

*Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Hearing Friday April 27, 2012
Biscayne National Park – General Management Plan*

Biscayne National Park is vital to my constituents, for their livelihoods as much as their own recreation.

Since the park announced that it would update its General Management Plan, I have heard from numerous anglers and boaters about their concerns that this magnificent resource might not remain truly accessible.

Just this past Monday, I sat down with my Congressional colleagues David Rivera and Mario Diaz-Balart to discuss with Superintendent Mark Lewis five alternative proposed General Management Plans.

Alternative #4 might turn out to be the preferred framework of park managers.

Following this meeting I asked several members of our South Florida community who are heavily involved with Biscayne National Park to share their thoughts on what Alternative #4 would mean to them if implemented.

The responses I received offered strong objections to the proposed plan.

And all were unified in opposing the controversial proposed Marine Reserve Zone – which could close all fishing – that they say is overly restrictive.

The MRZ would be over 10 thousand acres, or 7% of the park's marine waters, and is almost 30% of the park's reef tract.

The loss of fishing opportunities, and their associated economic impacts, would be significant.

These park users consider the closure of the most popular and productive fishing waters draconian and based on flimsy, outdated and or simply feel-good speculation of perceived benefits.

Another common theme that emerged was disbelief that the Park chose to disregard the recommendations of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, which cooperatively manages the park's fisheries resources, and the park's own Fishery Management Plan Stakeholder Working Group.

We all share the same goal of ensuring healthy, vibrant, and sustainable park and fishery.

With careful management our beloved Biscayne National Park will remain a jewel of our community and available for generations of visitors to respect and enjoy.

I expect that this hearing will help preserve the unique culture surrounding South Florida's water-centered way of life, while also protecting our environment and maintaining public to access the park's waters.