



General Management Plan Update

Dear Friends,

I want to express my sincere appreciation for your dedication to and interest in the future of Biscayne National Park. We have been working for more than a decade in developing a general management plan for Biscayne National Park and you have provided us with a wealth of information and input that is heartfelt and shows a deep sense of park stewardship. Biscayne National Park is your park and we are listening to your concerns and working with you to ensure the park is managed as best as it possibly can be for today and the tomorrows to follow. This newsletter describes your most frequent comments on the supplemental draft plan and the next steps in the process.

Most recently we received your thoughts about two new alternatives (6 and 7). The new alternatives were developed in consultation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. We received numerous comments and requests for further clarification about the size, location, and need for a potential special recreation zone, number of fishing permits in the special recreation zone, education and law enforcement, visitor access and safety, and the impacts to fishers and the local economy. This newsletter briefly summarizes your comments on these concerns and provides some additional clarification. A full summary of all public comments will follow as part of the final general management plan.

A number of you requested the chance for additional civic engagement in the development of this plan. We also have new information to share on the alternatives. Therefore, we would like to invite you to attend one of our focused public workshops this September for more specific input. The workshops will be an opportunity to express your thoughts comparing alternatives 4, 6, and 7, especially since alternative 7 did not receive many comments in the last public review. Please visit http://parkplanning.nps.gov/BISC_GMP to review those alternatives in the supplemental draft general management plan and to submit comments online. The public comment period is open for 30 days.

We look forward to hearing your ideas and opinions and working with you as we complete this important step of the planning effort and completing the general management plan. Thank you for your continued participation and interest in shaping the future of Biscayne National Park.
Sincerely,

Brian Carlstrom
Superintendent of Biscayne National Park



YOU ARE INVITED TO A PUBLIC WORKSHOP

All interested parties are invited to attend any of the three identical public workshops as follows:

**Monday, September 22,
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Pioneer Florida Museum,
826 South Krome Avenue,
Florida City, FL 33034

**Tuesday, September 23,
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Newman Alumni Center,
University of Miami, 6200 San Amaro Drive,
Coral Gables, FL 33146

**Wednesday, September 24,
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Holiday Inn Key Largo,
99701 Overseas Highway,
Key Largo, FL 33037

General Management Plan

The National Park Service uses general management plans to define zoning in the parks and guide management of park resources and how visitors interact with these resources. Biscayne National Park issued a draft plan in 2011, a

supplemental draft plan with two new alternatives (6 and 7) in 2013, and is currently seeking additional public comment on alternatives 4, 6, and 7.

Alternatives Under Consideration

Several alternatives included a zone specifically focused on the reefs in the southeast corner of the park. The purpose of each distinctive reef zone is to provide visitors with the opportunity to experience a healthy, natural, and ecologically intact reef community. Three alternatives currently under consideration propose different approaches to achieve this purpose:

- **Alternative 4** proposes the marine reserve zone (10,522 acres) where no commercial or recreational fishing occurs and snorkeling and diving activities would be allowed.
- **Alternative 6** proposes the special recreation zone (14,585 acres) where some types of fishing would be prohibited, recreational fishing would be by special permit, and snorkeling and diving activities would be allowed.
- **Alternative 7** proposes a special recreation zone in the same size, shape, and location as alternative 6; the same recreational fishing, snorkeling, and diving activities proposed in alternative 6 would apply, yet rather than an additional permit, recreational fishing would be open October through May and closed June through September.



Your Ideas, Thoughts, and Concerns

Three public meetings on the supplemental draft general management plan (supplemental draft plan), held in December 2013, were attended by approximately 190 individuals. A number of subsequent meetings were conducted with various organizations and members of the public in spring 2014. More than 18,000 correspondences, including form letters, were received, which provided a wide range of comments on the plan indicating there is great interest in the future of the park. As with the draft plan, the majority of the comments on the supplemental draft plan supported an alternative that contained a no-take marine reserve zone; specifically alternative 4.

The following comments highlight some of the most frequently heard public concerns on the supplemental draft plan.

Special Recreation Zone and Marine Reserve Zone

Commenters expressed confusion regarding the purpose of the special recreation zone, its relationship to the marine reserve zone, and how they differ. Commenters questioned the scientific basis of the special recreation zone compared to published literature on the effectiveness of the no-take marine protected zone, the effectiveness of a special

recreation zone in reaching the stated goals, the actual science and methods used in analysis, and/or the accuracy of such data. Other commenters were concerned that the special recreation zone concept (allowing fishing by permit) is untested and noted that marine reserves are a scientifically tested, efficient, and cost-effective method of protecting and enhancing coral reef ecosystems. Commenters requested more information on specific metrics that would trigger adaptive management changes in the special recreation zone or suggested the park use more specific fishery regulations such as bag limits. Some commenters suggested variations to zones including changing boundaries, dividing the special recreation zone or the marine reserve zone into smaller segments with varying degrees of restriction on visitor activities and fish harvest, and seasonally restricting fishing during spawning periods around closed areas.

The final general management plan / environmental impact statement (final plan) will include a thorough description of the scientific basis for the management actions proposed in each of the alternatives, specifically focusing on the size, shape, location, and purpose of the marine reserve zone and special recreation zone. This will also be a major focus of the September workshops.

Seasonal Closure

Commenters expressed support and opposition to the seasonal fishing closure proposed in alternative 7. A few commenters suggested variations of the seasonal fishing closure such as adjusting the months of closure to times of the year when fishing is less popular. Overall, however, we received very few comments on alternative 7. We would appreciate getting feedback during the workshops or the public comment period on alternative 7 and the strategy and effectiveness of a seasonal closure.

Anchoring and Safety

Both support and opposition were expressed regarding the provision to prohibit anchoring in the special recreation zone and install additional mooring buoys as recommended by some alternatives. Those in opposition voiced concern that it would make fishing less effective, increase conflicts between visitors using the same buoy, affect divers' safety, decrease access to all areas of the reef, and be difficult to implement due to costs. Commenters suggested that the prohibition on anchoring be phased in only as the mooring buoys are installed and for the park to complete its mooring buoy and marker plan. The National Park Service is anticipating these changes for the final plan.

Special Activity License

The majority of commenters on alternative 6 opposed the special recreation zone, particularly related to the initial number of special activity licenses to be issued and the proposed lottery system to issue annual permits to vessels. Some commenters opposed paying any fee and/or obtaining any additional license for fishing in the special recreation zone. Some commenters suggested that permits be issued to individuals rather than vessels, while other commenters supported the permit by vessel strategy. Some commenters also expressed concern that there was no explicit provision to allow vessels to transit the special recreation zone with fish on board that had been caught outside special recreation zone waters. Commenters also suggested that permits be issued on a daily, weekly, monthly, or seasonal basis, either in lieu of or in addition to, annual permits to better accommodate the less-frequent angler. The National Park Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission are currently revisiting the analysis that was used to determine the number and types of special activity licenses that would be issued for the special recreation zone. This would be reflected in the final plan and also discussed in detail at the September workshops.

Education and Law Enforcement

Commenters expressed concern about damage to park resources caused by visitors, with commenters suggesting either increased enforcement or revisions to education or law enforcement activities to address these impacts. The National Park Service agrees with the need for additional law enforcement to address a number of these issues, and the final plan will include a recommendation for additional law enforcement officers.

Spearfishing

Some commenters support the spearfishing prohibition citing the destructive practices of spearfishing on targeted species and the reef ecosystem. Other commenters support the continuation of spearfishing as a legitimate and highly

selective harvest method and an effective method for removing invasive lionfish. There were also comments that the specific location of the special recreation zone eliminates spearfishing opportunities in a premier spearfishing destination and an easily accessible shallow reef system that provides a good place to teach spearfishing to novices. Parkwide restrictions on spearfishing gear are recommended in the fishery management plan. The general management plan proposes elimination of spearfishing in the marine reserve zone or special recreation zone and such action will be reconsidered in the final plan.

Economic Impact

Commenters voiced concern that the visitor use restriction proposed for the special recreation zone would result in socioeconomic impacts to related industries (namely fishing, boating, and diving businesses). Commenters noted that these impacts could have local, regional, and statewide consequences on the tax base, property values, job loss, school funding, and other economic indicators. A detailed socioeconomic study would be provided to inform any new regulations to implement the final plan.

Relationship between General Management Plan and Fishery Management Plan

Some commenters expressed confusion about how the special recreation zone would fit with the park's fishery management plan, which was completed in July 2014 and identifies a number of potential management actions the park intends to pursue in the future related to improving fishery resources in the entire park. Key elements of the fishery management plan and the distinction between the two plans will be discussed further in the final plan.

Public Involvement

Commenters suggested that a more formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement should have been used to develop alternatives 6 and 7. Some commenters wanted more engagement with commercial interests, some with scientific interests, and some with conservation interests. Some commenters requested additional public involvement. It is due to many of these comments that the National Park Service is holding these additional public workshops.

New Information

Since issuance of the supplemental draft plan in 2013, the park has received new information on the following:

- habitat availability for reef fish in the special recreation zone
- effectiveness of marine reserves in Florida on reef fish and stony coral
- effectiveness of seasonal closures in many different areas

Detailed information will be made available at the public workshops.

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FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
PERMIT NO. G-83

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300

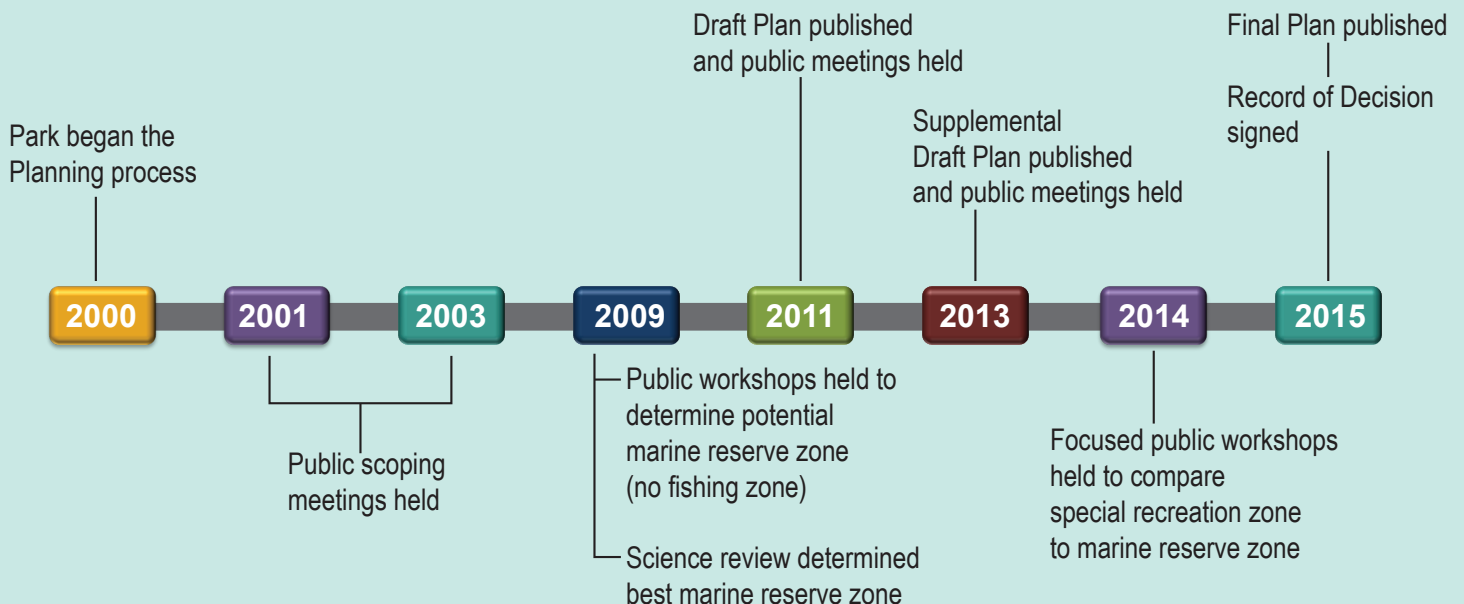


How to Join the Park's E-mail List

If you would like to join the park's e-mail list, or remove your name from the e-mail or mailing list, please send an e-mail to BISC_Mailing_List@nps.gov. Please use this e-mail address **only** for mailing list inquiries—not for comments on this plan because they cannot be accepted in e-mail format.

What's Next?

Following completion of the focused public workshops, we will finalize the plan and publish a notice of availability of the *Biscayne National Park Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* in the *Federal Register*.



Thank you for your continued interest in Biscayne National Park!