



## Shout for GLEE--Green Living is Here in the Keys

*Michael Welber, GLEE Steering Committee*



While people in the Florida Keys have been concerned about the quality of the water surrounding the islands, many of the other issues that concern climate change have not received much attention. Concerns such as reducing personal and business energy

usage, recycling cans and bottles, or tapping the plentiful energy of the sun to heat water or produce energy have been on the public back burner.

### Volunteers for Trash Pickup



**Nearly 30 dedicated Team OCEAN volunteers paddled along the mangrove shoreline of the Western Sambo Ecological Reserve, collecting mounds of trash they found along the way. The reserve is a fully protected zone within Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and is the focus of research projects comparing lobsters and fish found in protected zones with those found in areas that are fished. Marine cleanups are a regular feature of the Team OCEAN volunteer program. On this day, volunteers picked up over 1500 pounds of trash. The Sanctuary Friends Foundation of the Florida Keys donated three kayaks for use in cleanup projects.** Photos: Jacqueline Laverdure



During the last year a Keys organization – Green Living Energy Education (GLEE) – has stepped into this breach in a major way. GLEE, which began its life by organizing an annual energy expo, took on the critical issue of climate change and has already begun to make a significant difference.

One of the first steps was to organize a Keys-wide conference of elected officials and other major players to call attention to the profound need to take action. This conference, called the Keys Sustain-Ability Project, attracted an impressive roster of people including Monroe County Commissioners Mario DiGennaro, George Neugent and Sylvia Murphy. Mayors from several Keys cities attended as did representatives from Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority, Florida Keys Electric Cooperative and the Monroe County Schools.

The session featured an impressive array of speakers who explained the serious problem facing everyone and provided guidance on what both municipalities and individuals can do toward addressing climate change and making the Florida Keys greener.

As a result of this effort, all of the city mayors and the county mayor in the Keys have signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Now GLEE is strongly encouraging these governmental entities to take the next steps by inventorying their current energy usage and then finding ways to reduce it to meet the U.S. Mayors agreement guidelines.

As impressive as these efforts are GLEE has not restricted its advocacy to encouraging government to move on climate change. The group has also launched an initiative to increase the very low rates of recycling in the island chain. Estimates vary, but most put the participation rate at well below 20 percent. The GLEE recycling committee has implemented a local recycling campaign that includes local seminars, an educational program and official proclamations by each city.

GLEE has also launched a monthly electronic newsletter to help educate local citizens, facilitate certification for green lodging, provide guidance on water conservation, and, yes, stage another successful expo on May 9-11, 2008.

Its all a tall order, but the planet depends upon this kind of local action. For more information, visit [www.keysglee.com](http://www.keysglee.com).