

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society • Audubon Society of the Everglades • Center for Biological Diversity • Clean Water Action • Everglades Trust • Florida Keys Environmental Fund • League of Women Voters of Florida • Marine Conservation Institute • Miami Waterkeeper • National Parks Conservation Association • Reef Relief • Sierra Club Central Florida Group • Sierra Club Marine Action Team • Sierra Club Miami Group • South Florida Audubon Society • South Florida Wildlands Association • Tropical Audubon Society

May 28, 2015

Sally Jewell, Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to you to express our strong support for the creation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park to protect the park’s incredible but severely threatened coral reef ecosystem. We are deeply committed to the conservation of the unique landscapes, resources, wildlife, and recreational opportunities protected by the National Park Service and look toward your leadership in ensuring the future sustainability of Biscayne National Park.

Located in the backyard of the city of Miami, Biscayne National Park is a national treasure, home to one of the largest barrier reefs in the world and the only living coral reef in the continental United States. It is one of our country’s largest marine national parks and offers visitors the opportunity to explore a unique underwater world that they might never otherwise be able to discover. Biscayne National Park was created to protect “a rare combination of terrestrial, marine, and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty” for present and future generations. In addition to its great ecological value, the park is a significant economic generator, supporting a variety of economic and recreational activities, including diving, snorkeling, boating, and fishing. According to the National Park Service, over half a million visitors to Biscayne National Park in 2014 spent more than \$32 million and sustained 459 jobs in the local area. Unfortunately, Biscayne’s resources have rapidly deteriorated in health over the last few decades and scientists warn that some species populations within the park indicate “imminent resource collapse.” Immediate action needs to be taken to ensure the long-term health of Biscayne National Park.

Marine reserves are one of the quickest and most effective science-based solutions for conserving the future health and sustainability of Biscayne’s coral reef ecosystem. Creating a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park would help to improve the health of the park’s coral reefs, and increase fish size, diversity and abundance. Marine reserves implemented at Dry Tortugas National Park and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary have shown substantial benefits in the protection and restoration of degraded resources. Studies have documented increases in the size and abundance of once over-exploited species within the reserve areas and spillover of more and larger fish outside of reserve boundaries. Furthermore, an economic study prepared by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration indicated that no financial losses were reported by recreational or commercial fishers in the area and commercial catches of reef fish actually increased in the region. Similar protections are urgently needed to protect the threatened resources of Biscayne National Park.

The U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service have a duty to protect the resources of our spectacular system of national parks unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. We look for your leadership on this issue and strongly encourage you to create a marine reserve to protect Biscayne National Park's treasured system of threatened reef fisheries and coral reef ecosystems.

Sincerely,
(Signatures waived to expedite delivery)

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