



**Testimony of Mark E. Songer
Board President, Protect Key West and the Florida Keys, Inc.
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on Small Business
“Joint Oversight Hearing”**

August 11, 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.” Protect Key West and the Florida Keys, Inc. (dba Last Stand) is a volunteer organization whose mission is to promote, preserve and protect the quality of life in Key West, the Florida Keys and their environs, with a particular emphasis on the natural environment.

On behalf of Last Stand’s membership, I write to you to express our strong support for the creation of a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park to implement the fisheries management plan to conserve and restore the park’s fisheries resources.

Within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, we have witnessed the positive impacts of no-take marine reserves to enhance and sustain regional coral reef fisheries at Dry Tortugas. Scientific study over the first 10 years of the reserve detected significant changes in population occupancy, density and abundance within management zones for a suite of exploited and non-target species. The same research observed decreases in density of exploited species below baseline levels in nearby areas open to all fishing.

Public input during the process to create the Biscayne National Park management plan was extensive. Marine scientists from universities, NOAA Fisheries and the National Park Service evaluated publicly proposed alternative maps for marine reserves and ranked them according to the potential effectiveness of reaching zone goals. The final zone size, shape and location is based on this ranking and covers only 6% of park waters. Park visitors to Biscayne will still be able to fish recreationally in the majority of park waters, with 63% of hard-bottom areas outside of reserve boundaries. Boating, swimming, and diving will continue to be permitted within reserve boundaries.

Establishing a marine reserve will significantly increase the chances that future generations will be able to enjoy Biscayne National Park's rare combination of terrestrial, marine and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty. With that vision, we strongly support the creation of a marine reserve to protect Biscayne National Park's treasured system of threatened reef fisheries and coral reef ecosystems.

Thank you for considering our comments.