

Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez and Rep. Jim Mooney tour five state parks in Florida Keys

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Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez of Homestead and Rep. Jim Mooney of Islamorada last week visited five Florida State Parks within the Florida Keys as guests of the Florida State Parks Foundation and the Florida Park Service.

Accompanied by Florida State Parks Director Chuck Hatcher, Foundation CEO Julia Gill Woodward and Foundation Board Member Jose Romano, Sen. Rodriguez and Rep. Mooney toured:

- John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park (Key Largo).
- Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park (Islamorada).



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Julia Gill Woodward, Florida State Parks Foundation CEO

- Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park (Islamorada).
- San Pedro Underwater Archaeological Preserve State Park (Islamorada).
- Indian Key Historic State Park (Islamorada).

During the tour, Sen. Rodriguez and Rep. Mooney learned of visitor center enhancements at John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, including a new 360-degree camera that offers a breathtaking look of Florida's coral reef. They also explored the fossilized reef quarry at Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park and embarked on a boat

expedition through San Pedro Underwater Archaeological Preserve State Park, Indian Key Historic State Park and Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park.

"Our state parks are a source of pride for all Floridians and are renowned for their natural



Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez and Rep. Jim Mooney toured five state parks in the Florida Keys on Friday, Aug. 4, 2023.

beauty and recreational opportunities,” Sen. Rodriguez said. “I would encourage anyone visiting the Florida Keys to make sure they experience our amazing state parks as part of their itinerary.”

The only four-time winner of the National Gold Medal for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management, Florida State Parks has received a total of more than \$300 million in funding from the Florida Legislature over the last three years.

Florida’s 175 state parks, trails and historic sites in 2022 generated \$3.9 billion in direct economic impact while welcoming 32 million visitors and supporting 55,000 jobs through park operations.

“Florida’s state parks provide tremendous value for our citizens and for visitors from all over the nation and world,” Rep. Mooney said. “We are proud to support our parks in the Florida Legislature and are committed making sure they have what they need to remain the very best in America.”

“We are fortunate to have support from our lawmakers and are appreciative of their commitment to sustaining and improving our state parks,” Hatcher said. “Thank you to Sen. Rodriguez and Rep. Mooney for spending the day with us and exploring some of the outstanding parks that are in their backyard.”

The five parks included on the tour combined to host more than 600,000 visitors and generate more than \$75 million in economic impact in 2022.

That includes the popular John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, famous for being the country’s first “undersea” park. The 70-square-mile park, located at mile marker 102.5 on the Overseas



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Highway, offers visitors the opportunity to explore Florida's coral reef via glass-bottom boat, scuba diving and snorkeling.

"We are always honored to share Florida's state parks with our elected officials and highlight the incredible return on investment they provide," Woodward said. "We thank Sen. Rodriguez and Rep. Mooney for their time and for their continued support."

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