

FLORIDA KEYS

2 0 0 7 A C C O M P L I S H M E N T S



A diver examines coral nurseries in the Florida Keys. Photo: NOAA



A dolphin tour operator displays the Dolphin SMART flag. Photo: NOAA



Visitors view an 18th-century cannon at the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center. Photo: NOAA

World-Class Visitor Center Opens

In January 2007, NOAA opened the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center in Key West, Fla. The 6,400-square-foot facility — developed by NOAA, the National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and South Florida Water Management District — offers visitors an exciting array of displays and interactive exhibits highlighting the rich natural environment of the Keys. Staff and center organizers hope to increase public awareness and appreciation of the need to protect and conserve the ecosystems of south Florida and the Florida Keys. Highlights of the facility are a 74-seat theater, a topographical map of the Florida Keys, a replica of the Aquarius underwater laboratory, interactive exhibits, a live weather station and reproductions of South Florida habitats such as mangroves and beaches. More than 25,000 visitors have passed through the center since its opening.

Coral Nurseries Important for Research and Reef Restoration

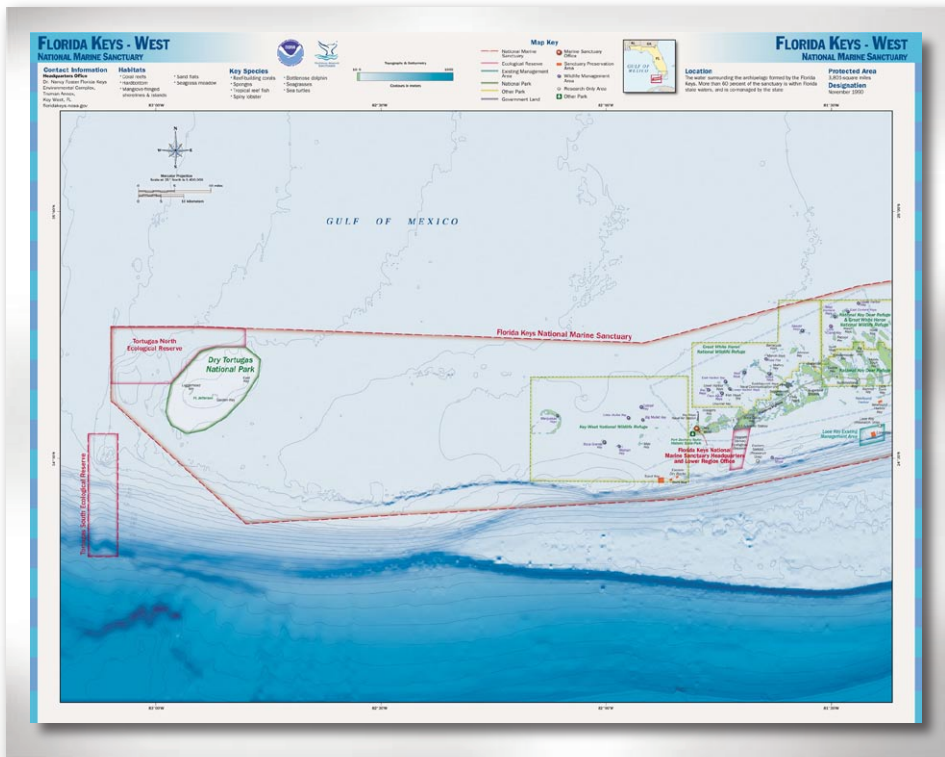
Nursery raised corals may prove to be key building blocks in restoring coral reefs in the Florida keys. In the first transplant effort of a coral restoration project, last year sanctuary scientists and volunteers relocated staghorn coral colonies to a reef where the corals had once existed. Over the next few years, as the growth rate and health of the transplanted corals are monitored, scientists expect to identify those corals that survive best and use this information in managing coral reefs in the future. Scientists from Mote Marine Laboratory are also growing colonies of stony corals under laboratory conditions that will be reattached to damaged reefs throughout the Keys. These colonies were started with fragments that were recovered by sanctuary staff from permitted development projects or vessel grounding sites. Sanctuary biologists also maintain a nearshore coral nursery off Key West that provides corals for research purposes and restoration projects,

New Program To Reduce Threats to Dolphins

A special area of the Florida Keys sanctuary is home to a resident group of bottlenose dolphins, making it a popular destination for businesses that operate dolphin tours. In an effort to reduce the impact of tourism on wild dolphins, Dolphin SMART, a voluntary education program encouraging responsible viewing of these wild mammals, was developed by NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program and National Marine Fisheries Service. The program's goals are to minimize the potential for wild dolphin harassment caused by commercial viewing activities, discourage close interaction with dolphins and promote sanctuary stewardship. It also includes an important research component that provides insight into the lives of the wild dolphins in Key West. Program participation is open to any commercial businesses booking wild dolphin tours in the Florida Keys.

<http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>





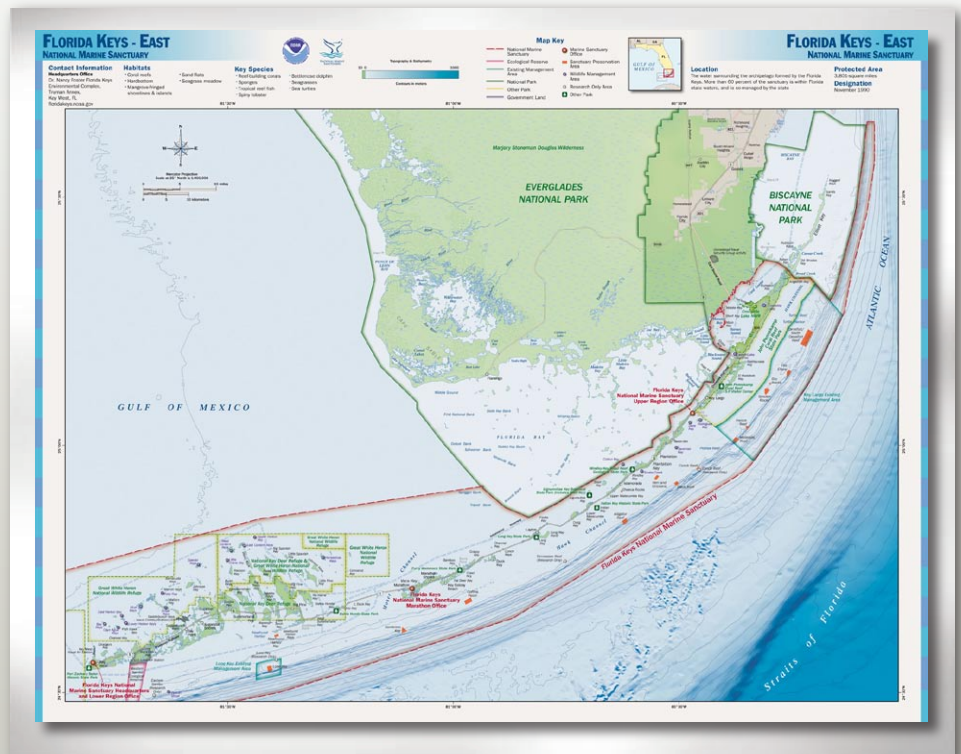
Sanctuary maps available at sanctuaries.noaa.gov

Cannon Displayed in Key Largo

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary unveiled an 18th-century English cannon and accompanying four-panel educational display at Key Largo Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center in December 2006. The display highlights the Florida Keys' valuable maritime heritage and serves as an example of the many outstanding contributions made by sanctuary volunteers. The display will be viewed by the 75,000 visitors to the center each year. The cannon is one of 13 first documented near Carysfort Reef off North Key Largo in 1994 by volunteers from the sanctuary's maritime heritage research inventory team. Little evidence of a shipwreck has been found, leading archaeologists to believe the cannons may have been heaved overboard in an attempt to free the vessel from the reef. Recovered by the sanctuary in 2003, the cast iron gun was manufactured between 1760 and 1780, weighs more than 1,000 pounds, and was capable of firing a four-pound ball.

Preserve America Grant Funds Shipwreck Site Studies

The sanctuary program received a \$9,650 grant from the NOAA Preserve America Initiative to support a project titled "Upper Keys Shipwrecks: Archaeological Site Assessment of Shipwrecks in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary." Through the project, researchers in Florida are documenting shipwreck sites and their important historic artifacts. The shipwreck sites will be recorded in the Florida Master Site File and sanctuary database for further resource management. Partners on the project include Mote Marine Laboratory and the Sanctuary Friends Foundation of the Florida Keys.



To learn more about these and other accomplishments, visit sanctuaries.noaa.gov

