

**President**

Dr. Jose Barros

Honorary Director

Roger Hammer

Board of Directors

Alan Steinberg

Brian Rapoza

Lewis Milledge, Esq.

Gary Hunt

Rafael Galvez

Elizabeth Smith

Pilar Rodriguez

Gary Milano

Martin Jensen, Esq.

Sonia Succar Ferré

Dr. Tiffany Troxler

Richard Pettigrew

Claire Lardner

Subrata Basu

Zachary Ruvin

Carlos Sanchez

Gary Pappas, Esq.

Advisory Board

Dennis Olle, Esq.

David Pearson

George Gann

Dr. Thomas E. Lodge

Katy Sorenson

Joy Klein

Executive Director

Laura Reynolds

Editor Ana Lima

August 3, 2015

RE: Written Testimony before the House Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on Small Business "Joint Oversight Hearing"

Dear House Committees of Natural Resources and Small Business,

Tropical Audubon has worked tirelessly to educate the public about Biscayne National Park, Advocate for its restoration and work toward preserving the remaining adjacent greenspaces on its coast. We strongly support the establishment of a marine reserve and no take zone within Biscayne National Park because even with all of our efforts the decline of the diversity and numbers of species have declined significantly in the past 25 years. This has no doubt had an impact on the success of all of the bird populations that depend on marine life to nest and breed successfully. Although the cause of wading bird decline is not well studied in Biscayne Bay, all of the citizen science data collected by Tropical Audubon Society and its volunteers point to food source decline as a major contributing factor in reproductive success.

Biscayne National Park is the largest marine park in the National Park System, created to protect, "a rare combination of terrestrial, marine, and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty" for present and future generations.

Biscayne National Park has been overfished and overstressed for decades since the establishment of the park in 1980. Scientific research clearly indicates that critical park resources are severely threatened, some on the verge of "imminent collapse."¹ According to a former park scientist, "the whole system is in jeopardy."

A marine reserve is a "no take" area that restores the marine ecosystem health and protects both the wildlife and habitats in the prospected area.

Marine reserves are based on science and years of research worldwide have shown their benefits. There is a scientific consensus that marine reserves are the quickest, cheapest and most effective method for conserving and sustaining coral reef ecosystems and fish populations.

For example, the marine reserve in Dry Tortugas National Park, which is supported by the state of Florida and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, have shown increase fish size which helps to ensure reproductive success and successful



recruitment to adjacent areas only five years after its creation. In addition, these havens provide safe nurseries that will help compensate for reduced number of mangrove-lined coastal areas lost to seawalls in Florida

The marine reserve at Biscayne National Park will cover 6% of the park and should use the established baseline to implement a robust monitoring program to show the success rate. We feel these measures are necessary to reverse the significant decline in biodiversity that has been documented by scientists such as Joan Browder, Joe Serafy and Jerry Alt.

At the hearing, it was stated that the marine reserve will work against public interest but according to the Organic Act, the National Park System is to be protected for “the common benefit of all the people of the United States,” not just for single user groups. The marine reserve is going just that. It will allow for other recreation users such as divers, snorkelers, swimmers and boaters the opportunity to experience a vibrant, healthy coral reef ecosystem that is not damaged.

Thank you for accepting our written testimony on this very important topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Reynolds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" being more prominent than the last name "Reynolds".

Laura Reynolds

Executive Director