

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**JUNE 16, 2026**

**ISLAMORADA, FLORIDA KEYS:  
“THE SPORTFISHING CAPITAL OF THE WORLD”  
BASS PRO SHOPS ACQUIRES  
HISTORIC CHEECA LODGE  
UNITES LEGENDARY  
OCEANFRONT RESORT WITH LANDMARK  
WORLD WIDE SPORTSMAN STORE & MARINA**



**The announcement underscores Bass Pro Shops’ growing commitment to hospitality and connecting customers to remarkable nature-based adventures. BASS PRO CLUB MEMBERS CAN EARN SPECIAL PERKS AND BENEFITS.**

Bass Pro Shops, through its nature-based resorts division, has agreed to acquire the legendary Cheeca Lodge, one of the most historic and beloved fishing and sporting resorts in the Florida Keys.

Long recognized as a gathering place for anglers, adventurers and families seeking the timeless spirit of the Keys, Cheeca Lodge has welcomed generations of visitors drawn to Islamorada’s world-famous waters, natural beauty, and laid-back hospitality. Bass Pro Shops and its founder, passionate angler and noted conservationist, Johnny Morris, are excited to enhance the resort while preserving its authentic character and heritage of connecting guests to the natural beauty of the Florida Keys.

This philosophy will guide the future of Cheeca Lodge.

Cheeca Lodge reinforces Bass Pro Shops' ongoing commitment to hospitality through world-class nature-based properties. Referred to as America's Premier Wilderness Resort, Bass Pro's flagship Big Cedar Lodge in the Missouri Ozarks hosts 7.5 million guests annually. In keeping with the founder's commitment to conservation, over half of the resort's 24,000 acres have been donated and forever preserved as part of the not-for-profit Johnny Morris Conservation Foundation.



**FOUNDER'S DREAM –  
CONNECTING FAMILIES TO FISHING AND NATURE  
FORGED FROM PASSION, COMMITTED TO CONSERVATION**

“I have been very blessed to have spent my entire life around the great sport of fishing. Growing up as far from the ocean as you can get in the Missouri Ozark Mountains, fly-fishing beautiful streams for perch and smallmouth bass. I will never forget dreaming about and then getting to catch my first tarpon on a fly. I was 16 years old fishing with my best buddy, my Dad and Capt. Sonny Eslinger on Buchanan Bank out of Bud N’ Mary’s Marina,” Johnny said. “From that special day forward, like many others, I have come to have enormous respect for the history of Islamorada, and the generations of anglers and families who have made memories here or who are blessed to call the Keys home. We’re humbled and honored to have the opportunity to help protect it and carry that story forward,” Morris continued.

As recipient of the prestigious Audubon Medal, Johnny is especially excited that Cheeca Lodge, in addition to its world-class fishing, can be further celebrated as an expanded adventure outpost to connect visitors to the amazing natural treasures of the Everglades and Florida Keys.



**Cheeca Lodge, founded in 1946, and World Wide Sportsman Store & Marina, founded in 1967, are now joined together to create...  
A TRUE SEASIDE ADVENTURE PARADISE  
IN THE HEART OF THE FLORIDA KEYS.**

**Cheeca Lodge** features both lodges and cottages with many offering direct oceanfront views. Guests are immersed in an impressive collection of amenities including three enormous tropical swimming pools, a world-class full-service spa, a 9-hole Jack Nicklaus-designed par-3 golf course, a 525-foot historic fishing pier, state-of-the-art fitness and meeting facilities, tennis and pickleball courts and upscale waterfront dining that serves as a dream location for weddings and special events.



The “Happy Times” Tiki Bar sits oceanside and poolside at Cheeca Lodge.

## **WORLD WIDE SPORTSMAN STORE & MARINA UNITING WITH NEIGHBORING CHEECA LODGE TO OFFER GUESTS EXPANDED ADVENTURE OPPORTUNITIES**



World Wide Sportsman Store & Marina, overlooking Florida Bay with direct access to the Everglades and the deep blue waters of the Gulf Stream, serves as a launch point for anglers from around the globe. The Islamorada Fish Company, Morada Bay and Pierre’s restaurants located adjacent to the landmark Store & Marina provide extraordinary waterfront dining experiences.

Originally founded in 1967 by legendary anglers George Hommell Jr. and Billy Pate, World Wide Sportsman quickly became one of the most premier saltwater specialist shops in the world. Widely regarded as a pioneer of flats fishing and conservation in the Florida Keys, Hommell helped shape Islamorada into “The Sportfishing Capital of the World.” George and Billy aligned with Johnny and Bass Pro Shops almost 30 years ago now, creating a legacy that continues to inspire anglers and outdoor enthusiasts today.



Johnny Morris with dear friend George Hommell, the original co-founder of World Wide Sportsman.

**The Florida Keys and Cheeca Lodge have long held a revered place in the history of American sportfishing, attracting well-known legendary anglers and pioneers such as:**

- **Ernest Hemingway**, legendary author, pioneering angler and longtime resident of the Florida Keys.
- **Zane Grey**, best-selling author and pioneering angler who established and served as the first President of the nearby storied Long Key Fishing Club.
- **President Harry Truman**, the 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States, was said to be the very first guest to check into Olney Inn, which later evolved into the iconic Cheeca Lodge.
- **President George H.W. Bush**, the 41<sup>st</sup> President of the United States became closely tied to Cheeca Lodge through his passion for fishing and his role in hosting the prestigious Presidential Bonefish Tournaments.
- **Ted Williams**, legendary Hall of Fame baseball player, was also a very accomplished fly-fisherman and frequent guest at Cheeca Lodge.
- **Jack Nicklaus**, the renowned golfer known as “The Golden Bear” spent many happy days on fishing expeditions based out of Cheeca. He also designed the resort’s 9-hole par 3 golf course.
- **Curt Gowdy**, host of The American Sportsman, frequently visited Cheeca Lodge, showcasing fishing in Islamorada alongside many celebrity guests.



Ernest Hemingway, legendary author, pioneering angler and longtime resident of the Florida Keys



Zane Grey fly-fished every winter in the Florida Keys in the 1920s



President George H.W. Bush hosted fishing tournaments out of Cheeca Lodge and World Wide Sportsman



Ted Williams, with a trophy 13 lb bonefish caught while fishing with World Wide Sportsman co-founder George Hommell



Jack Nicklaus, legendary golfer at Cheeca Lodge dock with a nice bonefish

**SUPPORTING THE LEGENDARY FISHING COMMUNITY REMAINS A TOP PRIORITY FOR BASS PRO SHOPS**

The company is committed to promoting the Sportfishing Capital of the World and its captains, marinas, resorts, restaurants and other destinations through Bass Pro Shops’ significant national and international customer base while continuing to be steadfast supporters of fisheries conservation.



## **Angling Legends Gather To Celebrate World Wide Sportsman New Store Opening on October 25, 1997**

Standing (left to right): Legendary angler Billy Pate, Loren Grey (son of Zane Grey), Captain George Hommell Jr., Johnny Morris, Lefty Kreh, and Mina Hemingway (granddaughter of Ernest). Seated: Curt Gowdy “The American Sportsman,” and baseball/angling legend Ted Williams.

**Conservation leaders and tourism officials anticipate long-term benefits for the community through continuing conservation stewardship and the promotion and preservation of one of the region’s most iconic resorts.**

“Johnny and Bass Pro Shops have always understood the importance of protecting the Everglades and celebrating our fishing heritage, making them outstanding partners for the future of the Keys,” said Eric Eikenberg, Chief Executive Officer of The Everglades Foundation.



Eric Eikenberg

“We were very excited to learn that Johnny and Bass Pro Shops will be expanding their involvement in the Keys. They have been true leaders in conservation, standing alongside us with habitat work, restoring fisheries, educating future generations, and ensuring the outdoor traditions remain strong for years to come. They support communities that make the fishing culture so special,” said Nick Wiley, Executive Director of the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida.



Nick Wiley

“We're excited to welcome Bass Pro Shops as stewards of this iconic Florida Keys landmark. We extend our deepest appreciation for their generous support of BTT, which has made an important difference in the recovery of our bonefish and the ongoing conservation of tarpon and permit,” said Jim McDuffie, President and CEO of Bonefish & Tarpon Trust.



Jim McDuffie

# **INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ANGLERS “TAKE A KID FISHIN’ – YOU’LL BE HAPPY YOU DID.”**

**– Johnny Morris**

## **THE MOST SPECIAL MEMORIES IN LIFE COME FROM SPENDING TIME IN NATURE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.**

**Inspired by our founder, Bass Pro Shops stands steadfast alongside its customers to provide significant support to help preserve fisheries, habitats, and the sport of fishing for future generations.**

**For more than the past decade, Bass Pro Shops has given back over 10% of its earnings to support conservation in the Florida Keys and beyond.**

Some of Bass Pro Shops’ and Johnny’s personal Florida-based conservation highlights include:

- In 2019, awarded one of conservation’s highest honors, The Audubon Medal from the National Audubon Society, becoming only the 58th recipient in the organization’s 120-year history.
- In 2013, the recipient of the highest honor presented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the BlueGreen Award.
- In 1995, a founding board member of Save Our Everglades.
- In 1996, one of 10 conservationists invited by President Clinton to develop the action plan to restore and protect the Florida Everglades and the Florida Bay.
- In 1988, appointed to the board of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation by President Ronald Reagan where he served 6 years including 3 as chairman.
- Bass Pro Shops Outdoor Fund has been a major donor to support critical research facilities dedicated to preserving Florida’s coral reefs and combating coral viruses. The fund has also supported transformative efforts to restore Lake George and the St. Johns River’s vital aquatic vegetation.



### **A LIFETIME OF FISHING AND CONSERVATION**

Lifelong fishing buddies, Captain Alex Adler and Johnny Morris releasing a giant bluefin tuna (estimated at 700 pounds) off Islamorada in the Florida Keys on March 12, 2021. At the time it was believed to be only the 3<sup>rd</sup> giant bluefin tuna caught in the Florida Keys on rod and reel in the last 50 years.

Bass Pro Shops, alongside its customers, has been a leading supporter of fisheries research through tagging programs with Bonefish & Tarpon Trust, The Billfish Foundation, IGFA, Center for Sportfishing Policy, Everglades Foundation and many other leading conservation organizations including satellite tagging programs for giant bluefin tuna in partnership with the University of Maine. Through these efforts, much valuable information has been gained to better manage fish species.



Bass Pro Shops Store Managers on a fishing adventure at Cheeca Lodge in 2021. Cheeca Lodge is an ideal setting for unforgettable weddings, retreats and meetings.



With a passion for fishing, Johnny Morris opened the original Bass Pro Shop in 1972 in the back of his Dad's Brown Derby Liquor Store in Springfield, Missouri. For the first 13 years, this remained the company's only store.



**CLICK THE IMAGE TO SEE HIGHLIGHTS FROM CHEECA LODGE & WORLD WIDE SPORTSMAN STORE & MARINA**