

BOAT BISCAYNE

Bringing Personal Watercraft Back to Biscayne National Park

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Campaign to Restore Personal Watercraft Use at Biscayne Nat'l Park Files Petition With U.S. Department of the Interior; Demands a Scientific Study Begin in 2006

Coalition Also Releases New Economic Study Estimating PWC Bans Have Cost \$2.7+ Billion to U.S. Economy and 3,300 American Jobs; Announces Growing Grassroots Support with Online Petition

Miami, FL – The BOAT Biscayne Coalition filed a petition today with the U.S. Department of the Interior, requesting the process to reevaluate the use of personal watercraft begin without delay at Biscayne National Park in Miami. This announcement was made a press conference at the Miami International Boat Show attended by personal watercraft (PWC) users who are currently prohibited from using the park's public waters. According to federal rules, an environmental assessment study followed by a formal rulemaking is required for Biscayne National Park to reconsider the current PWC ban.

The BOAT Biscayne Coalition argued that the ban is not only discriminatory to thousands of South Floridians, but also harmful to businesses that sell PWC or serve PWC owners. A new study was released at the press conference that analyzes the economic impact caused by PWC bans in national parks, an impact estimated to exceed \$2.7 billion since the mid 1990s and to have sacrificed approximately 3,300 U.S. jobs. The BOAT Biscayne Coalition asserts this economic harm is undue, as is the ban at Biscayne National Park, since 15 other national park units have conducted the required environmental assessment studies and all have scientifically concluded that PWC cause no unique impact on the environment and should not be banned on waters that allow other types of motorized boating.

“Every single study and rulemaking conducted by the National Park Service has found that personal watercraft do not cause significant impact and their use has been restored,” stated Maureen Healey for the BOAT Biscayne Coalition. Healey is the Executive Director of the Personal Watercraft Industry Association. “We are filing this new petition because we have uncovered the bias within the National Park Service against personal watercraft and we're simply not going to be ignored,” continued Healey. “While we're committed to working with the Park Service in a genuine and forthright manner, we're not going anywhere until the ban is reconsidered and the environmental assessment begins.”

The BOAT Biscayne Coalition also began an online grassroots petition last month (www.boatbiscayne.com) and already has collected approximately 1,000 electronic signatures from South Florida supporters who want the PWC ban at Biscayne National Park to be reviewed. These join the more than 2,000 signatories to the coalition's 2004 petition drive.

The BOAT Biscayne Coalition filed a petition in August 2004, which was denied in December 2004. In an effort to get a legitimate explanation for this denial, a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was submitted to the federal government and the response revealed that the National Park Service and Biscayne National Park had a very weak basis for denying the original petition. This unsupported bias and lack of response has not only angered boaters, but it has reinvigorated the BOAT Biscayne Coalition to demand a different response this time.

“There are about 18,000 registered personal watercraft in South Florida, which is a significant population of boaters,” said Healey. “These Floridians have the right to an unbiased scientific assessment.”

No study – scientific or otherwise – has ever been conducted at Biscayne National Park to justify the PWC ban that was enacted in 2000. Instead, a rulemaking from Park Service headquarters in Washington, DC banned PWC use systemwide as a result of a lawsuit brought by an anti-boating group. This rulemaking identified 21 parks that could reconsider the ban by conducting an environmental assessment and rulemaking to determine whether or not PWC use was appropriate for said park unit. Biscayne National Park was not on that list but any park unit –

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whether or not on this list of 21 – can independently reconsider PWC use by going through the process of conducting a scientific study and rulemaking, which takes approximately two years to complete.

“Denying us the right to a fair and unbiased study that will decide once and for all if our boats should be allowed in the park is no different than blatant discrimination,” stated Danny DiNicola of Miami, a PWC owner. “The superintendent’s reasons why he doesn’t think personal watercraft should be allowed aren’t scientific reasons. My personal watercraft is equipped with engine technology that is cleaner than any other boat on the water in the park but I’m the one who is banned, which makes no sense,” DiNicola continued. “The park can no longer treat me like a second rate citizen because my boat didn’t cost as much as some million dollar yacht.”

At the press conference, the BOAT Biscayne Coalition also announced the release of an economic study that quantifies the economic cost of the personal watercraft bans to the U.S. economy. Economist Laura Baughman, of The Trade Partnership, estimates the negative impacts of the bans (and of publicity associated with the bans) has resulted in an estimated loss of about \$2.7 billion over the last nine years.

“If one includes all the upstream and downstream costs of the PWC bans, the total economic impact to the American economy caused by the personal watercraft bans over the past decade reaches up to \$2.7 billion,” said Baughman. “This economic harm will continue at a pace of more than \$587 million each year as long as the bans continue,” she continued. This economic harm is particularly pronounced in communities near the National Parks such as Biscayne Bay that rely on tourism dollars to sustain the small businesses serving park visitors.

In 2003 there were 8,479 registered PWC in Miami-Dade County, 7,607 in Broward and 1,643 in Monroe – a combined 17,729 in the tri-county area. Statewide there were 106,356 registered PWC. Marco Rueda, General Manager of Motorsports of Miami, also spoke at today’s press conference about the ban’s impact on business.

“Motorsports of Miami is right next to Biscayne National Park and when the bans went into effect in 2000 the shop had to downsize. The personal watercraft showroom closed, repairmen were laid off and business shrunk,” said Rueda. “What hurts the most is that someone’s misinterpretation of personal watercraft is taking a serious toll, let’s just conduct the study and let science decide. Enough is enough,” said Rueda.

All other types of recreational and commercial boats are allowed on the park’s waters. Only PWC are singled out in the ban.

Bringing PWC back to Biscayne National Park involves a multi-step process outlined by the National Park Service, beginning with a scientific study called an environmental assessment. The assessment is then followed by a formal rulemaking process. To date, 15 other national parks have completed a site-specific environmental assessment and *every one of them* has concluded that there is no reason to ban PWC on waters that allow other types of motor boating. In the past two years, ten of those 15 parks have completed the rulemaking process and today welcome families who own and enjoy personal watercraft. The others are finishing the rulemaking process currently, and are expected to re-open to PWC in the near term.

The BOAT Biscayne Coalition is advocating that the park superintendent “**Begin Our Assessment Today.**” Original supporters of the coalition include Personal Watercraft Industry Association, the American Watercraft Association, the BlueRibbon Coalition, dozens of South Florida PWC dealerships and thousands of Florida residents. The coalition encourages everyone to visit www.boatbiscayne.com and take action by signing the online petition on the website.

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More can be learned at www.boatbiscayne.com