



100 YEARS

FIELDREPORT

Sun Coast Region | Winter 2018-2019



Celebrating NPCA's Centennial Preparing for Our Next 100 Years!



May 19, 2019 marks NPCA's 100th birthday. We have ambitious plans to celebrate this remarkable milestone, from exciting events with partners to increasing our advocacy capacity to centennial-related messaging throughout the year. We're proud of our ten decades as the only independent, nonpartisan organization advocating on behalf of America's national parks! In addition, our centennial year provides an opportunity to take stock—to look back on where we've been and to chart a course for where we'd like to go, with the help of supporters like you.

Please stay tuned for all the exciting NPCA events that will be happening all over the country and here in the Sun Coast region as we look forward to our next 100 years of engaging and inspiring the next generation of park advocates, protecting and enjoying our most beautiful places, and embracing and highlighting the diverse voices of our country and our history. Thank you for supporting NPCA and for your leadership to help protect the many treasured natural and historic sites in our National Park System.

Solving Florida's Water Crisis Through Everglades Restoration

Cara Capp

The news from Florida last summer was devastating: scores of manatees, dolphins, sea turtles, and fish washed up on shore, killed by one of the worst toxic blue-green algae and red tide outbreaks in the state's history. Meanwhile, seagrasses and fish populations in downstream Everglades National Park and the Florida Keys are in dire need of fresh, clean water. Florida's waters are in crisis

This broken system has existed since the early 1900's, when Florida's leaders sought to drain the Everglades to create dry land for development. By diking the southern border of Lake Okeechobee, the historic River of Grass sheetflow that once traveled through the state's southern peninsula and out to the Florida Keys was cut off. Today, over 70% of the Everglades' water supply has been cut off by development. With no southern outlet, excess water from Lake Okeechobee is discharged to the Caloosahatchee River to the west, and to the St. Lucie River to the east. These communities have long struggled with impacts related to this polluted discharges.

Thankfully, a solution to this crisis exists within the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which would not only restore the health and future of Everglades National Park but also create projects that



will clean polluted water, save Florida's wildlife and protect the state's billion-dollar tourism industry.

NPCA and our partners have been working hard to support the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir—one of the CERP projects that will store, treat, and redirect

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Top: Great Blue Heron in Everglades National Park, FL ©Galyna Andrushko | Dreamstime
Above: River of Grass in Everglades National Park, FL ©JC Ruiz | iStock

FIELD REPORT

Winter 2018-2019

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

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MEET THE STAFF | SARAH REED

What is your job? I'm the director of development for the Sun Coast and Texas regions. I have the privilege of meeting and guiding individuals who have generously decided to devote their philanthropy towards protecting America's national parks through our organization.

What is the best part of your work? Meeting our members! I love working closely with them to

connect their passion for conservation with the needs of the national parks and NPCA's advocacy work. The most thrilling aspect of my job is when I tell donors about the work



we were able to accomplish with the contribution they made. Seeing their eyes light up with pride is a joy.

What is your favorite national park and why?

I would have to say Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It's where I learned to mountain bike, hike, rock climb and rappel in high school. It's where I first went water rafting and fell in love with nature on a conservation level.

Above: Sarah Reed enjoying a beautiful day outside at Biscayne National Park in South Florida ©Sarah Reed | NPCA

INTERN CORNER | STACIE SCHULMAN

NPCA sincerely thanks our dedicated interns and fellows for their hard work and passionate commitment to America's national parks. This year in the Sun Coast region we've been grateful for the support of interns Kevin Ascencio, Natalie Hollander, Christopher Perse and Stacie Schulman. In his issue we're highlighting the contributions of Stacie who is currently continuing her fellowship with NPCA at our headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Stacie Schulman earned her B.S. in marine biology from Florida International University in the summer of 2018. During her senior year, she contemplated whether to go into

research or to explore opportunities in environmental policy. Luckily, NPCA helped her solidify her goals before graduation by offering her the marine fellow position for the Sun Coast region.

I look forward to working on more projects so I can continue to help protect our oceans and national parks.

— STACIE SCHULMAN



Throughout her fellowship, Stacie learned a lot about policy while investigating important issues for Florida's marine ecosystems and national parks. Stacie analyzed environmental impact statements, attended hearings and conferences on Capitol Hill, and lobbied for the protection of Florida's coral reefs in both Washington, D.C., and South Florida. Additionally, she wrote a lot: everything from fact sheets and comment letters covering issues as varied as the fisheries management plan in Biscayne National Park, and restoration plans that resulted from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Left: Stacie Schulman hiking the Makapu'u Lighthouse Trail in Waimanalo, Hawaii to see the Humpback whales that migrate to the islands in the winter to breed ©Stacie Schulman

Use of Personal Watercraft Threatens Gulf Islands National Seashore

Stacie Schulman

From white sand beaches and clear blue waters to dense maritime forests and historic forts, Gulf Islands National Seashore offers a wide range of incredible visitor experiences. Home to an abundance of wildlife, including bottlenose dolphins, manatees, sea turtles and close to 300 species of birds, the park attracts people from all over the world. However, the operation of personal watercraft (or “jet skis”) in the park presents an ongoing threat to these species and the ecosystems they depend on.

Over the past several decades, the National Park Service has documented a myriad of reasons why the use of personal watercraft within park boundaries is fundamentally incompatible with the protection of park resources and values. People often operate jet skis in shallow waters, risking collision with sea turtles and manatees and the uprooting of fragile seagrass beds that may take decades to recover, if they recover at all. Moreover, the use of personal watercraft generates loud, erratic noises that can harm nesting shorebirds, flushing them from their nesting colonies and resulting in reproductive losses. The high pitch sounds and intermittent changes in volume can also disrupt the natural soundscapes, such as the quiet and solitude often associated with national parks.



For years, NPCA has strongly opposed the use of personal watercraft in our national parks, including Gulf Islands National Seashore. Despite previous positions by the National Park Service in opposition to the use of personal watercraft at Gulf Islands, the Park Service now wants to increase their use in the park. The recently released Personal Watercraft Management Plan and draft environmental impact statement goes as far as proposing to decrease flat-wake zone distances and allow the operation of personal watercraft closer to shore in more of the park’s waters. Such a decision would be devastating to Gulf Islands, as it would increase disruptions to wildlife, habitat, natural resources and the visitor experience.

This fall, NPCA submitted detailed comments outlining exactly why the use of personal watercraft are not compatible with national park values and could actively damage park resources at Gulf Islands National Seashore (using much of the National Park Service’s own data!). Furthermore, we mobilized more than 6,400 of NPCA’s members and supporters to take action on the issue, letting the National Park Service know that there is strong visitor opposition to personal watercraft use. Thanks to all of you who took action to protect our national parks and the wildlife that call them home.

Above: Bottlenose Dolphins ©Gerald Marella | Dreamstime **Below:** Santa Rosa Island on the Gulf Islands National Seashore, FL ©Simon Crumpton | Alamy Stock



Turkey Point Expansion Plans on Hold, Biscayne National Park Still at Risk

Caroline McLaughlin

For years, NPCA has fought to protect Biscayne National Park and the surrounding environment from damage caused by both the current and future operation of Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant, owned and operated by Florida Power & Light (FPL). Located directly along Biscayne's shores, Turkey Point is unique in that it uses a system of unlined cooling canals to cool water from plant operations, rather than using cooling towers more commonly associated with nuclear power plants. For years, dense, hypersaline water laden with nutrients has seeped from the cooling canals directly into the underlying Biscayne Aquifer, contaminating the aquifer and threatening the drinking water supply for millions of South Floridians as well as the water quality in Biscayne National Park. Now under legal order to clean up the pollution, FPL's solution includes a controversial plan to decrease salinity in the cooling canals while extracting polluted waters from the aquifer. Whether or not these actions will be successful in addressing the full extent of pollution remains to be seen.

At the same time, FPL has sought approval to expand Turkey Point through the addition of two new nuclear reactors. The expansion would make it one of the largest nuclear-



generating facilities in the country. In 2018, after years of environmental analyses, public input and legal battles (including NPCA's unsuccessful challenge of the expansion), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) granted FPL the Combined Operating License needed for the expansion to move forward. However, there are still several hurdles FPL must clear before proceeding and, due to a confluence of complicating factors, it is looking increasingly likely that the expansion will never occur.

Now, FPL has made a move to extend the operating life of Turkey Point's two existing nuclear reactors, Units 3 & 4. Currently licensed to operate through 2033, FPL is seeking a 20-year license extension from the NRC that would allow these units, and the associated cooling canals, to operate through 2053. The NRC anticipates releasing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement in the

spring of 2019 that analyzes the environmental impacts of the relicensing.

Given the significant environmental damage already caused by the cooling canals and Turkey Point's vulnerability to the impacts of sea level rise, NPCA has serious concerns about subsequent license renewal. The environmental impacts associated with the future operation of the cooling canal system will be heavily dependent on FPL's ability to comply with current legal orders forcing them to clean up pollution emanating from the canals. As such, NPCA believes that FPL's compliance with these orders must be a condition of relicensing. Moreover, Turkey Point is highly susceptible to ever-increasing impacts of sea level rise and storm surge. Under the most optimistic scenario provided by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' projections, the plant and aspects of the cooling canals will be inundated by the year 2040—12 years before the end of the proposed reactor license extension. In the interest of protecting the health and integrity of Biscayne National Park, South Florida's limited water supplies and our valuable natural resources, these impacts and others must be analyzed and accounted for if relicensing plans are to move forward.

Above: View of Turkey Point Power Station from Biscayne National Park, FL ©Sandra Foyt | Alamy

Fighting to Protect Big Cypress from Oil Development

John Adornato III

NPCA and our allies are worried about the effects of oil and gas seismic testing and drilling on the endangered Florida panther habitat in Big Cypress National Preserve. When the Collier family deeded over their significant property holdings to create Big Cypress, they retained the subsurface mineral rights and continued to drill for oil in another part of the preserve. In 2015 Collier Resources Company submitted an application to explore the area for oil and gas reserves sufficient enough to justify additional drilling in the preserve, an application that National Park Service's (NPS) approved in 2016. Despite our unsuccessful legal challenge to that NPS permit, we continue to track these activities and work to document their negative impacts.

That vigilance includes monitoring the seismic testing.

Burnett Oil—working on behalf of Collier Resources—conducted seismic testing for several weeks during the dry seasons of 2017 and 2018. Through the images collected by NPS and the on-the-ground analysis conducted by our coalition's consultants, we observed significant damage to the fragile habitat as a result of the seismic testing. This damage is in direct violation of the company's state and federal permits. Unfortunately, neither NPS nor the Florida Department of Environmental Protection believe the damage is greater than anticipated. In fact, they stated as much in an October 2018 meeting where our coalition pressed the agencies' representatives to halt further damage until Burnett can demonstrate they can show they are able to fix the rutting and vegetation

impacts. The staff did not commit to requiring proof of Burnett's mitigation capabilities before allowing their continued access to these sensitive wetlands.

This denial of significant negative impact to the Florida panther's habitat will not



deter NPCA. We will continue to call for halting the seismic testing activities and will fight to ensure any damage done is adequately mitigated and the impaired area fully restored.

To view images and videos of trees being mowed down in the preserve, go to <https://www.npca.org/articles/1853-video-oil-trucks-mow-down-trees-at-national-preserve>.

Slow Progress in Protecting Biscayne's Fisheries

Caroline McLaughlin

In addition to its colorful coral reefs and palm-fringed islands, Biscayne National Park protects an abundance of fish species, often at different points in their life cycles. Species such as mutton snapper, hogfish and black grouper are ecologically and economically important, and are part of Biscayne's coral reef ecosystem that supports a vibrant recreational boating and fishing industry. Unfortunately, decades of overfishing, overuse, water pollution and climate change have taken their toll. Many of these species are severely threatened, and some are on the verge of collapse. If action isn't taken and fish populations and ecosystem health continue to decline, the National Park Service will have failed at its fundamental responsibility to protect our national parks in perpetuity for all Americans. Implementing a marine reserve and science-based fisheries management policies are key to protecting and restoring Biscayne's marine resources.

In 2015, the National Park Service approved a plan to create a no-fishing marine reserve in Biscayne to help protect the park's imperiled coral reef ecosystem. Unfortunately, plans to implement the marine reserve have been stalled due to strong congressional backlash and an absence of political will on the part of the current administration. While the marine reserve is on hold, alternate plans that may benefit Biscayne's fisheries are slowly creeping forward.

Biscayne National Park's Fishery Management Plan (FMP), finalized in 2014, aims to increase the average size and abundance of target fish species in the park by 20 percent and reduce marine habitat degradation through the creation of park-specific fisheries management regulations. The FMP lays out a menu of options to achieve these goals, including: decreasing minimum size limits and bag limits for target fish species, implementing or revising seasonal or spatial closures, prohibiting SCUBA spearfishing, eliminating the two-day lobster sport season, establishing coral reef protection areas, and gradually phasing out commercial fishing in the park. While all these options are currently on the table, the specific regulations have yet to be determined.

In close partnership with the state of Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Park Service is working to develop fisheries management regulations that would meet the goals of the FMP. To be officially implemented and enforced, the regulations must go through a state rulemaking process. This process includes a public comment period, public workshops and meetings, and final approval by Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Given the importance of this plan to the future of Biscayne's fisheries and overall health and sustainability, NPCA is closely tracking its progress.

NPCA is urging the National Park Service and FWC to develop regulations using a robust scientific analysis that is then made available to the public. The regulations must aim to increase the sustainability of Biscayne's critically important, but dwindling fish populations. Conserving Biscayne's fisheries will help protect biodiversity, provide recreational and economic opportunities, build ecosystem resiliency, and strengthen connections between our communities and maritime heritage. We must work together to protect Biscayne before it's too late.

Biscayne National Park
©Michael Patrick O'Neill | Alamy

Solving Florida's Water Crisis Through Everglades Restoration

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water from Lake Okeechobee south to Everglades National Park. The project was spearheaded by state leaders, who directed the South Florida Water Management District to expedite efforts to plan a reservoir to maximize ecosystem benefits on lands already in public ownership. State legislation that authorized this project planning stipulated that only land purchased from willing sellers could be used—resulting in an additional 500 acres purchased to add to the project footprint. In total, the storage capacity of the reservoir will reduce the harmful northern estuary discharges by 50% while delivering 200,000+ acrefeet of freshwater to the Southern Everglades each year.



Great Blue Heron in Everglades National Park, FL
©Howard Nevitt, Jr. | Dreamstime

GOOD NEWS

The EAA Reservoir was approved by Congress and signed by President Trump in late 2018

This plan can't move forward without funding, though—the federal government must fully fund CERP to ensure the EAA Reservoir and other critical restoration efforts can advance.

YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED TODAY!

Visit nps.gov/advocacy and join with thousands of NPCA members and supporters who have already asked President Trump and Congress to fully fund CERP with \$200M in federal appropriations this year. Fully funding restoration is the way to solve Florida's water crisis and save Everglades National Park.

NPCA PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION



Jacqueline Cruet

America’s national park idea is rooted in its people. The idea that the most scenic vistas and most ancient sites belong to all remains revolutionary. It is in this common ground, national parks, that a young nation finds its identity and is inextricably connected to its land and cultural history. This still holds true today—our national parks help us understand what it means to be American. These lands embody our ideals and hold our national memory.

For 100 years, NPCA’s members, supporters and partners have introduced people to their parks and the many ways to protect them. We work so that those not yet born will one day have access to these special places for recreation, inspiration, knowledge and joy.

Across Florida and into Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, NPCA’s regional partners make a positive impact in our parks and communities by working with NPCA staff to share park experiences and teach skills that open up the outdoors and highlight the critical roles citizens have in protecting public lands. With our strategic partners, NPCA introduced the beauty of our natural treasures and our shared cultural history to a new crop of urban youth and inspired them with a message of ownership, enjoyment, respect and responsibility for America’s national parks. In this year alone, NPCA’s

Sun Coast staff connected more than one thousand young people, veterans and families to their national parks and offered young citizens immersive park and civic engagement experiences.

Forging strong alliances among a new and increasingly engaged group of partners across the Sun Coast region, we’ve identified, developed, trained and mentored local youth, educators, veterans and military families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to become the next generation of citizen stewards for our national parks. Through a variety of events—boat rides, ranger-led tours, hikes, slough slogs, camping trips, marine data collection, beekeeping, Civic Voice workshops, etc.—program participants enthusiastically, and sometimes hesitantly, took risks, explored and absorbed new knowledge that informed their understanding of public lands.

Through structured and experiential activities, future stewards become aware of the scientific, economic and political complexities of ecosystems and national parks. Participants emerge from this program with a new appreciation for natural landscapes, a genuine understanding of parks’ significance and an increased confidence in their own ability to speak about national park protection to others, whether that other person be a grandparent,

a fellow student, a community leader or a state senator.

From July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018, NPCA:

- Worked with 20 Sun Coast regional partners and several national partners;
- Led 58 events that ranged from monitoring the Maritime Heritage Trail at Biscayne National Park and replacing the comfort stations for campers at Dry Tortugas National Park to building park benches at Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve;
- Introduced more than 1,000 people to their national parks; and
- Trained 50 park supporters to become effective park advocates through Civic Voice Workshops and meetings with decision makers.

NPCA’s Sun Coast team thanks our amazing partners for their support and unwavering commitment to raising awareness about the value of national parks and the need for national park protection through active citizenship. We continue to join our voices and enter into NPCA’s second century of park protection together with a view toward justice, equity, diversity and inclusion so that the national park idea continues to serve as a source of inspiration and reflection to all.

Above (Left to Right, Top to Bottom): Coral restoration work in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary ©DEEP | NPCA • Focus on Parks overnight at Everglades National Park ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA • Focus on Parks swamp walk in Everglades National Park ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA • Gen2050 service project at Crandon Park ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA • Gen2050 exploring Everglades National Park ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA • Gen2050 urban beekeepers ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA • Veterans service project at Dry Tortugas National Park ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA

RESTORE AMERICA'S PARKS

Descendant meets Congressman

Peri Frances,
Regional Council Member

On Florida's northeast coast lies Fort George Island. On this island, off of Heckscher Drive, by the entrance to the Mayport Ferry, there is a turn-off for a two-mile dirt road that leads to the Kingsley Plantation. If you've ever been to Jacksonville or Amelia Island, perhaps you've seen the sign and passed it. Or, you meant to check it out one day, but haven't yet. Or, you have been, but it's been a while.

It is a trip I have made dozens of times in my life as it's the home of my first known New World African ancestor Anna Kingsley, née Anta Madiguene N'diaye, and her husband Zephaniah Kingsley, who was a trader/planter and—at times—the plantation owner.

The Kingsley Plantation is a strikingly beautiful place with a very peculiar history. It is a sacred place to me, as it represents the often complex, painful and complicated story of African Americans in the Americas, and my own family's journey from enslavement to freedom. To me, it is as significant a landmark as Plymouth Rock or Ellis Island and should always be preserved and maintained for future generations. I go there several times a year, with college and university groups or with friends on beach trips. A few times I have been invited to speak as a descendant at events there. And, one time, I had the opportunity to spend the night in the slave quarters.

Out of all the times I have visited Kingsley, a trip I made this May was one of the most significant because it allowed me to give back in small portion to a place that means so much to me. NPCA and the Pew Charitable Trust co-hosted a tour of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve to bring attention to the \$11.6 billion repair backlog



at our national parks, and they invited me to be amongst the day's speakers. I was honored to be invited to add my personal story to the voices in support of legislation that would enhance parks as living classrooms for our nation's history and its ecosystems. What a rare

opportunity to speak on a panel before a sitting member of Congress, the current and previous superintendents of the Timucuan Preserve, representatives from Jacksonville's business community, and state and local lawmakers and to illustrate to them the personal impact the work they do has on the lives of regular citizens like myself.

At the event, I had a chance to meet and speak with U.S. Rep. John Rutherford, one of the sponsors of a bipartisan bill to address the park's repair backlog, \$4 million of which is at Kingsley Plantation. Rep. Rutherford is from the Jacksonville area and served as sheriff of Duval County before being elected to Congress. He remembered visiting Kingsley in his youth, but was clearly impacted by the history he heard and saw on his visit. In particular, he was moved by his interactions with one of the park rangers, Emily Palmer, who said she felt that her park ranger badge represents someone who protects history. As a former sheriff, Rep. Rutherford could relate to that.

I would say that we should all see ourselves as protectors of our country's fascinating and complex history. Visiting, conserving and contributing to our national parks is one important way to "wear the badge," and I am proud to be a part of such a worthy and meaningful effort. **#FIXOURPARKS**

Above: Peri Frances with Congressman Rutherford ©Ken McCray Photography **Below:** Restore Americas Park tour at Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve led by Park Ranger Emily Palmer. ©Ken McCray Photography



UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us to learn about and enjoy your national parks!



JANUARY 10-13, 2019
34th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference
Hawks Cay Resort
Duck Key, Florida

SPRING 2019
Tamiami Trail Ribbon Cutting

SPRING 2019
Palm Beach Speaker Series

APRIL 2-3, 2019
NPCA Centennial and 38th Annual "Salute to the Parks" Awards Gala
Washington, D.C.

APRIL 7-8, 2019
7th Annual Everglades Action Day
Tallahassee, FL

APRIL 20-28, 2019
National Parks Week partnership with The Mission Continues (TMC)

MAY 19, 2019
NPCA Founder's Day
Centennial Supper
Deering Estate, Miami FL

FALL 2019
NPCA's Regional Council Meeting and Park Excursion

Above: Barred Owl in Big Cypress National Preserve, FL ©Wilsilver77 | Dreamstime

For more information on these events, Contact suncoast@npca.org



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NPCA Sun Coast Regional Council Meeting 2018 Edition

Cheryl Swaby

The Sun Coast Regional Council converged within the welcome center of Big Cypress National Preserve for its annual spring meeting and park trip. It was a great time to visit this particular park unit as it had recently been recognized as an International Dark Sky Place by the International Dark-Sky Association. This designation reflects the preserve staff's dedication to protecting the natural night sky, allowing visitors to experience a starry night free of sources of light pollution.

Left: Night sky in Big Cypress National Preserve ©NPS **Right:** Sun Coast regional council spring meeting at Big Cypress visitors center ©Sarah Reed | NPCA

The council meeting started off with a welcome from ranger Lisa Andrews, the park's outreach and education coordinator. She provided the group with updates on recent preserve activities.

Then, NPCA staff—including the Sun Coast team and Vice President of Government Affairs, Kristen Brengel—briefed the council members on NPCA's work in the parks of South Florida. The Regional Council members and partners weighed in on some of the updates, including voicing concerns about the second bridge lift on Tamiami Trail, asking questions about NPCA's goals for its centennial, and discussing future opportunities for collaborations with the Sun Coast team.



The sunset, a lava lamp of slowly mixing warm colors, provided the perfect backdrop to the meeting's conclusion. We saw manatees breaching for breaths and alligators darting into the water. Everything seemed new and alive. Even the stars appeared to be getting closer as they pulsed in the dark night sky.

Next year, NPCA will celebrate its centennial. As we embrace the next century of park advocacy, we'll continue to serve our parks and their communities, collectively raising our voices on behalf of our national parks and local green spaces.



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