

Get your feet wet...
Discover Biscayne Bay!



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



Photo courtesy of Miami-Dade Dept. of Environmental Resource Management

BISCAYNE BAY, one of the world's most beautiful bodies of water, is a defining feature of South Florida. Its waters form a rich and diverse ecosystem of subtropical plants, fish, birds and other wildlife. The Bay enhances our lives and contributes substantially to the economy of our community. Surrounded by an exciting urban area, Biscayne Bay also connects us to unique and irreplaceable natural areas – two national parks, a national marine sanctuary, a state aquatic preserve and historic rivers and beaches. The Bay is a treasure. It belongs to us all.

Did you know?

- Just a few thousand years ago, there was no Biscayne Bay. Sea level then was about 20 feet lower than today, so the places we now call Miami and Miami Beach formed one continuous expanse of land.
- An estuary is the wide part of a waterway where fresh water and salt water mix. The Biscayne Bay estuary depends on the flow of fresh water from the Everglades and is home to dozens of species of birds and marine wildlife, including the endangered West Indian manatee and American crocodile.
- *Surrounded Islands*, a spectacular art installation, was created in 1983 by international artist Christo, who used 6.5 million square feet of brilliant pink fabric to transform 11 Biscayne Bay islands into gigantic lily pads for two weeks.





Extending more than 35 miles from north to south and 8 miles across at its widest point, Biscayne Bay seems vast. Still, the Bay is vulnerable. Unless we are careful, our treasure is at risk. Miami-Dade's 2.3 million residents and more than 10 million visitors each year have a major impact on the waters, ecosystems and future of the Bay.

Overuse, pollution, habitat loss, and unwise shoreline development – all present immediate and long-term risks, not only to the Bay, but also to the lives of local residents. If the Bay is harmed, so are we all.



Commodore Ralph Munroe snapped this shot of a traveler drawing fresh water from a spring in Biscayne Bay, ca 1890

Did you know?

- Biscayne Bay was once noted for its freshwater springs located in the Bay. Sailors and native people visited naturally occurring springs out in the Bay in search of drinking water.
- Over the past 50 years, people have made big changes to South Florida's landscape and, consequently, its natural water systems. Fresh water once flowed gradually into the Bay, fed slowly by coastal rivers and tidal creeks. Today, fresh water gushes into the bay from artificial canal discharge sites. Bay waters now are more vulnerable to pollution and disturbances in the delicate balance between fresh and salt water.
- Three types of mangroves grow along the Bay's shoreline. The red mangrove thrives along muddy coastlines, its spreading roots reaching outward toward the sea. The salt-tolerant black mangrove grows in mostly salty, silty soils closer inland, while the white mangrove lives further ashore.



Photographs by Jo-Anne Gardner

The Bay and its watershed form a complex web of ecosystems. Rimmed by mangrove wetlands, the natural Bay is a shallow estuary of clear waters and sandy Bay bottoms with seagrasses, corals and sponges. From the water's edge, from causeways and bridges, and especially from boats, you can see a splendid array of fish, crabs, lobsters, turtles, birds and other wildlife, and subtropical plants ranging from mangroves to flowering trees. Natural areas – from Oleta River State Park in the northern Bay to Black Point and Card Sound toward the south – let you experience the best of South Florida, whether you're on foot, in a canoe, or looking out the window of your car. The Bay is part of a much larger regional ecosystem, which relies on fresh water flowing from Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, through the watershed and into the Bay. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and other regional conservation efforts have direct impact on the future of Biscayne Bay.

Did you know?

- Volunteers Harry and Darlene Kelton founded the Pelican Harbor Seabird Station in 1980 to rescue sick, injured and orphaned seabirds, mostly threatened brown pelicans harmed by fishing tackle. Visit the station, off the 79th Street Causeway, for an up-close look at pelicans and other wildlife.
- A chain of 42 islands called the Emerald Keys lies at the southern end of the Bay, within Biscayne National Park. They are transitional islands – sharing some of the features of the hard rock coral keys to the south and some of the sandy barrier islands to the north. A few of the islands have tropical hardwood hammocks, with trees including mahogany and gumbo limbo as well as rare butterflies and abundant wildlife.





You can enjoy Biscayne Bay in a hundred different ways – swimming, boating, fishing, bird watching, picnicking or just watching the clouds float by. Shop and dine near the water’s edge at Bayside in downtown Miami. Stroll along the shoreline in Coconut Grove, Miami Shores, Key Biscayne, Miami Beach or south Dade’s Black Point Marina. Swim at Matheson Hammock, Cape Florida or Haulover Beach. Then grab your camera and drive across a Bay causeway – each offers a different great vista. You’ll find peaceful paths at Oleta River State Park in North Miami or the beautiful Deering Estate to the south in Palmetto Bay. You can rent a sailboat, canoe or kayak; take a fishing or sightseeing cruise; go windsurfing; or romp with your dog along the beach.

Did you know?

- Many celebrities have owned Miami waterfront homes – Madonna, Sylvester Stallone, Jennifer Lopez, Oprah Winfrey, Rosie O’Donnell, Mel Brooks and Cher are just a few. Miami’s own Gloria Estefan came from Cuba at age two and has lived here ever since. Miami also has been the scene of famous films and TV shows, such as *True Lies*, *Out of Time*, *CSI Miami* and, of course, classics *Flipper* and *Miami Vice*.
- Shake-A-Leg is an acclaimed sailing program for people with disabilities and at-risk youth. Each year, more than 5,000 people set sail in 20-foot “independence” sailboats specially designed for individuals whose disabilities range from spinal cord injuries and Down syndrome to blindness and other conditions.





A healthy Biscayne Bay is vital to our economy. Tourism, our biggest business, is based on a beautiful environment – not just sunny days, but also clean air, sandy beaches, sparkling waters, and thriving fish and wildlife. The Bay is home to hundreds of commercial enterprises – hotels, marinas, restaurants, retail stores, recreational outfitters and tourist attractions. The Port of Miami, one of the world’s largest commercial ports, is the cruise capital of the world and is home port to 18 cruise ships that serve nearly four million passengers each year. The port’s impact on Miami-Dade’s economy is estimated at more than \$8 billion annually and 45,000 jobs.



Did you know?

- On March 8, 2003, eight mega-cruise ships docked at the Port of Miami. Their combined total of approximately 19,000 passengers embarking that day set a record.
- Two leading health care institutions overlook Biscayne Bay – Mount Sinai Medical Center, with 3,500 employees, and Mercy Hospital, employing 2,200. Two other major employers, The Miami Herald and Florida International University, also have bayfront locations.
- The Miami River is Florida’s fifth largest port and the primary service area of international trade with the Caribbean.





Biscayne Bay belongs to everyone, whether we want to swim, sail or fish, go shopping, dining or bird watching, work or play along its shore or on its sparkling waters. Yet many area residents find it difficult to enjoy this great community treasure. Some families live too far away; for them, just getting to the Bay takes too much time or money. Public transportation and parking are inconvenient. Access points

to the Bay can be hard to find. Often, boats offer the best way to enjoy the Bay – yet owning and keeping a boat in Miami-Dade has become more difficult. For people with special needs – older residents, people with disabilities, and those with economic or language barriers – gaining access to the Bay is even harder.





The Trust for Public Land is working in partnership with government agencies, area residents and other nonprofit groups to increase public access to Biscayne Bay. A yearlong planning effort established a series of action steps including:

- Creating a shoreline walking and biking trail to provide an interconnected greenway along the waterfront.
- Developing a “blueway” canoe and kayak paddling trail, with the necessary information, facilities and services to allow small-boat access throughout Bay waters.
- Promoting a county-wide Biscayne Bay organization to sustain the effort of protecting Bay resources, enhancing public access and advocating for responsible stewardship.
- Strengthening measures to safeguard physical access to the Bay and to protect special Bay views, including consistent enforcement of laws and regulations.
- Protecting critical land and water areas for long-term public access, including acquisition of key sites or use of conservation easements for community benefit.
- Improving Miami-Dade’s boating infrastructure to enable residents and visitors to enjoy Bay waters more easily, affordably and safely.
- Promoting improved and integrated Bay-oriented communications, including publications, media coverage, online resources and other information sharing, to instill knowledge and appreciation of the Bay.



Did you know?

- More than 30 jurisdictions have responsibility for planning, regulating and managing Biscayne Bay and its shorelines. They include federal, state and county agencies, and more than a dozen municipalities in Miami-Dade County alone.
- Aggressive shoreline development has contributed to our area's economy and quality of life – but only for some residents. While Miami's dramatic skyline is pictured in the world press, huge office and condo canyons have meant the

loss of parks, historic structures and Bay views. Balancing different community interests isn't easy.

- More than 58,000 boats are registered to Miami-Dade residents. More than 40 percent are small, trailered boats. Yet local laws make it illegal to park your boat and trailer on your driveway or in front of your home, and local boatyards can accommodate only a fraction of the need.

- The award-winning Miami-Dade Park and Recreation Department celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2004 by designating several of its signature parks as heritage sites. Among them are Greynolds Park and Matheson Hammock Park, both built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.





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Biscayne National Park, Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation Dept., Miami-Dade County Dept. of Environmental Resource Management, City of Miami, City of Miami Beach, Oleta River State Park, Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, FAU Catanese Center for Environmental and Urban Solutions, South Florida Regional Planning Council and the Institute for Community Collaboration.





Want to find out more?

www.discoverbiscaynebay.org

www.tpl.org/florida

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 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.

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