



We celebrate Biscayne Bay and envision a community that offers safe, abundant and diverse experiences for physical and visual access to these waters.

DISCOVER BISCAYNE BAY

GET YOUR FEET WET

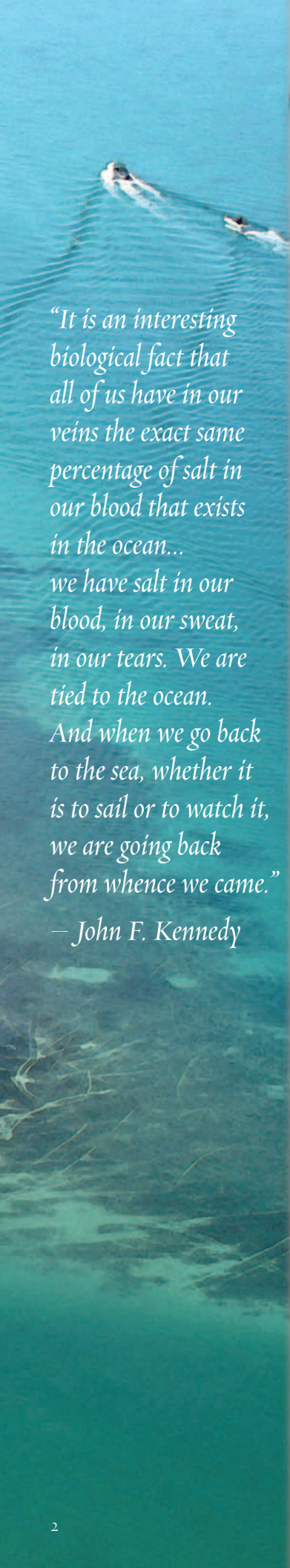


Illustration by Carol Garvin

The Public Access Plan for Biscayne Bay

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE TRUST *for* **PUBLIC LAND**
CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE



“It is an interesting biological fact that all of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean... we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch it, we are going back from whence we came.”

— John F. Kennedy



LIVING IN FLORIDA, MANY OF US MAY CONSIDER OURSELVES TIED TO THE OCEAN. But a surprising number of South Florida residents rarely encounter the beautiful waters that characterize our community.

By any measure, the waters and shoreline of Biscayne Bay are a treasure. The Bay is a unique natural habitat, a rich ecological community with abundant and varied animal and plant life. The Bay is part of a large regional ecosystem connecting the Everglades, several rivers, Florida Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

Southeast Florida’s coastal areas are remarkable in their diversity. Between Miami-Dade’s northern and southern county lines, a distance of less than 50 miles, the coastline reveals lush green parklands, dense mangrove preserves, open sandy beaches, bustling shipping ports and marinas, high-rise hotels, and mansions of the rich and famous.

The Bay is a focal point of recreational activity for local residents and the 10 million tourists who visit each year. Boating, swimming, fishing, sunbathing, shopping, dining and sightseeing all are part of Miami’s water-oriented lifestyle and a major factor in the area’s economy. From hotels to cruise lines, from condo towers to the new performing arts center, our community and the lives and livelihood of its residents are affected greatly by Biscayne Bay.





The Bay defines the identity of South Florida and Miami-Dade County.

So it's hard to imagine that many local residents have no relationship with Biscayne Bay. Yet, for a substantial portion of the local population, the Bay is too remote, too expensive, blocked from access and even blocked from view.

The reasons are many – physical, social and economic, the result of urban planning and development, transportation and regulatory issues, and public policy. The reasons are not new, nor are they unique to Miami-Dade. Experts and concerned citizens have recognized the issues for decades, and over the years considerable efforts have addressed many aspects of waterfront planning and use. Still, public access to Biscayne Bay remains a challenge.

In 1999, the Florida legislature established the Biscayne Bay Partnership Initiative, a community-based forum to survey public and private activities and programs affecting the Bay, and provide recommendations for actions to protect and enhance the Bay's resources. Ecological health was made a special priority.

Among the overarching themes identified by the Partnership was the importance of unlocking access to Biscayne Bay. Based on recommendations of the Partnership, the

State of Florida in 2001 provided funding for the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to develop a strategic public access plan for the Bay.

Under the guidance and authority of the South Florida Water Management District, TPL spearheaded a two-year, three-phase planning effort, in collaboration with an advisory team of informed, dedicated and highly able individuals who know and love Biscayne Bay and who share the aim of making the Bay more accessible to greater numbers of people.

This advisory team of about three dozen individuals reflected a cross-section of interests – the environment, tourism and recreation, government, education, business, and planning and resource management. Together, they represented a wealth of knowledge and experience in fields with a direct bearing on Biscayne Bay and the issues shaping its future. They also were familiar with the previous research and recommendations concerning the Bay and took advantage of this valuable body of knowledge.

During 2003 TPL and the advisory team conducted a series of meetings, workshops, brainstorming sessions and research activities, from which emerged a vision for the future of the Bay and a strong consensus about what needs to happen in the coming years.



THE RECOMMENDATIONS
CONTAINED IN THE
BISCAYNE BAY STRATEGIC
ACCESS PLAN ARE BASED
ON A SHARED VISION:

Biscayne Bay shines as Miami-Dade County's crown jewel. Its crystal waters flow from a vibrant urban area to pristine, natural settings reminiscent of early Florida when unencumbered vistas blurred the line between sky and sea. We continually return to these shores and waters to see, feel and experience their magic by means of a well-defined and integrated system of green and open spaces, landscapes of trails and water-borne routes. No matter where we live, how old we are or what our abilities may be, we enjoy safe physical and visual access to a diversity of recreational, commercial, cultural and natural experiences that entertain and challenge us and restore our souls. We celebrate the Bay's inherent beauty and respect the wildlife living there. We use the Bay responsibly, ensuring its health and knowing that it is the key to the quality and vitality of our community.

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In articulating this vision, the advisory team started with a set of core values. They include a commitment to environmental sustainability, appreciation of the area's wildlife, and the promise of equity – the promise that everyone will have equal physical and visual access to the Bay. Also among the core values is the acknowledgment that Bay access contributes significantly to the community's economy and its quality of life, and that the two are inseparable. Finally, because the team valued the visual aesthetic of Biscayne Bay, it shared a commitment to protecting the Bay's special vistas – not only from the land to the water, but also from the water to the land.





TO REALIZE THIS VISION, THE ADVISORY TEAM SET FORTH A SERIES OF GOALS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS TO ENSURE BAY ACCESS FOR ALL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS, AND TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACCESS AMONG THOSE WHO MOST LACK IT.

GOAL 1:

DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS PROGRAM.

Through public education, broad-based communications, events and publications, and by nurturing effective coalitions of community organizations, neighborhoods and individuals, we can create a strong grassroots constituency for the Bay, increase the community's sense of stewardship of its resources and encourage strong advocacy for its preservation.



GOAL 2:

CREATE AN ETHIC OF RESPECT FOR WILDLIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Through wildlife and habitat conservation, by taking steps to reduce pollution and by restoring critical land and water areas, Miami-Dade residents can enhance both the ecological and the economic health of the community.

GOAL 3:

ENSURE RESPONSIBLE, BALANCED AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE BAY. Equal Bay access for all Miami-Dade residents and visitors means creating an



infrastructure that addresses a broad range of issues – transportation, facilities, recreation, location, distribution, affordability, management, quality and connections. Equal access also means providing opportunities for people of varying abilities and across the full economic spectrum, and for people with different ideas about how they want to use and enjoy the Bay.

GOAL 4:

PROMOTE ECONOMIC VITALITY AND BALANCED GROWTH.

South Florida's approaches to urban design and development will continue to have profound implications on the future of Biscayne Bay views, access and use. Through better planning, more consistent safeguards and enforcement, and through more effective cooperation among diverse interests, decision-makers can do a better job of balancing the community's needs for a thriving economy and a healthy environment.



It is in all of the community's interest to share a commitment to protecting the land and water upon which our economy depends, with the understanding that major economic forces – such as the Port of Miami and Miami-Dade's real estate development industry – are dependent on the condition of the Bay.



GOAL 6:

DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES.

The Bay offers a good opportunity for enhancing Miami-Dade's transportation networks and increasing Bay access for all residents and visitors. A coordinated approach to land and water transportation will encompass issues related to the use of boats, cars, buses and public transportation.



GOAL 5:

ESTABLISH A SYSTEM OF COORDINATED GOVERNANCE AND SOUND PUBLIC POLICY.

Over the long term, improving public access to the Bay will depend on the way this community – from decision-makers and business leaders to public agencies and local residents – addresses issues of policy, administration and management of land and water resources. By working to improve the clarity and consistency of regulations governing Bay use, we can improve coordination among different jurisdictions, maximize the impact of existing safeguards, streamline the permitting process and inform better decision making with respect to public policy.



GOAL 7:

ENSURE SAFETY AND CONSISTENT ENFORCEMENT OF PROTECTIVE MEASURES.

Safety on our waters is integral to enjoyment and access. A fundamental goal of the access plan is based on efforts to provide broader public education on swimming, boating safety and overall community security.





FROM PLANNING TO ACTION:

On behalf of the many local residents, agencies and organizations that value Biscayne Bay for play, for respite and rehabilitation, for the environmental and economic opportunities it offers, and simply as the identifying feature of our community, TPL presents this plan for improving public access to the Bay.

A series of recommended strategies and pilot projects will provide some of the first specific steps to transform this plan into access. These projects are a way to increase awareness of our objectives and offer new opportunities for area residents and visitors to enjoy these waters and shores.

Recommendations for improving public access to the Bay include:

- Empowering a county-wide Biscayne Bay organization to spearhead the ongoing effort of protecting Bay resources, enhancing access and advocating for responsible stewardship.
- Safeguarding physical access to the Bay and protecting special Bay views, including consistent enforcement of existing laws and regulations.
- Protecting critical land and water areas for public access in perpetuity, including public acquisition of key sites or use of conservation easements for community benefit.
- Creating a shoreline walking and biking trail to provide an interconnected greenway along the waterfront.
- Creating a waterway trail for canoes and kayaks, with the necessary information, facilities and services to allow small-boat access throughout Bay waters.
- Supporting public communication programs to promote knowledge and appreciation of Bay resources, including publications, media coverage, online resources and other means of sharing information about the Bay.
- Improving Miami-Dade's boating infrastructure to enable residents and visitors to enjoy Bay waters more easily, affordably and safely.





Photographs by Michael Wray except as noted

Graphic design by Kim Foster Design

Concept and copy by Phyllis Shapiro

With grateful appreciation to the South Florida Regional Planning Council's Institute for Community Collaboration and the members and alternates of the Access Plan Advisory Team for their dedication to this planning effort: Elizabeth Abbott, Doug Black, David Brennan, Mike Brescher, Allyn Childress, Marsha Colbert, Marella Crane, Ovidio DeLeon, Phil Everingham, Barbara Falsey, Craig Grossenbacher, Cynthia Guerra, David Henderson, Harry Horgan, Jim King, Captain Dan Kipnis, Nancy Lee, Nancy Liebman, Carl Liederman, Adrian Aye-Lyew, Ernie Martin, Monika Mayr, Gary Milano, Rafaela Monchek, James F. Murley, Jorge Padron, Audrey Ordenes, Don Pybas, Tim Schmand, Cai Svendson, Bann Williams.

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The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. Established in 1972, TPL has had a strong presence in Florida for most of the organization's history, helping create parks and protect open spaces and natural areas for public use. TPL has also been a leading force in the creation of the Miami River Greenway, now under development as a series of parks and pathways along both sides of the river.

www.tpl.org/florida

www.discoverbiscaynebay.org