



8 Coral Reef Conservation Fund

Introduction

The Coral Reef Conservation Fund (the Fund) is a partnership between NOAA and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Established in 2000, the Fund provides competitive grants to projects that build community-based, public-private partnerships to reduce and prevent degradation of coral reefs and associated reef habitats. Funded projects target a specific audience and address specific threats with a hands-on approach within the following categories:

- Increasing community awareness through education and stewardship activities
- Improving the management effectiveness of coral reef protected areas
- Reducing impacts from pollution and sedimentation
- Reducing impacts from over-harvesting and other fishing activities
- Reducing impacts of recreational uses, tourism, and boating
- Restoring damaged reefs or associated reef habitats

The Fund is managed by NFWF with support from the CRCP and the NOS International Programs Office. Preliminary and final grant reviews are shared by staff from across NOS and NMFS.

Since 2002, NOAA awarded \$4.9M to 144 projects in coral areas throughout the U.S. and in over thirty countries (see Exhibit IV-8-1 for the distribution of project funding). This support was further leveraged with an additional \$345K from partner agencies (primarily the Castle Foundation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service), and \$8.5M in non-Federal matching funds provided by grantees, resulting in a total of \$13.7M in support (a 2.8:1 multiplication of NOAA funds).

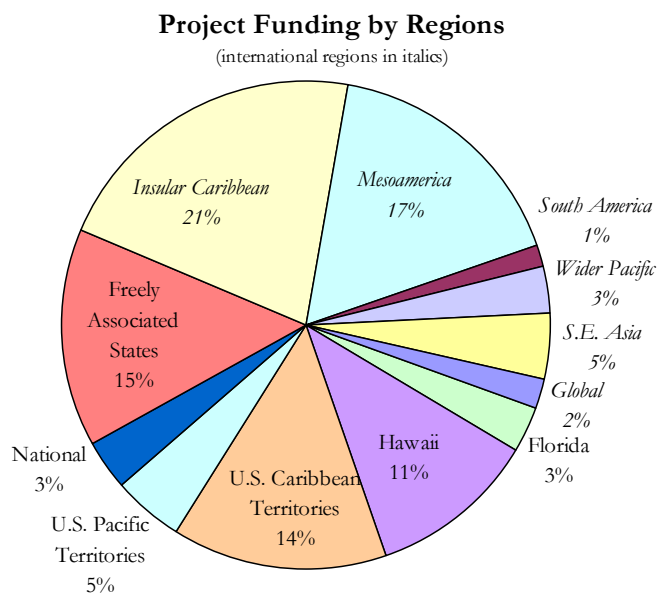


Exhibit IV-8-1. Funding by Regions.





Awards are widely distributed, with only two large NGOs (The Nature Conservancy and the World Conservation Society) receiving more than three grants. Sixteen other, primarily local NGOs and institutions received two to three grants in that time. The majority of grant awards have been one of a kind, as seen in Exhibit IV-8-2.

Exhibit IV-8-2 Coral Reef Conservation Fund Funding by Grantee Category (2002-2006)				
Organization	# Projects	% Total Projects	Funding	% Total Funding
Non-Profit	111	77%	\$10,863,839	79%
For-Profit	3	2%	\$193,000	1%
Federal Agency (International)	3	2%	\$261,583	2%
State / Local Government	10	7%	\$838,398	6%
Education	17	12%	\$1,518,275	11%
TOTAL	144	100%	\$13,675,094	100%

a. Eligibility

The Fund gives priority to projects that focus on U.S. domestic, U.S. insular (territory and commonwealth), the Pacific Freely Associated States (Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau), the Wider Caribbean, and Mesoamerican coral reef ecosystems. Since 2002, approximately 89% of project funding has been directed to these regions.

b. Activities

The Fund addresses causes of coral reef degradation wherever they occur, from coastal watersheds to the reefs and surrounding marine environment. Since 2002, funded projects have been broken down as shown in Exhibit IV-8-2. Approximately 36% of funding focused primarily on raising community awareness of coral issues through education (31 projects) and stewardship (14 projects); 21% of funding supported the development of new coral marine protected areas (MPA) or efforts to improve the management effectiveness of existing MPAs (34 projects); 15% of

Project Funding by Activity (2002-2006)

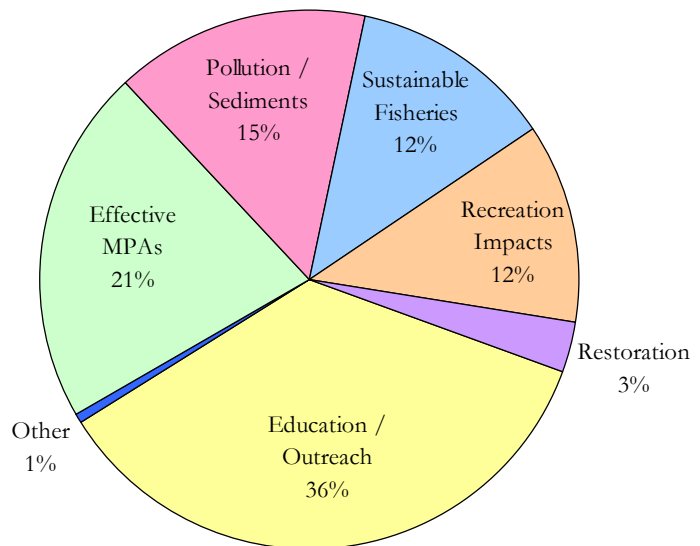


Exhibit IV-8-2. Funding by Activity





funding focused on hands-on, measurable watershed approaches to reduce land-based pollution and sedimentation to adjacent coral reef habitats (22 projects); 12% of funding supported efforts to monitor fisheries and improve conservation practices (17 projects); 3% of funding supported efforts to restore damaged coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses (7 projects); and 12% of funding supported efforts to reduce impacts of recreational uses (17 projects). Most recreational impact projects were funded through the *Anchors Away!* Program, which awards grants to install and maintain mooring buoys to protect sensitive coral reef resources from anchor damage and to identify MPAs primarily in the Wider Caribbean Region.

c. Outputs

Key outputs and accomplishments of Fund-supported projects are as follows:

- Initiated a long-term, national, community-driven coral monitoring and assessment program to educate local people and lay the foundation to develop a reef management program for the Rongelap and Mili Atolls.
- Worked to identify important spawning aggregation sites for grouper, snapper, and other reef fish in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and the surrounding region. Training workshops were conducted in the Bahamas and British Virgin Islands (BVI) to build cooperative relationships between local fishermen and fisheries researchers from the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, BVI, Jamaica, and USVI. A total of 64 research trips were conducted during the 2004-05 seasons, and over a dozen spawning aggregation sites for commercially-important species were logged.
- Installed 50 dive mooring buoys and 25 MPA boundary buoys to help protect 30 miles of World Heritage barrier reef in Ambergris Caye, Belize. Additionally, an educational brochure and mooring buoy map were produced for distribution to local dive shops in San Pedro.
- Developed and applied survey methods to examine fish populations at established monitoring sites and conducted surveys of fish markets, exports, and subsistence fisheries to determine the effects of commercial and subsistence harvesting.
- Initiated education and stewardship activities for residents of Punta Parguera. Over 80 community members participated in educational talks on mangrove reforestation, coral reefs, water quality and sedimentation, and the implications of coastal development. The project also initiated a community monitoring program. As a result of this project, many students and community members now understand important ecological linkages, as well as the goals of government and other conservation institutions in the area. In addition, conflicts with local coastal managers have been greatly reduced.
- Examined upgrades to constructed wetlands and evaluated increases in efficiency in the reduction of sewage and stormwater runoff. The project concluded that poor plant selection, substrate dissolution, design inefficiencies, and a lack of maintenance contribute to a wetland's failure to efficiently remove contaminants. Research from the project continues to influence how constructed wetlands are used elsewhere in the region





in houses, condominiums, and hotels. In addition, wastewater management agencies, architects, engineers, and government officials have partnered with the grantee organization to study ways of implementing wetland construction on a larger scale.

- Developed monitoring and evaluation programs to evaluate effectiveness of management and implementation plans for protected coral reefs at Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park and the Coron Island Ancestral Domain in Palawan, Philippines.
- Initiated a project to reduce impacts of pollution and tourism on coral reefs at Hunting Caye through improvements of public infrastructure (toilets, grey water boxes, and waste management).
- Supported education and stewardship activities on Haiti's Arcadins coast by presenting conflict resolution classes to approximately 1,000 people to communicate the conservation and management needs of watersheds and coral reefs; developing a pamphlet in Creole explaining the economic losses caused by the destruction of coral reefs; and supporting field activities, such as beach cleanups and mangrove plantings.
- Conducted workshops in San Antonio, Solola, Guatemala to raise awareness on the urgent freshwater crisis, introduce an effective and sustainable model of watershed management, and establish a network of practitioners to advance community-based watershed and protected areas conservation in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.

e. Outcomes

Highlights of impacts and outcomes arising from Fund-supported projects include:

- Worked with local stakeholders to install 31 mooring buoys, established a volunteer maintenance team, produced educational materials, and trained community-based monitoring to dive instructors and artisanal fishers in the newly-created Seaflower Biosphere Reserve in the San Andres Archipelago of Colombia. These participatory initiatives have helped to resolve conflicts and build a spirit of volunteerism among area divers, fishers, and government agencies. The project has been recognized internationally, owing both to the success of the mooring buoy deployment and the high level of community involvement.
- Supported marine patrols, environmental education activities, and an AGRRA monitoring program and database. Monitoring has been carried out continuously since this time and resulting data will support future management. The project supported the temporary closure of three dive sites due to visitation pressure and influenced the adoption of a Code of Conduct by divers and visitors and the use of better practices by dive shops. Outcomes of these efforts include the establishment of a small no-take zone for lobsters and conchs and a successful restoration of staghorn, elkhorn, and lettuce corals that were damaged from boat anchorages.
- Facilitated community and stakeholder leadership to develop a comprehensive management strategy for the Namena MPA (Fiji). Over the course of two years, the MPA concept grew from the villagers' traditional idea of protected fishing grounds into a network of ecologically-important protected areas throughout the immediate coastal and





marine zone of the Kubulau district. The plan was created through discussions, presentations, surveys and meetings of stakeholders (Council of Chiefs, government, and community members). Approximately 36% of the community fishing ground is now designated as “no-take” and anecdotal evidence suggests larger fish have returned.

- Supported the volunteer planting of 500 Red Mangrove, *Rhizophora mangle*, seedlings at Grand Ilet in the Simpson Lagoon (St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles). A survey in January 2007 revealed a 70% survival rate, exceeding the standard rate of 50% provided by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The mangroves are already home to a variety of wildlife, and seedlings have been recorded growing among the newly established red mangrove roots. Community awareness of mangroves has increased, especially for the school children who participated in the plantings. Press releases and media interviews also raised awareness among the general public.
- Initiated a Pride conservation education campaign to increase awareness of Pohnpei’s marine environment and build support for its sustainable use. The campaign addressed the threat of overharvesting inside local MPAs, and used the mangrove crab, or “Elimoang,” as its flagship species. The Elimoang campaign dramatically increased knowledge and support for MPAs among local communities. By the end of the project, there was an increase in the percentage of fishers talking about the importance of the marine environment and MPAs to their neighbors from a pre-campaign baseline of 22% to 82% post-campaign. There was also an increase in the percentage of fishers who believe it is “important” that hunting and fishing in the MPAs not be allowed, from 30% pre-campaign to 100% post-campaign. The campaign was also successful in getting two new MPA communities (Mwand and Sapwitik/Lenger) to join Pohnpei’s MPA Network, in helping to develop a new community sponge farming business, and in garnering community and UNESCO support for a new biosphere reserve at And Atoll. The UNESCO biosphere reserve program designated And Atoll to be the second Micronesian biosphere reserve in 2006.

f. Challenges

In recent years, NOAA and NFWF have focused increasingly on the measurable outcomes of projects supported by the Fund. In 2005, this issue was addressed by incorporating logic framework tables into all applications. These tables outline the activities and anticipated results of the project, as well as establish indicators for measurement and targeted milestones for success for the project and beyond. In 2005 and 2006, NFWF held several grant-writing workshops with specific instruction on evaluation and the logic frameworks to help build applicant capacity.

The popularity of the Fund and the increasing need within the conservation community has resulted in a significant increase in number of applications. This has increased the review committee burden, extended grant processing time, and resulted in a large number of applicants investing significant time only to be rejected. NFWF has taken several steps to resolve this issue, beginning with the transfer to an online application system in 2003 that included online





reviewing capabilities. NFWF also piloted a shortened pre-proposal form in 2006 that will allow applicants to spend less time preparing proposals, and now recommends only the strongest proposals to the full committee. NFWF also increased the number of staff in 2006 to assist the program in service to our applicants in project development, grantees, reviewers, and partners.

The Fund prioritizes funding for U.S. trusts and territories, but has received a relatively small number of quality proposals from these areas in comparison to other locations, largely due to capacity issues. To address this challenge, NFWF has held grant opportunity and grant-writing workshops in conjunction with USCRTF meetings in Puerto Rico and USVI, and has structured the review committee to contain revolving seats that will draw from a different territorial government each year to raise awareness of the program. NFWF has also addressed this issue through grant-making by working with RARE (an outreach, awareness, and capacity building NGO) to focus their efforts in U.S. trusts and territories. Since engaging RARE, the Fund has awarded one or two capacity-building projects each year in these areas.

As the Fund has grown, NFWF and its partners have recognized the need to develop an online database to house project information and final reports for reporting purposes. This will improve the accessibility of project information to potential grantees who can apply lessons learned to other regions. The Fund will highlight model projects that have developed useful coral reef conservation tools and solutions.

In an effort to respond to grantee interest and NFWF needs to organize metadata, NFWF has established a searchable conservation library that will contain all final reports and products from each awarded project. NFWF plans to have all Fund projects in the database by close of the calendar year 2007. Support was also given to the Rainforest Alliance in 2006 to develop a similar service for Latin America and the Caribbean that will provide translations into Spanish and Portuguese.

NFWF is updating its online software in 2008 to provide increased service to applicants, grantees, and partners. This will include the ability to customize applications to track specific metrics, developing an entirely paperless process and providing online review submission, ranking, and weighting across reviewers.

NFWF and NOAA have recently partnered with Foundations of Success (FOS) to assess the first five years of the Fund (2001-2006). To date, a subset of Fund projects have been broken down into target, threat, and conservation strategy components to determine the frequencies of each in the overall portfolio. NFWF, NOAA, FOS, and Fund partners are currently reviewing priorities for future funding with the goals of focused grant-making, establishing measurable milestones, and the development of a structure for future metadata analysis. While it is too soon in the assessment to articulate future priorities for the program, the NFWF Board of Directors has shown interest in targeting a specific location or threat priority (i.e., development practices in the Caribbean, consumer demand for reef products in the U.S.) as a “keystone” initiative for heightened focus and evaluation within the overall portfolio.

