

The case for Biscayne

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It is the purpose and function of the National Park Service to protect, preserve and provide for the appropriate use of the Nation's outstanding scenic, scientific and recreational lands and waters.

Presently there are 32 national parks, 33 historic parks and sites, 77 national monuments, 23 military or battlefield parks and sites, 3 parkways, 11 national recreation areas, as well as other classifications such as National Memorials, National Cemeteries, the Capitol parks, the White House, etc. administered by the Service. In total there are 263 areas within the National Park system, covering approximately 26.5 million acres (of which less than 20 million acres are within the continental United States).

You will note that the service administers for the people of this nation, and of all nations, several kinds of areas, such as significant and worthy in its own right, to be given this highest of land ethic designations - dedicated to the public welfare - to honor our past, to improve the quality of our environment, to be used to inspire man's mind and contribute to his cultural development.

These areas are a part of you heritage - a birthright of those born in the last half of the twentieth century - manages under policies that assure they will remain (of which less than 20 million acres are within the continental United States).

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The park system reflects the principal of government, established within out lifetime, that the use of our nation's natural resources need not be wholly consumptive, but some yields from our lands and waters can be measured in terms of social benefits and individual happiness, as well as in dollars. It is, therefore, a function of government, not only to administer a complex society, but to plan and develop a quality society so that we may leave behind the structural essentials to make life worth living in future generations. This principle gives expression to the concept that preservation of places of beauty is of proper governmental concern and that representative areas of the nation's priceless treasures should be set aside for the public's use and enjoyment. It thus follows that neither individuals nor special interest groups have an

unqualified right to ignore the public welfare and deny public use of nationally significant resources and assets.

The areas of the national park system are of three types:

1. Natural areas - These are spacious parks of outstanding natural beauty and scenic grandeur displaying the best of our magnificent mountains, waterways, forests and geologic phenomena; most also serve as wilderness wildlife sanctuaries. Examples are: the great Geysers and wildlife of Yellowstone; the rocky fog-covered headlands of Arcadia; the forest covered Appalachian Mountains of the Great Smokies; the redwoods of Sequoia; the spectacular chasm of Grand Canyon; Yosemite Valley; the mountain wilderness of Olympic; these and many more, the crown jewels of our nation, irrespective of where they are located, and yours, regardless of your state of residence.

2. Historical areas - Smaller sites and structures commemorating or illustrating the story of America's social development and expansion. They are preserved so that today's society can learn of the great events that have influenced and shaped our nation's growth. This category is broad and spans the entire epoch of man's life on Earth, including the recent past in which our nation's cultural and technological advances are depicted.

Within the system are archeological areas in which Indian towers, pueblos and cliff dwellings constructed a thousand years ago are preserved (e.g., Chaco Canyon or Navajo National Monuments); represented are structures from the periods of Spanish, French and English occupation and influence (e.g., Castillo de San Marcos, Tumacacory National Monuments); the colonial days (Colonial and Independence National Monuments); the Westward Expansion (Custer Battlefield, Fort Union National Monuments and Fort Laramie National Historic Site). These and many more, including the memorials and monuments found in Washington, depict those persons, events and places which not too many years ago, now called history, built the foundations upon which we in the next few short years will carry forward the building of this social culture, this land we call the United States of America.

There is another historic category which in this day of apathy and non-involvement warrants particular comment. In our Civil War areas the service protects and interprets our nation's most precious shrines; here in the crucible of national anguish, personal courage, sacrifice, and dedication to principle welded our country and people into the proud nation that we are today.

3. Recreation areas - are large areas where high density outdoor activity, especially water-based recreation, is provided to meet the ever increasing demand for such activity, primarily in the vicinities of metropolitan centers. It is in such areas as these that the people can find orderly, well-maintained public lands and waters, developed and managed as public pleasuring grounds. There the nation's populace, 70% of which live in dense urban environments can get out-of-doors and recreate mind and body. They can enjoy fishing (and in some recreation areas, hunting), boating, hiking, bicycling, picnicking, camping, beach combing, nature walks and interpretative walks, swimming, water skiing, horseback riding, and so on. Within this classification are large national reservoirs like Glen Canyon and Lake mead, and the seashores - those lovely undeveloped beaches such as Cape Hatteras in the east, Padre Island on the Gulf, and Point Reyes on the Pacific Coast. This category is a relatively recent evolution in the growth of the National Park System.

More areas of all classifications will need to be added to the system, if the public is to be adequately served. National Park Service visitation, just since 1940 has risen from about 16 million visitors to over 135 million last year (an 850% increase in less than 30 years - and continues to rise at a rate of 11 to 12 % a year). During the same period our population grew

by nearly 70 million persons to approximately 200 million. But our National Park System acreage to serve this exploding demand has been increased by only 5 million acres.

In regard to the three types of areas there is often expressed some confusion regarding "National Monuments". National Monuments are primarily outstanding scientific areas which are set aside by executive order but which in practice are considered and approved by Congress, just as are National Parks proposals. Some are of the natural classification (as represented by the dying volcanoes of Katmai), others are associated with history (such as Ft. Sumter). Size is of no criteria: Katmai (2,670,000 acres) is larger than most national parks, while others (like Fort Sumter - 2.4 acres) are small - but not to the point of insignificance, for all national monuments have nation-wide significance.

It is into this fraternity of crown jewels - this system of nationally significant areas - that Biscayne National Monument would be associated and conjoined.

Biscayne National Monument, while having some elements of interesting history associated with it, would be in the category of a natural area. But it would also be unique inasmuch as it would be managed to provide and encourage appropriate recreation use of the underwater resources.

The major purpose of the monument would be to protect and make available for public use a rare combination of marine life in a tropical setting. Many residents of southern Florida would consider the landed area, 4,000 acres of mangrove, mundane; but in national context this is a tropical setting of great beauty. Additionally, the monument would encompass 101,000 acres of Bay and ocean shoal containing magnificent and extensive living coral formations at shallow depths - with their associated unusual and beautiful tropical fish, sea fans and sponges. Of course, South Florida is the only place in the continental United States where living coral and related marine life can be found.

We have heard that with Everglades National Park's 2,000 square miles South Florida has "enough parks". However, in character these two areas are distinctly dissimilar. Scientifically, Biscayne is predominantly of tropical flora and fauna, representing the West Indies ecological province. Everglades National Park, on the other hand, is of the Gulf of Mexico province (or temperate subtropical). An example of this distinction is in invertebrate life: of the 355 species of invertebrates found within these two areas only 15 are found in common on the Upper Keys (BNM) and within Florida Bay (ENP).

Further, and perhaps of even more importance to the average visitor, is that while a major purpose of the monument would be to preserve and protect the rare marine life of Biscayne Bay and the offshore waters, its principal attraction would be coral reef interpretation and the availability of facilities for underwater activity and viewing (via glass bottom boat, submerged viewing rooms, snorkeling and diving) and such other important active recreation outlets as swimming, boating, fishing, camping, picnicking, bicycling, water skiing, and hiking. Many of these activities today are extremely popular in this area, and it is axiomatic such use will become immensely more popular in the future. Monument status would provide for these activities while presently proposed alternative use of these lands and water will result in the loss of these magnificent natural resources and the recreation opportunities they afford.