Written Statement of
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"Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for Fishermen, Small Businesses, the Local Economy and Environment"
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Chairman Bishop and members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing on the National Park Service's final General Management Plan for Biscayne National Park. As a matter of introduction, my name is Carl Liederman, and I'm president of a small family owned business known as Capt. Harry's Fishing Supply in Miami, Florida. We have been in business for 45 years and employ 30 people. Because our business has a huge financial dependence on healthy and sustainable fisheries, I have been involved in fishery related issues on the local, state, and federal level for over 30 years. Without sustainable fisheries and access to our local waters, our business and the jobs it supports cannot survive. And we are just one of many fishing, boating, and marine related businesses whose businesses rely on the same. Any closure large or small impacts the sales of many products. Whether it's hooks and line or bait, fuel, or ice, every lost sale impacts our business. All lost sales permanently impact our industries as they trickle down through the entire economic chain. Just ask any marine related business along the Gulf of Mexico how the closure and misguided allocation of just one fishery, red snapper has impacted their business.

Saltwater recreational angling in the state of Florida has more economic value and supports more jobs than any other state and south Florida is the epicenter for the state's marine and recreational fishing industries. Recreational fishing's economic value to the state of Florida, both freshwater and saltwater, is greater than Florida citrus industry. Much of our state's tourist driven economy is impacted by anglers who travel from all over the country and the world to experience the wonderful fishing opportunities that our great state offers. And of course a great percentage of these trips occur right here in south Florida in our two national parks and portions of the Florida Keys Marine Sanctuary.

The most recent data compiled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) ranks Florida as number one for the number of resident anglers and their expenditures in the country and number one for the most nonresident anglers and their expenditures in the country. Other pertinent data from the same USFWS document notes that fishing in Florida creates more than 80,000 jobs and creates $8.6 billion in economic activity. That coupled by the impact of the recreational boating industry, which lists 5500 boating related businesses in the state, $2.3 billion in retail sales for new boats, motors and marine accessories, and directly employs 40,000 people, makes these industries key economic engines for our state and south Florida.

While breaking out the exact south Florida economic impact is difficult, I can tell you that a large portion of these numbers are generated from south Florida. There are between 2.5 and 3 million people who

live in the lands surrounding Biscayne Bay and approximately 6 million in the southeast Florida corridor. This number of people coupled with the fact that there is probably no other place in the country and for that matter in the world where such a diverse fishery exists helps drive our economy. Anglers who live here and travel here from around the country and the world can expect to catch seatrout, snook, bonefish, permit, and tarpon with the city of Miami as a backdrop. Offshore, our sailfish fishery is recognized as world class with many of the other fabled destinations around the world. And all of these successes are occurring through management of the resource, not by unnecessary closures.

Management of the state of Florida's natural resources is charged to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). It is widely recognized as one of the finest fish and wildlife management agencies in the country. With the largest coast line of any of our states, FWC has special expertise when it comes to dealing with saltwater fish and other marine creatures. Over the past several years they have dealt with massive fish kills caused by freezes, red tides, algae blooms, and excessive fresh water dumping. Unfortunately many of the issues affecting the fisheries around the state are not angling related. 100 years ago, Biscayne Bay was a subtropical estuary. Today it is saltwater lagoon. Freshwater from the Everglades poured into the bay not only from the river and creeks that flow into the bay but also from the large number of fresh water springs that bubbled up through the lime stone rocks at the bottom of the bay. Local residents would row out to the docks they had built around the upwellings to dip freshwater.

Today, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is faced with a myriad of new issues requiring new and innovating approaches when it comes to managing our fisheries and wildlife resources. From water quality issues, agriculture run off, changing environmental conditions, and finally to a massive influx of new people relocating to the state every year, the FWC team has been able to meet these challenges and continue to provide the people of Florida and visitors the opportunity to enjoy the many outdoor experiences available.

Often overlooked in this process of managing natural resources is the partnership that exists between the governmental organizations charged with managing our natural resources and the fishermen and hunters of our country. These fishermen and hunters are our first line of defense. Not only are we the ones who are often the first group to identify issues, but it is our money paid into the system through license fees and excise taxes that helps fix problems and rebuild the stocks. Through fishing license sales and the excise taxes on sportfishing equipment and motorboat fuel, the recreational fishing and boating community provides about one billion dollars a year toward fisheries conservation and management. These solutions have come through many innovative scientific solutions and at times have required temporary closures.

The use of the word “science” can lead one down many different paths. For every scientific study related to fisheries management, there is often another study refuting the results of the first study. There is good science, old science, new science, and bad science, and then there is selective science. And since the first four are pretty self-explanatory, I’ll discuss selective science. It becomes interesting how desired results occur when an organization or agency hire someone to study something where a specific result is desired. And while the outcome might not be expressed to the individual or group, the result is often implied. And bent results can be achieved in many different ways. If I wanted to do fish censuses in an area and the desired outcome would be to prove these fish were absent or show below desired density you could conduct the survey when the fish were not present. As an example, certain large grouper and snappers leave the areas in the bay and shallow reefs for deeper water during the summer months only to return to the shallower areas when the temperatures moderate. Their physiological makeup requires this. They cannot tolerate the warm water temperatures created by our hot summer months. They also return to the shallower waters to spawn. Tidal changes also can determine the presence or absence of fish. Certain fish move into areas to feed based on tidal fluctuations. Even migratory species found only offshore are affected by this. These are just a couple of examples where the science backed conclusions can be skewed. Scientists can paint all kinds of pictures, create many fancy graphs but unfortunately the fishermen who spend many hours on the water are often overlooked or their observations and experience are disregarded.

Of many of the documents presented by Park Service are 10 to 15 years old. One even predicts the “eminent collapse” of the Biscayne Bay fishery which of course 15 years later is not the case.

That being said, in 2004 I was asked to become part of Biscayne National Park’s fisheries working group, which was formed by the Sanctuary Advisory Council for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) along with the park and FWC. Our group was being given the opportunity to help identify deficiencies in the fisheries resources within the park and help craft methods to restore these fisheries. From the onset our group looked forward to the opportunity because as part of the process we could develop a plan that would insure the protection of the park and its resources for future generations while allowing the fishing community to continue to use and enjoy the park. The group was made up of recreational and commercial fisherman, scientists, divers, and assorted conservation groups. Some of the fisherman had fished Biscayne Bay for over 50 years.

As the process moved forward it became apparent that the park and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, which had partnered with the park, already had their own agenda. In their minds fisheries management could not be accomplished without the additions of NFZs(no fishing zones), MPAs(marine protected areas), and RNAs(reserve natural areas). This was pushed in spite of the fact that a MOU(memorandum of understanding) had already been signed between the Biscayne National Park and FWC that implied all fisheries management would be the responsibility of the state and closures would be used only as measure of last resort if all other management tools failed.

In the end in spite of their attempt to put the onus of closures on the backs of fishermen and other stake holders, two federal agencies lost their bid to get any MPAs, NFZs, or RNAs in the document that was presented by the fisheries working group to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

on June 15th 2004. The working group identified a series of comprehensive recommendations to improve the condition of the park's fisheries resources, including a boating permit that would help fund management activities, more stringent species-specific fishing regulations, and improved enforcement and education. I am confident that these strategies would work if given a chance. But in the end, the agencies thanked us for our 6 months of work and oh yes, "we'll just put the closures in the general management plan."

Biscayne National Park is unique in many ways. It's an urban park surrounded by the highest population density in the state of Florida. The area has the largest fishing and marine driven economy in the country. It is nothing like the 151 square mile Tortugas ecological reserve located 70 miles west of Key West and managed jointly by NOAA and FWC. The Tortugas ecological reserve has some of the largest spawning aggregations of multiple fish stocks including grouper and snapper found in U.S. waters. But from the beginning it was apparent to participants and observers that the National Park Service in partnership with the FKNMS was going to get their desired closure at Biscayne National Park. A review of the park's draft alternatives from 2003 presented to the public during the initial stages of preparation of the general management plan shows that alternative 5 mirrors closely the closure that the park is moving forward with. Instead of working with the working group that they had seated, and FWC who is charged with protecting Florida's natural resources, the park has chosen to go it alone. And while they choose to point out that they are only closing 6% of the park's waters they are in fact closing almost 40% of the park's reef area, which is some of most productive fishing bottom in our area. While significant in terms of lost public access, closing this area will do nothing biologically to improve the overall fisheries conditions in the park. There is simple no good science to support it, as the FWC can attest here today. And that coupled with the adverse ecomomic impact this closure will bring to many of the marine related small businesses in south Florida makes this closure a very bad idea.

In closing, I would like to point out that our national park system is truly one of our country's treasures. It should be nurtured and treasured for future generations. Unfortunately when it was created by Congress 99 years ago they may have erred in the lack of oversight of management decision-making within individual park units. What was created is probably the only example of an aristocracy that exists in the U.S. government. When an agency is able to disregard input from partner agencies, unwilling to work toward common solutions, and trample on groups that are part of the park's history and tradition, it might be time for Congress to revisit the process.