



Foundation Document Overview

Biscayne National Park

Florida



Contact Information

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Purpose



BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK protects a rare combination of coral reefs and undeveloped islands, bay waters, mangrove coasts, and associated fisheries and wildlife of the northernmost Florida Keys and southern Biscayne Bay for the education, inspiration, recreation, and enjoyment of present and future generations.



Significance

Significance statements express why Biscayne National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Biscayne National Park's fabric of Florida coral reefs and keys, estuarine bay, and mangrove coast is a significant and integral part of the South Florida ecosystem within the wider Caribbean community where diverse, temperate, and tropical settings mingle.
- Consistent with Biscayne National Park's purpose and the NPS Organic Act, visitors enjoy opportunities for a multitude of recreational activities in proximity to one of the country's major metropolitan centers. Visitors find inspiration in the park's tranquility, solitude, scenic vistas, underwater environment, and sound of nature's voices.
- Biscayne National Park encompasses a large part of the northern extent of the Florida Reef Tract. Its fragile and dynamic coral reefs and coastal systems are characterized by numerous transitions in the physical and biological environment. The park preserves a largely undisturbed gene pool of tropical and subtropical flora.
- Biscayne National Park provides a rare opportunity to experience mostly undeveloped Florida Keys surrounded by clear tropical waters and fresh sea breezes.
- Biscayne National Park preserves unique marine habitat and nursery environments that are capable of sustaining diverse and abundant native fisheries.
- Biscayne National Park's submerged and terrestrial resources represent a sequence of rich history encompassing early settlement, maritime activities, agriculture and development of the islands, and the melding of diverse cultures.
- Biscayne National Park offers outstanding opportunities for education and scientific research due to the diversity, complexity, and interrelatedness of its natural and cultural resources, and provides a dynamic laboratory for marine and terrestrial studies.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Coral Reefs**
- **Subtropical Coastal and Marine Ecosystems**
- **Opportunities for Public Enjoyment**
- **Sustainable Recreational Fisheries**
- **Undeveloped Character**

Biscayne National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Cultural Resources**
- **Stiltsville**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Biological Uniqueness**
- **Biological Diversity**
- **Estuarine Restoration**
- **Cultural Significance**
- **Sustainability**
- **Opportunities to Connect With an Urban National Park**



Description

Biscayne National Park was established in order to preserve and protect for the education, inspiration, recreation, and enjoyment of present and future generations a rare combination of terrestrial, marine, and amphibious life in a tropical setting of great natural beauty.

Biscayne National Park is located south of Miami, Florida. It is a marine park consisting of mostly submerged land and includes coral reefs, sandy shoals, 4,825 acres of mostly undeveloped mangrove shoreline, and more than 40 keys or islands primarily composed of limestone and coral. The primary means of access to park waters is by private, partner, or commercial permit-holding operators. Visitors come to the area for recreational opportunities including boating, fishing, snorkeling, SCUBA diving, paddling, birding, and nature viewing.

Biscayne National Park is recognized for its natural resources, which represent a combination of terrestrial, estuarine, and marine resources in a subtropical setting of great natural beauty. The park can be divided generally into four prominent ecosystems: (1) terrestrial mangrove shorelines, (2) shallow estuarine system (Biscayne Bay) with diverse bottom communities, (3) keys (islands), and (4) coral reefs and hardbottom habitat. The coral reefs of Biscayne National Park are due east of the keys and are part of the Florida Reef Tract that stretches from the Dry Tortugas to Martin County. Much of the northern part of the Florida Reef Tract is in the park and makes up much of the northernmost extension of living coral reefs in the United States. Most of the shallow, protected waters of Biscayne Bay contain the estuarine environment of the park, which primarily supports seagrasses and hardbottom communities.

Biscayne National Park has a rich history of aboriginal occupation and use, Spanish and English exploration, pirates, smuggling, shipwrecks, marine salvaging, agriculture, and commercial development that reflects the continual link between humans and the sea that has characterized this area for the past 10,000 years.

Remnants of this cultural history are present throughout the park and are represented by both terrestrial and submerged cultural resources. Terrestrial cultural resources include Native American occupation sites as well as historic structures, ruins, homesteads, and farmsteads. Submerged and shoreline cultural resources include materials associated with prehistoric sites as well as historic shipwrecks, ship strandings, wharfs and piers, and the remains of other structures and materials along the water's edge. Because of the park's natural history of rising sea levels, former terrestrial sites (possibly early prehistoric ones) may now be under water.

Land uses adjacent to the park's western boundary include agricultural fields interspersed with residential and commercial developments as well as industrial uses and utilities. The Florida Power & Light Inc. Turkey Point Power Plant facility site, Miami-Dade County solid waste landfill, and South Miami-Dade Black Point Sewage treatment site are visible from the Dante Fascell Visitor Center at Convoy Point. Two public marinas operated by Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department, at Black Point and Homestead Bayfront, are contiguous with park boundaries and provide public access to the marine parts of the park. Other Miami-Dade County noncontiguous marinas outside of park boundaries also contribute to public access to the park. The greater urban Miami skyline from Kendall to Key Biscayne is visible from the park visitor center building at Convoy Point.

