

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

2008 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Photo: FRNMS

Sanctuary Releases Revised Management Plan Following Extensive Public Process

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary released its revised management plan in December 2007, the result of six years of rigorous review and public involvement. The sanctuary's management plan is designed to identify the best strategies to protect the natural and cultural resources the Florida Keys, and the sanctuary is mandated by Congress to review the plan every five years to assess its effectiveness. When the Florida Keys sanctuary's first management plan was under development in the 1990s, it received more than 6,000 comments from the public. The 2007 revised plan, which also solicited comments at public meetings and via the Federal Register, received only a few dozen comments – proof that the extensive public involvement throughout the creation of the original plan succeeded. The revised plan contains four new action plans addressing science management and administration, damage assessment and restoration, operations, and evaluation.

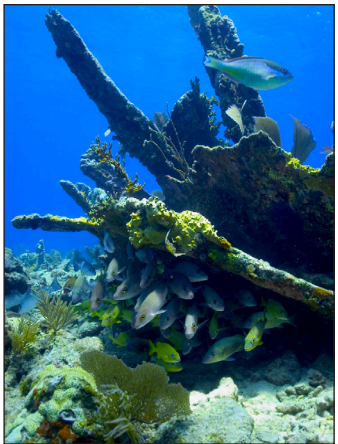


Photo: Russ Green

Marine Life Improves Since Creation of Ecological Reserve

In 2008, seven years after Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary set aside the Tortugas Ecological Reserve, researchers continued to document improvements in the reserve's fish stocks and corals, indicating that the ecosystem appears to be rebounding from decades of overfishing and environmental changes. Scientists from NOAA, the University of Miami and partnering organizations conducted more than 1,700 dives in the area of the Dry Tortugas in 2008, comparing marine life populations between protected and non-protected areas. Biennial scientific surveys, ongoing since 1999, point to increases in size and abundance of important commercial fish species within the reserve, including snapper and grouper, providing evidence that the zone is fulfilling its role in protecting the region's marine life. Designated in 2001 after an extensive public process, the Tortugas Ecological Reserve is a 151-square-nautical-mile "no-take" area of protected marine habitat, the sanctuary's largest protected area within its network of 24 marine zones.



Photo: FRNMS

Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center Offers Community Events, New Exhibits

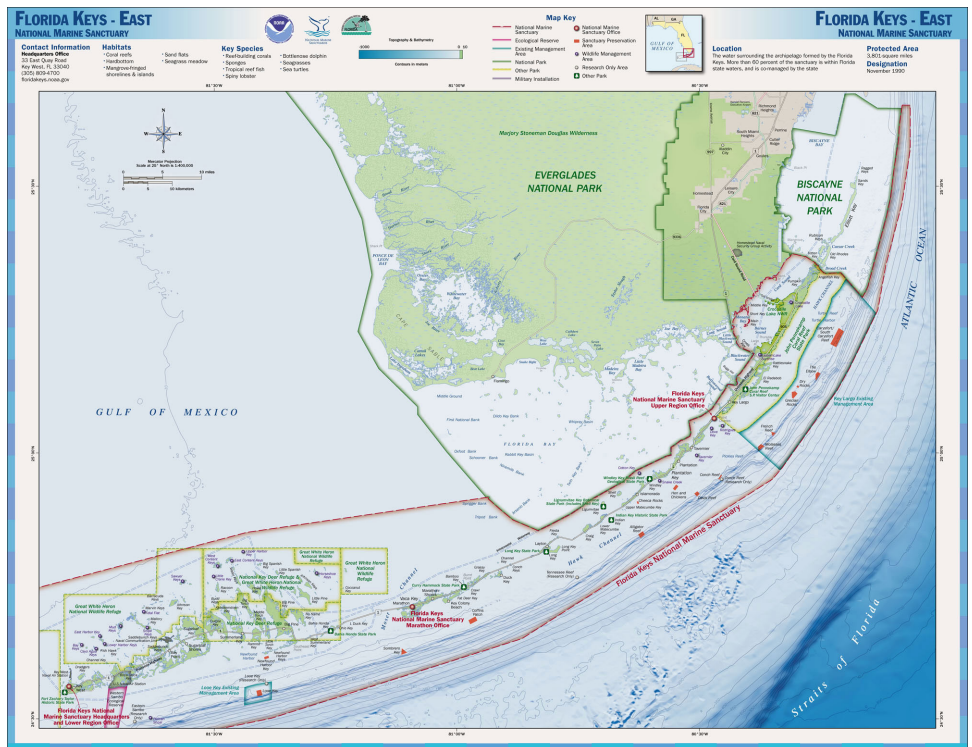
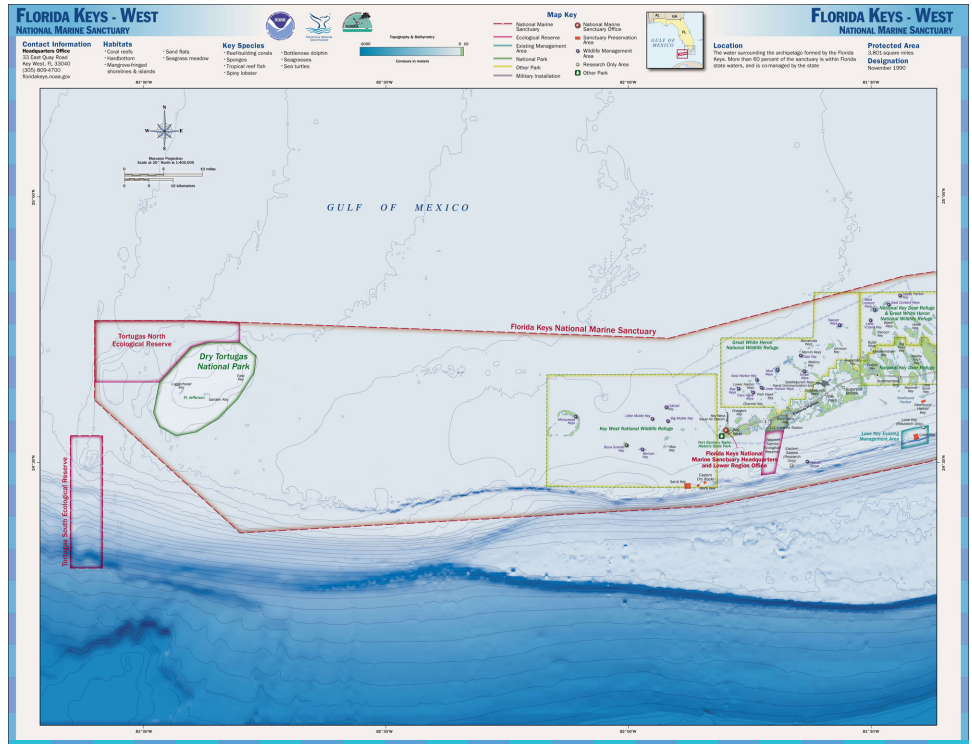
NOAA's Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center in Key West, Fla., has become an integral part of the community for visitors of all ages since it opened in early 2007. In February 2008, Mote Marine Laboratory opened the "Living Reef" exhibit in a new section of the center, highlighted by a 2,400-gallon reef tank featuring fish and invertebrates native to the Florida Keys. Visitors can also view aquaria with living hard and soft corals, a coral spawning video, and three smaller aquaria featuring research projects being conducted in the Keys. The center also serves as host for many community events, including film festivals and youth programs like "Discovery Saturdays."

Florida Keys Sanctuary Partnership Recognized for Coral Protection Efforts

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was presented with the Coastal America Partnership Award in February 2008 for its efforts to rescue more than 7,000 coral colonies. Sanctuary personnel and partners formed the Coral Protection and Restoration Program after recognizing potential threats to corals from seawall construction and repairs, marinas and dock development, and shoreline stabilization projects. The program takes coral colonies that are threatened by impacts and relocates them to restore depleted areas, features them in educational exhibits at public aquariums or uses them for research that will help protect coral reefs for the future. Research partners helped rescue corals too small to relocate and have developed coral nurseries to sustain them and eventually provide healthy corals to replenish natural sites. Major partners in the program include the Florida Aquarium, University of Florida, U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, Mote Marine Laboratory, Continental Shelf Associates and local aquaculturist Ken Nedimyer.

Technology Helps Reveal the Maritime Past of the Florida Keys

The waters of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary are home to hundreds of known shipwrecks, and many more lay awaiting discovery and identification. Researchers exploring one such unidentified wreck in 2008 were rewarded with the rare find of samples of hydrated cement, which afforded them the opportunity to study the reactions between cement and seawater. Chemical analysis revealed it to be Portland cement – a type that was produced between approximately 1890 and 1925 – ruling out an earlier hypothesis that the wreck had been carrying cement for Civil War era fort construction. The new dating of the material suggests that the vessel may have been shipping cement to the Keys for construction of Henry Flagler’s “overseas railroad.” This valuable piece of the puzzle, in combination with shipping records, may help positively identify the ship.



Sanctuary maps available at sanctuaries.noaa.gov

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