

# ONE CRANDON PARK

**A Call to Action**

**RESEARCH SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

2020





The Crandon Park: A Call for Change report is comprised of an *Executive Summary* and the following *Research Volumes*:

- Vol. 1 Introduction
- Vol. 2 Crandon Park Today | Part 1 - Site Analysis  
Crandon Park Today | Part 2 - Specific Area Analysis
- Vol. 3 Relevant History
- Vol. 4 Master Plan Evolution
- Vol. 5 Park Governance & Funding
- Vol. 6 Recent Best Practices
- Vol. 7 Park Precedents
- Vol. 8 Historic Documentation

**DRAFT - ISSUED ON JULY 15, 2020**

Copyright © 2020 West 8 Urban Design and Landscape Architecture & Citizens for Park Improvement, Key Biscayne Community Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this book, except as noted below, may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

Every effort has been made to identify owners and gain permission for images.  
Errors or omissions will be corrected in subsequent editions.

Printed in the United States

All photos are courtesy of West 8 and KBCF unless otherwise noted.

*One Crandon Park: A Call to Action*  
*Research Synthesis and Conclusions*

A Supplement to  
*The Crandon Park: A Call for Change - Research & Analysis Report*

~

*Prepared for*  
Citizens for Park Improvement (CPI)

*Elaborated by*  
West 8 urban design and landscape architecture



# **ONE CRANDON PARK**

**A CALL TO ACTION | RESEARCH SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

# A Call to Action

Letter to the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)

July 27th, 2020

Mary Barley  
Trustee  
National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)  
777 6th Street, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001-3723

Subject: Crandon Park - A Call to Action

Dear National Parks Conservation Association,

Parks are the lifeblood of our cities, reflecting and supporting the aspirations of our communities. We as landscape architects take seriously, and enjoy deeply, our role in shaping these spaces as they evolve over generations. We have no doubt that the NPCA shares this similar feeling of fulfillment in stewarding our nation's land. For this reason, we come to you as peers, to write with deep concern about the current state and operation of Crandon Park on Key Biscayne. Crandon Park is one of Miami-Dade County's heritage parks, and is a regional ecological treasure, forming the southernmost key of the Miami area's chain of barrier islands. Today, in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter Movement, it is clear — more than ever — that parks and open space play an essential role in creating healthy, safe havens for all people to enjoy nature, as well as a space for freedom of expression. Parks are not just green spaces. They are spaces for people, a mission that has been woven into the very fiber of Crandon Park since Miami-Dade County acquired the land from the Matheson Family almost 80 years ago.

Like many aspects of our society, public parks are plagued by issues of inequity, both in terms of access and amenities. In many respects, Miami-Dade County has been a trailblazer in reaching unprecedented targets that guarantee every resident is within a 10-minute walk to a park or open space from their homes. While many County parks have been updated in recent years, Crandon Park is one of the few that has not been able to modernize to meet contemporary standards of design excellence or needs of its community. This is in large part due to restrictions imposed by its current *Master Plan* document. As a result, its grounds have become a museum of abandoned structures and crumbling



facilities, while its natural preserves suffer from unmanaged growth and invasive species. A drive through the Park reveals that, while it is among the largest parks in the area, it has a small and fragmented presence. This lack of cohesive identity is reinforced when one walks through the site, which is sparsely populated during the week, and only partially activated during the weekend. Adding urgency to an update for Crandon Park is its vulnerability to storm surges and sea level rise. How the Park faces this imminent reality will undoubtedly determine its longevity and success.

The NPCA possesses a considerable and honorable responsibility in helping shape the future of Crandon Park, as they hold two of the four seats on Crandon Park's Master Plan Amendment Committee. Therefore, we call upon the support of the NPCA for their assistance and guidance as an independent public voice in helping save Crandon Park from the brink of decline. As the nation's leading and most well-established advocate for the preservation and protection of America's national parks, civic open spaces and natural preserves, we look to the NPCA as critical and capable stewards of Crandon Park's future.

Herein, we provide a summary of our rationale and evidence for why and how Crandon Park needs to evolve and adapt based on our collective knowledge and findings. Armed with the aid of the NPCA, [One Crandon Park](#) will finally have the potential to become a resilient, economically sustainable and inclusive park for the people.

Sincerely,



West 8 Urban Design and  
Landscape Architecture  
*Adriaan Geuze, Founder*



Citizens for Park Improvement  
*Carlos de la Cruz, Jr., Chairman*



Rickenbacker Causeway

CITY OF MIAMI

VIRGINIA KEY

PROJECT SITE

Bear Cut Bridge

Biscayne Bay

Fossilized Reef

CRANDON PARK

Crandon Boulevard

Atlantic Ocean

KEY BISCAYNE

VILLAGE OF KEY BISCAYNE

BILL BAGGS FLORIDA STATE PARK

# One Crandon Park

## Research Synthesis and Conclusions

*In 2019, the Citizens for Park Improvement (CPI), a non-profit entity formed by local citizens concerned with the current condition and operation of Crandon Park, approached the internationally-acclaimed landscape architecture firm West 8 to evaluate Crandon Park and its current Master Plan document, which governs its facilities and operations.*

*In turn, the West 8 team conducted an objective, preliminary analysis, and concluded that the Park is in dire need of physical and organizational improvements. These changes are only possible through a revision of its current Master Plan, which the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) plays a crucial role in overseeing.*

*Herein is a synthesis of our research and conclusions to the NPCA expressing our interdisciplinary team's call to action to mend the fragmented site, and create **One Crandon Park** for all people to enjoy in perpetuity. For a more detailed understanding, an **Executive Summary** and eight-volume **Research & Analysis Report** disclose the full extent of the West 8 team's study.*



▶ For more info, see  
**Executive Summary &  
Volume 1 | Introduction**

# Introduction

## Crandon Park

Crandon Park is one of Miami-Dade County's seven Heritage Parks. Comprising a total of 975 acres, it occupies the northern third of the island of Key Biscayne. Visitors access the Park via the Rickenbacker Causeway and Crandon Boulevard, a four-lane road bisecting the Park and separating the Atlantic beach front to the east, from the Biscayne Bay front to the west.

*The root of Crandon Park's problems today stem from a series of chronic shortfalls in management, maintenance and funding.*

Environmentally sensitive areas account for 46% of the total park land, the greatest allocation of the land within the Park. The Park's extensive nature preserves, which exhibit a spectrum of ecologies from upland hammock to mangroves, qualify the Park as a valued environmental asset and precious habitat for native flora and fauna. The fossilized reef off its northern coast is unique to the United States.

The Park's primary facilities consist of a public marina, beach, picnic areas, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Biscayne Nature Center, a golf course and three separate areas providing opportunities for recreational tennis.

The root of Crandon Park's problems today stem from a series of chronic shortfalls in management, maintenance and funding. Gaining insight into the complex social, cultural and environmental forces that have shaped this park, as well as examining the site's current condition, are absolutely crucial for the NPCA to understand how it became so disunified and dysfunctional.



*Crandon Boulevard, four-lane highway, bisects and splits Crandon Park into two fragmented parts.*

# The Rise and Fall of Crandon Park

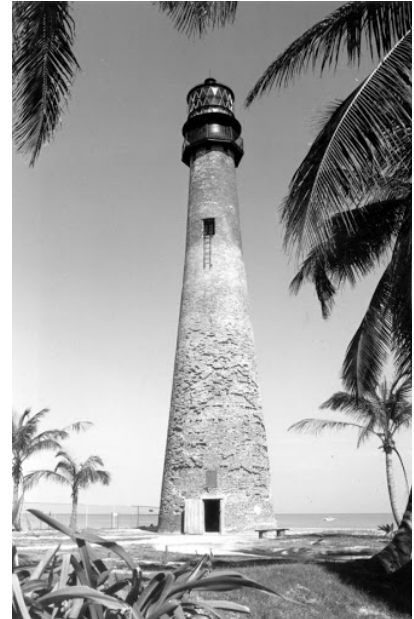
## An Overview of Key Biscayne

Key Biscayne has a long and rich history. Prior to the arrival of drag lines and dredges, the island was naught but stretches of sandy beach cloaked with thickets of saw palmettos and mangroves. Within this wilderness, a tribe of indigenous people known as the Tequesta made it one of their seasonal gathering places for hundreds of years. It was on Key Biscayne where Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León first set foot on the North American continent almost five centuries ago.

The Cape Florida Lighthouse at the southern tip of the island was a beacon to mariners and pirates, witness to the Second Seminole War in the early nineteenth century, and a secret meeting place for runaway slaves awaiting safe passage to the British Bahamas.

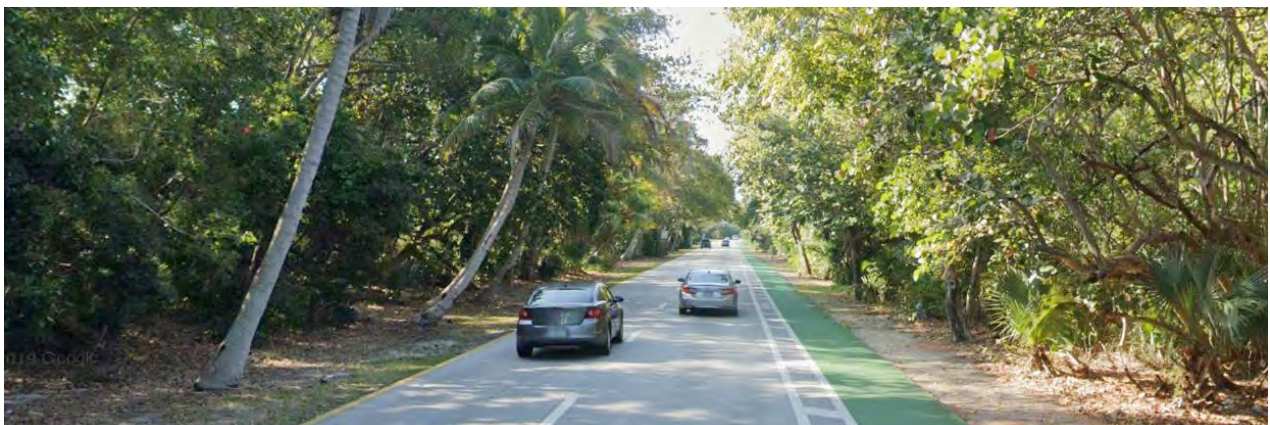
More recently, in the 1960s and early 70s, Key Biscayne was popularly known as the “Winter White House” serving as President Nixon’s vacation home. The center of the island is a flourishing residential community incorporated in 1991 as the Village of Key Biscayne. In many aspects, it is one of the most prosperous communities in the United States.

The southernmost third of Key Biscayne was acquired by the State of Florida in 1966, becoming Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park. It includes the symbol of the island – the Cape Florida Lighthouse – and is one of the most frequented parks in the state park system.

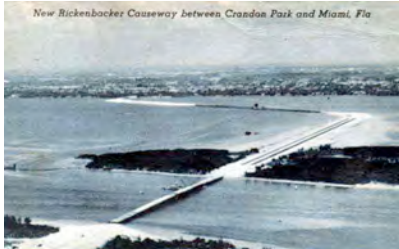


*Cape Florida Lighthouse in Bill Baggs Florida State Park is the oldest structure in Miami-Dade, first erected in 1825.*

▶ For more info, see  
Volume 3 | Relevant History



*There is a lack of spatial connectivity and visual connections across Crandon Boulevard, which today exists as a “green tunnel.”*



The Rickenbacker Causeway connected Key Biscayne to the mainland, paving the way for new development.

## William J. Matheson Paves the Road to Island Development

In the early part of the twentieth century, William J. Matheson, a wealthy New York industrialist, assembled ownership of approximately two thirds of the island. Matheson established experimental fruit groves and plantations, planting thousands of coconut palms (*coco nucifera*), which have become the emblem of Crandon Park today.

Foreseeing the promise of a commercial and residential development like Miami Beach, Matheson envisioned a causeway that would link the mainland to the island, which at the time was only accessible by boat. He negotiated an agreement with the City of Coral Gables to build a causeway over the middle of Biscayne Bay, which would annex the Key into Coral Gables's municipal boundaries. However, later on he sued the City of Coral Gables to deannex the island. By opting out of Coral Gables, into "unincorporated" Dade County, Key Biscayne would not be bound by such restrictive development codes.

The devastating 1926 hurricane and subsequent Great Depression brought Coral Gables to its financial knees and stalled Matheson's plan for a causeway. He died in 1930 leaving his property to his three children, Anna Matheson Wood, Malcolm Matheson and Hugh Matheson. For a decade, his dream lay dormant.

In 1940, however, a plan to link Key Biscayne to the mainland by a causeway over Biscayne Bay arose through the efforts of County Commissioner Charles Crandon (the Park's namesake). He proposed a trade with the three Matheson heirs, wherein the County would design, finance and construct the causeway and a road through the Matheson properties in exchange for park land on the north end of the island.<sup>1</sup>

The three Mathesons accepted and consequently deeded Tracts 2, 3 and the northern 1900-feet of Tract 1 to the County to be used for "public park purposes only." The deed stipulated that the park land would be returned to the Mathesons if the County failed to build the causeway in a timely fashion.<sup>2</sup>

1. Dade County agreed "to construct through [the Park] a roadway extending from the causeway entrance to Key Biscayne on the north by a direct route through aforesaid Proposed Park Area to the south boundary thereof, and thence in a southerly direction through the remaining lands on Key Biscayne to a point on the private canal which runs in an easterly and westerly direction from Biscayne Bay to the Atlantic Ocean." (Matheson Deed dated April 25, 1940)

2. "In case said [bridge] work shall not be completed as aforesaid, or in case at any time it shall be definitely abandoned before completion or the use of said proposed park area for park purposes shall be abandoned, said land shall be reconveyed and released to [Anna Matheson Wood, Malcolm Matheson, and Hugh Matheson], [their] heirs, grantees or assigns, upon his or their request, in good, clean and slightly order and condition." (Matheson Deed dated April 25, 1940)

## The Rickenbacker Causeway & Development of Key Biscayne

Following delays from World War II, the Rickenbacker Causeway was finally completed in 1947. It resulted in an impressive fourteen mile-long, scenic highway providing vehicular access from the mainland to Key Biscayne and all the way through Crandon Park to the southernmost tip of what would later become Bill Baggs Florida State Park. The stretch of road that runs through Crandon Park and the remainder of Key Biscayne is known today as Crandon Boulevard.

Celebrated as a great feat of engineering, realization of the causeway and access to an island park was a popular event. Postcards from the time reveal the extent to which the local community saw the trade in a positive light. The County obtained a park in exchange for a causeway financed by tolls. With vehicular access from the mainland, the Mathesons' Key Biscayne real estate suddenly became very valuable.

Today, the upscale Village of Key Biscayne with a population of approximately 13,300 people is one of the most prosperous municipalities in the United States.

## William L. Phillips Creates a Vision for Crandon Park during an Auto-oriented Era

The County employed the famous landscape architect William L. Phillips to design Crandon Park as an "Island Paradise." Renowned today as the pioneer of tropical landscape architecture, Phillips played a major role in shaping Florida's park landscapes. In fact, he designed two other County parks – Greynolds and Matheson Hammock Parks – as well as the stunning Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, among other nationally recognized Florida landscapes.

In 1942, Phillips presented to the County a design for an intensely developed recreational park that included a beach with

▶ For more info, see  
Volume 4 | Master Plan Evolution



*Crandon Park officially opened to the public in 1947 and was originally designed to accommodate thousands of cars for beach visitors.*

*By the mid-1970s, Crandon Park had reached the apex of its popularity, attracting almost 2 million visitors annually.*



Historic postcard of Crandon Park Beach, Key Biscayne, FL. (ca. 1950s)

3. Jackson, Faith Reyher. *Pioneer of Tropical Landscape Architecture: William Lyman Phillips in Florida* (University Press of Florida: 1997), p.167.

cabanas, a park loop that stretched along the shore of Biscayne Bay, a series of curated view corridors, a central allee, a marina, a canoe club, camping grounds, as well as various play fields for horseback riding, archery, tennis and golf.

Influenced by fashionable auto-driven layouts like Robert Moses's Jones Beach in New York, Phillips saw the wide four-lane Crandon Boulevard as its central spine. Connected to the Rickenbacker Causeway, it functioned as the main means of access within, and through, the Park, funneling droves of vehicles to its beachside parking lots that could accommodate up to 5,000 cars.

## Crandon Park Prospers as an "Island Paradise"

When the Park opened in 1947, only some elements of Phillips's *Vision Plan* (1942) were completed. Of those included were the almost two miles of sandy beaches dotted with coconut palm trees, picnic grounds with barbecues, stopping places for fishing and launching boats, and an amusement park with a carousel and a miniature train that carried children and parents through the natural hammock at the southern end of the Park. Dredge was used as fill to elevate the land behind the beautiful beaches and marina. This act of engineering indelibly altered the barrier island's natural morphology, resulting in the largely human-made landscape today.

Although not included in his 1942 proposal, Phillips later designed the grounds of the Crandon Zoo (now the Crandon Gardens) with the lion tamer Julia Allen Field, the Zoo's first director. Both Crandon Zoo and the Beach became major attractions to Key Biscayne and County residents alike. Recent literature suggests that by the mid-1970s, Crandon Park had reached the apex of its popularity, attracting almost 2 million visitors annually. As one resident poetically recounts, "two miles of crescent beach, fringed with clusters of coconut palms, thatched-roof shelters on sun-brilliant white sand, and five miles of winding roads through tropical settings, Crandon was fat cloud formations, bright moons, soft winter air, and love at first sight."<sup>3</sup> Even to this day, this idyllic tropical image persists in the memories of Key Biscayne's long-time residents.



## The Lasting Effect of Ad Hoc Development in Crandon Park<sup>4</sup>

Strolling through Crandon Park's grounds today, visitors may only catch a glimmer of its former glory in the cathedral of banyan and coconut palm trees that frame a breathtaking vista of the Atlantic Ocean. Over the course of approximately thirty years, much of Phillips's historic design was implemented in a piece-meal fashion, or not at all. The Golf Course and the Marina, for instance, were not completed until the late 1960s. Other critical design elements, such as inclusion of a roundabout near the Marina as a gateway moment to the Park, fell by the wayside – unbuilt. Additionally, a looping trail along Biscayne Bay was never realized, nor were plans to provide unobstructed views of Biscayne Bay and Miami to the west.

The nature of Crandon Boulevard, too, drastically changed over the decades. Instead of a scenic parkway, it became a major thoroughfare serving a substantial residential community and popular state park to the south. With vehicles moving at high speeds, the boulevard ceased to be a spine for a park and instead became an unfortunate obstacle. It literally bisects the eastern and western sides of the Park with a hectic highway and tall dense planting, thereby breaking any sense of coherent identity. The lack of preserving these key historic design elements have regrettably resulted in a disunified visual and spatial composition and site plan. In a word, the clear landscape identity instilled by Phillips's became "lost" – it was no longer One Crandon Park.

The greatest deviation from Phillips's *Vision Plan* (1942) was due to minimal oversight of the Park's vast acres of lowlands and wetlands in the southwest and northwest. These areas, which Phillips had originally designated for recreation were left undeveloped. They eventually became unmanaged zones of wilderness, vulnerable to arbitrary acts of dredging for fill and mosquito ditches, and even an illegal landfill. The result was eventually much-needed preservation of the native wetland species and mangrove hammocks, many of which are home to endangered species such as the West Indian Manatee.

Today, these natural areas are known as the West Point, Ibis



*Crandon Boulevard segregates the Park between its eastern (bottom) and western (top) sides*

4. The County could hardly be blamed for its ad hoc park development process. Prior to 1957, Dade County did not enjoy home rule. It was governed largely by special acts of legislature. Around this time, too, Fidel Castro took power in Cuba and the first wave of immigrants arrived in Miami, introducing enormous financial issues and cultural change.

and Bear Cut Preserves, covering almost half of the Park – an impressive ecological asset. While protection of its delicate ecosystems are of paramount concern, it is a great loss to the surrounding community that only the Bear Cut Preserve is accessible to the public. Plans in the 1990s to build nature trails, boardwalks and tours led by trained naturalists were unfortunately never realized. Instead of becoming an opportunity for public stewardship and environmental awareness, these preservation areas have become a public burden.

### Years of Litigation Battles Result in the Crandon Park Master Plan



Tennis Stadium has lost its original function and purpose.

Beginning in the late 1980s, descendants of the Matheson heirs raised objections that the County was using Crandon Park for commercial ventures rather than “public park purposes” as stipulated in the 1940 Deed. Tensions reached a crescendo when the County entered into an agreement with promoters to use the Park to host a professional tennis tournament. Included in the arrangement was the County's commitment to construct a large and permanent tennis stadium. The tennis tournament – or Miami Open as it became later known – was incredibly successful, generating millions in economic benefit and drawing thousands of people each year from around the globe to Key Biscayne. Crandon Park was back on the map, but the very nature of its use as a “public park” was in peril, especially as the rest of the park continued to degrade.

Ultimately, the County and Matheson Family arrived at a *Settlement Agreement* in 1993 that required adoption and enforcement of a *Crandon Park Master Plan* and limited means by which it could be revised. Artemas P. Richardson, the last generation of Olmsted landscape architects, was employed to write the master plan and did so in the years following.

For more info, see  
Volume 4 | Master Plan Evolution

## Creation of an Outdated and Highly Restrictive Master Plan

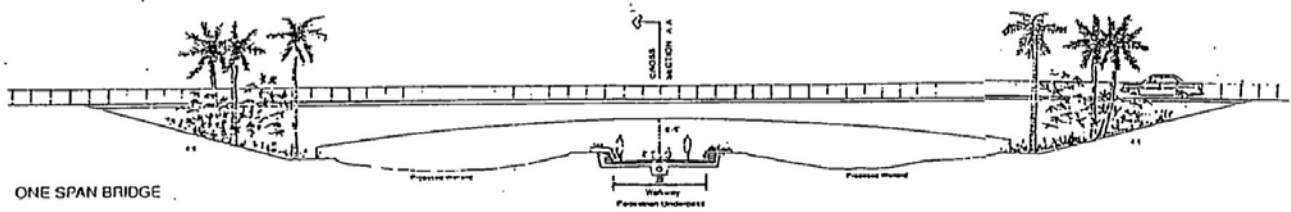
An unusual process followed over a number of years in which one of the Matheson descendants, Bruce C. Matheson, played a very large role in revising and preparing Crandon Park's Master Plan document. Richardson's first master plan, published as *Crandon Park for the Twenty-first Century* (1993), as well as the second iteration, were rejected by the Matheson Family. While Richardson tried to propose a number of innovative improvements that would help unify the fragmented park, most were written out of today's current *Master Plan*. Such improvements included a grade separation along Crandon Boulevard and a more cohesive interpark pedestrian and bicycle path system.



*Crandon Park Master Plan (1995-2000)*

When comparing the 1995 *Master Plan* (which was last published in 2000, and referred to as the "current" *Master Plan*) against existing conditions, it is clear that many of Richardson's design recommendations were largely ignored. For instance, efforts to balance preservation and the community's recreational needs remain unrealized. Physical and operational Improvements to largely abandoned grounds of the Crandon Gardens are also lacking. Of Richardson's design elements that were included in the final, and current, *Master Plan*, only select portions have been implemented.

Unlike most comprehensive master plans, the current *Master Plan* was created without considerable public input or inclusion. As a result, the Park's current policies serve specific party interests and not necessarily those of its constituents. Twenty-five years old, it almost goes without saying that Crandon Park needs to revise its *Master Plan*.



*Proposed section of Crandon Boulevard showing an open span bridge with a pedestrian/bicyclist underpass that would connect to the Central Allee and lagoon. The minimal ramping (3%) of the vehicular overpass and proposed plantings would make it seem like a natural development.*

# Crandon Park Today

## Crandon Park's Key Challenges

For more info, see  
Volume 2 | Crandon Park Today

Based on our interdisciplinary team's mixture of intimate, local knowledge of the site and professional expertise in park design – internationally and in the Miami area – we collectively agree and conclude that Crandon Park suffers from decades of shortfalls in management, maintenance and funding. While the Park's breathtaking natural beauty, sandy beaches, memorable vistas and astonishing wildlife remain a lasting attraction to visitors, even these aspects are in danger of being destroyed by the impact of hurricanes and sea level rise.

With the wealth of understanding that the NPCA has in park advocacy, we believe in Crandon Park's great potential to become a world-class recreation park and pioneer of coastal resilience.

Below are eight key findings our research, analysis, and first hand observation has revealed.



*Empty beach Parking Lot creates a sea of asphalt*

**1. Too Much Asphalt & Concrete and a Hostile Pedestrian Environment:** First impressions of Crandon Park hold an indelible mental picture – asphalt and concrete. Built during an auto-driven age, the Park dedicates acres of valuable protected upland areas to sprawling parking lots and an excessive number of roads, many of which lead to unremarkable destinations and create a hostile environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

Not only is there too much parking east of Crandon Boulevard, but opportunities to use that parking to serve other facilities were not taken because of poor planning. In addition, there are an excessive number of access/egress points to major facilities. Many of these are currently closed or littered with temporary and disorganized signage. As a result, circulation throughout the site is very confusing and labyrinthine.

The Tennis and Golf Course are not strategically located to optimize the site's scarce upland areas. Their locations unnecessarily require additional roads, parking, and maintenance areas to be placed on valuable high ground, which could alternatively be dedicated to nature preserves

or for public enjoyment through recreational programs. This is strikingly apparent in Phillips's Central Allée, which today leaves little impression, looking oddly out of place, when it should be the centerpiece connecting every upland Park activity.

**2. The Park Lacks a Unified Identity and Coherent Site Plan:**

Time has not been kind to the concept of using Crandon Boulevard as the spine for Crandon Park. Whatever the original intention, the boulevard's principal use today is to facilitate the rapid movement of cars and trucks through the Park to reach somewhere else, as opposed to within the Park. Overgrowth of dense vegetation divides the Park organizationally, visually and spatially. This creates a disconnect in identity between the eastern and western sides of the Park; they are not perceived as belonging to one park.



*Blocked entry drive to Tennis Center*

With overgrown plants blocking views, and the plethora of incongruent entry drives, the Park's circulation and access are confusing, even dangerous, particularly for cyclists and pedestrians. In addition, there is limited pedestrian and bicycle access between different Specific Areas (i.e. Marina, Beach, Golf Course, Bear Cut Preserve, etc.). While some public bus stops are provided, many are inaccessible by foot and/or in poor condition, marked only by a sign.

The spectrum of different maintenance levels throughout the Park, coupled with various styles of furnishings and lighting elements, and poor signage visibility also contributes to the Park's fragmented identity.

**3. Environmentally Sensitive Areas Have Been Seriously Neglected:**

Crandon Park's natural areas are not performing optimally at best, and are under attack by invasives and in poor health at worst. Without a fundamental change in Crandon Park's operations and funding, many of these natural preserves will lose their significance by the incursion of non-native species of fauna and flora. The degree of neglect is reflected in unrepaired fences intended to protect these areas, this degradation negatively impacts visitor experience. A site that possesses such a rich abundance of



*Some of the preserves are under attack from invasives such as Australian Pine*

According to NOAA analysis, by 2030 sea level will be one foot; and by 2060 it will be three feet; and by 2100 it will be 6.75 ft.<sup>5</sup>



Eroding coastline and fragmented dune system

5. Toomey, Diane. "At Ground Zero for Rising Seas" *Yale Environment 360* (14 July 2016): [https://e360.yale.edu/features/florida\\_rising\\_sea\\_level\\_tv\\_weatherman\\_john\\_morales](https://e360.yale.edu/features/florida_rising_sea_level_tv_weatherman_john_morales); NOAA Sea Level Rise Viewer: <https://coast.noaa.gov/slr/#/layer/slr/3/-8922931.093404494/2964238.96951349/15/satellite/none/0.8/2050/interHigh/midAccretion>

habitat has the potential, and even responsibility, to serve visitors as an outdoor classroom. Such interactions foster environmental stewardship and build a sense of ownership within the community for the Park. Only the Bear Cut Preserve and Nature Center currently do this, but they are not able to expand their efforts due to development limitations imposed by the current *Master Plan*. This shortfall limits the Park from developing a group of constituents that care for, and fight for, the protection of its sensitive areas.

- 4. Lack of Resiliency to Hurricanes and Sea Level Rise:** Due to its low elevation, Crandon Park is very vulnerable to sea-level rise and storm surges. There are, of course, many different estimates of the magnitude of sea level rise expected over the next 50 years. However, it has risen over 9 inches in the past 80 years, and few anticipate that sea will not continue. The range of opinions vary from a problem to a catastrophic problem. Given such predictions, Crandon Boulevard, Marina, Beach, Picnic Grounds, Golf Course and Tennis Center, Crandon Gardens will be submerged. Currently Crandon Park does not have a strategy to address these urgent concerns unlike other popular local beaches such as Miami Beach.

Compounding the risk of destruction, is Crandon Park's eroding coastline and dune system. Although some measures were implemented in the early 1990s to stabilize Crandon Park's coastline and beaches, much of that work is now gone and the majority of the beach remains vulnerable to erosion. Dune protection and enhancement has been recommended by experts since the Crandon Park: The Next Fifty Years report was written in 1989, but has never been implemented.

- 5. Abandoned Amenities and Crumbling Facilities:** It is striking the number of facilities that are severely damaged, abandoned, or inaccessible to the public due to plant overgrowth or lack of maintenance. Walking through the Park, it is easy to spot broken down picnic shelters, abandoned park staff buildings, relics of old zoo cages, remnants of long-gone children's rides, an unused tennis stadium, and roads that lead to nowhere. In some cases, the current Master Plan stipulates that buildings that fall into

such a state of disrepair should be torn down and the land given over to landscape without compensating for the lost amenity space. Such policies do not allow for flexibility in growth or development. For a park to serve its public, it must maintain its structures and grounds.

- 6. Untapped Opportunities for Public Enjoyment:** Every afternoon the sun sets over Biscayne Bay, presenting one of the most dramatic views in the State of Florida. Park visitors miss this display, as the Park provides almost no places for the public to enjoy that view.

While public access into the environmentally sensitive areas must be carefully planned, there is an opportunity for nature trails, canoe and kayak water courses to be strategically placed, allowing enjoyment and engagement between nature and people. West Point and Ibis Preserves are currently not accessible to the public even for passive nature observation activities, despite this being a recommendation in the current *Master Plan*.

- 7. Unsustainable Operation, Management and Revenue and the Need for Philanthropy:** The Marina, Golf Course and Tennis Center receive ample attendance; however, some of these facilities are in need of updates in order to optimize enjoyment and revenue generation. Furthermore, the Golf Course sits at a low elevation, vulnerable to flooding, and the Tennis Center has a large abandoned stadium that desires re-purposing. The remainder of the Park, including its beaches, appear underutilized, particularly during the weekdays. Overall, the Park does not present an attractive, well-maintained, well-organized or inviting appearance. This negatively impacts visitor experience, and, in turn, also hurts potential revenue sources.

The financial pillars of every successful public park consist of allocations of taxpayer dollars, philanthropic support and revenue from operations, vendors and lessees who provide park services. Without a structure for philanthropic support or optimized revenue streams from Park vendors, the Park will continue to suffer from neglect and will succeed only in a race to the bottom.



*Museum of abandoned structures in Crandon Gardens*



*Nature preserves trails are not well maintained and under attack by invasive flora and fauna.*



*Shuttered concession stand*



*Crumbling picnic pavillion in Crandon Gardens*

**8. Rigid Planning Framework:** The defining elements of the existing *Master Plan* are: preservation of the ad hoc site plan as it exists today, strict and unrelenting regulation of Park operations and facilities, and prevention of adaptive change. Examples include highly restrictive covenants that limit flexibility in the Park's development; poor maintenance of its facilities, structures and signage; and management of invasive; endangered or threatened species and vegetation overgrowth; and limiting public participation in day-to-day operational decisions. Moreover, the *Master Plan* precludes public and civic involvement in the Park and prevents the benefit of philanthropic support. These outdated policies are currently preserved in perpetuity, unless a revision is authorized.



*View corridor blocked by vegetation to the Biscayne Bay on the west side of the Park*



# The Path to Change: A Master Plan Revision

## Create One Crandon Park

Our objective was to analyze Crandon Park's existing conditions and function. In the process, we came to see the great potential of Crandon Park as a pioneer of coastal resilience, and home to a world-class beach, golf course and preserve all in one park. The Park's "bones" proposed by Phillips in 1942 are obscured by the disconnected decisions that followed. Every park, and especially the very best, evolve to meet shifts in community, culture and environment. As a "public park," Crandon Park must and should be formed out of an inclusive chorus of voices from the County, landscape architects, environmentalists, financial consultants, park planning professionals, and current and future stakeholders. A complete set of constituencies is necessary to guide a path to a Park that is equitable, inclusive, sustainable, resilient and, most of all, enjoyable.

We hope that this research and preliminary analysis will commence a public dialogue about the use of this public land. While this Synthesis reflects our own findings from a concerned citizen group and landscape professional perspective, we encourage early engagement in interested constituents and public discussion.

*We see the great potential of Crandon Park as a pioneer of coastal resilience, and home to a world-class beach, golf course and preserve all in one unified park*

▷ For steps on Master Plan Revision, see Executive Summary | Research & Analysis Report



*View corridor to the Atlantic Ocean on the east side of the Park*

*Two of the Amendment Committee members are appointed by the County and two are appointed by the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA).*

## The Amendment Process & Role of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)

Following a process of Public Planning and Community Outreach, the Amendment Process to the current *Master Plan* can officially commence.

Under the *Settlement Agreement*, the Master Plan can be revised in a process that includes a vote in favor of a revision by the County Commission followed by an affirmative vote of three of four members of the Crandon Park Master Plan Amendment Committee approving the change. **Two of the Amendment Committee members are appointed by the County and two are appointed by the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA).**

We believe that the NPCA as well-established leaders and advocates for parks has the power to spearhead Crandon Park from the antiquated trappings of an obsolete *Master Plan* into the Twenty-first Century. In a few years time, the Park will be approaching its 75th anniversary – today is the moment to seize the present and save Crandon Park from the brink of decline.

We hope that our vision of **One Crandon Park** will inspire the NPCA and countless others in the Key Biscayne and Miami-Dade County communities to create a ***Resilient, Economically Sustainable and Inclusive Park for the People.***



## Credits

*Prepared for*

**Citizens for Park Improvement (CPI)**

*Elaborated by*

### **West 8 Team**

Adriaan Geuze	<i>Founder</i>
Daniel Vasini	<i>Creative Director</i>
Donna Bridgeman	<i>Project Manager/Urban Designer</i>
Ashley Schwemmer-Mannix	<i>Project Manager/Landscape Architect</i>
Maia Peck	<i>Designer</i>
Kristine Skujina-Meijina	<i>Designer</i>
Cyrus Henry	<i>Assistant Designer</i>
Simone Delaney	<i>Architecture Intern</i>

*In collaboration with*

Charles Birnbaum	<i>Cultural Landscape Foundation</i>
Steve Vitoff	<i>Marino PR and Strategic Communications</i>
Andrew Britton	<i>Key Biscayne Community Foundation</i>

See *Crandon Park: A Call for Change - Executive Summary* for full list of Acknowledgments.







