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**Testimony of Drew Martin**  
**Loxahatchee Group Sierra Club of Florida**  
**Before the House Committee on Natural Resources and**  
**the House Committee on Small Business**  
**“Joint Oversight Hearing”**

**August 3, 2015**

Chairman Bishop, Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Grijalva, Ranking Member Velazquez, and members of the committees – thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the hearing titled, “Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for Fishermen, Small Businesses, the Local Economy and Environment.”

Our group represents all Sierra Club Members in Palm Beach, Martin and St. Lucie Counties and a portion of Okeechobee County. Many of our members travel and use the Biscayne Bay National Park. Also, many of our fish species that migrate may travel through this park to our area. Further, we support the general concept of Marine Reserves.

I also traveled to the National Park Hearings to participate in the public comment sessions. The reef system off Biscayne Bay National Park is an important asset to all citizens of Florida. As a member of focus groups who discussed the park’s use of marine reserves I felt that all parties were given ample opportunity to present their case. The reef system in Florida is experiencing extensive pressure from over-fishing. In particular spear fishing and fish traps can be very damaging. Many of us visit reefs to view fish. Reef fish are exceptionally beautiful and bring in extensive tourist dollars. Our concern is that some anglers will continue to take too many fish without a marine reserve and that leaves fewer fish for the rest of us to view.

Fish populations have been shrinking for the last fifty years. During this time more and more anglers have come to Florida to fish. Marine Reserves with no-take rules have shown themselves to greatly improve fish populations in and around these reserves. They leave bigger fish and more healthy fish. The Marine Reserve in Biscayne Bay National Park is about 6 percent of the park.

At the same time the act of fishing on reefs can be very damaging. Fishing gear is lost and continues killing fish. There is incidental bycatch. There is further damage from anchoring near or on reefs.

We believe that it makes sense to leave some areas without fishing so that fish stocks may be replenished. Other areas will still remain open to fishing. Other fishing rules would continue to apply.

Fishing cannot continue if fish stocks are completely depleted. It is better to act before fish stocks fall below levels that will not allow fish populations to recharge their numbers. Around

the world fish stock numbers have improved when fishing was limited and the basic numbers did not fall below minimum number of fish.

This is simply good fishery management not to allow existing fish stocks to be completely depleted. Please do not override the work that has been done by the National Parks Service in establishing a workable marine reserve.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.