

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Witness Statement

**Testimony of
U.S. Rep. Carrie P. Meek
March 14, 2000
House Committee on Resources
National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to testify on H.R. 2557, the Miami Circle bill. I thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

As a native Floridian and a Member from South Florida, I am pleased to be the sponsor this bill, which would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a feasibility study on the inclusion in Biscayne National Park, Florida, of the archaeological site know as the Miami Circle.

I would like to begin by discussing the developments surrounding the discovery of the Miami Circle. In September 1998, workers preparing land for development at the mouth of the Miami River began to notice a mysterious circular formation in the limestone bedrock that forms the foundation of the City of Miami.

Further examination by archeological professionals revealed that this site, where the river meets the bay, was utilized by the prehistoric Tequesta civilization 2,000 years ago, perhaps serving as an astronomical tool or as a cultural center for their complex maritime society.

Floridians marveled at this clue to our past, and Miami is rediscovering and rejoicing in the ancient Tequesta culture which, so many centuries before us, survived and flourished in an environment once dominated by sawgrass and alligators.

I believe that we have a responsibility to preserve and study reminders of our heritage. H.R. 2557 would be an important step toward ensuring that we save this priceless landmark. A study conducted by the National Park Service to examine the feasibility of making the Miami Circle part of Biscayne National Park would be an appropriate way of fulfilling our responsibility to preserve this historically significant Tequesta site.

There is a natural connection between Biscayne National Park and the site of the Miami Circle. Stretching from Biscayne Bay near Miami to the northernmost Florida Keys, the Park is already home to over one hundred known archaeological sites, the majority of which are submerged, as well as ten historic structures. Among those archaeological sites are several smaller, 'satellite' Tequesta camps. Protection of the Miami Circle within the boundaries of the Park, in conjunction with these other camps, would allow for comprehensive site comparison, investigation and study.

Furthermore, the Miami Circle site is not only a site of local and regional significance, but also of national significance, as it is believed to be the only cut-in-rock prehistoric structural footprint ever found in North

America. This archeological site, which potentially qualifies to be included in the National Register of Historic Places, connects all Americans in a special way to the first inhabitants of the Continent. Thus, it is very appropriate that we study its inclusion to our National Park System. We must take seriously our responsibility as guardians of this cultural landmark and recognize that only through conservation and analysis will we be able to fully grasp the magnitude of this discovery.

The annexation of the 2.2 acre Miami Circle property into Biscayne National Park, if found to be appropriate in this feasibility study, will save the Miami Circle from bulldozers and cement pourers; allow us to gain a greater understanding of the Tequesta culture; and add a valuable asset to our existing National Parks System.

We will not only be preserving a valuable piece of history, but will also provide a fitting gateway to one of our Nation's newest National Parks.

Thank you once again for your consideration of this bill. I look forward to working with you in passing this legislation, hopefully in this session of Congress.

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