



Final General Management Plan Update

Dear Friends of Biscayne National Park,

Biscayne National Park announces the release of its Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. I want to express my sincere appreciation for your interest and support in the development of this plan. It is the culmination of a great deal of time, energy, and input from members of the public, other agencies and the National Park Service. This final general management plan provides comprehensive guidance for perpetuating natural systems, preserving cultural resources and providing opportunities for high-quality visitor experiences. Its purpose is to decide how the National Park Service can best fulfill Biscayne National Park's mission, maintain its significance, and protect its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

During the past fourteen years the National Park Service held over 22 public workshops and received more than 43,000 public comments. These comments conveyed the desire for action to be taken to restore the coral reef ecosystem and improve the visitor experience of the park. The final plan proposes Alternative 8, a hybrid of previous plan alternatives. It adopts the no fishing marine reserve zone in Alternative 4 and the other management zones described in Alternative 6. The marine reserve zone will be the primary tool in a suite of techniques used to improve the park's coral reef ecosystem and provide visitors with the opportunity to experience a natural, healthy reef with larger and more numerous fish. It is also anticipated to create the potential for a spillover effect, improving fishing experiences in surrounding areas.

Continued public involvement is critical to the success of park management actions. The park worked and continues to work cooperatively with partner agencies, especially the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service, and local agencies.

Your input was instrumental in the planning process. The National Park Service values the public's interest in Biscayne National Park, and we look forward to implementing the plan with your support and collaboration.

Sincerely,

Brian Carlstrom
Superintendent of Biscayne National Park



HOW TO OBTAIN A COPY

The Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement is available as follows:

DOWNLOAD

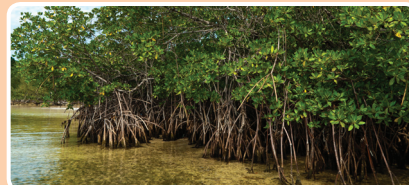
www.parkplanning.nps.gov/bisc_gmp

LIMITED NUMBER OF CD AND PRINTED COPIES

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Homestead, FL 33033

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email us at bisc_planning@nps.gov
or call us at (305) 230-1144



General Management Plan

General management plans guide future park management actions in order to achieve the park's mission of resource preservation and protection for the education, recreation and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Recent science indicates park reefs are degraded due to coral bleaching events and depleted fish populations. Living coral cover and abundance and size of reef fish have dramatically declined, as shown by peer-reviewed scientific studies. The public expressed similar concerns about reef conditions and conveyed the desire for action to be taken to improve the reef ecosystem and visitor experience.

The final plan is part of the park's responsible management of the marine ecosystem and visitor experience and was crafted with intensive public involvement. It is a hybrid of previous plan alternatives and adopts the no-fishing marine reserve zone in Alternative 4 with other management zones described in Alternative 6.

Of the park's 173,904 acres, the marine reserve zone will set aside 10,502 acres (about 6%) of the park's waters and about 30% of the park's reef area in order to restore the overall reef ecosystem and provide visitors who snorkel and dive with the opportunity to experience healthy and natural coral reefs with larger and more numerous fish.

Throughout the planning process, the park worked and will continue to work cooperatively with partner agencies, especially the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service and other local agencies.

Marine Reserve

A marine reserve zone is expected to result in a healthier reef with larger, more numerous fish for visitors to enjoy while snorkeling and diving. Over time the zone is expected to provide a spillover effect with larger fish leaving the zone and providing better fishing experiences in surrounding areas.

The National Park Service carefully considers science and policy in all decisions to restrict visitor activities. Scientists have been recommending the implementation of a marine reserve within the park for more than fifteen years. Marine reserves have been shown in numerous scientific studies to be effective at not only providing habitat and ecosystem preservation but also improving the size and quantity of reef fish.

Similar marine reserves both worldwide and locally have yielded positive results, including Dry Tortugas National Park and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Management of the marine reserve zone will utilize the best available reef management science.

While public use of nearly 90% of the park will remain the same and 70% of the reefs will remain open to fishing, this marine reserve zone is an investment with lasting returns for visitors and the local economy.

Extensive Outreach Efforts

The National Park Service's fourteen year planning effort included more than 1,000 participants during 22 public meetings and workshops, and the consideration of more than 43,000 unique public comments. Over 90% of comments supported a marine reserve in the three rounds of public comment periods (2011, 2013 and 2014). This conveyed a clear desire for something to be done to improve the coral ecosystem and visitor experience.

In 2009, the park conducted three public workshops to determine the size, shape and location of a marine reserve zone. These recommendations then underwent a science review with NOAA Fisheries Service, the University of Miami, and the National Park Service to rate the public-submitted marine reserve zone designs on their effectiveness towards reaching zone goals. The scientists' recommendations, along with public comments, guided the proposed marine reserve zone.

The park increased outreach efforts with elected officials, organizations, and other stakeholders throughout the plan's development. In December 2014, Miami-Dade County commissioners unanimously passed a resolution supporting the establishment of a marine reserve in the park.

Civic Engagement Shaped the Plan

Changes were incorporated into the plan in direct response to public and government agency comments.

The park heard a great need for increased education and enforcement. The plan calls for increased education and emphasizes our current Boater Education Class and Fisheries Awareness Class. The plan also calls for additional law enforcement, pending funding.

The park will phase in mooring buoys rather than implement an immediate anchoring ban within the marine reserve zone.

A no-anchor, limited-access zone at Legare Anchorage would be reduced to 756 acres and less than a third of its current size, expanding boater access in this area. Upgrades in GPS technology allow for the reduced size of this anchorage while still protecting sensitive resources.

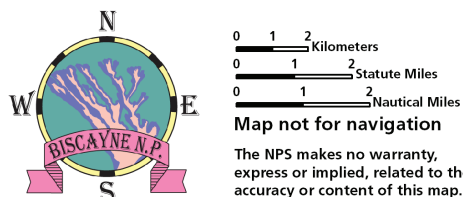
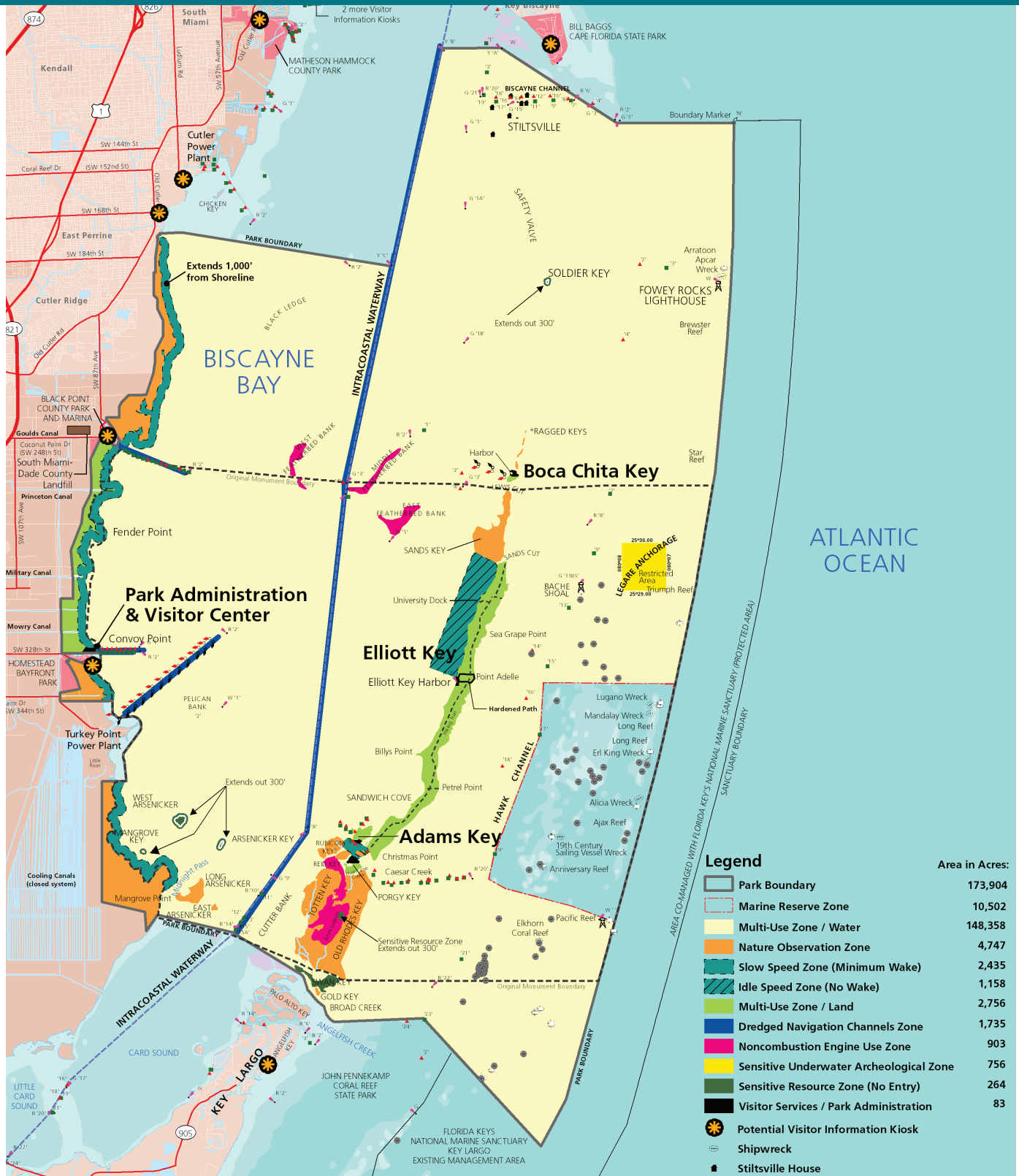
A single slow speed zone in the shallow waters along the mainland shoreline will benefit vital fish nursery habitat, manatees and paddler and angler safety.

Featherbed Bank will be open only to non-combustion engines in order to protect vital fish nursery habitat.

Marker and zoning names will be consistent with state and county names.

Sensitive resource zones will protect nesting water birds and make the park's management of these colonies consistent with State of Florida recommendations.

Map - Alternative 8



Note 1: Existing conditions and some features such as the locations of shoals, reefs, and shallow coral areas, may be considered unchanged.

Note 2: To show visually, the size of zone colors have been enlarged in certain areas.

Note 3: Some areas in the Park Boundary are not NPS owned but do not appear at this map scale. Zoning shown would not apply to non NPS lands unless they were acquired from a willing seller.

*RAGGED KEYS #2, #3, and #5 are Private Properties

Next Steps

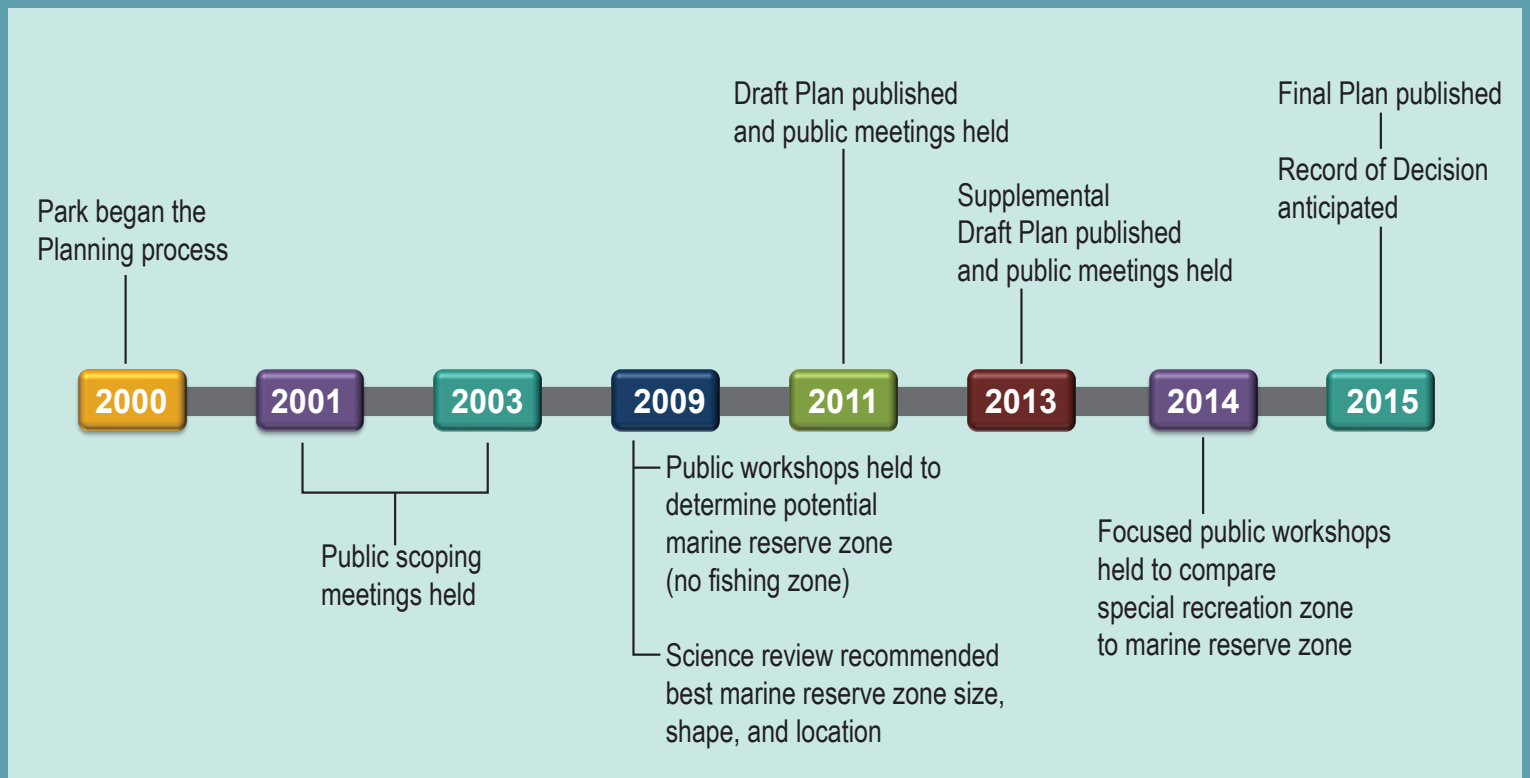
The Record of Decision could be signed no sooner than 30 days after the June 5th release of the final plan. This will allow the park to begin operating under the new plan and implement a number of elements of Alternative 8.

The plan will be gradually implemented over the next few years depending on available funding and staffing.

Implementation of the marine reserve zone will occur after a special park regulation is issued. The regulation will define the various aspects and requirements of visitor access within the zone.

Continued public involvement is critical to the success of park management actions. The park worked and continues to work cooperatively with partner agencies, especially the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service.

General Management Plan Timeline



Staying Updated

For more information about Biscayne National Park please visit the park website at www.nps.gov/bisc or follow the park on Facebook at www.facebook.com/biscaynenps, Twitter at www.twitter.com/biscaynenps or Instagram at www.instagram.com/biscaynenps.

Thank you for your continued interest in Biscayne National Park!



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