

Show as folks walk in the door

MARK

"Welcome and thanks for spending your valuable time sharing your comments on this important project"

Open House Objectives

- Provide information about the plan for mooring buoys and markers within the park
- Provide the public opportunity to discuss project with NPS staff
- Obtain your comments regarding the proposed actions and environmental impacts

MARK –

“tonight’s objectives are to...”

WANTED: LIONFISH SIGHTINGS AND/OR CAPTURES



This non-native species is taking over our waters. We need you to help keep the population under control!



- **Human safety concerns: Fins contain venomous spines**
- **Ecological concerns: Lionfish are voracious predators, are competing with native fish**

How can you help?

1. Remove any lionfish you observe (use nets, spears etc., and avoid contact with the venomous fin spines)
2. Report your sightings and captures to Biscayne National Park (786-335-3649 or vanessa_mcdonough@nps.gov). In your report, please include:
 - Your name and contact information
 - The location of the sighting/capture (provide GPS coordinates if possible)
 - The date of sighting/capture
 - The number of lionfish seen/removed
3. Never release aquarium species into the ocean, and if you happen to catch a lionfish on hook-and-line, do not put it back in the ocean.

ELSA: Before we begin speaking about mooring buoys, let's talk about a current and very urgent threat. Lionfish are just beginning to invade park waters. They've been found all over the park, including the bay, although they seem to like structures. We're asking you to please safely capture and report the lionfish, and please don't release lionfish. There's a lot of information on this slide so we have copies of it to hand out.

Tonight's Topics

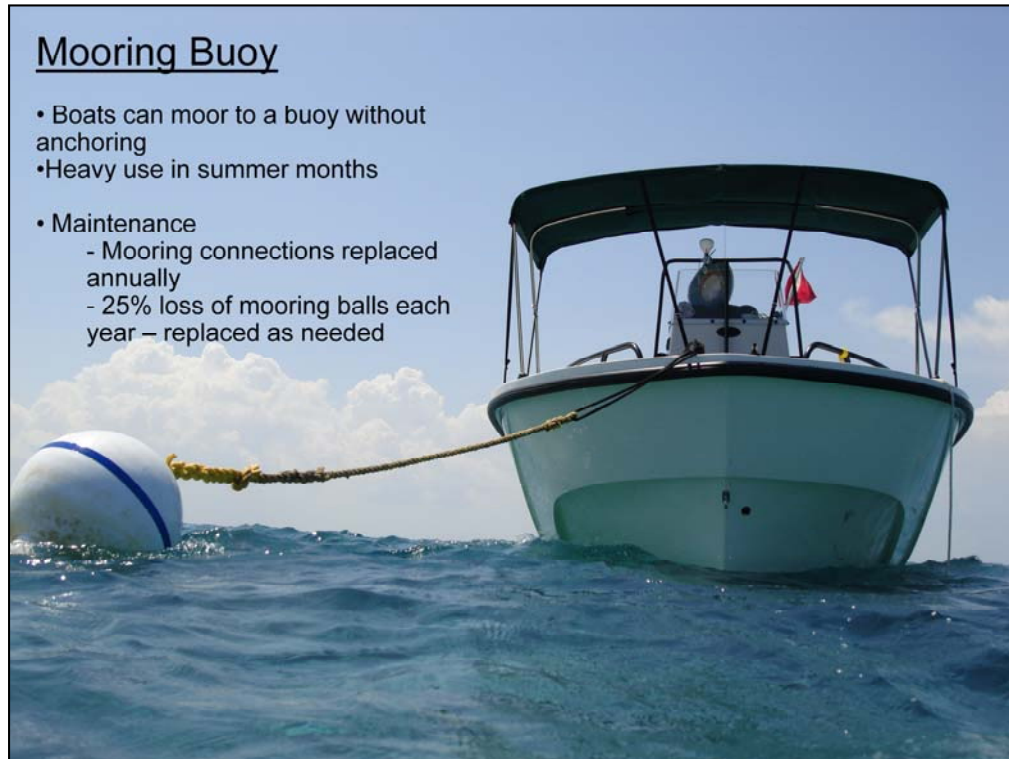
- Types of buoys and markers
- Plan objectives
- Alternatives in the plan
- Environmental impacts from alternatives
- Next steps and schedule
- How to provide comments

ELSA–

“Tonight we will be presenting to you...”

[summarize slide]

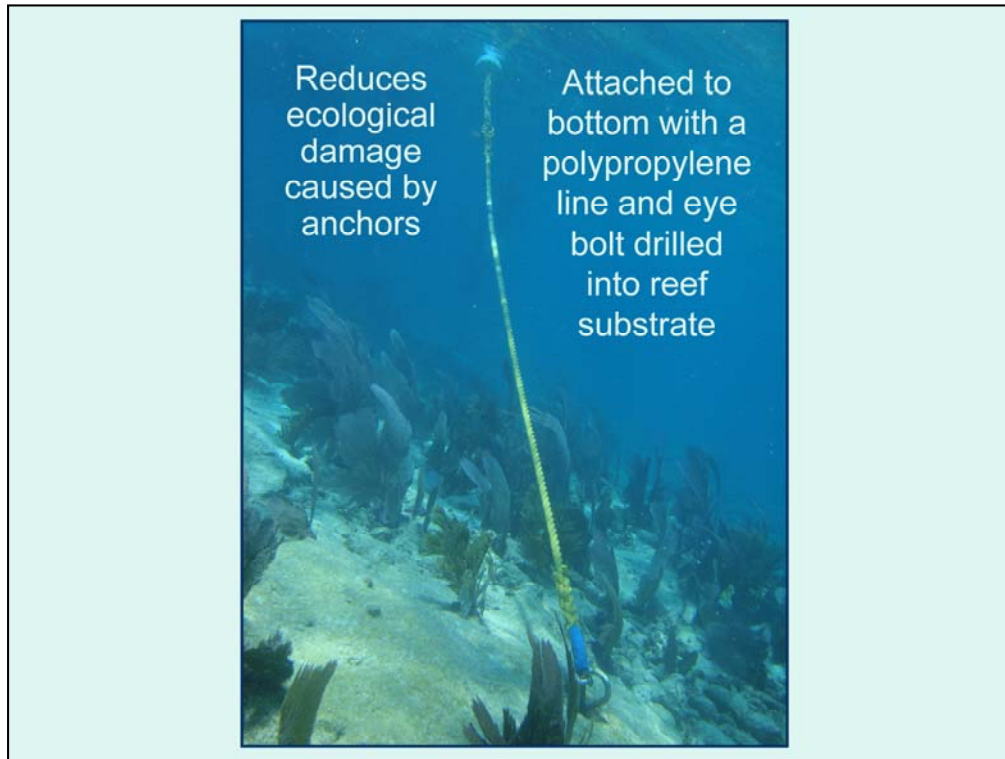
“We hope you will offer us other alternatives and issues to consider in the plan”



ELSA–

“Mooring buoys are just that – you can moor your boat to a buoy instead of using an anchor.”

“They have to be replaced periodically.”



ELSA—

“this is how mooring buoys are fastened to the sea bottom. We choose sites to minimize damage.”

3 kinds of markers

Informational Markers

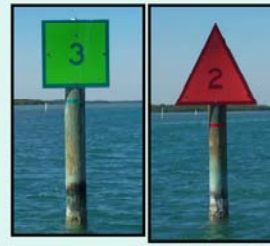
Identify hazards and relate information

Regulatory Markers

Indicate slow and no wake zones, exclusion zones, and other regulations

Navigational Markers

Indicate navigational routes such as channels



ELSA—

“Informational markers are there to tell boaters about possible hazards in the water or other kinds of messages that are not regulations. Regulatory markers let boaters know about special rules in the area, such as no wake zones. Navigational markers let boaters know about navigation routes such as channels.

Channels in Park where ATONs managed by others

- **USCG:** Intracoastal Waterway, Hawk, Biscayne, Pacific Reef
- **Miami-Dade County:** Black Point, Homestead Bayfront, Broad Creek
- **FPL:** Turkey Point Channel



ELSA—

Many of the channels in the park are managed by other entities. The Coast Guard maintains..."

Channels in Park managed by NPS

- Boca Chita Channel
- East Featherbed Cut
- Caesar Creek



Boca Chita harbor

ELSA—

The National Park Service maintains the private Aids to Navigation in ...”

Plan Objectives

- Visitor Experience
 - Provide a variety of opportunities to easily secure a boat using mooring buoys
 - Expand Maritime Heritage Trail
 - Provide safer access to reefs for recreational purposes and reef preservation
 - Reduce overcrowding in some areas



ELSA

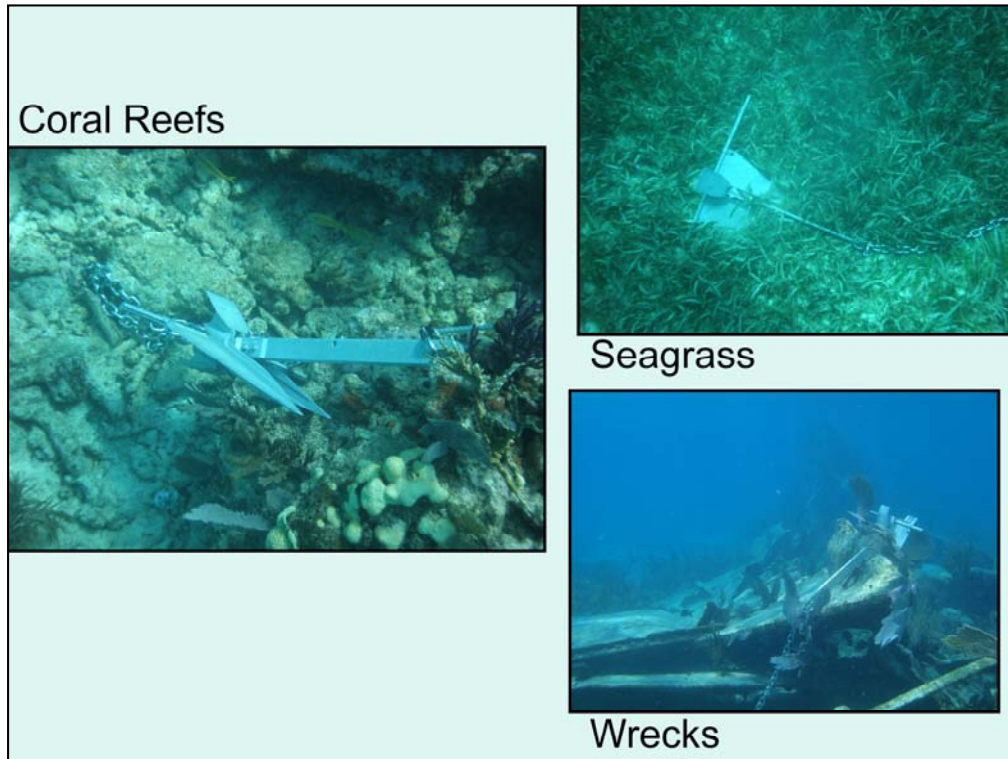
“Here’s what we set out to do with this plan. We wanted to provide ways to easily and safely secure boats, expand the popular Maritime Heritage Trail, provide safer access to reefs, and reduce the overcrowding that happens in some areas. In case you are not familiar with the Maritime Heritage Trail, it currently consists of shipwrecks such as the Mandalay, with the locations marked on the park map, that are popular for snorklers and divers.”

Plan Objectives

- Natural and cultural resources
 - Reduce number of vessel groundings through the use of markers
 - Reduce disturbance to wildlife by marking closed areas
 - Use mooring buoys to reduce anchor damage

ELSA

“By increasing the number of markers in the park, we’re trying to prevent vessel groundings, which we hope will reduce damage to corals, seagrasses, and shipwrecks and submerged shell middens. It’s a lot better to prevent vessel groundings than to try and restore these areas. We’re also hoping to reduce disturbance to wildlife and reduce anchor damage to seagrasses, corals, and shipwrecks through the use of mooring buoys.



ELSA

“It is hard to quantify or take a photo of anchor damage. Here are staged examples of anchors posing threats to corals, seagrass, and shipwrecks. If you were to pull on any of these anchors you could damage these resources.”

Alternative A

No action – continue current management

- NPS would continue to manage markers and buoys on case by case basis
- Only three shipwrecks in Maritime Heritage Trail have mooring buoys
- ~20 mooring buoys in coral areas, none in seagrass areas
- Overcrowding near Stiltsville and in Sands Cut
- Anchoring allowed among mooring buoys

ELSA

“We are proposing two alternatives, but we could add more depending on your input. We will start with the no-action alternative for comparison purposes, which is to continue the current management. In this case...

Current condition – mooring buoys

- Only 1 boat may moor to a buoy at a given time
- Currently, once all buoys are occupied, anchors may be used



ELSA

“The existing rules for mooring buoy use are...” [READ SLIDE]

“Wrecks with mooring buoys include the Mandalay, Lugano, and 19th Century Sailing Vessel”

“Reefs with buoys include the Shark, Anniversary, Rocky, Bache Shoal, Schooner.”

Current condition of Markers

- Inspected annually
- Cleaned, repaired, and replaced as needed
 - Navigational markers take 24-48 hours to repair or replace
 - Informational markers take up to 30 days

ELSA

“Under current management, we inspect the markers that we maintain annually, and clean and repair them as needed.”

Current condition – Maritime Heritage Trail

- Three wrecks, 2 mooring buoys each
- Three wrecks without buoys
- No submerged interpretive markers
- No handouts, dive cards, or other info as you snorkel or dive



Diving the *Alicia* wreck

ELSA

“Currently, all the Maritime Heritage Trail sites are shipwrecks. Only three have mooring buoys. Other than locations, and a bit of information on our website, the park does not offer any on-site information or handouts.”

Current condition – overcrowding

- Near Stiltsville
- Sands Cut
- University Dock



ELSA

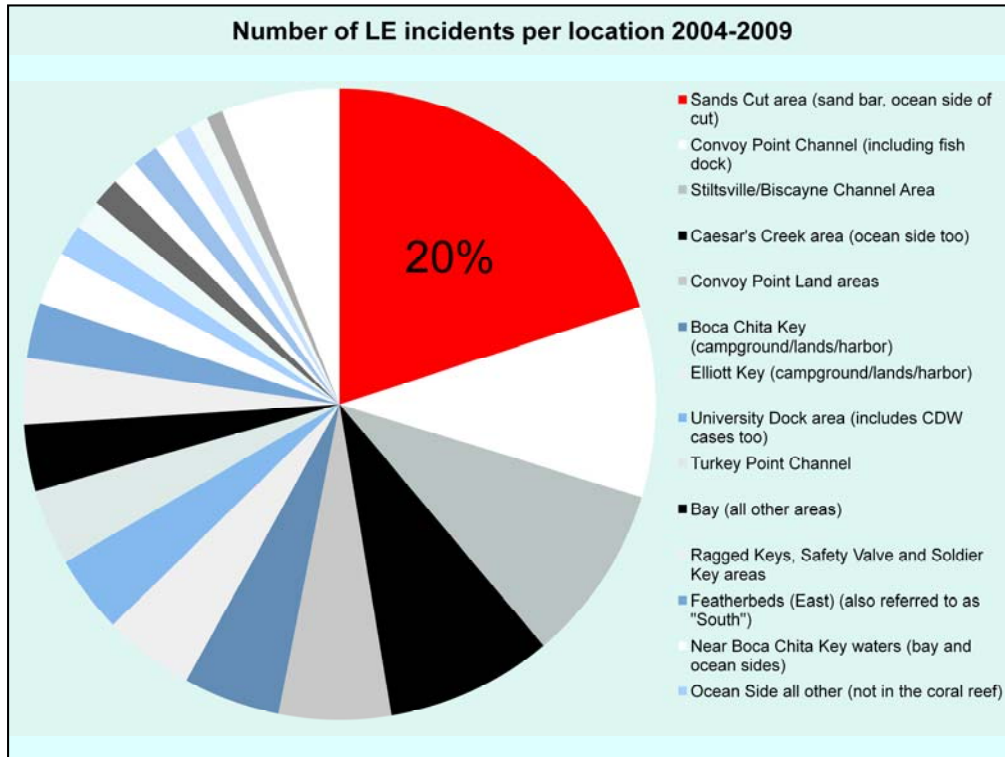
“There are three areas where we know we have overcrowding conditions, especially on weekends and holidays. Biscayne Channel near Stiltsville, Sands Cut, and University Dock.”

Types of LE incidents at Sands Cut

- Boating under the influence
- Disorderly conduct/public intoxication
- Controlled substance possession
- Minors in possession of alcohol
- Medicals
- Littering
- Vessel accidents (crash)
- Soundscape violations
- Assault and battery

ELSA

Read slide



ELSA

20% of all incidents that law enforcement rangers respond to within Biscayne National Park are at Sands Cut, a very small area. This means they are unavailable to respond to other kinds of violations or emergencies in other parts of the park. Furthermore, it takes a minimum of 23 minutes for rangers to respond to Sands Cut, and often they cannot access the boat in question due to overcrowding. We are very concerned about visitor safety in this area.

Current condition – seagrass beds

- Many shallow seagrass beds lack a sufficient number of markers
- ~200 reported vessel groundings in seagrass per year
- Recent settlements range from \$65,000-\$350,000
 - Settlements cover response, damage assessment, planning, restoration, and monitoring



ELSA

“We hope the plan can offer some help to the park’s seagrass beds because they are in serious need of it as you can see here. Boaters may not realize they are headed towards a dangerously shallow areas and markers may help that. Although we get about 200 reported groundings in seagrass each year, we know there are many more that go unreported. When we are able to identify the responsible party – and we aren’t always able to do so – we try to reach a settlement with them to cover the park’s expenses in assessing, restoring, and monitoring the restored area. Recently the ranges have been from the tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Seagrass beds also suffer from anchor damage, but it is very hard to quantify anchor damage. We instead try to prevent anchor damage through boater education.”

Current condition – coral reefs

- Fewer than 10 grounding cases reported per year
- Restoration very expensive
 - costs ~ \$6,000/day for contractor
 - more expensive in cost and ecology because reefs are slow-growing
 - \$10,000-\$1 million settlement range
- Reef vessel groundings sometimes also damage historical shipwrecks
 - cannot be restored



Reef damage by boat

ELSA

“While there are fewer reported cases of vessel grounding on coral reefs, they are much more serious in terms of ecological cost and financial cost to restore. It costs \$6000/day for a contractor to restore a coral reef, so settlements can reach as high as a million dollars. And even after restoration these sites are not as good as they were before the grounding, because coral is so slow-growing, inches a year. And when a modern vessel grounds on a historic shipwreck... there is no method to restore a historic shipwreck, it is damaged forever.”

Current condition – closed areas

- No closed marine areas marked (ex. Arsenicker, Legare Anchorage)
- Approaching the closed islands could disturb nesting wildlife



ELSA

“Although some areas like the Arsenickers are closed, there are currently no markers to delineate the closure. This is a concern because approaching boats could disturb nesting and roosting wildlife.”

Alternative B – The Plan

- Address immediate needs:
 - Identify and mark heavily impacted shallow areas
 - Add, remove, and/or relocate markers as currently needed
 - Install informational markers for closed areas
 - Buoy installation
 - Formalize Maritime Heritage Trail
- Adaptive Management

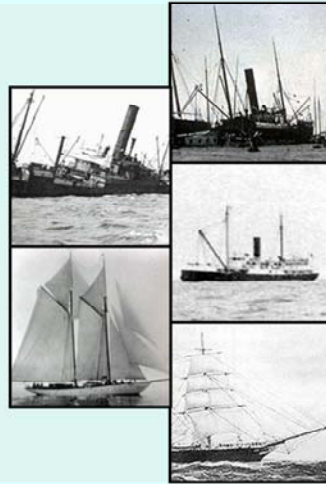
ELSA

“The other alternative is the proposed plan. I’ll go through some proposed site-specific actions and our adaptive management proposal. Here are some of the proposed actions.”

READ SLIDE

Maritime Heritage Trail

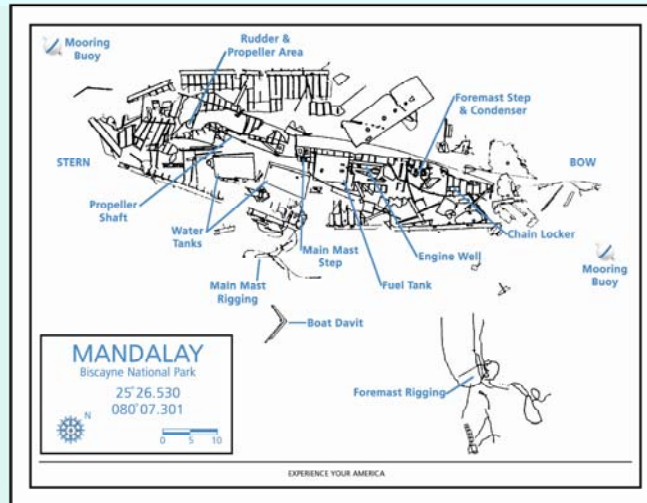
- Criteria for inclusion such as no portable artifacts
- Submerged resources other than shipwrecks
- Establish number of mooring buoys per trail site
- Establish no-anchor zones
- Install underwater interpretive panels
- Install mooring buoys at other 3 wrecks



ELSA

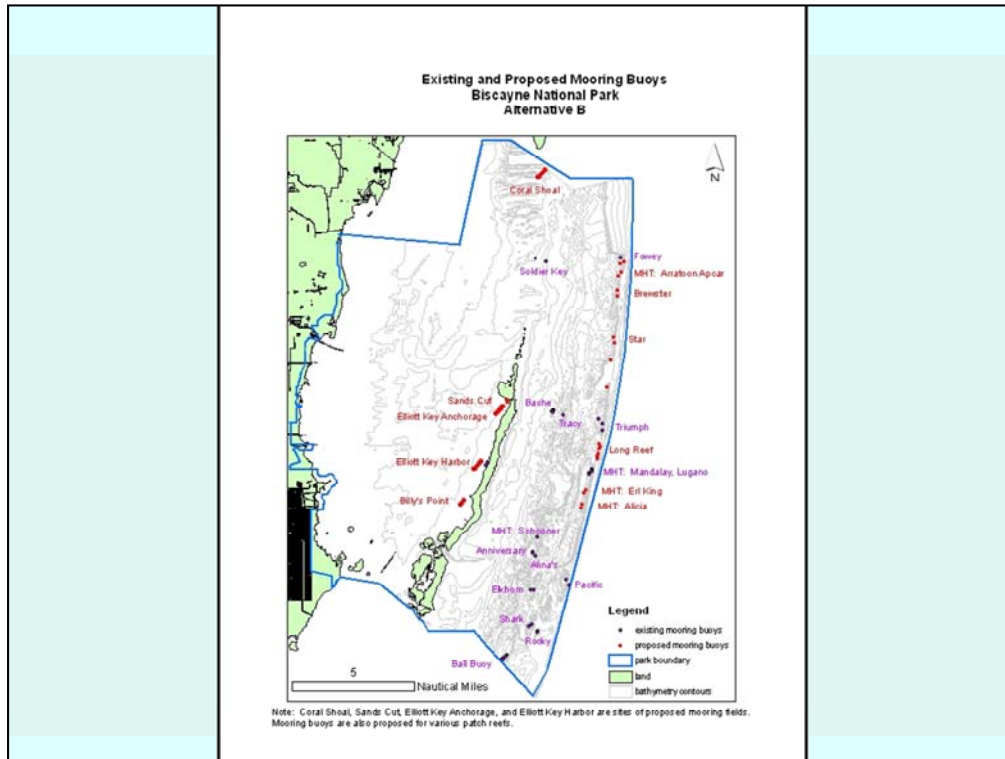
“We’re proposing to formalize the Maritime Heritage Trail. We don’t want people to take things like brass fittings from shipwrecks, so wrecks with portable artifacts probably wouldn’t be considered for inclusion. But sites other than shipwrecks may be interesting to snorkel. We are proposing up to four mooring buoys per site depending on the site, and we are proposing no-anchor zones around buoys. We are also proposing installing underwater interpretive markers and also installing buoys at the wrecks that don’t already have them. As an immediate action, we’ll add buoys to those sites that do not have buoys.”

Proposed MHT dive cards



ELSA -

Another proposed action is to produce and provide hard plastic underwater dive cards. The dive cards would have the wreck diagram on one side, like you can see here in this prototype. The other side would have the story of the wrecked vessel. The diagram would indicate direction, and show location of mooring buoys, so you know which way to swim once you moor your boat.



In this diagram, the existing mooring buoys are shown in purple, and the proposed mooring buoys are shown in red. We're proposing to add mooring buoys to all MHT sites, several offshore reefs, and Billy's Point. If you have other, specific locations where you would like us to install mooring buoys, we'd love to hear from you.

Site-specific actions of Alt B

- Install boundary markers
- Install informational markers at boundaries and in channels leading into park (re lobster sanctuary, slow speed zones, etc.)
- Install markers denoting closed areas (e.g. Arsenickers Keys, Soldier Key)
- Stiltsville/Coral Shoal & Sands Cut Shoals: mooring field/no anchor

ELSA

“In the next few slides, you’ll see some site-specific actions we are proposing in the plan.”

READ SLIDE

Site-specific actions of Alt B

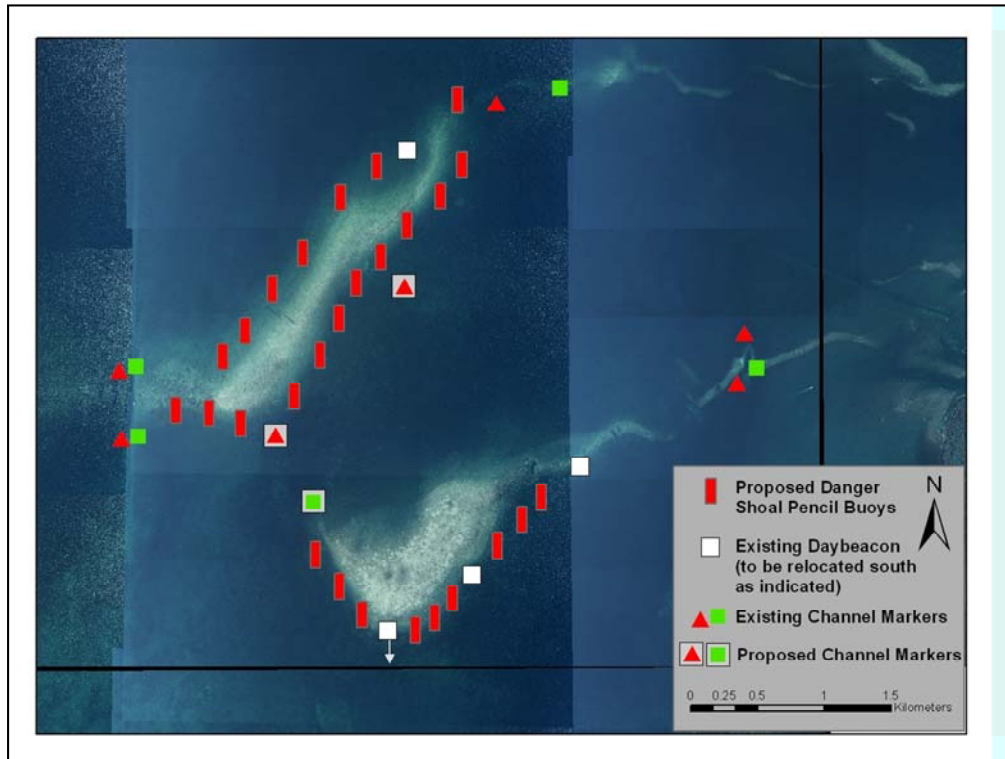
- Stiltsville: Speed restriction zone in flats next to Biscayne channel; more info signs
- Featherbeds: Relocate S marker, install info & navigational markers
- Legare Anchorage: install info markers
- University Dock: install info markers
- Mainland western shoreline: increase # of manatee slow speed signs

ELSA: READ SLIDE

Site-specific actions of Alt B

- Elliott Key Harbor: mooring field, prohibit anchoring, add info markers re quiet hours
- Caesar Creek: place markers to indicate shoals
- Hawk Channel: ask USCG to add markers between 15 & 17; and between 17 & 19
- Jones Lagoon: install info & reg markers
- Arsenicker Keys: install nav markers on the edge of the ICW between 8 & 9

ELSA: READ SLIDE



ELSA –

This is what we are proposing for the Featherbeds area. Proposed pencil buoys are shown as red bars. Proposed channel markers are shown in a box.

Adaptive Management

- Assessment:
 - Is there resource damage?
 - Is there a desired visitor opportunity?
 - Is there a safety concern?
- If yes to any: determine desired condition and appropriate tools; cost, partnerships
- Monitor to see if desired conditions met

ELSA: “We are also proposing an adaptive management strategy to deal with future buoy and marker issues. In the future we would follow this strategy instead of having public meetings, unless it seemed like it was controversial.”

Preliminary Environmental Issues

- Alternative B was determined to have little to no adverse impact on:
 - Marine resources – corals, seagrasses
 - Fish, wildlife & species of concern
 - Cultural resources
 - Visitor use and experience
 - Public health and safety**Beneficial impacts!**



ELSA

“The plan examines the impacts of the proposed actions on several issue topics, such as natural and cultural resources, visitor experience, and safety. Alternative B was found to have little to no adverse impacts on these resources, and in many cases had beneficial impacts.”



ELSA

"I'd like to explain the next steps. We're here, in the public review of the plan. After we get your input on the plan, we should be able to issue a decision document within a couple of months. This time period is tentative."

Public Comments

Your Comments Are Important

- Purpose, need and objectives
 - Alternatives
 - Key issues of concern
 - Immediate needs
 - Criteria to establish
-
- Provide verbal comments after the presentation
 - On the comment forms tonight

ELSA

“As we said throughout the presentation tonight, there are a variety of aspects of this plan that we would love to hear your input about. You can provide comments tonight verbally after the presentation, or on the comment forms tonight. You can be a speaker, or just give your thoughts to one of the Park Service people at the easels, or you can write down your thoughts and hand them to any of the park people here tonight.”

Public Comments

You can also provide written comments

- On the project web site (address on handout)
- By mail (address on handout)
- Drop off at Visitor Center

Public comment period closes:
September 3, 2010

ELSA

“You can also send comments electronically via the website on the letter, or mail in your comments, or drop them off at the Visitor Center. Just make sure we get your thoughts by September 3.

Upcoming events for other plans

- **Early 2011** (tentative) – Fishery Management Plan Record of Decision
- **Late 2011**– General Management Plan public meetings

Thank you for your time!

* We hope that you continue to participate in the process *

ELSA

“Thanks very much for giving the National Park Service your valuable time, and we wanted to let you know about the status of other plans. We hope to have the Record of Decision for the Fishery Management Plan in early 2011, but we are still waiting to hear from the State of Florida, our cooperator for this plan. We hope to have public meetings for the General Management Plan later in 2011. Thanks again!”

THANK YOU!

Now it is time for public comments.

Public comment period closes:
September 3, 2010

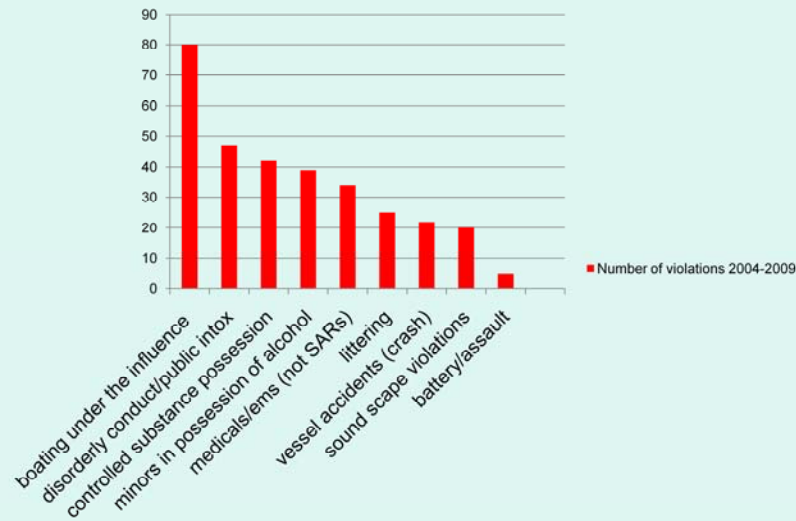
Meeting ends 8 p.m.

ELSA

“You can also send comments electronically via the website on the letter, or mail in your comments, or drop them off at the Visitor Center. Just make sure we get your thoughts by September 3.

Parkwide Stats: Types of LE incidents at Sands Cut

Number of violations 2004-2009



Highest number of LE incidents parkwide 04-09:

Prohibited vessel operations: 754 violations e.g. bowriding