

BOAT BISCAYNE

Restoring ICW Access for Personal Watercraft in Biscayne National Park

Protecting Boater Safety: Restore Personal Watercraft Navigable Access along the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway in Biscayne National Park

Biscayne National Park is a popular boating destination, attracting nearly half a million visitors each year. It is comprised of over 172,000 acres of water, enjoyed at present by all types of boats except one. As a result of a system-wide National Park Service (NPS) rule in 2000, the use of personal watercraft (PWC) has since been prohibited at Biscayne National Park. An unintended consequence of this restriction creates a safety risk to thousands of South Florida boaters that should be corrected immediately. The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway (ICW), the primary coastal boating navigation channel in Florida and the eastern seaboard, transits directly through Biscayne National Park approximately two miles from shore. Because of the National Park Service rule, PWC operators today are denied safe passage provided to all other types of vessels that travel the ICW from Miami to points south and are forced to go out into the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Surely when the rule was written that would apply to the entire National Park System, the NPS did not intend to create this harmful situation and deny PWC operators access to the navigable waters of the ICW that is afforded to all other boats. Restoring access to the ICW in Biscayne National Park should be accomplished swiftly either by the Park Superintendent or Congress.

The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway (ICW)

The federally authorized navigational channel was created to provide safe passage for boaters traveling along the Eastern seaboard. The waterway runs approximately 1,200 miles from Norfolk, Va., to Key West, Fla., 17 miles of which traverses Biscayne National Park. Today, to get from one side of the park to the other, a PWC operator must travel nearly 12 miles out into the Atlantic Ocean rather than simply travel the two to three miles inshore along the ICW. Depending on weather conditions, the sea 10 miles out can be challenging for all small boats, let alone PWC.

The BOAT Biscayne Coalition—an alliance founded in 2004 by members of the American Watercraft Association (AWA), BlueRibbon Coalition and the Personal Watercraft Industry Association (PWIA)—is very concerned about the safety of PWC operators who are forced to circumvent the park's boundaries because of the current ban. All other boats have access to the ICW. Only PWC are prohibited. There are approximately 20,000 registered personal watercraft in Miami-Dade, Monroe and Broward counties. To reduce the risk of serious boating accidents and fatalities, the Coalition is encouraging the Park Service to restore PWC access immediately along the ICW as it runs through Biscayne.



The Coalition is not alone in calling for an immediate solution. Several organizations at the national, state and local levels have also expressed concerns regarding the safety of PWC operators. These organizations include the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway Association, BoatU.S., Florida Inland Navigation District, Marine Industry Association of South Florida, National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, National Marine Manufacturing Association and the National Safe Boating Council.

PWC and the Environment - Clean & Quieter

The PWC ban at Biscayne National Park is based on allegations that personal watercraft present a negative impact on the local environment. Recent studies, however, prove otherwise. Fifteen separate national parks have conducted environmental studies and all individually conclude that PWC present no unique impact. Many national parks have restored PWC use as a result of these findings, but Biscayne National Park has yet to begin the environmental study process. Today's PWC are up to 90% cleaner and 70% quieter than those manufactured before 1998. Objective studies and sound science confirm that there is no scientific reason to ban PWC on waters that allow other types of motorized boating. According to the California Air Resource Board, "Four-stroke [PWC] engines are as clean as outboard and inboard/stern drive engines with similar engine sizes."