



VILLAGE OF PINECREST
Office of the Village Council

Testimony of Cindy Lerner, Mayor, Village of Pinecrest, Florida
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on
Small Business "Joint Oversight Hearing"

August 13, 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."

I am currently the Chair of the Energy Environment and Natural Resources Committee for the National League of Cities, and on their National Board, I am a board member of the Florida League of Cities, serving on their Energy Environment and Natural Resources Legislative Committee and immediate past president of the Miami-Dade County League of Cities.

Biscayne National Park (BNP) is an ecological gem in the backyard of Miami-Dade County. BNP is a part of the economic engine of south Florida. We depend on the quality and abundance of the beautiful natural resources in BNP for the high quality of life we enjoy here in south Florida. Appropriate action to protect and maintain the resources of the Park is important not only for its ecological health, but also for the local economy of south Florida. The decline of fisheries and live coral cover impacts tourism and affects the enjoyment of residents recreating, fishing and diving in Biscayne National Park. Significant action is called for, in the form of the creation of a marine reserve to restore and protect the ecological treasures of Biscayne National Park.

The resources of BNP are deteriorating. The fish caught today do not compare in size to the fish caught in Biscayne Bay decades ago. There are fewer fish in the bay and park than in the past and live coral cover has significantly declined. A 2012 National Park Service Assessment of the Resource Condition in Biscayne National Park found that overfishing generally is a major threat to the natural resources in BN.

A marine reserve is the necessary and appropriate measure to address the problems facing Biscayne National Park. The Biscayne National Park Management Plan (BMP) takes many steps to better manage the resources within the park. One of the most valuable measures is a 10,500 acre marine reserve, which is a proven and effective measure to restore the resources. The marine reserve accounts for only 6% and 37% of the reef tract in the park. We know from the effective use of marine reserves in other locations that fish landings outside reserves increases dramatically after a closing part of a reef to fishing. The occurrence of coral disease decreases significantly within no-take marine reserves.

12645 Pinecrest Parkway, Pinecrest, Florida 33156
T: 305.234.2121 | F: 305.234.2131
www.pinecrest-fl.gov



August 12, 2015

Testimony of Cindy Lerner, Mayor, Village of Pinecrest, Florida

Page two

Users of Biscayne National Park and the surrounding bay can expect to see benefits from the reserve in as little as five years. This means that in five years or less, the fisheries are expected to increase and there will be more fish in Biscayne Bay for everyone.

Limiting fishing activity in this relatively small area of the Park will result in a greater user experience for everyone, with little or no expected negative economic impact, and expected economic benefits within a matter of years. Glass-bottom boats, recreational vessels, snorkelers and divers will continue to be able to access the marine reserve and experience a coral reef unimpaired by fishing activity and fishing gear debris. Education and monitoring of these activities within the marine reserve will track status of the reef and help to ensure that the coral reef is there for the enjoyment of this and future generations. The benthic resources, coral reef and fisheries are the defining characteristics of Biscayne National Park and must be protected.

The management plan for Biscayne National Park was finalized after 15 years of extensive public engagement, scientific analysis and thousands of public comments received, the vast majority of which supported a marine reserve. Creation of the marine reserve follows the general sentiment of the public and demonstrates the effective application of science in managing the resources.

I support the National Park Service's decision to create a marine reserve in Biscayne National Park. Their leadership on this issue will provide needed protections for the national treasure we enjoy in Biscayne National Park.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cindy Lerner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cindy Lerner

Mayor

Village of Pinecrest