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Before the

**Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment of the
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

United States House of Representatives

- Regarding Visitor Experience at National Parks-

April 5, 2017

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today representing the over 550,000 dues paying members of the Boat Owners Association of the United States, BoatU.S., all of whom are avid recreational boaters. Our members enjoy this family friendly activity on all types of water around the country, including many national parks, while using a wide range of boats types. For many, boating is the quintessential expression of the freedoms we enjoy in this Nation. We appreciate the chance to share how public-private partnerships and technology can improve the visitor experience in National Parks and other public lands

Reflecting on the visitor experience in National Parks provides an opportunity to consider how important access to the water is to boaters. To state the obvious, without adequate waterway access there is virtually no opportunity to go boating. Boaters need facilities to launch & retrieve, dock, moor and anchor their boats. Providing such access is vital to keeping boating available to the American public. The thoughtful oversight of this Committee and Congress should focus the National Park Service and other federal agencies on providing such access to our public lands and waters.

In our experience, how well a particular National Park unit or other federal entity provides access is highly variable. In some case they welcome boaters and often it is the only way to reach remote areas. In 2012 we happened to feature some of the great national park opportunities for boaters in our Trailing Magazine (see attached.) One interesting note to this article is the discussion of the South Padre Island National Island Seashore. At this park, the boat ramp lacked adequate capacity on busy weekends, highlighting the fact that demand for water access exists.

Other NPS units do not always seem to welcome boats and often make management decisions that diminish public access. The controversies at Key Biscayne National Park surrounding fishing access, the provision of adequate moorings, bans on certain types of boats and expansive non-motorized zones is of grave concern to boaters. In our view, a shift in management philosophy to one that welcomes all users, not just the young and fit, is long over-due.

Our current system of waterway access provides a good example of the wide range of partnerships that can come together so the public can enjoy our public lands and waters. For example, many boating access programs are funded by the **Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund**. This user pay-everyone benefits fund is supported by taxes on boaters and anglers. The fund is used to match state, local and private investment for ramp construction, larger vessel docks and other facilities that give access to the water. This very successful program was most recently reauthorized as part of the FAST Act in 2015, and runs through 2020. This system is widely supported by the boating and angling community. Boaters are not looking for a free ride, and are quite willing to pay reasonable fees provided they can count on the facilities being available and well managed.

Today, we recognize there is a reconsideration of federal budget priorities currently being taken up by the Administration and Congress. We respectfully suggest that investment in facilities that provide access to public lands and waters should remain a priority. As noted, access to the nation's waterways is very important to tens of millions of recreational boaters. Each year over 80 million Americans go boating, with a large portion doing so on federally managed waters. Millions more highly value campgrounds, trails and other facilities on public lands. We ask the help of this Congress to be sure that recreational boaters – including a very large number of boaters in Texas and the U.S. Virgin Islands – and other outdoor recreation participants aren't ignored as tough budget decisions are made.

As funding priorities are debated, we offer for consideration an instance when a new model of public/private partnership was created to meet a need. During another time of budget crunches, the Coast Guard shifted its mission focus and ended its long-time policy of aiding recreational boaters stranded on public waters. While they continue to come to the aid of those in life-threatening conditions, other situations such as a malfunctioning engine, or running out of fuel, is no longer a time where the USCG will provide assistance.

In response to this policy change, BoatU.S. created a nationwide towing dispatch service which today has more than 600 towboats available across the country– and is covered by a very reasonable annual cost, even for offshore needs. The program is effective and works well, is popular and allows the USCG to focus on emergency missions. In fact, there is a large industry of on-water service providers, as well as an industry trade association, the Conference of Professional Operators for Response Towing--also known as C-PORT. C-PORT sets the industry standards for professionalism and training, ethics, vessels and equipment. C-PORT and its members such as BoatU.S., work closely with state and federal agencies to ensure that recreational boaters receive prompt and professional assistance on the water, assistance which over the past few decades has saved the Coast Guard untold millions of dollars.

Another area where we see opportunity for federal agencies to provide better services involves the application of new technology. Information on boating and other outdoor opportunities are often difficult to discover on many government websites such as Recreation.gov and individual park web sites. Such resources should be welcoming to visitors and provide ready ways to discover all the activities available. This requires a new outlook on the part of federal managers, one with a view to enhancing the visitor experience as part of their core mission.

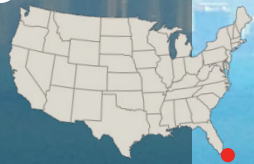
We also see technology as way to enhance access while protecting resources. With multiple permits and licenses often required to access public lands and waters, providing electronic, mobile-friendly methods to obtain them is essential to improving access. Providing greater connectivity will also open up management options such as allowing faster updates to charts and maps, and better reporting of available activities such as

fishing or camping. BoatU.S. supports the appropriate use of technology to improve visitor experiences on all public lands and waters.

In closing, Recreational boaters and anglers have an abiding interest in the protection of our waterways as do other recreational users of public lands. We are on the water, in the water and eat fish from the water, and wish to see these special places protected. We also need to be able to reach these locations in many different ways. Providing appropriate access is crucial to the long term political and financial support for national parks and other public lands. We appreciate the opportunity to bring the voice of boaters before the Subcommittee.

Biscayne Bay

FLORIDA



www.nps.gov/bisc

Within sight of Miami, only four percent of its 181,500 acres is land. Florida's Intracoastal Waterway runs through Biscayne Bay National Park.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: Convoy Point, where the Visitors Center is located, is the go-to place for south Florida wind-surfers.

CLOSEST BOAT RAMPS: Herbert Hoover Marina at Homestead Bayfront Park (9698 SW 328 Street, Homestead) – open 24 hours for annual pass holders; otherwise, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Matheson Hammock Marina (9610 Old Cutler Road, Miami), \$12 launch on weekdays and \$15 on weekends. Black Point Marina, www.blackpointmarina.com (24775 SW 87 Avenue, Miami), 6 lanes

DON'T MISS: Boca Chita Key, with the park's lighthouse, and the coral reefs located along the eastern water edge of the park

BE AWARE: Mooring balls are free and are located around some of the boat wrecks, so use those where found. More mooring buoys will likely be on the way once the park completes its mooring buoy plan. Anchoring is OK; just be careful where you do it so as not to damage the coral reefs.

The Natural National Places

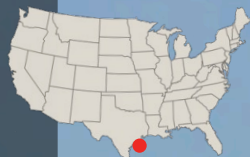
Hitch up the trailer and head to our 58 National Parks, 10 National Seashores, 4 National Lakeshores, and 18 National Recreation Areas.

They add up to more than 43,000 miles of shoreline and 4 million acres of water to explore in your trailerable boat. Here are a few that have caught our eye



PHOTO: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Padre Island TEXAS



www.nps.gov/pais

Padre Island National Seashore (also called "PINS") is on North Padre Island. South Padre Island, 35 miles long and only a half-mile wide at its widest point, has 5,000 residents and more than 1 million visitors every year.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: At 70 miles, the seashore is the longest undeveloped barrier island in the world.

BOAT RAMPS: The boat ramp at Padre Island National Seashore was expanded five years ago and now can handle approximately 120 vehicles and trailers. Even after doubling the size of the lot during the expansion, it continues to fill to capacity on many summer weekend days. Due to the distance involved when driving from Corpus Christi, this has been a source of frustration for area boaters when they arrive to find it already filled. **There is no overflow parking so the only option is to either wait for someone to leave or head back to the ramps in the city.**

COST: For one-time users, entrance to the park is \$10.00 and a one-day boat ramp fee is \$5. Frequent users of the boat ramp typically buy an annual park pass to the National Seashore for \$20 and purchase an additional one-year ramp-use permit for \$10.

DON'T MISS: Flocks of as many as 300,000 shorebirds have been sighted feeding on the shallow mud flats along the bay. The area serves as the wintering grounds for approximately 80 percent of the North American redhead duck population as well as a variety of other waterfowl. In addition, there are unusual bird sightings, such as some flamingos that were seen last year. Many of the fishing guides have become accomplished birders as well in order to supplement their income with bird-watching tours.

ADVICE: Baffin Bay has hard, rock-like clusters of ancient tubeworm masses that can cause prop and hull damage. In addition, the Texas Parks and Wildlife game wardens and National Park Service rangers watch to ensure that prop scars are not being cut into seagrass beds. Inexperienced boaters will need good charts.

NOT ALLOWED: PWCs, kite surfing, or air boats



PHOTO: RODE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

NATIONAL PARK

Lake Clark

ALASKA

www.nps.gov/lack

If you take your boat trailer here, let us know about it as there are absolutely no roads within the park. So, one might ask, why even have a park? Access is by airplane. The recreational boater usually hires a fishing guide though boat rentals are common, too at The Farm lodge. That said, this is a remarkable and distant place, 100 miles southwest of Anchorage (an hour's flight to the park). Point in fact: There are no news releases on the Lake Clark website. In 2011, 4,300 people visited Lake Clark National Park. That's fewer than the daily number of visitors to Yellowstone and Clark is twice the size (2.6 million acres). The lake is 42 miles long and nearby Crescent Lake (nine miles long by four miles wide) is also popular for boating.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: When you're not on the water, make plans to go to the Dick Proenneke cabin on Twin Lakes in Lake Clark National Park, which he built using only hand tools and his own labor. He began work on the cabin in 1967 at the age of 51 and lived there until 1998, when he was 82. The craftsmanship is part of a documentary, "Alone in the Wilderness," shown on PBS stations.

BOAT RAMPS: None

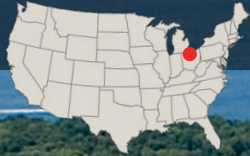
WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Bears are common and so are warnings about keeping your distance from them. This includes not leaving food scraps anywhere when hiking. This is a revered salmon fishery and that's one of the reasons Lake Clark became a national park. Red sockeye (June-July) and coho (August-September) salmon, arctic char (June-September), northern pike, and lake trout are found in Lake Clark and the nearby Crescent Lake waters. Waterskiing is popular here, too.

PHOTO: GLEN ALSWORTH

INTERNATIONAL PEACE
MEMORIAL

Perry's Monument

OHIO www.nps.gov/pevi



This is the site of the Battle of Lake Erie between Britain, Canada, and the United States in October 1813. Nine U.S. ships under the command of Oliver Hazard Perry captured six British Royal Navy vessels. It was one of the biggest battles of the War of 1812 and gave the United States control of Lake Erie for the remainder of the war.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: While under renovation now, it's expected that visitors will be able once again to climb 317 feet to the top of the Perry Monument

by mid-June of this year and see the Lake Erie Islands and the shores of Ohio and Michigan, as well as across Lake Erie to Ontario, Canada.

BOAT RAMPS: Put-in-Bay Yacht Club (www.pibyc.org) is free to members and \$5 for public use. Ramps at Catawba Island State Park, Kelley's Island State Park, and South Bass Island State Park are free.

DON'T MISS: The Put-in-Bay Butterfly House on South Bass Island has more than 500 different types of butterflies that have been brought here from around the world. For only \$7 (\$4 for kids), you can relax in the educational butterfly garden for as long as you'd like. Nearby is the Cedar Point Amusement Park with 17 roller coasters – the most in any amusement park in North America.



PHOTO: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



NATIONAL
RECREATION AREA

Lake Mead

NEVADA-ARIZONA

www.nps.gov/lake

Less than 30 miles from Las Vegas, there's 1.5 million acres where the Mohave Desert, Sonoran Desert, and Great Basin Desert meet with a mix of mountains and clear blue water. The construction of the Hoover Dam across the Colorado River in 1931 as a way to put people to work during the Great Depression created Lake Mead and Lake Mohave.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: In 1964, the Lake Mead National Recreation Area became the first of 18 created in the United States. Lake Mead is the largest man-made lake in the Western Hemisphere and the recreation area is twice the size of Rhode Island.

BOAT RAMPS: There are ramps throughout the lake's 820-mile shoreline. An entry pass is good for 1-7 days and runs \$10 per vehicle; a "lake use fee" allows boaters to launch a vessel and explore both lakes, and costs \$16 per vessel (\$26 total for a week). Annual passes are also available. Either state's fishing license along with an additional Colorado River Fishing Stamp is good throughout the park – boaters do not need to carry a license from both states to fish the waters of Lake Mead or Lake Mohave (no matter where they put in from).

DON'T MISS: The Narrows in the north part of the lake; the Black Canyon Springs south of Hoover Dam, with hot and cold water ranging from 55 to 136 degrees coming out of the rocks; and the Paint Pots at Fortification Hill. Seeing Hoover Dam from the water is a great photo opportunity. Desert bighorn sheep are common along the shoreline.

PWCs: As of January 2013, PWCs with two-stroke engines are no longer allowed on Lake Mead or Mohave. However, if your PWC has a direct-injection two- or four-stroke engine that meets the EPA 2006 emission standards, it's allowed to operate here.

DROUGHT: The snowpack in the mountains, the source of water for Lake Mead, is at 60 percent of normal this year. Still, lake levels are expected to be adequate for boat ramp use. This link proves lake level data: www.usbr.gov/lc/riverops.html.

PHOTO: COREY FULLER



NATIONAL SEASHORE

Cape Lookout NORTH CAROLINA



www.nps.gov/caloc

Stretching 56 miles across four barrier islands, this undeveloped beach offers wild horses on Shackleford Banks, and islands reachable by ferry or your own boat.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: The Cape Lookout Lighthouse is the only light in the country operating 24 hours a day. Cape Lookout National Seashore is a nesting site for two threatened species of sea turtle: the loggerhead and the green turtle.

PHOTO: CRYSTAL COAST CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

BOAT RAMPS: There are no boat ramps within the boundaries of the seashore, but there are a number nearby. Ocracoke Island, Harkers Island Fishing Center (www.harkersmarina.com, \$15 to launch), Oysters Creek, and North River Strait's Landing are some places to launch. There's also a ramp on the Intracoastal Waterway – behind the Visitors Center.

FOR THE KIDS: Climb the Cape Lookout Lighthouse on Wednesdays between May 16 and September 22 this year. Cost is \$4

for children under 12 years of age. Its 216 steps take you 163 feet to the top.

PWCs: Allowed in one of 10 designated areas only. They are well-marked and the areas have no-wake zones upon entering.

MORE ONLINE: See other parks to trailer your boat to, www.BoatUS.com/trailerclub/magazine