



# FIELDREPORT

Sun Coast Region | Winter 2016



## Homestead Trolley Receives National Award



**T**he National Park Service honored NPCA, Biscayne and Everglades National Parks, the gateway city of Homestead and local partners with the Director's Partnership Award for establishing the National Parks Trolley, the first public transportation initiative in Florida to connect people to their national parks. One of eight projects nationwide to receive this distinction, the trolley has been a complete success. The trolley's third season began November 14, 2015, running each weekend through May 1, 2016. To date more than 4,000 visitors have taken this free, ranger-guided trolley to experience and enjoy their national parks. Visitors can hop on the trolley in downtown Homestead.

## Greater Protection for Biscayne

**B**iscayne National Park is one of our country's largest marine national parks. Beneath its surface waters lie rolling sea grass meadows, twisted mangrove roots, and majestic coral reefs. Home to part of the third largest barrier reef tract in the world, Biscayne National Park protects some of the only living coral remaining within the continental United States.

South Florida is a world renowned snorkeling, diving, fishing, and boating destination, and Biscayne National Park is a significant economic driver in the region. More than half a million park visitors support 460 local jobs and pump \$45 million into the local economy. These recreational activities depend upon healthy coral reefs and native fish populations, which have declined dramatically in recent decades because of over-use, over-fishing, declining water quality, marine debris, and warming seas.

"I have witnessed firsthand the degradation of our coral reefs and the depletion of native fish populations," said Jack Curlett, an avid angler and member of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council. "I've been fishing in Biscayne Bay for 30 years and the days of plentiful mature fish are long gone. If we don't act now, there won't be any fish left for our children and grandchildren."

This summer, after more than 15 years of stakeholder input and scientific analysis, the National Park Service announced plans to create a no-fishing marine reserve within Biscayne National Park. According to Curlett, "Marine reserves work. They help protect marine habitat and can improve local fishing when bigger, more abundant fish 'spill over' into areas outside the reserve."

Biscayne National Park protects some of the only living coral remaining within the continental United States.

Although 95 percent of the park is water, only 7 percent of park waters and less than 30 percent of its reefs will be included as part of a no-fishing marine reserve to protect the park's threatened coral reefs, help restore dwindling fish populations, and improve the visitor experience. More than 20,000 of NPCA's one million members

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**Top:** Boca Chita Key, NPS **Left:** Trolley in Homestead, Florida ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA

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**Florida, Louisiana, Coastal Mississippi and Alabama, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands**

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## REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S LETTER BY JOHN ADORNATO III

**N**early 100 years ago, Congress adopted legislation creating the National Park System. Today, we are thankful for that effort to protect and interpret America's natural and historical treasures. These incredible places provide time for solitude, destinations for family vacations, and opportunities for learning and reflection. This coming year they will also provide an opportunity for celebration.

As we celebrate what has been called America's best idea, we must also plan for the coming years. What improvements can be made to our parks? What stories from our history are not yet told? Where do we have opportunities to protect and preserve the land and waters of our country that remain threatened by development?

At the end of 2014, Congress answered some of those questions with a law that created seven new national park sites, such as Harriet Tubman in New York, the Manhattan Project (with sites in three states), and Tule Springs in Nevada; nine national park expansions; eight special resource studies (including the Head of the Pass in Louisiana); and funding extensions for 14 national heritage areas. In February 2015, President Obama established Pullman National Monument in Chicago to commemorate the first African-American labor union and development of the country's first model industrial town. A campaign, led by National Parks Conservation Association, is now under way to preserve Stonewall in New York City, the birthplace of the modern civil rights movement for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community.



You all know about our national parks. You've visited them with your families, enjoyed the unique stories that they tell, and you know about the work that NPCA does to protect them. As we look forward to the next century of our national parks, we want to encourage more people to care about their national parks, and speak up on their behalf.

In the coming year, we will be intensifying our efforts to attract new people to the parks through our Find Your Voice initiative. We hope you join us and help to spread the word about the importance of protecting our parks—and most important, visit the parks to experience what they have to offer.

**Above:** John Adornato III in Big Cypress National Preserve ©Jacqueline Crucet | NPCA  
**Below:** Ghost Orchid ©Ggpalms | Dreamstime.com



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## Everglades Plans its Future

**E**verglades National Park is an unusual place. It is the first national park designated for its unique ecology rather than grand vistas; it's the only place in the country that hosts both crocodiles and alligators; and it's only one of three parks in the world with a triple designation of International Biosphere Reserve, World Heritage Site, and a Wetland of International Importance.

In managing the park, the Park Service must carefully balance protection of the park's diverse wildlife and wilderness habitat found within its more than 1.5 million acres with access for more than 1 million adventure-seeking visitors who provide more than \$100 million to the local economy each year. Guidelines for managing national parks are detailed in individual General Management Plans. The latest management plan for Everglades was more than a decade in the making and replaces one that was last completed in 1978.

The new plan will guide the park for the next 20 to 30 years, and includes additional protections for seagrass and fish habitat. NPCA and its supporters pushed for some of these protections, including a park-wide boater education and permit program and significant expansions of pole/troll zones into one third of Florida Bay. Charlie Causey, avid fisherman and member of the Florida Bay Stewardship Committee, says "Boater education is key to helping protect the

seagrass meadows of Florida Bay and others areas of the park so critical to our local economy."

In addition, a new kayak/canoe trail will extend from Tamiami Trail to the main park road, through 80,000 acres of newly designated wilderness. The plan also includes more appropriate management of airboat concessions. The park plans more chickees, elevated platforms with thatched roofs, for overnight stays along the Wilderness Waterway trail in the 10,000 Islands area, and dedicated paddling-only segments.

Our NPCA members and supporters helped to ensure these positive changes to the plan by

The park plans more chickees along the Wilderness Waterway trail in the 10,000 Islands area, and dedicated paddling-only segments.

sending more than 12,000 letters of support. NPCA continues to engage park staff, key stakeholders and supporters to move forward with implementation of this important plan that will serve to protect this world-renowned resource for generations to come.



**Top:** Chickee in Everglades National Park ©Lorrdok | Dreamstime.com **Above:** Canoeing in Everglades National Park ©Terry J Alcorn | Dreamstime.com

## NPCA Regional Council Adventures

This fall, Sun Coast's Regional Council toured De Soto National Memorial as part of the fall 2015 meeting. Located on Florida's Gulf Coast, De Soto National Memorial chronicles the 16th Century landing of the Spanish army and the impact of this epic landfall on a native people. National Park Service Superintendent Jorge Acevedo provided us a warm welcome and historian and Ranger Daniel Stephens led our group on a tour along a trail through the woods, featuring interpretive objects and life-sized cutouts. The park is known for its lively reenactments that provide visitors a realistic look back 300 years into the experience of battling soldiers, far from home in unknown lands.



Earlier last spring, our Regional Council met in Naples, took a swamp buggy tour into Big Cypress National Preserve, and discussed efforts to protect the endangered Florida Panther while ensuring that Off-Road Vehicle



use and hunting are appropriately managed.

**Above (Left):** SCRO Regional Council on the De Soto Trail ©Jacqueline Crucet | NPCA  
**(Right):** Swamp Buggy in Big Cypress National Preserve ©Jacqueline Crucet | NPCA

## Mega-Marina Threatens Virgin Island Parks

Some of the most world's spectacular tropical marine life can be found in Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument. These parks are home to endangered sea turtles, native tropical fish, mangrove forests, and spectacular corals. This incredible biodiversity is threatened by the proposed development of a mega-yacht marina in nearby Coral Bay.

Wildlife in the region, including green sea turtles, brown pelicans, black tip sharks, and humpback whales depend on a healthy environment and clean water for survival. Hurricane Hole—a distinct area within Coral Reef National Monument—is home to some of the most undisturbed mangrove forests in all of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Nestled among the roots of shoreline mangroves are unique coral communities containing about 30 different species of corals and critical nursery habitat for juvenile fish.

The construction and operation of the proposed mega-yacht marina on St. John would require the installation of more than 1,300 pilings in sensitive seagrass beds, potentially damaging water quality and harming endangered coral species and fish habitat.

The 145 slip marina would take up nearly 40 percent of Coral Bay Harbor. Boat traffic of vessels up to 210 feet would increase within Coral Bay and surrounding national park waters, bringing with it increased pollution and noise.

Virgin Islands National Park is a premiere tourist attraction and significant economic driver in the region. According to a recent National Park Service report, nearly half a million visitors to the park spent nearly \$60 million, supporting 789 jobs and generating nearly \$80 million in economic activity for the region. Preserving the quality and integrity of the natural resources that enchant tourists and support the local economy is critical to the future of the U.S. Virgin Islands and its national parks.

NPCA is working closely with community groups, including Friends of Virgin Islands National Park and Save Coral Bay, to unite our efforts in opposition to the project as planned. Many thanks to the more than 17,000 NPCA members and supporters who voiced their concerns about this project and helped hold developers accountable for the potential impacts of their actions on Virgin Islands National Park.

**Below:** Colorful dinghies in Coral Bay, St. John, US Virgin Islands ©C. Kurt Holter | Shutterstock.com



# Greater Protection for Biscayne

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and supporters voiced their support of the marine reserve.

The marine reserve is vital to the long-term survival of this important natural resource. Implementation has been delayed for

another year or more due to opposition. NPCA will continue to urge the Park Service to implement the reserve as quickly as possible.

**Below (Left):** Atlantic Spadefish, NPS **(Right):** Snorkelers explore the coral reef in Biscayne National Park, NPS

# 20,000

Number of NPCA members and supporters who voiced their support of the marine reserve.



# Lancelot Jones Day Established

**N**ational park advocates working in conjunction with elected officials helped to establish a state-wide Lancelot Jones Day on October 12, 2015, in recognition of his life-long commitment and contributions to Biscayne National Park.

Led by NPCA, members of Mahogany Youth and fellow advocates worked together with elected leaders including State Representative Holly Raschein and State Senator Dwight Bullard to recognize Jones in a one-time resolution for the second year in a row. Advocates also obtained a perpetual designation for the second Monday of October in both Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties by working in partnership with elected officials from the State Legislature, Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, and the gateway city of Homestead. In addition,



Miami-Dade County and the City of Homestead authorized the naming of the street leading to Biscayne National Park as "Sir Lancelot Jones Way."

Others instrumental in this effort include City of Homestead Commissioner Stephen Shelley and staff, Biscayne National Park Superintendent Brian Carlstrom and staff, the offices of Representative Raschein and Senator Bullard, Miami-Dade Commissioners Levine Cava and Moss, Monroe County Commissioner Murphy, Miami Dade College Earth Ethics Institute and many community partners, like NPCA Board of Trustees member Audrey Peterman. NPCA thanks all our partners who have long advocated for more representation of the impactful Jones Family story so that all can share in this rich history.

**Left:** NPCA National Board Member Audrey Peterman (center) and community partner supporters celebrate Lancelot Jones street naming ©Jacqueline Cruet | NPCA



# Caroline McLaughlin

Biscayne Program Manager

## MEET THE STAFF

**What is your job?** As NPCA's Biscayne Program Manager, a lot of my job focuses on advocating for the protection of Biscayne National

Park, focusing on wetland restoration, conserving coral reefs and marine wildlife, and improving water quality in the Bay. I also work to protect marine resources in and around our national parks in South Florida, the Florida Keys, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### What is the best part of your work?

I love being able to see the difference I'm making through the work that I do. Because I focus on specific issues in specific national parks, I can actually hop on a boat, get in the water, and see the resources I'm working so hard to protect. Being able to physically see and experience the places I'm trying to save makes me more connected to my work and to the mission of NPCA.

### What is your favorite national park experience?

When I was a college student at the University of Miami, I worked as an intern with a shark research group that was doing field work in Biscayne National Park. I remember swimming in the shallow waters off Elliott Key at night searching for juvenile sharks, feeling partly terrified and wholly amazed that this extraordinary place existed right off the shores of Miami. It was my first time in Biscayne National Park and it made a huge impression on me. Years later, I've been lucky enough to find a job that allows me to work full time to protect one of my favorite places in the world.

**Above:** McLaughlin with staghorn coral reef in Biscayne National Park; © Cara Capp | NPCA



## NPCA Launches Find Your Voice Initiative

Last spring, NPCA launched the Find Your Voice initiative to build on the increased attention around national parks during the centennial anniversary year of the National Park Service.

Find Your Voice is an initiative to educate, engage and empower new national park advocates to ensure America's favorite places continue to thrive into their next century. As part of this effort, National Parks Conservation Association is hosting activities and projects in and near national parks across the country, from community service projects to advocacy trainings. The initiative aims to inspire the next generation of advocates to find their voice for our national parks.

NPCA's Sun Coast and Pacific Region's each hosted an inaugural event in April. Our Sun Coast event took place in the gateway city of Homestead and at both Everglades and Biscayne National Parks, where more than 200 visitors and locals alike hopped on the free national parks trolley and joined NPCA staff in this day-long celebration of the parks and park protection that featured a call to action for the creation of a marine reserve zone in Biscayne. Students with Mahogany Youth led fishing lessons along Biscayne Bay while students with the Frost Museum of Science shared their citizen science and marine data collection. Members of Ann Storck Center invited all to share in a large art project.

Many participants also heard first hand from national park advocate Lloyd Miller, 92, who was partly responsible for the creation of Biscayne National Park. He shared stories about his experiences in advocating for the creation of the park. Biscayne rangers guided visitors on boat rides, while a reenactor portrayed Lancelot Jones, who sold his land to the park, and recounted his love of sponges, birds and fish.

A second trolley stop brought visitors to Everglades National Park and Anhinga Trail, where visitors could take a walking tour, view wildlife, and watch a film short documenting urban youth encounters with wilderness.

NPCA and our community partners continue our celebration of the park and its advocates through 2016. We hope you'll join us on the trolley and at events to be announced via email and on our website so we can explore, enjoy and protect our national parks together for another hundred years.

**Above:** Anhinga Trail Boardwalk in Everglades National Park ©Justin A Lyden | Dreamstime.com

# Progress on the Horizon for Tamiami Trail Bridging

**G**ood news for Everglades National Park! The next phase of the Tamiami Trail is scheduled to begin next spring, in time for the National Park Service Centennial.

Tamiami Trail is the roadway that runs across the state connecting Tampa to Miami, and acts as a dam that restricts the historic north-south flow of water into Everglades National Park. This is causing significant deterioration to the park's wading bird populations and wetlands. The solution? Bridge critical segments of the road to restore water flow and connect wildlife habitat.

NPCA has worked for more than a decade to bridge Tamiami Trail, and celebrated the completion of the first one-mile bridge section in 2013. Now with a strong funding commitment the next 2.3 miles of bridging will move forward and set the stage for the final 3.2 miles.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded a \$20 million Transportation Infrastructure Generating Economic Revenue (TIGER) grant jointly to the National Park Service and the Florida Department of Transportation to move forward with construction. This grant came on the heels of Florida Governor Rick Scott's commitment



of \$90 million from the state budget to bridge Tamiami Trail over three years.

A groundbreaking celebration is being planned for the coming spring and NPCA will help announce the date to all members

and supporters. Together we can call for completion of this critical project.

**Above:** An American Alligator on the side of the road on Tamiami Trail ©carstenbrandt | iStockPhoto.com

## Restoring America's Everglades

**J**oin us for the 31st annual Everglades Coalition conference at the Biltmore in Coral Gables, Florida from January 7-10, 2016 to discuss progress on restoration of America's Everglades. NPCA continues to serve as national co-chair of the Coalition.

The theme of the 2016 conference, "Voices of the Everglades: All for Restoration," invites participants to explore and celebrate the diverse stakeholders whose lives and livelihoods are intertwined with the Greater Everglades ecosystem, and how to best achieve our shared vision for restoration.

Conference attendees include high-level policymakers, elected leaders, agency staff, academics, business leaders, and passionate advocates throughout the Everglades community. This year college students will be well represented at the conference, thanks to a number of scholarships extended to college students throughout the state.



Important topics in this year's agenda include the National Park Service Centennial, upcoming groundbreaking of the next phase of bridging the Tamiami Trail, progress on the restoration of Biscayne National Park

including the creation of a marine reserve zone, timely wildlife and habitat issues, and restoration funding.

**Above:** A nest of threatened young wood storks ©Kodell | Dreamstime.com



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us to learn about and  
enjoy your national parks!

**31st Annual Everglades  
Coalition Conference**  
January 7-10, 2016  
Biltmore Hotel  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Everglades Action Day**  
January 28, 2016  
State Capital Building  
Tallahassee, Florida

**NPCA National Board &  
Regional Councils Trip**  
February 3-6, 2016  
Naples, Florida

**NPCA Speakers Series**  
March 31, 2016  
Lost Tree Club  
North Palm Beach, Florida

**4th Annual  
Everglades Day**  
April 8, 2016  
Homestead, Florida

**NPCA Annual  
Gala & "Salute to  
the Parks"**  
April 13, 2016  
Washington, D.C.

**Sun Coast Regional  
Council Meeting**  
May 2016  
Key West, Florida

**EXHIBITION: National  
Parks & South Florida**  
June 2016  
Coral Gables Museum  
Coral Gables, Florida

For More  
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