

REPORT TO THE U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE ON THE STATUS OF LOCAL ACTION STRATEGIES (2002-2006)

Background

Local Action Strategies (LAS) were initiated in the fall of 2002 by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF) to increase resources dedicated to, and improve effectiveness of local coral reef conservation efforts in U.S. jurisdictions. This fact sheet summarizes information that will be provided in a soon to be published LAS Status Report.

The seven U.S. coral jurisdictions (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Florida, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) developed LAS for applicable focus areas addressing five priority threats to coral reef ecosystems: land-based sources of pollution, over fishing, recreational overuse and misuse, lack of public awareness, and climate change, coral bleaching, and disease. In addition, several jurisdictions developed LAS to address three other significant threats, including population pressure, aquatic invasive species, and maritime industry and coastal construction.

These LAS are locally-driven, short range roadmaps for collaborative and cooperative action among Federal, state, territory, and non-governmental partners which identify and implement priority projects to reduce threats to coral reef ecosystems.

Accomplishment Highlights

Developing new or expanded partnerships

- Several key partnerships were formed in Hawaii to develop LAS including a partnership with the Hawaii Ecotourism Association to develop goals, objectives, and priorities for the Recreational Impacts LAS
- A partnership was established between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the National Coral Reef Institute to comprehensively map and initiate long-term monitoring of southeast Florida's reefs.

Increasing outreach and public awareness

- In American Samoa, a year-long "Rare Pride" education and outreach campaign was initiated and the marine science program at the local community college was enhanced and expanded through LAS projects.
- A "Guardians of the Reef" initiative was launched in Guam to engage high school juniors and seniors in delivering coral reef education programs to elementary classes.

Improved coral reef management

- Eco-permit legislation was enacted to manage activities in Guam's Marine Preserves and a Conservation Officer Enforcement program ensures greater protection for natural resources in the Marine Preserves.
- The U.S. Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Commission adopted regulations to implement a management plan for the East End Marine Park on St. Croix.

Building local capacity to address management issues

- Commercial and recreational fisher's workshop and enforcement training for coral reef protection in Puerto Rico.
- The CNMI successfully hosted a summer internship program to introduce college students to natural resource careers and provide hands-on experience in coral reef resource management.

Improving our understanding of coral reef ecosystems

- The Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative completed the first phase of a Biomarker study aimed at linking land-based sources of pollution to coral reef degradation and initiated the second phase of the study.
- The aquatic invasive species team in Hawaii completed a series of surveys and is designing control techniques to better understand and address detrimental impacts of invasive species on Hawaii's reefs.

LAS Projects and Funding

- Approximately 760 projects have been identified to address eight LAS threat areas across the 7 jurisdictions.
- Roughly 65% of all LAS projects identified are currently being implemented – some of which have already been completed.
- The total estimated cost to implement all LAS projects with funding estimates would be \$61.8 million dollars (total project costs for all 7 jurisdictions)
- Approximately \$25 million from numerous government and nongovernmental sources has been applied to project implementation to date (2003-2006) - approximately 40% of the total needed budget for implementation.
- The \$25.0 million in project implementation funds come from numerous sources including Federal agencies (NOAA, DOI, EPA, USDA/NRCS, DOJ, U.S. Forest Service, and USGS), state/territory and county agencies, universities and research institutes, non-governmental organizations, private corporations and foundations.
- Local agencies have successfully leveraged hundreds of thousands of dollars in volunteer services and in-kind resources, including time and skills, which have not been quantified in the total amounts of support received.

Challenges and Next Steps

- Limited capacity of local institutions to manage activities that impact reefs continues to pose a major challenge toward greater progress, particularly in territorial jurisdictions.
- Almost \$37 million is still needed to complete the first phase of LAS projects
- There is a continuing need for greater USCRTF Federal agency engagement and participation in LAS initiative – in particular, increased support at the local level.
- New guidance for the next generation of LAS projects has been developed and includes evaluation of previous LAS efforts and assessment of local capacity needed to continue and begin new LAS project development and implementation.