



BACKGROUND

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1990 to protect and preserve spectacular, unique, and nationally significant marine resources. Within the sanctuary is the world's third largest barrier reef, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands, and more than 6,000 species of marine life. The sanctuary also protects pieces of our nation's history such as shipwrecks and other archeological treasures.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is part of the National Marine Sanctuary System, which is a network of underwater

parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington State to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. National marine sanctuaries are managed for the conservation of their natural and cultural resources, while supporting sustainable recreation, tourism and compatible commercial activities. The network includes a system of 13 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.

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Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary



Photo: Jack Fishman

Volunteer divers attack the marine debris problem made worse by Hurricane Irma.



Photo: Matt McIntosh/NOAA

Blue Star fishing guides respect and protect the sensitive Florida Keys ecosystem.



Photo: Greg McFall/NOAA

An ecosystem-altering coral disease event elicits an unprecedented, collaborative response.

Sanctuary restoration after Hurricane Irma

Following Hurricane Irma, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, along with key partners, stabilized ecologically and economically valuable corals, advised salvage operations on 1200+ vessels posing pollution and navigation hazards, and assessed changes to maritime heritage sites. The sanctuary, an advisory council working group, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation established *Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys* to train and permit local businesses to remove marine debris like lobster traps, fishing gear, and construction materials. Divers collected 4,600 pounds of marine debris and 4,000+ feet of trap line from April to September.

Program recognizes responsible fishing guides

The Blue Star Fishing Guide Program, launched in April 2018, recognizes recreational charter captains who are committed to sustainable fishing and educating their customers about resource protection in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Sportfishing accounts for approximately 20 percent of recreation in the sanctuary and this voluntary training and compliance program seeks to increase the knowledge of fishing guides and their clients in conserving the unique Florida Keys ecosystem. The program is modeled after the highly-successful Blue Star Dive Program and is supported by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

Partners in coral disease response

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and additional NOAA offices are collaborating with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Park Service, and other government agencies, universities, and nonprofit organizations to address stony coral tissue loss disease, an unprecedented coral disease event that threatens the marine ecosystem and the local economy. Partners are working to document the disease outbreak, identify likely causes, understand factors that may be contributing to the outbreak and spread, and develop treatments and interventions while planning for restoration.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Looking Ahead to FY19

- A multi-year process will culminate in release of proposed changes to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's management plan, zoning, and regulations based on scientific data and input from federal, state, and local partners along with community and industry leaders.
- To continue responding to the coral disease outbreak, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and its partners will rescue healthy coral, establish gene banks, develop techniques to grow susceptible and ESA-listed species, and determine risk-adverse methods for outplanting on the reef.
- An online education course highlighting the unique characteristics and regulations of Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary will be made available to boaters. The course goal is to reduce impacts to the sensitive marine environment and promote sustainable behaviors.

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