

Meeting Summary
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force
December 2-4, 2004
Miami, FL

The 12th biannual meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (Task Force) was held on December 2-4, 2004 in Miami. The Department of Interior and the State of Florida hosted the meeting. Almost 500 participants attended the 2-day business meeting and associated workshops held before and after the meeting. The Task Force heard updates on Task Force action items, presentations on current coral reef conservation issues, and public comments from citizens around the country. In addition, the Task Force took action on several key items.

The following is a summary of decisions and presentations from the meeting. The full meeting agenda, copies of presentations and additional information from the meeting can be found on the Task Force website.

Task Force Resolutions and Decisions

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force passed two resolutions during the meeting. The first resolution called for improved interagency coordination to avoid adverse coral reef impacts during spawning season. The second resolution called for the establishment of interagency working groups to develop standard mitigation protocols and best management practices. The Task Force also approved the 2005 Task Force meeting schedule. Additional information on these decisions is available on the Task Force web site.

- *Resolution on Coral Spawning*
The Task Force called on all federal agencies conducting activities in coastal waters adjacent to or on coral reefs to assess activity impacts on coral reproduction and life cycles. It further called for development of additional forecasts of coral spawning events to help avoid impacts on coral reproduction.
- *Resolution on Interagency Mitigation Working Group*
The second resolution called for the establishment of interagency working groups – federal, state and territories – to develop and “implement a more effective and efficient mitigation process for coral reef ecosystems.”
- *2005 Meeting Schedule*
The next Task Force meeting will be held in Washington DC from March 2-3, 2005. During this meeting, the Task Force will hold a short business meeting and will emphasize smaller in-depth working meetings to advance existing initiatives and resolutions, such as the Local Action Strategy effort. The Task Force also accepted Palau’s offer to host the fall 2005 meeting.

Important Announcements

- On December 2, James L. Connaughton, Chair of the White House Council of Environmental Quality, provided remarks to open the meeting and announced support for the Task Force Local Action Strategy initiatives, including \$2.7 M in President Bush’s

Fiscal Year 2006 budget request to support implementation of the state/territory coral reef conservation strategies.

- On December 2, NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), the State of Florida, and the Great Barrier Marine Park Authority of Australia (GBRMPA) announced formation of a new partnership (Memorandum of Agreement) among the organizations to improve information exchange and joint projects to advance the science and management for resilient coral reef ecosystems.

Special Honors and Awards

- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) posthumously honored Nancy Foster, longtime NOAA scientist and administrator, with the naming of a section of the world's largest coral reef in her honor. Foster served in a variety of positions during a 23-year NOAA career, and is only the second American to receive the naming recognition.
- Two individuals were presented with special "Coral Champion" awards for outstanding lifetime contributions to the conservation and management of coral reefs: Billy Causey, Superintendent for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and Joel Tutien, manager of the U.S. Virgin Islands National Coral Reef Monument.
- Ten additional Coral Reef Task Force awards were presented to the following organizations or individuals in five categories:

Outstanding Public Awareness and Education:

John Hargis, Teacher/Educator, Palm Beach County School District, Florida
Seacamp Association, Inc., Big Pine Key, Florida

Outstanding Scientific Advancement of Knowledge:

Robert Ginsburg, Ph.D., Professor of Marine Geology, University of Miami Rosenstiel
School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, Miami, Florida
Walter Jaap, Ph.D., Coral Reef Ecologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission, Florida Marine Research Institute

Outstanding Community Level Participation:

Peter Gladding, Private commercial fisherman, Florida (posthumous)
Jay Cashmere, WPTV News Channel 5, Florida
Ocean Watch Foundation, Lighthouse Point, Florida

Outstanding Management – National

Hanalei Watershed Hui, Hanalei, Hawaii

Outstanding Management – International

Belize Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute, Belize
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville, Australia

Update on Task Force Business

- *Local Action Strategies Update*
The Task Force heard updates from NOAA and State and Territory representatives on the Task Force on progress to finalize and begin implementing the Local Action Strategies.

Representatives from NOAA gave an update on the Local Action Strategy (LAS) initiative. Final LAS documents are available for all of the Pacific jurisdictions. Puerto Rico, Florida and the USVI have successfully completed the development phase of their LAS and plan to have final documents available early 2005. The states and territories are now officially kicking off the 3-year implementation period and most jurisdictions have already begun implementing year 1 projects.

Using a “funding tracker” that developed to assist this effort, NOAA estimates the price tag on the full 3 years of LAS implementation to be roughly 29 million. To date, there has been 11.6 million committed already to implement these projects. This number does not include all the non-financial assistance that has been provided both by the States and Territories and the Federal partners to advance this effort.

It is important to note that a significant portion of the state/territory support for first year project implementation is made up of redirected sources of existing annual funding. A total of \$4,357,000 of the state/territory funding comes from the reallocation of federal grant funding such as NOAA’s coral reef management, coral reef monitoring and CZM grants and EPA’s 319 grants, USDA Farm Bill, and DOI Sportfish restoration grants. Again, this is due to the need to sustain momentum of the effort based on commitments to stakeholders that have been involved in the process to date.

To assist the LAS effort, it was recommended that

- federal agencies in DC and at their regional offices continue to make the LAS a priority;
- Task Force members identify more funding opportunities at the Federal and State/Territory level and identify additional partnerships in order to fully implement the LAS effort;
- Task Force members also focus on addressing local capacity and infrastructure needs;
- the Steering Committee and Task Force members continue designing performance measures that will help track accomplishments from this effort.

Updates were also provided on LAS initiatives in each of the States and Territories.

- **Atlantic Mitigation for Coral Reef Impacts Report**

The USFWS presented the findings from the Atlantic Mitigation for Coral Reef Impacts Report. USFWS completed a study of mitigation for federally funded or permitted projects that impact coral reefs in the South Atlantic and Caribbean, in response to Resolution 4 from the 8th Coral Reef Task Force Meeting. The review focused on US Army Corps of Engineers' projects from 1985 to the present to provide information and recommendations for consideration. Mitigation success, as judged from compliance with permit conditions when possible, was variable, but showed improvement over the years.

Representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided an update of efforts to implement the Task Force resolutions on Pacific and Atlantic Water Quality. Several recommendations were made on how to proceed regarding these initiatives. Please see the "12th Task Force meeting" section of the Task Force web site for copies of these presentations.

Special Presentations

- Representatives from the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force presented an update on the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Initiative: Connecting Science and Management In The Coastal Ecosystem.
- Dr. Frank Muller-Karger gave the Task Force an update on the final report from U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.
- John Christensen and Roger Griffis from NOAA gave updates on two important reports coming out in 2005: the *Implementation of the National Coral Reef Action Strategy*, a report on US Coral Reef Task Force activities in 2002-2003, and the 2nd report on the health of US coral reefs, *The State of Coral Reef Ecosystems of the United States and Pacific Freely Associated States: 2004*.
- John Day from GBRMPA presented on Australia's efforts to increase the resilience of coral reef ecosystems in the Great Barrier Reef.
- Team Panda, a youth organization associated with WWF, gave a special presentation to the Task Force on their efforts to protect South Florida reefs and their views on climate change's effects on reefs.

Public Comment

The Task Force received public comment from 21 people during the first day of their business meeting. Text of public comments and further information can be found on the Task Force website. The following individuals provided comments to the members:

- Ted Davis (South Broward High School)
- Leslie Ricketts (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation)
- Richard Appledoorn (University of Puerto Rico)
- Alexander Stone (Reef Guardian International)

- Bob Glazer (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)
- Jason Bennis (National Park Conservation Association)
- Ellyn Tom (Pacific Fisheries Coalition, Hawaii Audubon Society)
- Tom Goreau (Global Coral Reef Alliance)
- Dan Clark (Cry of the Water)
- Stephanie Clark (Cry of the Water)
- Dave Raney (Sierra Club/REEF Check)
- Tomas Camarena (Environmental Defense)
- David White (The Ocean Conservancy)
- Georgiana Bustamante (Caribbean MPA Management Network and Forum)
- Karen Gottlieb
- Andrew Shepard (University of North Carolina Wilmington)
- Jeff Torode (Greater Ft. Lauderdale Dive Association)
- Bernhard Riegl (NCRI)
- Brent Plater (Center for Biological Diversity)
- Pedro Monteiro (Sierra Club)
- Robert Ginsberg (University of Miami)

Workshops

The Task Force held 4 public workshops in conjunction with the meeting on the following topics. Please see the “12th Task Force meeting” section of the Task Force web site for additional information on these workshops.

- Teacher Workshop “Coral Reefs – Cities Under The Sea” held on Sat. November 20th, 2004. More than forty south Florida teachers attended this workshop that provided teachers with a rare opportunity to interact with leading coral reef researchers and conservation experts to bring the latest scientific and educational resources into their classrooms.
- Sustainable Diving & Snorkeling Practices (December 1)
- Improving Science and Management of Florida's Coral Reef Ecosystems (December 4)
- Damage Assessment & Restoration Protocols for Coral Reef Habitats (December 4)