

Florida Legislators' Sportsmen's Caucus

Re: Biscayne National Park

As Chairmen of the Florida Legislators' Sportsmen's Caucus, one of the challenges that we hear most often about from Florida sportsmen and women is access to government controlled areas in Florida. This includes federal lands and water, as well as areas controlled by Florida's water management districts. This letter is submitted to voice support of the National Park Service's Alternative 6 for the General Management Plan that was proposed for Biscayne National Park on November 15th, 2013.

The Biscayne National Park (BNP) contains some of the finest saltwater recreational fishing areas, not only in Florida, but in the entire United States. Additionally, the Park's location in highly urbanized southeast Florida makes it an extremely valuable component of Florida's \$7.1 billion economic impact of saltwater recreational fishing. And, with the challenges still being presented by our economy, we need to encourage, rather than inhibit, the continuation of recreational fishing activities in Florida.

The Florida Legislators' Sportsmen's Caucus supports marine fisheries conservation programs. However, the Caucus was vehemently opposed to the marine reserve proposed in the 2011 BNP Draft General Management Plan. The unnecessary measure would have prohibited recreational fishing in a large portion of Biscayne Bay with little or no benefit to fish populations.

With the movement away from a large no-take marine reserve and no-motor zone, the Caucus is pleased with alternative 6 proposed for the BNP General Management Plan. Therefore, **the Florida Legislators' Sportsmen's Caucus SUPPORTs Alternative 6 for the Preferred BNP General Management Plan proposed on November 15th, 2013.**

The Caucus also suggests several areas for consideration and improvements in balancing resource management priorities and recreational pursuits in National Park Service waters. Conjointly with recreational fishing stakeholders, the Caucus notes that maximizing the number and use of permits, allowing temporary permits for tourists, and phasing in the prohibition on anchoring as mooring buoys are installed are all important considerations moving forward.

The Caucus commends the NPS for halting the no-take marine reserve and seeking a balanced general management plan. Additionally, the Caucus thanks the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and thousands of conservation-minded anglers who participated in the prior public comments and user group discussions on the Fishery Management Plan

We strongly urge the National Park Service to keep our recreational fishing areas open and fully accessible by implementing Alternative 6 while considering possible improvements for recreational anglers and boaters.

Sincerely,

Senator Thad Altman, Co-chair

Representative Doug Holder, Co-Chair