difference.

In partnership with the community groups Mahogany Youth, Junior Scientists in the Sea, Earth Ethics Institute at Miami Dade College, and others, NPCA helped young people experience the outdoors. Participants then acquired skills and information so they could identify and address targeted national park issues, discuss these issues



with decision makers, and become agents for change in their local communities. It worked. Once disconnected from their natural environment and disenfranchised from their political leaders, graduates of Civic Voice Lessons now have traveled the length of Florida to have their voices heard in Tallahassee and are eager to make a difference in their national parks.

"National parks provide everyone a connection to something greater than themselves. These young people are now

using their voices to help protect what they've come to see as their inheritance," says NPCA Program Analyst Jacqueline Cruet, who developed Civic Voice Lessons in partnership with NPCA's Center for Park Management (CPM). The program's success has been repeated in Miami and replicated in Los Angeles, Baltimore and New York City, and will soon take place in Galveston, Texas. In addition, a formal Civic Voice Lessons curriculum is underway as a component of NPCA's "Find Your Voice" initiative to be launched this spring in time for the Park Service's Centennial in 2016 and NPCA's Centennial in 2019.

NPCA looks forward to building on the success of Civic Voice Lessons, bringing the next generation along in our efforts to protect, restore, and strengthen America's national parks so they can be explored and enjoyed now and forever.

Above: Engaged Civic Voice Lessons Miami Participants © Elizabeth Bowler | NPCA

NPCA Hosts 30th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference

In January 2015, NPCA hosted and co-chaired the 30th annual Everglades Coalition conference in Key Largo, Florida. More than 300 participants came to the event, the largest annual forum on Everglades restoration.

NPCA staff moderated conference sessions on federal restoration funding and the impact of oil drilling on Big Cypress National Preserve. NPCA's Chief Operating Officer Theresa Pierno introduced keynote speaker Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, who reaffirmed her commitment to protecting America's Everglades. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell also addressed the conference, highlighting the Administration's restoration priorities for 2015 and beyond. Graduates of NPCA's youth advocacy program were guests on the "Hall of Fame" panel, alongside NPCA Board Member Mary Barley, who was featured for her decades-long efforts to protect and restore the River of Grass ecosystem.

Other notable participants included Asst. Secretary of the Army Jo-Ellen Darcy, U.S. Reps. Curt Clawson, Alcee Hastings, and Patrick Murphy, former U.S. Senator Bob Graham, National Park Service Southeast

Regional Director Stan Austin, Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Park Superintendent Pedro Ramos, Biscayne National Park Superintendent Brian Carlstrom, and numerous municipal, county, and state elected leaders.

NPCA's leadership was instrumental in facilitating a successful Everglades Coalition conference, which has set the stage for restoration progress with strong bipartisan support.



Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell at the Everglades Coalition Conference 2015 © Cara Capp | NPCA

Preserve Hurricane Hole

Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument are home to some of the National Park System's best-kept underwater secrets, protecting tangled mangrove nurseries, enchanting coral reefs, and colorful fish species. Visitors to the park can experience unrivaled recreational opportunities, including kayaking in clear blue waters and snorkeling to discover a pristine underwater world. The mangrove forests at Hurricane Hole, a particularly unique area within the park, are some of the most undisturbed in all of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Earning its name from its use as a refuge protecting ships from storms, Hurricane Hole consists of shallow marine bays and strips of red mangrove forests bordering the shoreline. The area is home

to secret communities of corals nestled among the roots of the mangroves that were only discovered by the U.S. Geological Survey in 2009. Some 30 species of corals are found here and it is the only mangrove ecosystem in all of the Caribbean protecting so many different kinds of corals.

In nearby Coral Bay, the proposed construction of a mega-yacht marina threatens Hurricane Hole's fragile ecosystem and the critical habitat it provides for marine invertebrates, fish, and spectacular coral formations. NPCA is engaging our members, supporters, and local partners to urge the government to oppose this potentially destructive marina. NPCA seeks to protect Hurricane Hole's irreplaceable natural treasures and to ensure that its incredible

landscapes, waters, and wildlife are safeguarded for future generations. If you'd like to join NPCA in protecting this marine treasure, contact suncoast@npca.org.

Below: Healthy Tropical Coastal Habitat © NPS
Bottom: Virgin Islands National Park © Lit Liu | BIGSTOCKPHOTO

Hurricane Hole is home to secret communities of corals nestled among the roots of the mangroves that were only discovered by the U.S. Geological Survey in 2009.



Space Complex Development Threatens Canaveral National Seashore

Canaveral National Seashore is an ancient barrier island that contains the longest stretch of undeveloped public beach on the east coast of Florida. The Seashore, which stretches across more than 57,000 acres, includes an open lagoon, coastal hammock, pine flatwoods and offshore waters. It is home to 13 federally listed and endangered species, including four species of sea turtles that nest along the beaches. Each year, more than one million visitors come to the Seashore to enjoy the beaches, hike through rare maritime hammock, fish along the shore, and engage in other recreational uses of the park. Canaveral has a unique relationship and partnership with

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and nearby Kennedy Space Center, which still owns a portion of the Refuge lands originally acquired as buffer land.

Space operations at the Space Center have mostly had minimal impact on Canaveral National Seashore, however, a proposal to develop a commercial space launch complex in a particularly beautiful portion of the Refuge is under consideration. This development will not only cause irreparable damage to the habitat in the Refuge, it will also affect visitor access to and experience of Canaveral National Seashore. “While NPCA strongly believes the Space Center can and

should accommodate future commercial space launches, we believe that the types of uses and development permitted should remain within the footprint of the existing Space Center,” says Sarah Barmeyer, Director of Conservation Programs at NPCA. “NPCA supports future uses that are consistent with the conservation of the Seashore and nearby Wildlife Refuge to protect the species and habitat there, and to ensure continued public use and enjoyment into the future,” Barmeyer adds.

Below: Royal Tern flock along Canaveral National Seashore © Jesse Kunerth | Dreamstime.com



A proposal to develop a commercial space launch complex in a particularly beautiful portion of the Refuge is under consideration

National Parks Trolley 's Second Season!

All aboard for Homestead's National Parks Trolley! Now in its second season, this public transportation initiative—developed by NPCA, the City of Homestead, and the National Park Service—connects people to their parks every weekend, November through April. Pick up the trolley at Losner Park, located in Homestead's Historic downtown, and take a 20-minute, ranger-led trolley ride to either Biscayne or Everglades National Parks or to Miami-Dade County's Homestead Bayfront Park. Park admission and the trolley are both free. Once at the parks, visitors can enjoy planned activities like canoe lessons or guided hikes.

More than 4,000 visitors rode the trolley in the first four months of operation last year; for many, it was their first trip to a national park. To meet demand and expand service, the City of Homestead recently purchased a second trolley. The city also worked with the National Park Service to offer holiday service during the last week of 2014, when more than 1,400 passengers journeyed to their national parks with family and friends.



NPCA is proud to have spearheaded this project and thankful for the support and leadership of the exceptional staff of the National Park Service and the City of Homestead, particularly Vice Mayor Stephen Shelley, a true champion of our national parks. We congratulate the City on its award-winning marketing campaign for this project. The Sun Coast Regional Office is proud to have helped make our south Florida national parks more accessible and we hope that these efforts can be replicated elsewhere.

Above: National Park visitors step off the Homestead National Park Trolley © Thomas Strom | NPS

Biscayne National Park Maritime Heritage Trail

Snorkeling and diving at Biscayne National Park's Maritime Heritage Trail allows visitors to explore the rich environmental and cultural resources the park has to offer. The trail follows six ship wrecks, spanning nearly a century of history with a variety of vessel types, in the incredible underwater world of Biscayne Bay. It is the only submerged archeological trail in the National Park System and a national parks experience not to be missed!

NPCA supported the effort to install informational markers along the trail so visitors can learn about wreck sites during their snorkeling or diving journey. NPCA joined Biscayne National Park staff to install these markers and celebrate a new and unique kind of visitor engagement.

Below: National Park Ranger Charles Lawson celebrating the setting of one of six markers along the Maritime Heritage Trail © NPS

Calling all underwater adventurers!



Jacqueline Crucet, Program Analyst with Sun Coast Regional Office

MEET THE STAFF

Q. What is your job? **A:** A large part of what I do is community engagement to improve public knowledge, support, and protection

of our national parks. One main focus of mine is working with community stakeholders and the National Park Service to protect America's only flooded grasslands, Florida Bay, and other marine areas of Everglades National Park. I also focus on working with local cities, community organizations, and young people on projects and programs that create connections to and spur action toward keeping these treasured places beautiful for today and the future.

Q. What's the best part of your work?

A: Introducing people to their national parks and to the fact that the national parks they are experiencing today will, with all of our efforts, be the same places for beauty and reflection for future generations to experience and enjoy. It's very gratifying.

Q. What are some of your favorite park experiences? **A:** One of my favorite stories

is about hiring a local actor to portray Lancelot Jones in Biscayne National Park. This actor had never been in the park before, had never been on a boat before, and didn't really know the story of Lancelot Jones and his remarkable pioneer family. At the end of the day, he came away with a true appreciation of park waters, the Jones family story, and is now a very active and effective young advocate for our national parks. It goes to show you how parks inspire and connect people.



Jacqueline Crucet and NPCA mascot Teddy at the opening of the Homestead National Park Trolley © Diario de Las Americas



SUN COAST REGIONAL OFFICE
450 North Park Road • Suite 301
Hollywood, Florida 33021

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NonProfit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Hollywood, FL
Permit No. 1039

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Join us to learn about and
enjoy your national parks!

**Sun Coast Regional Council Meeting,
Reception and Park Excursion**
March 11 and 12, 2015 •
Naples, FL and Big Cypress National Preserve

**The 34th Annual NPCA “Salute to the Parks”
Awards Dinner and Meeting of the Board**
March 24-26, 2015 • Washington, DC

Third Annual Everglades Action Day
Tuesday, April 7, 2015 • Tallahassee, FL

NPCA Parkscapes Trip to the Everglades
April 12-17, 2015 • Everglades City, FL

Find Your Voice NPCA’s Campaign Kick-Off
April 18, 2015 • Homestead, FL, and Los Angeles, CA

31st Annual Everglades Coalition Conference
January 8-10, 2016 • Coral Gables, FL

For More
Information On
These Events,
Contact
suncoast@npca.org



Right: Sun Coast Regional Council on swamp buggy tour of Big Cypress National Preserve
© Jacqueline Crucet | NPCA

Printed on FSC certified paper
with soy-based ink.

