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**Testimony of Philip K. Stoddard, PhD  
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources and  
the House Committee on Small Business  
“Joint Oversight Hearing”**

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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 have served on the doctoral research faculty at Florida International University for 23 years, and as the Mayor of the City of South Miami for the past 5 years. I enjoy fishing and snorkeling. I provide my testimony here as a private citizen, but I speak as one with considerable familiarity with the published literature on marine conservation, and I address the public interest as best I see it, which I am duly sworn to serve in my public capacities.

I write in favor of the proposed Marine Reserve in Biscayne National Park and in opposition to the proposed “Preserving Public Access to Public Waters Act”. As a scientist who enjoys recreational fishing, I am a huge fan of protected marine reserves despite the slightly reduced fishing space they afford us.

The proposed no-take zone is small, compared either to other such reserves around the world, or compared to the open fishing grounds in Biscayne Bay and the surrounding Florida Keys that are not proposed for special protections. Frankly, I am surprised that a protected zone this small has generated any controversy.

I understand that opposition to this proposed preserve originates from recreational and commercial anglers. Using the latest technologies, fishermen have proven extremely effective at finding and catching fish. Fishermen likewise have proven completely ineffective at protecting and preserving marine fish stocks. The collapse of the Atlantic fish stocks should be adequate testament to that truth. However, looking locally, you will also see that most of our tropical reef fish stocks have declined drastically both in size and numbers, even on reefs in the best condition. The reason is that smart fisherman direct their efforts on the most productive areas where fish spawn, because that’s where the fish are most easily located and caught. Of course, that’s also where the key production occurs that sustains the population, and that’s where no-catch zones must be established.

The situation is directly analogous to investing, where preservation of productive capital is key to long-term success. Any investor will tell you “never spend the principal”. In a year when returns drop, the investor tightens his belt but doesn’t spend the principal. In years with higher returns, the investor lives better but still returns some of the proceeds to the capital pool to cover inflation. Through discipline and sound principles, the investor lives better for having protected the income-generating capital.

Similarly, research shows that no-catch Marine Reserves are extraordinarily effective at increasing the populations of fish sought by recreational and commercial anglers, not only inside the marine protected zones, but also outside of them as well. Further, marine protected zones foster production of fish stocks far better than catch limits, which are much harder to enforce. So here in South Florida, we have anglers upset because the scientists are acting as responsible managers of the resource in a way that will provide local fishermen and everybody else with the most opportunity. Opposition to the protected zone is short-sighted and contrary to the long-term best interests of those complaining and to the rest of us who likewise enjoy a day of fishing, fine fish on our table, as well as diving on a productive reef tract covered with big fishes.

As a biologist, public leader, and private citizen, my strong request is that everyone respects the expertise of the fisheries scientists, allow the Park Service to manage the park using the best science available, and allow the citizens and environment the opportunity to benefit from the plan the scientists have proposed.

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