



## National Parks Recovering from Hurricane Damage

By Sarah Gaines Barmeyer

**T**his year's record-breaking hurricanes—Harvey, Irma and Maria—devastated the communities and national parks in their paths.

More than 50 park sites in nine states and territories have been impacted by the hurricanes, damaging infrastructure and habitat and causing park closures.

Storms damaged and destroyed historic structures, staff housing, visitor centers, ferry boats, levees, docks and more. Critically, they also seriously harmed natural habitat, threatening water quality, wildlife habitat, and the ability of these areas to protect communities and ecosystems from future storm surges.

Hurricane Irma hit the Sun Coast Region, impacting the following parks:

- **At Virgin Islands National Park**, a direct hit from the storm smashed historic structures, visitor centers, docks, trails and staff housing. The park is likely to remain closed for an entire year.

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## PROJECT UPDATE

### Clean Water for Everglades National Park

By Cara Capp

**G**ood news for Everglades National Park! State and federal agencies are embarking on a restoration project to create a new source of clean freshwater to rehydrate the Southern Everglades and Florida Bay.

America's Everglades is a globally unique and valuable ecosystem. Home to diverse wildlife like the American alligator, West Indian manatee, Florida panther, wading birds, tropical fish and more, Everglades National Park preserves over 700 square miles of wilderness that is owned by all Americans. But the park and the greater ecosystem have suffered from decades of development that has forever changed Florida's landscape. Half of the historic Everglades has been lost, and over 70 percent of the "River of Grass" water flow is gone.

The suffering of Everglades National Park is one symptom of Florida's overall water crisis. While the Southern Everglades and Florida Bay are starved for freshwater, the northern Caloosahatchee River and St. Lucie River are inundated with polluted discharge from Lake Okeechobee. The solution to this



crisis is to send clean water south to the Everglades, restoring some of the historic freshwater flow that once dominated this unique ecosystem.

Projects authorized by the 2000 Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) have led to incremental progress toward this goal. However, many efforts have not moved quickly enough to bring much-needed benefits to the ecosystem.

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**Top:** An alligator rests in Everglades National Park. ©Noeabusleme | Dreamstime **Above:** Florida Governor Rick Scott signs legislation to advance a water storage reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to benefit Everglades National Park. ©Cara Capp | NPCA

# FIELD REPORT

Winter 2017-2018

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

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Newsletter Design by  
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## REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S LETTER BY JOHN ADORNATO III

**M**any of you reading this letter experienced the unprecedented hurricane season that unfolded this past fall. The number of severe hurricanes—category 3, 4 or 5—was the largest number ever to hit the United States. They presented a challenge to many of us, forcing us to consider the possibility of evacuating, protecting our cherished things and otherwise staying safe. Then came the recovery.

National parks in the Sun Coast Region took the heaviest hit, suffering damages everywhere from Virgin Islands National Park to San Juan National Historic Site to all of the parks in Florida, including Biscayne and Fort Matanzas. Ironically spared were the parks in New Orleans and even Gulf Islands National Seashore. I spoke with the leadership of the National Park Service and with many of the staff who work at the affected parks or who came from other parks to help with recovery efforts. All were heroes in their own right, seeking to protect and repair America's cherished places.

We are pleased that Congress funded some of the needs of the Park Service; however, we know that it still won't be enough. Indeed, I learned that after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, only one of two housing facilities in Biscayne National Park was funded to be repaired; the other sits dormant still. Now, we'll be lucky if the first one is repaired. We know, though, that the most critical part of

rebuilding is resiliency. Whether we debate the causes or not, we are dealing with the impacts of a changing climate. We will continue to face higher seas, stronger and more frequent storms, and other challenges—like the severe wildfires causing damage to homes and natural areas in the West. NPCA is sending the message that as we repair, we must rebuild stronger and smarter to combat these anticipated changes. Repairing water-damaged staff housing in Flamingo at Everglades National Park doesn't make much sense if it continues to flood. Instead, the whole structure should be raised to Monroe County standards, so it doesn't flood again.

At the frontlines of combatting climate change is the Climate Solutions Caucus, started by U.S. Representatives Carlos Curbelo (R-FL26) and Ted Deutch (D-FL22). With over 60 members from across the country, they've been talking the talk about bipartisan efforts to find solutions, and even voted as a block to defeat a bad environmental rider last fall. They came out with a letter supporting resiliency recovery efforts from the storm. NPCA is proud to work with the caucus to build bipartisan support for preserving our heritage. Ultimately, the question of how to provide more resiliency to our natural and cultural resources will become even more pressing, and we hope to have set the stage for positive and constructive solutions.



**Above:** Adornato and family making memories in Acadia National Park ©John Adornato III | NPCA

# Inspiring Environmental Stewardship

**“In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.”**

— John Muir, American environmentalist and leading advocate for the establishment of the national park concept, 1838-1914



By NPCA Partner Linda Pulley Freeman

**M**y core vision in developing the GEN2050 Youth Enrichment Program was to inspire young adults—who will be our community leaders in the year 2050—to embrace entrepreneurship, leadership, STEM, social responsibility and environmental stewardship. In June 2017, our first GEN2050 summer camp students were not enthusiastic about working in a garden or being outside for any extended period. Fifty percent of them were not interested in whether pollinators, like honeybees, were on the decline in the United States. They had very little understanding of how their lives and the natural environment were interdependent. Then, in late June, I met Jackie Cruet through a Leadership Florida classmate. Jackie is the Sun Coast senior program manager with NPCA. She shared with me NPCA’s focus on inspiring young people to become environmental advocates.

In July, she spent a morning with GEN2050 in the Trinity Urban Garden. Her visit was serendipitous. We agreed right then to

engage the kids with the national parks, using the parks as a hands-on, environmental stewardship lab.

Our first GEN2050 national park adventure with NPCA happened in late October at Biscayne National Park. The entrance to the park is located in Homestead, Florida, about an hour away. As we stood on the visitor center deck, it seemed as if we were worlds away from the pace and congestion of urban Miami-Dade County.

Jackie and a seasoned team from Biscayne National Park Institute took us on a boat tour to Boca Chita Key, sharing the area’s unique history and their knowledge of Biscayne Bay’s ecosystems. The kids were enthralled. Many had never visited a national park or traveled in a boat. We saw sea grasses, mangroves, pelicans and other sea birds, nurse sharks and fish, and even had the opportunity to climb the stairs of a lighthouse. When we returned to the dock near the visitor center, the kids were asking how soon we could come back! They were so enthusiastic that Jackie asked them to share their first impressions of the park.

*Here are a few of their comments:*

**“Scary, and then I started to like it.”**  
—PATRICK

**“It was exciting, and I got to learn new things.”**  
—JOSHUA

**“Home. I love being here. Appreciative.”**  
—STEPHANYE

**“I have never been here, and I lived here all my life.”**  
—NANDZY

**“Smoothing.”** —ZONA

**“I never expected something like this. I am eager to come back.”**  
—ARIYANNA

**“A brand new experience and a different mindset.”**  
—DONALD



My first impression was “What a treasure!” I’m looking forward to our next GEN2050 outdoor learning experience with NPCA. We are planning a spring camping trip to Elliot Key. Thank you, National Parks Conservation Association!

*Linda Pulley Freeman combines her specialized training in environmental and chemical engineering with her deep ministerial commitment as she serves mission fields at home and abroad.*

**Left:** NPCA Jackie Cruet with GEN2050 stewards Biscayne National Park—Dante Fascell Visitor Center. ©Michele Lozano **Above:** GEN2050 stewards first visit to Biscayne National Park ©Linda Freeman

# PROJECT UPDATE

## Clean Water for Everglades National Park



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Earlier this year, NPCA was present as Florida Governor Rick Scott signed legislation directing state water managers to expedite the plan to store and treat excess water from Lake Okeechobee and deliver it south to Everglades National Park, as outlined in CERP. With the support and partnership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state water managers have begun to assess the scope of the project and perform early modeling of the reservoir. Per state legislation, the reservoir must be capable of storing at least 240,000 acre-feet of water in the Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee. This amount of available freshwater storage will provide enormous benefits to Everglades National Park. It will also help improve the ecosystems of the northern Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries, often overloaded with polluted lake water.

This amount of available freshwater storage will provide enormous benefits to Everglades National Park. ... and help improve ecosystems...

The South Florida Water Management District will provide an update on the progress of reservoir planning to Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature in early 2018. NPCA will remain actively involved every step of the way to ensure the project does the most good for Everglades National Park and the greater Florida landscape.

**Above:** Newborn baby manatee © Izanbar | Dreamstime

## Restoring Biscayne National Park's Coastal Wetlands

By Caroline McLaughlin

**B**iscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park are important parts of the greater Everglades ecosystem. Historically, water from the Everglades flowed to Biscayne Bay through ground and surface water, feeding a productive, diverse estuarine ecosystem. However, the draining of the Everglades and subsequent changes to South Florida's hydrology negatively affected the Biscayne Bay estuary. Cutting off freshwater flow to the bay damaged important habitats, threatening the survival of the area's fish and wildlife, including 44 threatened and endangered species like the wood stork and American crocodile.

The Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) project, part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), will help improve freshwater deliveries to Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park, restoring coastal wetlands and tributaries. As the only CERP project dedicated to Biscayne Bay, BBCW will also help reduce freshwater point source discharges to the bay by redistributing surface water using a spreader canal system. Spreading water across a wider area of coastal wetlands will lower nearshore salinity and improve nursery habitat conditions for fish and shellfish.

In addition to its numerous ecological benefits, BBCW will provide key economic and social gains for our communities. Better water quality and healthier wildlife will benefit the robust recreational fishing industry supported by Biscayne Bay. Furthermore, increasing freshwater flow in coastal areas will push back against saltwater intrusion and protect our drinking water supply. Finally, BBCW will improve the health of mangrove and coastal ecosystems, which act as a critical buffer between local communities and the physical impacts of storm events. In the wake of the deadly hurricanes that ravaged our coasts in 2017, we need to prioritize improving the resilience of our communities.

BBCW is divided into two phases, the first of which is well underway. With enough funding, BBCW Phase I could be completed in just a couple of years. Thus, robust federal and state funding is urgently needed to bring Phase I across the finish line. NPCA calls on Congress and the Florida Legislature to dedicate sufficient funding to complete BBCW Phase I so that we may realize the full ecological benefits of years of work and millions of dollars of investments.



**Above:** White Ibis in the shallow waters of Biscayne Bay ©Constance Mier | Alamy

# National Parks and Service

By Jacqueline Cruet

**N**PCA continues to partner with our local veterans to help improve and protect our national parks. Two NPCA veteran partners in the Sun Coast Region are, The Mission Continues and Adaptive Aquatics, and each take a different approach toward national park work.

The Mission Continues veterans provide boots on the ground in our parks. This fall, they helped respond to damage created by Hurricane Irma by restoring trails used by school children in Everglades National Park. They also removed debris and replaced an American flag at a fishing camp that serves as a base for veterans on multi-day healing excursions in the Ten Thousand Islands area of the park.

Adaptive Aquatics are NPCA's flippers in the water at our marine parks by diving in park waters. This group assists Biscayne National Park staff by monitoring several shipwrecks that are part of the Maritime Heritage Trail.

Both groups have a keen interest in serving our parks on site and in our nation's capital. This Veterans Day, in fact, several veterans traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss the importance of the National Park Service Legacy Act, a bill that would provide dedicated funding to help address the park system's \$12 billion repair backlog. Veteran Angel Gual even met with Department of the

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and various elected officials to lend his civic voice and personal story of the value parks play in veterans' lives.

NPCA will continue to work with our veteran community to help connect them to their national parks and exercise their civic voice for national park protection.



**Left:** The Mission continues at Everglades National Park ©Tim Long **Right:** Worth O'Brien, of Aquanauts Adaptive Aquatics, debriefing the group after diving the Maritime Heritage Trail in Biscayne National Park ©Clark Stephens

## Intern Corner

By Cheryl Swaby

**N**PCA sincerely thanks our interns and fellows for their hard work and passionate commitment to our national parks. This year **Shauna Mackey**, **David Riera** and **Jonathan Steinmuller** served as fellows to our Sun Coast Regional Office.

Last fall, **Shauna** worked as a communications fellow to secure support and draft public comments for the business community and the NPS Legacy Act. She participated in and assisted with several Civic Voice Lessons and successfully advocated for Everglades restoration in Tallahassee as part of Everglades Action Day. Shauna holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications and was the College Emmy recipient for newscast in the 35th College Television Awards.

Growing up in Hialeah, Florida and serving in the Marine Corps in the U.S. and Iraq kept **David** close to nature throughout his early life. He served as The Mission Continues fellow with NPCA in 2016 and has returned



as an intern to continue supporting the efforts of NPCA's Sun Coast Region. He was awarded his Master of Science in Environmental Studies in the spring of 2017 for his work to develop a method to conserve endangered wetland orchid species. He is a student member of the Board of Directors for the Society of Wetland Scientists and serves as the current president of both the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences club as well as the new South Florida Beekeeping Association at Florida International University (FIU). He effectively advocated for the National Park Service Legacy Act with NPCA in Washington, D. C.. David is currently in a PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction

with a Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM) focus at the FIU College of Education.

**Jonathan** is a Bright Future Scholar at the University of Florida. During the spring, Jonathan supported our Everglades restoration work, specifically assisting our campaign to purchase land south of Lake Okeechobee for the construction of a reservoir. He targeted and coordinated outreach to key decision-makers and partners. He is a hockey fan and welcomed the opportunity to work with NPCA's new partner the Florida Panthers hockey team, speaking to event-goers about NPCA's conservation work.

**Above Left:** Shauna Mackey ©Shauna Mackey **Above Middle:** David Riera reading a Sun Coast Field Report ©David Riera **Above Right:** Jonathan Steinmuller ©Cara Capp

# NPCA Regional Council Adventures

By JoAnn Tredennick, Regional Council Member

**N**PCA certainly had a presence in my town of Jacksonville, FL this past March when the Sun Coast Regional Council joined forces with the Southeast Regional Council. In addition to meeting fellow park advocates, we shared memories at both Cumberland Island National Seashore and Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve.

Superintendent Gary Ingram of Cumberland Island gave us a brief overview of the park at the visitor center in St. Mary. After the beautiful ferry ride, Park Ranger Nick Roll welcomed our group with a hike along the River Trail and an outstanding tour of Dungeness Ruins.

Walking along the shores of Sea Camp Beach was stunning and reminded us all of the need to protect this fragile place. At Plum Orchard, park volunteers brought cultural resources to life by revealing the rich histories these objects and structures hold.

Among Timucuan's 46,000 acres of salt marshes, coastal dunes and hardwood hammocks, we explored the Kingsley Plantation. Park Ranger Susie Sernaker shared the remarkable story of the multi-racial family that farmed the island with a

cadre of enslaved people, whose homes were made of tabby (a type of concrete made by burning oyster shells to create lime, then mixing it with water, sand, ash and broken oyster shells). Tabby was used by early Spanish settlers in present-day North Carolina and Florida. This was a visit I won't soon forget.

For those of you who know me, historic preservation is critical to my very being and

where much of my passion lies. I was pleased to be able to discuss the relevant role our national parks play in our modern lives. Thank you to all who attended our reception, including the staff of U.S. Representative John Rutherford, U.S. Senator Bill Nelson, and our great civic leaders in Jacksonville. It's an honor to partner with NPCA to protect America's favorite places, rich culture and history for future generations.



**Above:** Sun Coast and Southeast Regional Council members at Plum Orchard Cumberland Island National Seashore ©Tracey Kramer | NPCA

## Fighting to Protect Big Cypress from Oil Development Update

By Nick Lund

**O**ne year ago, in the Sun Coast newsletter, I detailed a lawsuit that NPCA filed against the National Park Service. Joined by our partners at the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthworks, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and South Florida Wildlands Network, our lawsuit challenged the government's approval of a private company's plan to explore for oil and gas inside Big Cypress National Preserve.

Despite the best effort from the coalition's lawyers, a U.S. District Court judge ruled in favor of the Park Service in April. NPCA and our partners strongly disagreed with the decision, but it was decided that further appeal had a very low likelihood of success. Regardless of our protests, the Burnett Oil Company conducted the first phase of its seismic testing in the preserve over the summer.



**Above:** Observation hut and platform at Big Cypress National Preserve ©Gynane | Dreamstime

The rainy season returned, the equipment was forced out of the preserve, and now NPCA and our partners are looking towards the future. Through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, the coalition has received a lot of information about the impacts of the exploration activities over the summer, and has found some alarming impacts. We're learning about forest destruction, soil rutting and other impacts that we can use to challenge future phases of the project.

We are working with state and local officials to raise additional challenges to the project based upon the impacts observed in the FOIA documents and by environmental consultants hired by the coalition. We were disappointed by our first setback, but we are dedicated to the continued protection of Big Cypress National Preserve.



## National Parks Recovering from Hurricane Damage

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- At Everglades National Park, the hurricane destroyed Gulf Islands Coast Visitor Center, damaged Flamingo Visitor Center, sank vessels within the park, and damaged wastewater and water treatment plants.
- At Dry Tortugas National Park, a 40-foot section of the historic Fort Jefferson moat wall collapsed in the wake of Hurricane Irma's drenching rains.

National parks bring people together. We are seeing that even now with the rebuilding and relief efforts in our coastal park communities.

As these areas begin to rebuild, NPCA remains deeply concerned about the threat to National Park Service funding if the agency must absorb the enormous cost of repairing hurricane damage. Damage estimates are expected to be hundreds of millions of dollars, which far exceeds the National Park Service's annual maintenance budget.

We will work to ensure that national parks are included in a federal supplemental funding bill that supports the recovery of our national parks and their historic and natural resources, addresses the need for their resilience, and maintains the integrity of the recreation and tourism economies parks support.

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**Photos (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):** Shark Valley in Everglades National Park, may not be opened for many months into the winter tourist season due to hurricane damage. ©John Adornato III | NPCA • Piles of debris at Flamingo Visitor's Center at the southern tip of Everglades National Park ©Cara Capp | NPCA • Construction of the next 2.5 miles of the Tamiami bridge was not affected. ©John Adornato III | NPCA • Damaged moat wall at Fort Jefferson ©NPS Eastern Incident Management Team • The Gulf Coast Visitor's Center at Everglades National Park was destroyed and will need to be rebuilt to allow boat tours of the Ten Thousand Islands ©John Adornato III | NPCA





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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us to learn about and enjoy your national parks!

**JANUARY 11-14, 2018**  
33rd Annual Everglades Coalition Conference  
Hutchinson Island Marriott  
Stuart, Florida

**JANUARY 23, 2018**  
6th Annual Everglades Action Day  
Tallahassee, FL

**MARCH 2018**  
NPCA Speaker Series  
Miami, Florida

**MARCH 2018**  
NPCA Regional Council Meeting and Park Excursion

**APRIL 2018**  
NPCA's 37th Annual "Salute to the Parks" Awards Gala  
Washington, DC

For more information on these events, Contact [suncoast@npca.org](mailto:suncoast@npca.org)

## Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant Litigation Update

By Caroline McLaughlin

**N**PCA has been working for nearly a decade to protect the waters of Biscayne National Park from plans to expand Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant, owned and operated by Florida Power & Light. NPCA filed suit against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to protest plans to inject contaminated wastewater deep underground due to fears that the water could migrate upwards and contaminate South Florida's future drinking water supply.

Last year, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) conducted an evidentiary hearing, or "battle of the experts," to determine the outcome of our case. Despite our best efforts and that of our attorneys and expert witness, the ASLB ruled against us, finding the NRC successfully demonstrated that the environmental impacts of the proposed deep injection wells would be small.

While we are disappointed with the ASLB's decision, Florida Power & Light still needs to



clear a number of hurdles before proceeding with the expansion. NPCA will continue to do everything we can to ensure that Biscayne and Everglades National Parks are protected from the environmental threats associated with the expansion.

**Above:** Canoeing in Biscayne National Park  
©Sandra Foyt | Dreamstime



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