

# U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE

Coming Together to Save our Coral Reefs

## CORAL REEFS: NATURAL TREASURES, ECONOMIC RESOURCES

**C**oral reefs are among the most diverse and biologically complex ecosystems on earth.

These rainforests of the sea provide economic and environmental services to millions of people as areas of natural beauty and recreation and sources of food, jobs, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and shoreline protection. Under threat from multiple stresses that are overwhelming their natural resilience, coral reefs are deteriorating worldwide at alarming rates. An estimated 27% of the world's reefs have already been seriously damaged, and 58% are threatened by a variety of impacts including shoreline development, polluted runoff from agricultural and land-use practices, ship groundings, over-harvesting, destructive fishing, diseases, and climate change, [http://coral.noaa.gov/gcrmn/Status\\_2000.pdf](http://coral.noaa.gov/gcrmn/Status_2000.pdf)

## TASK FORCE MISSION

**The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF) was established by Presidential Executive Order in 1998 to lead U.S. efforts to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems.** The CRTF, co-chaired by the Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior, includes 12 federal agencies responsible for coral reef conservation, 7 state and territorial partners, and 3 freely associated states. The CRTF has been instrumental in building partnerships and strategies for on-the-ground action to conserve coral reefs.

**In 2000, the CRTF adopted the National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs, the first U.S. plan to comprehensively address the most pressing threats to coral reefs.**

The Action Plan is designed to be the nation's roadmap to more effectively understand coral reef ecosystems and reduce the adverse impacts of human activities. The plan identifies two fundamental themes for immediate and sustained national action:

- Understand coral reef ecosystems and the natural and anthropogenic processes that determine their health and viability;
- Quickly reduce the adverse impacts of human activities on coral reefs and associated ecosystems.

The CRTF has launched a number of initiatives to help implement the plan, including development of three-year Local Action Strategies in each jurisdiction to address key threats to reefs.



**Members of the  
U.S. Coral Reef  
Task Force**

**Commonwealth of  
Puerto Rico**

**Commonwealth of  
the Northern  
Mariana Islands**

**DHS/USCG**

Department of  
Homeland Security  
United States Coast Guard

**DOC/NOAA**

Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration

**DOD**

Department of Defense

**DOI**

Department of the Interior

**DOJ**

Department of Justice

**DOS**

Department of State

**DOT**

Department of Transportation

**EPA**

Environmental Protection  
Agency

**Federated States  
of Micronesia**

**NASA**

National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration

**NSF**

National Science Foundation

**Republic of Palau**

**Republic of the  
Marshall Islands**

**State of Florida**

**State of Hawaii**

**Territory of  
American Samoa**

**Territory of Guam**

**Territory of the  
U.S. Virgin Islands**

**USAID**

Agency for International  
Development

**USDA**

Department of Agriculture

**Through its members & partners, the CRTF is  
working to address the following needs:**

**Mapping**

CRTF members are undertaking a major effort to develop comprehensive and consistent maps of U.S. coral reef ecosystems. The goal is to map all shallow U.S. reefs by 2007. Most U.S. coral reefs have never been adequately mapped.

**Assessments, Inventories, and Monitoring**

The National Action Plan calls for building an integrated nationwide coral reef monitoring system to profile and track the health of U.S. coral reefs. Over time, a coordinated coral reef monitoring system will allow for regular assessments of reef health.

**Strategic Research**

Additional research is needed to improve our knowledge of the processes that regulate the health of coral reef ecosystems, and what can be done to protect and restore coral reefs.

**Marine Protected Areas**

The National Action Plan identified Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as a key ecosystem management tool to protect coral reef ecosystems and promote sustainable use of their resources. The goal is to strengthen networks of coral reef protected areas and protect 20% of U.S. coral reefs as marine reserves by 2010.

**Managing Coastal Impacts**

The National Action Plan calls for a number of measures by states, territories, and federal agencies to better manage activities on land and water that affect coral reef resources, including habitat destruction, sediment runoff, and other pollution.

**Sustainable Fishing**

Improve management to reduce overfishing and damaging fishing practices to ensure the commercial, recreational and subsistence benefits of fishing on reefs.

**Restoration**

Restoring damaged coral reefs is a very difficult, long-term activity that is still not well understood. Our ability to restore damaged reefs will continue to improve with experience and new science.

**Outreach and Education**

Outreach and education efforts are critical to all coral activities implemented by the CRTF. The Task Force strives to increase public understanding of the value of coral reefs, the threats to their survival, and what can be done to protect them.

**International**

The United States has interests in protecting international coral reefs. Healthy marine ecosystems are critical to U.S. diplomatic and development strategies to: promote economic and food security, establish social stability, improve human health, and conserve biodiversity in many countries.

**Partnerships**

Conserving U.S. and international coral reefs requires both concerted efforts and sustained collaboration by many partners. The CRTF would like to thank the many public and private entities, including scientists, coastal resource managers, non-governmental organizations, businesses and volunteers, who participate in efforts to help preserve coral reef ecosystems world-wide.



For information on the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and how to get involved, please visit the web site at <http://coralreef.gov/>