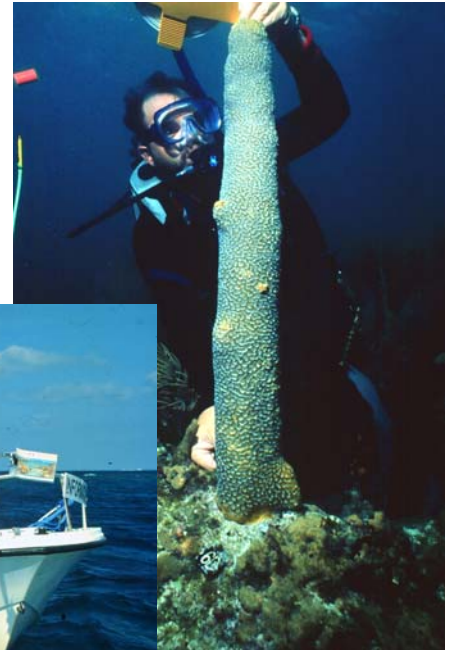


Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Draft Revised Management Plan



February 2005

U.S. Department of Commerce

National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration

National Ocean Service

National Marine Sanctuary Program

This document is the draft revised management plan for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. It replaces the management plan that was implemented in 1997 and will serve as the primary management document for the Sanctuary during the next five years.

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Note to Reader

In an effort to make this document more user-friendly, we have included references to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary web site rather than including the entire text of many bulky attachments or appendices that are traditionally included in management plans. Readers who do not have access to the Internet may call the Sanctuary office at (305) 743-2437 to request copies of any documents that are on the Sanctuary's web site. For readers with Internet access, the Sanctuary's web site can be found at: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is a report on the results of NOAA's five-year review of the strategies and activities detailed in the 1997 *Final Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. It serves two primary purposes: 1) to update readers on the outcomes of successfully implemented strategies - in short, accomplishments that were merely plans on paper just five years ago; and, 2) to disseminate useful information about the Sanctuary and its management strategies, activities and products. The hope is that this information, which charts the next 5 years of Sanctuary management, will enhance the communication and cooperation so vital to protecting important national resources.

Sanctuary Characteristics

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary extends approximately 220 nautical miles southwest from the southern tip of the Florida peninsula. The Sanctuary's marine ecosystem supports over 6,000 species of plants, fishes, and invertebrates, including the nation's only living coral reef that lies adjacent to the continent. The area includes one of the largest seagrass communities in this hemisphere. Attracted by this tropical diversity, tourists spend more than thirteen million visitor days in the Florida Keys each year. In addition, the region's natural and man-made resources provide livelihoods for approximately 80,000 residents.

The Sanctuary is 2,900 square nautical miles of coastal waters, including the recent addition of the Tortugas Ecological Reserve. The Sanctuary overlaps six state parks and three state aquatic preserves. Three national parks have separate jurisdictions, and share a boundary with the Sanctuary. In addition, the region has some of the most significant maritime heritage and historical resources of any coastal community in the nation.

The Sanctuary faces specific threats, including direct human impacts such as ship groundings, pollution, and overfishing. Threats to the Sanctuary also include indirect human impacts, which are harder to identify but seem to be reflected in coral declines and increases in macroalgae and turbidity. More information about the Sanctuary can be found in this document and at the Sanctuary's web site: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>.

Management Plan Organization

Within this document, the tools that the Sanctuary uses to achieve its goals, are presented under five management divisions: 1) Science; 2) Education, Outreach & Stewardship; 3) Enforcement & Resource Protection; 4) Resource Threat Reduction; and, 5) Administration, Community Relations, & Policy Coordination. Each management division contains two or more *action plans*, which are implemented through supporting *strategies* and *activities*. The strategies described in the 1997 *Management Plan* generally retain their designations in this document. As in the 1997 plan, two or more action plans may share a strategy where their goals and aims converge.

Accomplishments and Highlights

The Sanctuary's programs and projects have made significant progress since the original management plan was implemented 1997. An overview of these accomplishments is provided in the Introduction. In addition, each action plan contains bulleted lists of accomplishments since the 1997 management plan was adopted.

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Acronyms

ASA	Abandoned Shipwreck Act
ATBAs	Areas to Be Avoided
AWT	Advanced Wastewater Treatment
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DARP	Damage Assessment and Restoration Program
DMR	Department of Marine Resources (Monroe County)
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
F.S.	Florida Statutes
FAC	Florida Administrative Code
FDACS	Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
FDHR	Florida Division of Historical Resources
FDEP	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
FFWCC	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
FKNMS	Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
FKNMSPA	Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Protection Act
FPS	Florida Park Service
FWRI	Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
FWS	Fish and Wildlife Service
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HAZMAT	Hazardous Materials
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
MEERA	Marine Ecosystem Event Response and Assessment
MHR	Maritime Heritage Resources
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act
MMS	Minerals Management Service
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Act
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NMS	National Marine Sanctuary
NMSA	National Marine Sanctuary Act
NMSP	National Marine Sanctuary Program
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOS	National Ocean Service
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPS	National Park Service
OSDS	On-Site Disposal System
PSSA	Particularly Sensitive Sea Area

SAV	Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
SCR	Submerged Cultural Resources
SEFSC	Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SFWMD	South Florida Water Management District
SPA	Sanctuary Preservation Area
SWIM	Surface Water Improvement and Management Act
SWM	Stormwater Management
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard
USDOC	U.S. Department of Commerce
USDOI	U.S. Department of Interior
USDOS	U.S. Department of State
USDOT	U.S. Department of Transportation
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WMA	Wildlife Management Area

1.0 INTRODUCTION



1.1 The National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP)

The National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) is a network of 13 marine protected areas (Figure 1.1), encompassing marine resources from Washington State to the Florida Keys, and Lake Huron to American Samoa. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Ocean Service (NOS) has managed the nation’s marine sanctuaries since passage of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972. Title III of that Act is now called the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), which is found in Appendix A.

Today, the national marine sanctuaries contain deep-ocean gardens, near-shore coral reefs, whale migration corridors, deep-sea canyons, and underwater archaeological sites. They range in size from one-quarter square mile in Fagatele Bay, American Samoa, to more than 5,300 square miles off Monterey Bay, California – one of the largest marine protected areas in the world. Together, these sanctuaries protect nearly 18,000 square miles of coastal and open ocean waters and habitats. While some activities are managed to protect resources, certain multiple uses, such as recreation, commercial fishing, and shipping are allowed to the extent that they are consistent with a sanctuary’s resource protection mandates. Research, education, outreach, and enforcement activities are major components in each sanctuary’s program of resource protection.

The NMSP is recognized around the world for its commitment to management of marine protected areas within which primary emphasis is placed on the protection of living marine resources and our nation’s maritime heritage resources.

Figure 1.1. The National Marine Sanctuaries



The NMSP Vision:
People value marine sanctuaries as treasured places protected for future generations.

The NMSP Mission:
To serve as the trustee for the national system of marine protected areas to conserve, protect, and enhance their biodiversity, ecological integrity and cultural legacy.

1.2 The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS)

Historical Setting

Warning signs of the fragility and finite nature of the region's marine resources have been present in the Florida Keys for years. In 1957, a group of conservationists and scientists met at Everglades National Park to discuss the demise of the coral reef resources at the hands of those attracted by its beauty and uniqueness. The conference resulted in the 1960 creation of the world's first underwater park, John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. However, in the following decade, public outcry continued over pollution, overfishing, physical impacts, overuse, and user conflicts. The concerns continued to be voiced by environmentalists and scientists alike throughout the 1970s and into the 1990s.

As a result, additional management efforts were instituted to protect the Keys' coral reefs. In the Upper Keys, Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1975 to protect 103 square nautical miles of coral reef habitat from north of Carysfort Lighthouse to south of Molasses Reef. In the Lower Keys, the 5.32 square nautical mile Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1981.

Despite these efforts, oil drilling proposals and reports of deteriorating water quality occurred throughout the 1980s. At the same time, scientists were assessing coral bleaching and diseases, long-spined urchin die-offs, loss of living coral cover, a major seagrass die-off, and declining reef fish populations. Such threats prompted Congress to act. In 1988, Congress reauthorized the National Marine Sanctuary Program and ordered a feasibility study for possible expansion of Sanctuary sites in the Florida Keys - a directive that signaled that the health of the Keys ecosystem was of national concern.

The feasibility studies near Alligator Reef, Sombrero Key, and westward from American Shoal were overshadowed by several natural events and ship groundings that precipitated the designation of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS). Three large ships ran aground on the coral reef during one 18-day period in the fall of 1989. Although people cite the ship groundings as the issue triggering Congressional action, it was, in fact, the cumulative degradation and the threat of oil drilling, along with the groundings. These multiple threats prompted Congressman Dante Fascell to introduce a bill into the House of Representatives in November of 1989. Congressman Fascell had long been an environmental supporter of South Florida and his action was very timely. Senator Bob Graham, also known for his support of environmental issues in Washington and as a Florida Governor, sponsored the bill in the Senate. Congress gave its bipartisan support, and on November 16, 1990, President George Bush signed the bill into law.

With designation of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in 1990, several protective measures were implemented immediately, such as prohibiting oil and hydrocarbon exploration, mining or otherwise altering the seabed, and restricting large shipping traffic. Additionally, protection to coral reef resources was extended by restricting anchoring on coral, touching coral, and collecting coral and live rock (a product of the aquarium trade). Discharges from within the Sanctuary and from areas outside the Sanctuary that could potentially enter and affect local resources were also restricted in an effort to comprehensively address water quality concerns.

Administration and Legislation

The Sanctuary uses an ecosystem approach to comprehensively address the variety of impacts, pressures, and threats to the Florida Keys marine ecosystem. It is only through this inclusive approach that the complex problems facing the coral reef community can be adequately addressed.

The goal of the Sanctuary is to protect the marine resources of the Florida Keys. It also aims to interpret the Florida Keys marine environment for the public and to facilitate human uses of the Sanctuary that are consistent with protection of this particular marine ecosystem. The Sanctuary is administered by NOAA and is jointly managed with the State of Florida under a co-trustee agreement. The Florida Governor and Cabinet, sitting as the Board of Trustees for the State of Florida, designated the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as the State's partner for Sanctuary management. Additionally, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), created in 1999, enforces Sanctuary regulations in partnership with Sanctuary managers. FWC also houses the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI), which conducts and coordinates scientific research and monitoring.

National Marine Sanctuaries are typically designated by the Secretary of Commerce through an administrative process established by the NMSA. However, recognizing the importance of the Florida Keys ecosystem and the degradation of the ecosystem due to direct and indirect physical impacts, Congress passed the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act (FKNMSPA) in 1990, (P.L. 101-605) (Appendix B) designating the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. President George Bush signed the FKNMSPA into law on November 16, 1990.

The FKNMSPA requires the preparation of a comprehensive management plan and implementing regulations to protect Sanctuary resources. This draft *Revised Management Plan* responds to the FKNMSPA's requirements. The implementing regulations, effective as of 1 July 1997, are found at 15CFR922 and in Appendix C. The designation document for the FKNMS is found in Appendix D.

Sanctuary Boundaries

The Sanctuary's enabling legislation designated 2,800-square-nautical miles of coastal waters off the Florida Keys as the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The Sanctuary's boundary was amended in March 2001 when the Tortugas Ecological Reserve was designated, significantly increasing the marine resources requiring protection.

Currently, the boundary encompasses approximately 2,900 square nautical miles (9,800 square kilometers) of coastal and ocean waters and submerged land (Figure 1.2). The boundary extends southward on the Atlantic Ocean side of the Keys, from the northeastern-most point of the Biscayne National Park along the approximate 300-foot isobath for over 220 nautical miles to the Dry Tortugas National Park. The boundary extends more than 10 nautical miles to the west of the Park boundary, where it turns north and east. The northern boundary of the Sanctuary extends to the east where it intersects the boundary of the Everglades National Park. The Sanctuary waters on the north side of the Keys encompass a large area of the Gulf of Mexico and western Florida Bay. The boundary follows the Everglades National Park boundary and continues along the western shore of Manatee Bay, Barnes Sound, and Card Sound. The boundary then follows the southern boundary of Biscayne

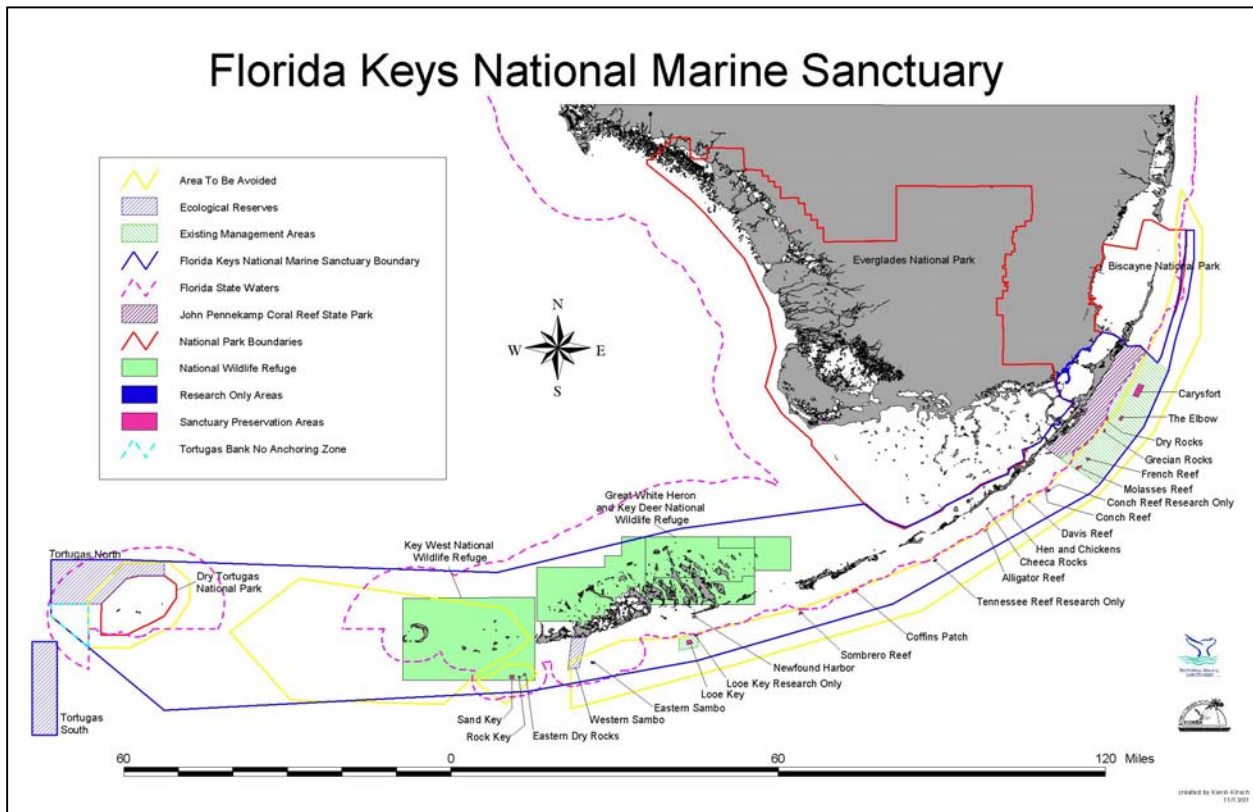
National Park and up its eastern boundary along the reef tract at a depth of approximately 60 feet until its northeastern-most point.

A separate, non-contiguous, 60 square nautical mile area off the westernmost portion of the Sanctuary is called the Tortugas Ecological Reserve South. The area's shallowest feature is Riley's Hump.

The Sanctuary boundary overlaps two previously existing National Marine Sanctuaries (Key Largo and Looe Key); four U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) refuges; six state parks, including John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park; three state aquatic preserves; and other jurisdictions. Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park and Dry Tortugas National Park are excluded from Sanctuary waters, but each shares a boundary with the Sanctuary.

The shoreward boundary of the Sanctuary is the mean high-water mark, except around the Dry Tortugas where it is the boundary of Dry Tortugas National Park. The Sanctuary boundary encompasses nearly the entire reef tract, all of the mangrove islands of the Keys, and a good portion of the region's seagrass meadows.

Figure 1.2. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Boundaries



Socio-Economic Context

The environment and the economy are inextricably linked in the Florida Keys, making management and protection of existing resources and reducing impacts critical if the economy is to be sustained. Tourism is the number one industry in the Florida Keys, with over \$1.2 billion dollars being spent annually by over 3 million visitors. The majority of visitors participate in activities such as snorkeling, SCUBA diving, recreational fishing, viewing wildlife and studying nature. Recreational and commercial fishing are the next most important sectors of the local economy, annually contributing an estimated \$500 million and \$57 million respectively (<http://marineeconomics.noaa.gov>).

Because of the recreational and commercial importance of the marine resources of the Florida Keys, protecting these Sanctuary resources is valuable not only for the environment but also for the economy. The special marine resources of the region, which led to the area's designation as a National Marine Sanctuary, contribute to the high quality of life for residents and visitors. Without these unique marine resources, the quality of life and the economy of the Keys would decline.

1.3 The Management Plan Review Process

What is management plan review?

In 1992, when Congress reauthorized the NMSA, it required all National Marine Sanctuaries to review their management plans every five years in order to monitor and evaluate the progress of the national mission to protect national resources. The Florida Governor and Cabinet, as trustees for the State, also mandated a five-year review of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Management Plan in their January 28, 1997 resolution.

The Sanctuary's management plan review creates a road map for future actions based on past experience and outcomes. The review reevaluates the goals and objectives, management techniques, strategies, and actions identified in the existing management plan. It provides the opportunity to take a close and comprehensive look at outcomes and plan for future management of the Sanctuary.

The 1997 Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Management Plan

After the initial six-year FKNMS planning process, a comprehensive management plan for the Sanctuary was implemented in July 1997. The management plan focused on ten action plans which were largely non-regulatory in nature and involved educating citizens and visitors, using volunteers to build stewardship for local marine resources, appropriately marking channels and waterways, installing and maintaining mooring buoys for vessel use, surveying maritime heritage resources, and protecting water quality. In addition to action plans, the 1997 management plan designated five types of marine zones to reduce pressures in heavily used areas, protect critical habitats and species, and reduce user conflicts. The efficacy of the marine zones is monitored Sanctuary-wide under the Research and Monitoring Action Plan.

The implementing regulations for the FKNMS became effective July 1, 1997. The 1997 management plan was published in three volumes: Volume I is the Sanctuary management plan itself (which this document updates); Volume II describes the process used to develop the draft management alternatives, including environmental and socioeconomic impact analyses of the alternatives, and the environmental impact statement; Volume III contains appendices, including the texts of Federal and State legislation that designate and implement the Sanctuary. All three volumes of the 1997 management plan are available on the Sanctuary web site (<http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/>) and from the Sanctuary's Marathon office. Volume II is not being revised as part of this review. After public input, government review and final adoption of this five-year review and revised Management Plan, this document will replace Volumes I and III.

How does management plan review work?

Review of the 1997 management plan began in early 2001 with a meeting in Tallahassee, Florida, among Federal and state partners responsible for Sanctuary management and various FKNMS and NMSP staff. The review included the Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) and the general public in every step of the process.

In the late spring and summer of 2001, FKNMS staff, working closely with the SAC, held scoping meetings and re-convened working groups that had been created during development of the 1997 plan. The scoping meetings were held in Marathon, Key Largo, and Key West, and gave the public the opportunity to meet with SAC members, Sanctuary managers, and FKNMS staff. The meetings

included round-table discussions on every action plan, and participants had the opportunity to move freely between the various topics being discussed at each table.

The scoping period for the revised management plan lasted from June 8 through July 20, 2001.

Approximately 30 comments were received - a sharp contrast to the more than 6000 public comments received during the comment period for the 1997 plan. In addition, the working groups held more than three dozen meetings between June and September 2001 to discuss, evaluate, revise and update action plans. SAC members and FKNMS staff who had served on the working groups presented the proposed revisions to the Sanctuary Advisory Council at three meetings in October 2001. The full advisory council recommended minor changes and approved each action plan in this document. The Advisory Council membership and Working Group membership lists are included in Appendix E.

The Role of Sanctuary Management as Facilitators

A Sanctuary management plan is designed to identify the best and most practical strategies to achieve common goals, while getting the most out of public investment. Achieving this aim cannot be accomplished solely through the authorities and resources of an individual Sanctuary management authority. It requires a broad partnership of programs, authorities, and resources, coordinated to meet the needs of both the sanctuary site and the broader region of which it is a part.

Consequently, the management plan review process first focuses on finding the most effective strategies to accomplish common goals. These strategies are the product of a process that brings together constituents, institutions, and interested parties in directed working groups to address specified problem areas. How these strategies are to be implemented – with whose authorities, investments, and personnel – is determined subsequently to developing the best strategies. While the Sanctuary program commits to carrying out specific strategies as budgets allow, in many cases implementation becomes the responsibility of other institutions such as state, Federal, or local partners, that have either the authorities, the appropriate program, and/or the resources required.

In this process, the sanctuary management plan becomes a framework in which the role of all partners is codified. The Sanctuary assumes the role of facilitator and integrator of a far larger body of activities and outcomes than are within the immediate authorities, programs, and resources of the site. This facilitation role provides the mechanism for continued implementation, evaluation, and adaptation of the partnership activities documented by the plan, ensuring its continuity and overall success.

1.4 Accomplishments

There have been many accomplishments in the sanctuary beginning with the authority established under the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act of 1990 and the implementation of the management plan in 1997. An overview of the Sanctuary's accomplishments is given here, and more details are provided within each Action Plan.

1. Area To Be Avoided. The "Area To Be Avoided" (ATBA) designation has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of major ship groundings on the coral reefs. As Figure 1.3 illustrates, prior to 1990 there was a major ship grounding involving vessels greater than 50 m in length, nearly every year, while only two have occurred since the creation of the ATBA. The International Maritime Organization agreed that the ATBA should be given additional strength as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in 2002 (see Accomplishment 5 below). The ATBA regulations are at 15 CFR Part 922, Subpart P, Appendix VII. Figure 1.4 shows the ATBA and the Sanctuary boundary.

Figure 1.3. Reef groundings of vessels greater than 50m before & after ATBA designation.

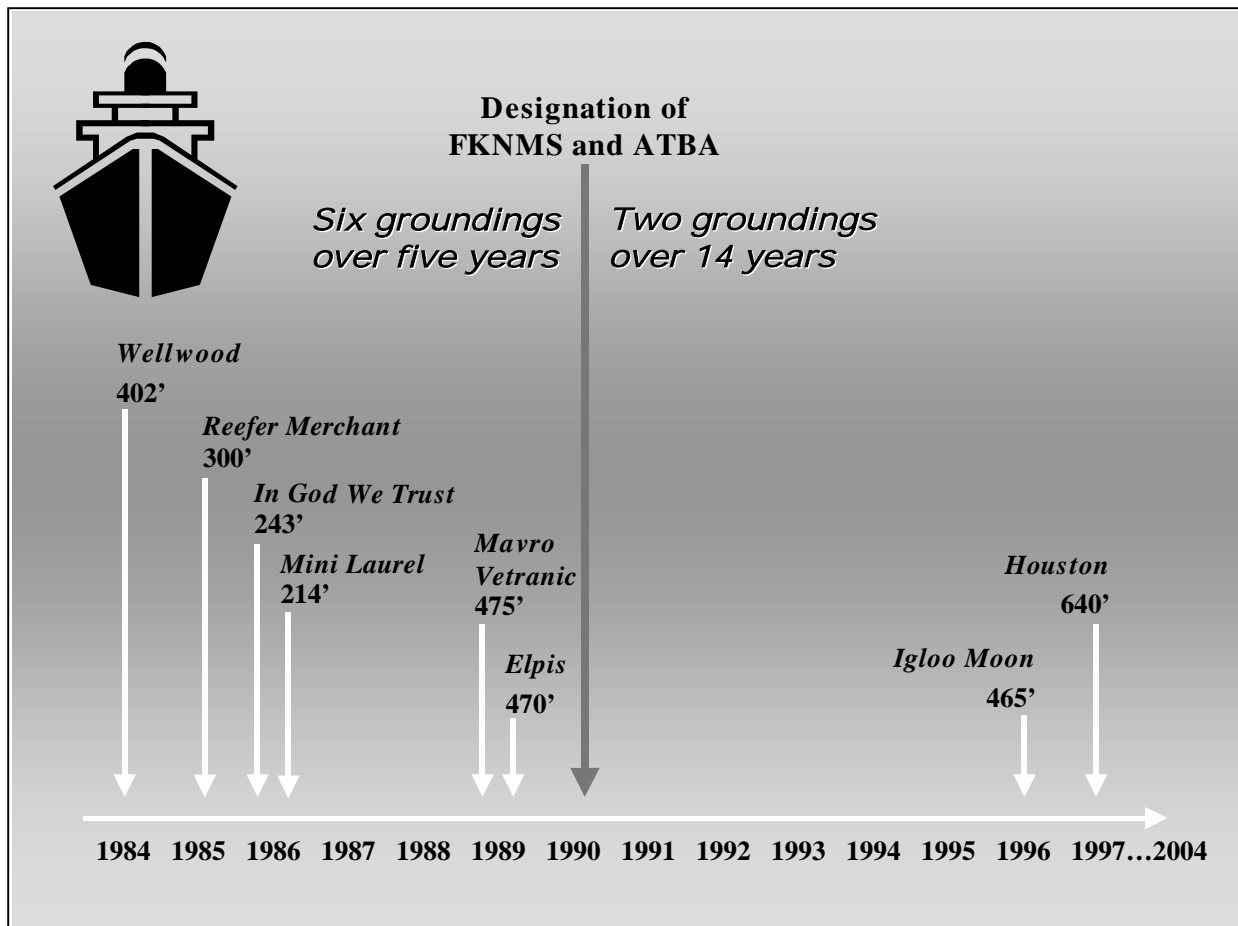
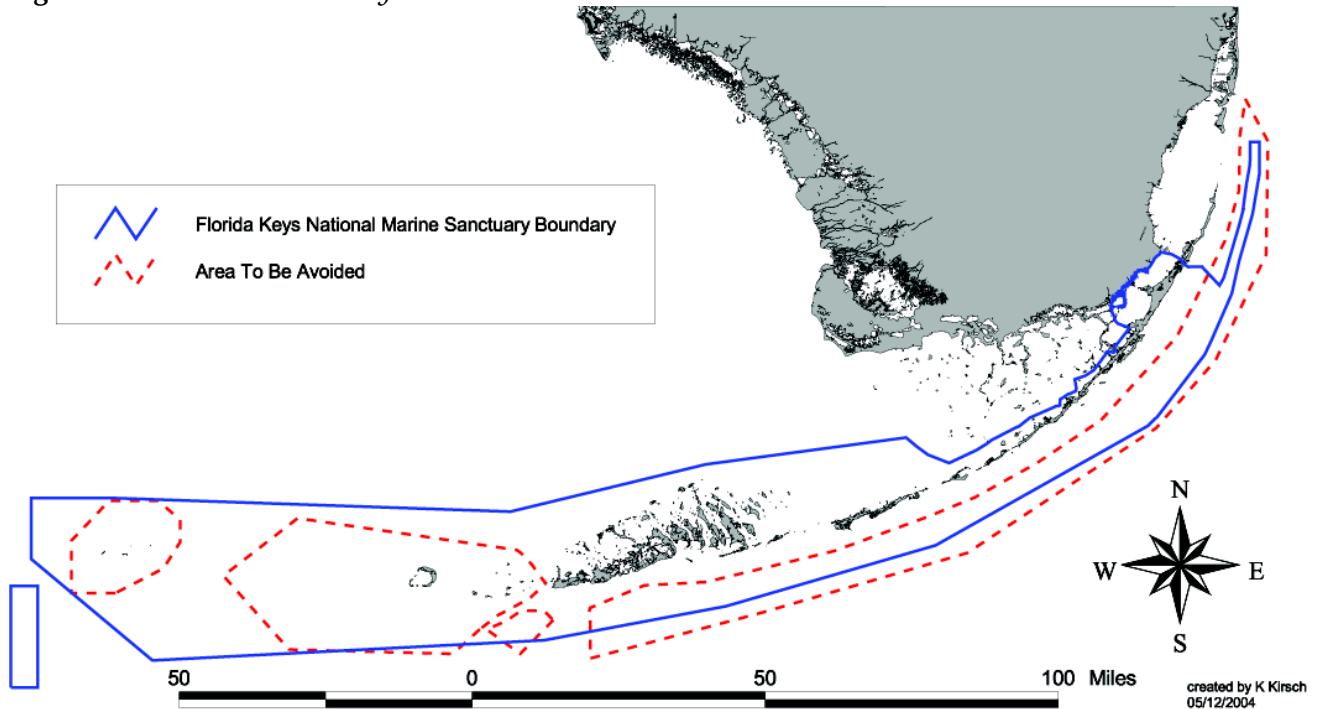


Figure 1.4. FKNMS boundary and ATBA



2. Oil Drilling and Hard Mineral Mining Ban. A ban on these activities was established when the Sanctuary was created, and has prevented these activities from occurring in the Sanctuary.

3. The Water Quality Protection Program. This program has produced the first Water Quality Protection Program for a national marine sanctuary and has fully implemented 26 of 49 high-priority activities, many of which are carried out in cooperation with other action plans.

4. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The Sanctuary continues to participate in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. Sanctuary staff have been active on this project since 1993, including chairing a working group for the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and staffing its science and education committees. The Sanctuary's participation seeks to protect the ecosystem's water quality by eliminating catastrophic releases of freshwater into Florida Bay following rain events.

5. Designation of the Florida Keys as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. In November 2002, the United Nations International Maritime Organization approved designation of the Florida Keys as a PSSA. The designation is not accompanied by additional rules and regulations, but seeks to elevate public awareness of the threat of oil spills and hazardous materials to sensitive marine environments and will ensure that the previously mentioned ATBA is noted not only on U.S. charts but also on nautical charts worldwide.

6. Long-term and continuing progress in the Research and Monitoring and Zoning action plans.

Research and Monitoring has produced significant scientific data, hypothesis testing, mapping, trend documentation, and wide dissemination of these findings. Especially notable is the Keys-wide benthic map which provides valuable information for Sanctuary managers. In addition to the new protected zone in the Tortugas Ecological Reserve, the Sanctuary's zoning programs continue to provide invaluable data that crosses simple category boundaries.

7. Education, Public Outreach, Sanctuary Stewardship, and Volunteerism. Through these inter-related efforts, information is flowing from scientists to managers and then to educators, who reach the next generation. More than 120,000 volunteer hours, a \$1.8 million value, have been donated to the Sanctuary between 1996 and 2000. Even more valuable than the dollar worth of the program is the stewardship created through volunteerism, which uniquely contributes to the long-term effectiveness of the Sanctuary.

8. Enforcement and Regulations. Both the city of Key West and the State of Florida have declared Florida Keys waters under their jurisdictions as "no-discharge" zones. Additional accomplishments in implementing the Enforcement and Regulatory Action Plans are largely a tribute to the cooperative efforts among the State, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Park Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA. Notable among these is the cross-deputization of state-certified law enforcement officers, which allows them to enforce some Federal laws, including fisheries regulations.

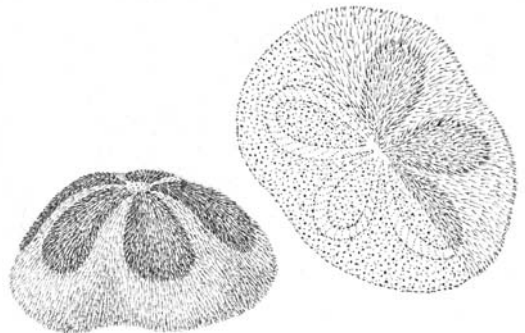
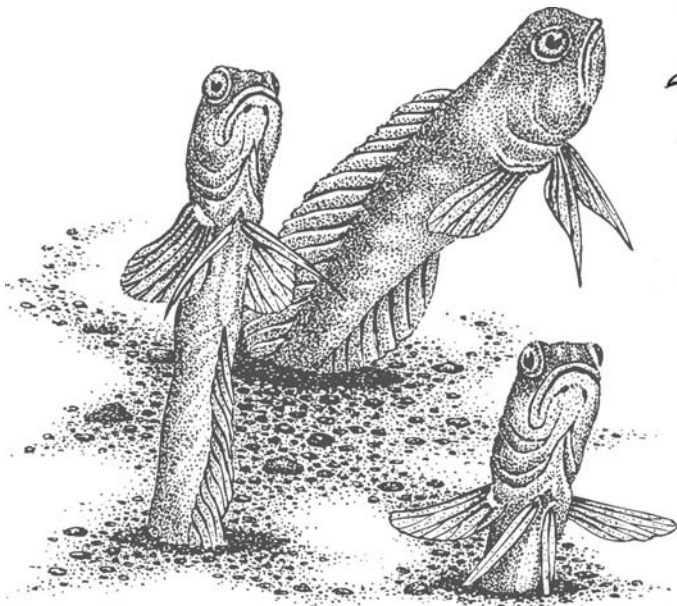
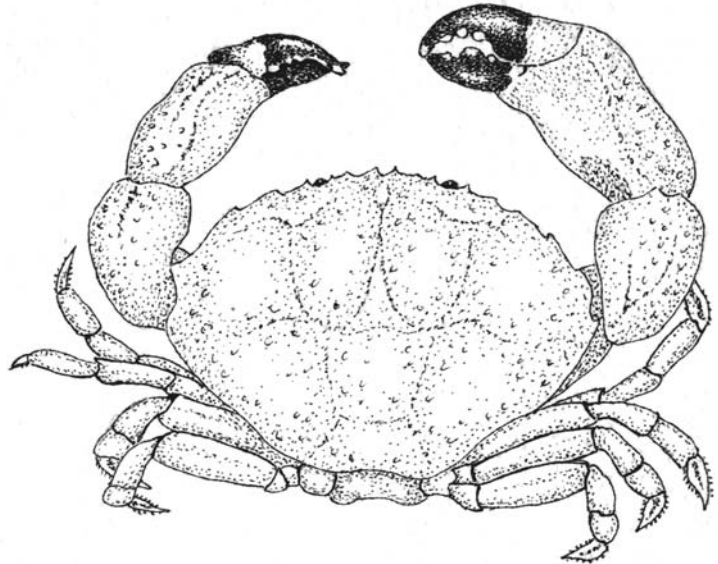
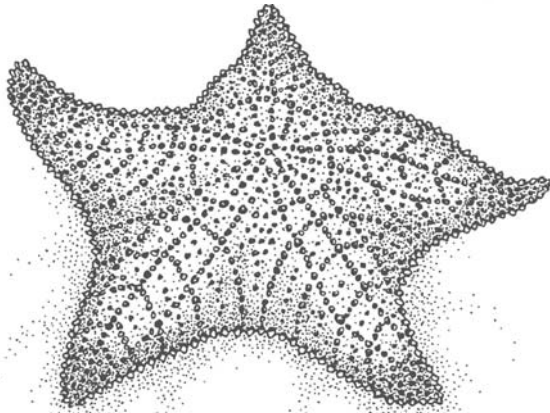
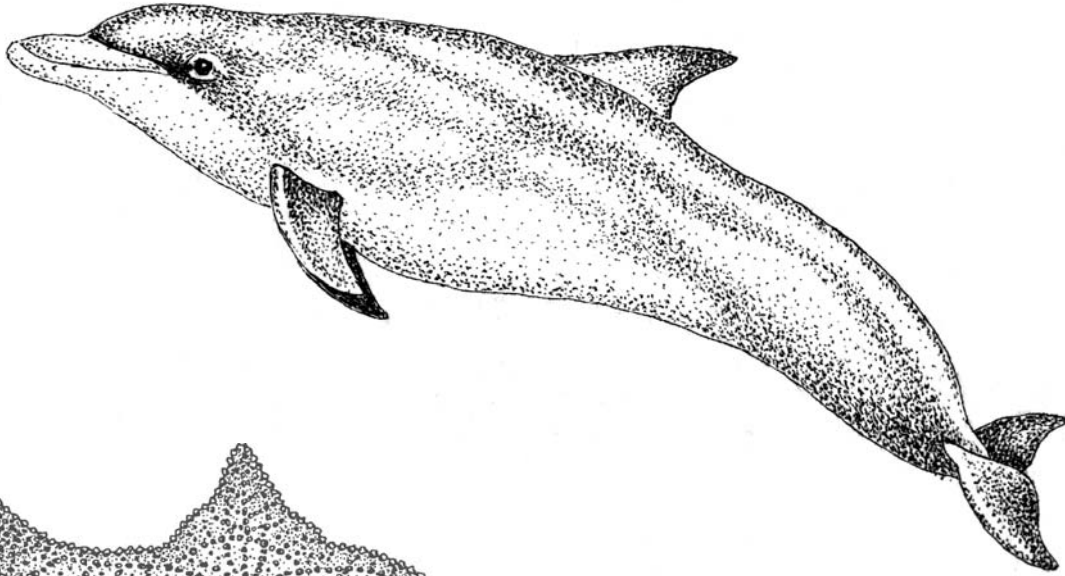
9. Damage Assessment and Restoration. The Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan is new to this document but is based on accumulated data and lessons learned since 1982. The cross-disciplinary strategies will prove useful in reducing the number of vessel groundings in Sanctuary waters as well as restoring Sanctuary resources damaged by vessels.

10. Maritime Heritage Resources. The Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan includes a close partnership of the State, NOAA, and the Florida Advisory Council on Historic Preservation described in a 1998 programmatic agreement for resource management (see Appendix F). More recently, the 2002 discovery of a previously unknown wreck within the Sanctuary has brought about a community-endorsed research and interpretation plan for the site. Overall, the Action Plan represents excellent progress in balancing resource protection, investigation and interpretation.

11. Mooring Buoys and Waterway Management (formerly Channel Marking). The Mooring Buoy and Waterway Management Action Plans have implemented simple but effective strategies for reducing vessel damage to the coral reef and to seagrass beds. The long-term success of these programs – mooring buoy strategies have been used in local Sanctuary waters since 1981 when they were introduced at the Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary – has largely been due to a unique interface of education, outreach, enforcement, and research and monitoring activities.

12. Operations. Since 1997, the Sanctuary has integrated the administrative functions of two former sanctuaries – at Key Largo and Looe Key – into a single headquarters umbrella with two regional offices. This integration streamlined delivery of human resources, community relations, and policy development. It also resulted in a series of accomplishments, ranging from an updated electronic financial reporting system to the 130-episode television series, *Waterways*.

2.0 THE SANCTUARY ENVIRONMENT: A SUBTROPICAL ECOSYSTEM



2.1 Introduction

Adjacent to the Keys' land mass is a complex marine ecosystem that supports a variety of spectacular, unique, and nationally significant seagrass meadows, mangrove islands, and extensive living coral reefs. This ecosystem is the marine equivalent of a tropical rain forest in that it supports high levels of biological diversity, is fragile and easily susceptible to damage from human activities, and possesses great value to humans if properly conserved. The ecosystem supports over 6,000 species of plants, fishes, and invertebrates, including the nation's only coral reef that lies adjacent to the continent, and one of the largest seagrass communities in this hemisphere.

2.2 Living Marine Resources

The Florida Keys ecosystem contains one of North America's most diverse assemblages of flora and fauna. The Florida peninsula and Florida Keys serve as a partial barrier between the temperate waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the tropical to subtropical waters of the Atlantic Ocean, resulting in a unique distribution of marine organisms.

The coral reef tract, arching in a southwesterly direction for 220 miles, comprises one of the largest communities of its type in the world. It is the only emergent coral reef system off the continental U.S. All but the northernmost extent of the reef tract lies within the sanctuary.

The reef tract is a bank-barrier system comprised of an almost continuous reef community. One of its most noticeable features is its seaward-facing spur-and-groove formation. Over 6000 patch reefs, circular to oval in shape, lie in nearshore to offshore areas.

The ecosystem also supports one of the world's largest seagrass beds, among the richest, most productive, and most important submerged coastal communities. Seagrasses provide food and habitat for commercially and recreationally important species of fish and invertebrates. Without the seagrass community, the coral reef community would likely collapse.

Mangroves form an important component of the ecosystem, fringing most of the more than 1600 islands and 1800 miles of shoreline. Mangroves provide important ecological functions such as habitat for juvenile fishes and invertebrates, sediment traps, and surface area for attached organisms such as oysters, sponges, and algae.

The Florida Keys coral reef ecosystem is highly biologically diverse, and includes:

- 520 species of fish, including over 260 species of reef fish
- 367 species of algae
- 5 species of seagrasses
- 117 species of sponges
- 89 species of polychaete worms
- 128 species of echinoderms
- 2 species of fire coral
- 55 species of soft corals
- 63 species of stony corals

Coral Reefs and Coral Health

The reefs of Florida have undergone change for millennia due to sea-level changes, storms, and other natural occurrences. More recently, human impacts have directly and indirectly damaged the reef structure and reef communities, and as a result corals are under stress.

In the Florida Keys, a decrease in coral cover and species diversity and an alarming increase in coral diseases and coral bleaching have been recorded in the Coral Reef/Hard-bottom Monitoring Project conducted by Florida's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI). The project records biodiversity, coral condition (including diseases and bleaching), and coral cover at stations located in various habitat types. Since 1996, over 66 percent of the monitored sites have exhibited losses in stony coral

diversity, although some positive trends were noted in the 1999-2000 survey period. Significant gains and losses of several stony coral species have occurred both between years and over the entire sampling period, indicating fluctuations in coral species richness but no loss of species Sanctuary-wide.

In addition, FWRI monitoring has shown a declining trend in stony coral cover from 1996 to 2000, with the greatest relative change occurring in the Upper Keys. A reprieve from this decline has recently been observed and may be attributable to the lack of significant events such as bleaching, tropical storms, or hurricanes. As with species diversity, scientists find that coral cover is highly variable by both habitat type and region.

Recruitment (settlement of new individuals) of stony corals is an important factor in overall community dynamics. Two monitoring programs that are evaluating coral recruitment trends find that differences exist in coral recruitment among habitat types and regions. Juvenile corals in the lower Keys suffered significant mortality in 1998 due to a direct strike from Hurricane Georges.

Coral diseases increasingly threaten the overall health and vitality of reef systems in the Sanctuary. While over ten coral diseases are believed to exist at this time, only three pathogens have been positively identified. The monitoring project has documented increases in the number of research stations that contain diseased coral, the number of coral species with disease, and the number of diseases themselves. Regional differences in disease incidence have also been documented, with the highest concentration observed in the Key West and Lower Keys region.

Over the past 20 years, coral bleaching events in the Sanctuary have increased in frequency and duration. Massive coral bleaching was first recorded in the Lower Keys in 1983 along the outer reef tract, where shallow fore-reef habitats were the most affected areas. Bleaching expanded and intensified with events in 1987 and 1990, and culminated with massive coral bleaching in 1997 and 1998 that targeted inshore and offshore reefs throughout the Keys. Coral bleaching is undoubtedly responsible for some of the dramatic declines in stony coral cover observed Sanctuary-wide in the last five years. Similar observations of bleaching have been made regionally and internationally since 1987, and it is widely recognized that 1997 and 1998 were the worst coral bleaching years on record, causing significant loss of corals worldwide.

Algae, Seagrasses, and Other Benthic Organisms

Monitoring of benthic, or bottom, communities by the National Undersea Research Center at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington has documented that algae of various species dominate bottom habitats at all sites throughout the Sanctuary. Sponges and soft corals cover a much smaller percentage of the sea floor (from about 10 percent to 20 percent). Like algae, they are highly variable, depending on the region being surveyed and the time of year.

Seagrasses are comprehensively monitored by Florida International University as part of the Sanctuary's Water Quality Protection Program. Data indicate approximately 12,800 square kilometers of seagrass beds lie within and adjacent to the Sanctuary. Some variability in seagrass cover and abundance has been identified, although populations seem relatively stable. Continued monitoring will be invaluable for detecting human impacts on the seagrass communities.

Reef Fish

Monitoring fish populations occurred for many years before the Sanctuary's designation and continues to this day. From 1979 through 1998, a total of 263 fish species representing 54 families were observed. Over half of all fish observed were from just ten species. Relatively few fish of legal size have been seen, which is consistent with several studies that indicate reef fish in the Florida Keys are highly overexploited.

Despite population declines throughout much of the Sanctuary, fish numbers in fully protected zones (Sanctuary Preservation Areas, Ecological Reserves, and Special-use and Research-only areas) are increasing to some degree. Years of data from one monitoring program show that the number of individuals of three exploited species are higher in protected zones than in fished sites. Researchers have also seen an overall increase in the average abundance of three snapper species at several sites after the sites were protected.

Mobile Invertebrates

FWRI monitors mobile invertebrates, such as spiny lobster and queen conch. Spiny lobsters continue to be more abundant in the fully protected Sanctuary Preservation Areas and Ecological Reserves than outside these areas. Researchers have found their average size is larger and catch rates (number of lobsters per trap) are higher than in reference areas during both the open and closed fishing seasons.

Queen conch populations have remained low for the last decade despite a prohibition on their collection since 1985. Attempts to supplement wild populations with laboratory reared stock and experiments aimed at improving their reproduction are designed to ameliorate the long-term decline in queen conch populations in the region.

Sea urchins are also in very low abundances, especially the long-spined urchin, suggesting poor recovery of this species since its massive Caribbean-wide die-off in 1983. Two research efforts underway are exploring means by which populations of this key species may be restored.

2.3 Non-living Marine Resources

Maritime Heritage Resources

The waters of the Florida Keys have some of the most significant maritime heritage and historical resources of any coastal community in the nation. Because of its unique geographical position on the European and American trade routes, shipwrecks in the Keys contain a record of the 500-year history of the Americas. Key West has been the crossroads of the Caribbean, and the sea has remained the common thread through the region's cultural and historic sites. The relative inaccessibility of underwater cultural sites has ensured that many delicate artifacts remain undisturbed. The importance of the region's maritime heritage resources is great, and the possibility exists for discovering some of the earliest archaeological sites in North America. A detailed description of the cultural and historical resources of the Florida Keys is contained in the "Description of the Affected Environment," of the Environmental Impact Statement (see Volume II of the Florida Keys Management Plan at <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>).

Water Quality

Many water-quality parameters have been monitored Sanctuary wide by Florida International University's Southeast Environmental Research Center since 1995 as part of the Water Quality Protection Program. Thus far, results indicate that some elements (dissolved oxygen, total organic nitrogen, and total organic carbon) are present in higher concentrations in surface waters, while other indicators (salinity, turbidity, nitrite, nitrate, ammonium, and total phosphorus) are higher in bottom waters.

Geographic differences in water quality include higher nutrient concentrations in the Middle and Lower Keys and lower nutrient concentrations in the Upper Keys and Dry Tortugas. Also, declining inshore-to-offshore trends across Hawk Channel have been noted for some parameters (nitrate, ammonium, silicate, total organic carbon and nitrogen, and turbidity).

Probably the most interesting findings thus far show increases over time in total phosphorus for the Dry Tortugas, Marquesas Keys, Lower Keys, and portions of the Middle and Upper Keys, and increases in nitrate in the Southwest Florida Shelf, Dry Tortugas, Marquesas Keys, and the Lower and Upper Keys. In contrast, total organic nitrogen decreased somewhat, mostly in the Southwest Florida Shelf, the Sluiceway, and the Lower and Upper Keys. These trends may be driven by regional circulation patterns arising from the Loop Current and Florida Current, and have changed as the period of record has increased.

Stationary instruments along the reef tract continuously monitor seawater parameters and ocean states. The data are analyzed by Florida Institute of Oceanography's SEAKEYS program and periodically transmitted to satellites and made available on the Internet. Additionally, water temperature data are recorded every two hours from a series of thermographs that the Sanctuary has maintained for the past ten years.

2.4 Threats to the Ecosystem

The deterioration of the marine ecosystem in South Florida is no longer a matter of debate. Visitors, residents and scientists alike have noted the precipitous decline in the health of the coral reef ecosystem. The threats causing these visible signs of decline are numerous and often complex, ranging from direct human impacts to global climate changes.

Direct human impacts include vessel groundings, anchor damage, destructive fishing, and damage to corals as a result of divers and snorkelers standing on them. Boat propellers and large ships have damaged over 30,000 acres of seagrasses and more than 20 acres of coral reef habitat in the Sanctuary.

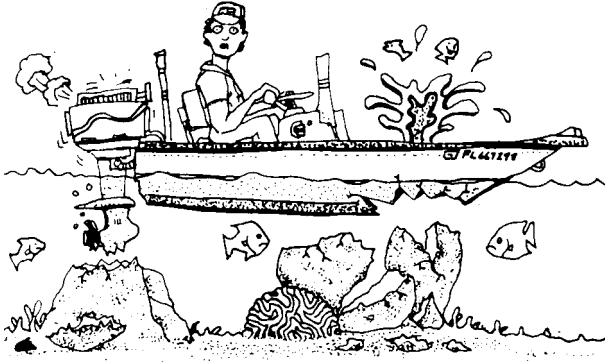
Most pressures stem from the 5 million annual visitors and 80,000 year-round residents. Their high levels of use in the Sanctuary have significant direct and indirect effects on the ecosystem. Sanctuary visitors primarily seek water-related recreation, including fishing, diving, snorkeling, and boating.

Although less immediate than direct physical damage to the corals, other stressors also significantly affect the Florida Keys ecosystem. Overfishing has dramatically altered fish and other animal populations on the coral reef, contributing to an imbalance in ecological relationships that are critical to sustaining a diversity of organisms. Eutrophication (an outcome of excess nutrients in the water, such as fertilizers) of nearshore waters is a documented problem. Wastewater and stormwater treatment and solid-waste disposal facilities are highly inadequate, directly affecting nearshore water quality. Some solutions to water quality problems are being implemented, but given the scope of the problem, more action is required.

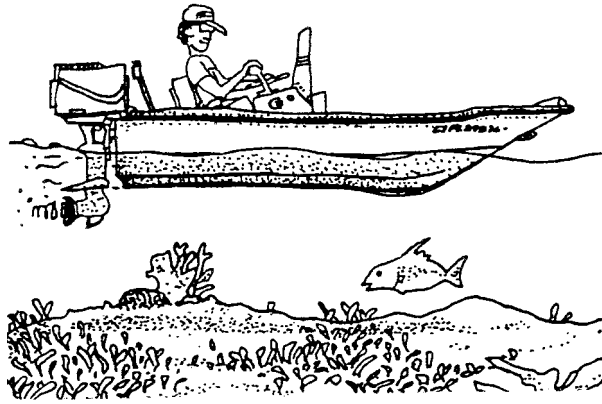
In Florida Bay, reduced freshwater flow has increased plankton blooms, sponge and seagrass die-offs, and fish kills. Since Florida Bay and nearshore waters provide important nursery and juvenile habitat for a variety of reef species, the declines in these areas affect the overall health and structure of offshore coral reefs. Therefore, regional strategies to address the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of freshwater flows into the South Florida ecosystem and Florida Bay through the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan are critical.

In addition, seasonal and yearly seawater temperature fluctuations, increasing solar radiation, and atmospheric changes all affect the ecosystem. The impacts are seen in coral disease and bleaching, which have increased in frequency, duration and range, coinciding with the ten warmest years on record. Under normal conditions, corals and reef organisms would be expected to tolerate and recover from sporadic events such as temperature variation. However, additional human-induced stresses are likely affecting the ability of these organisms to adequately recover from climate fluctuations.

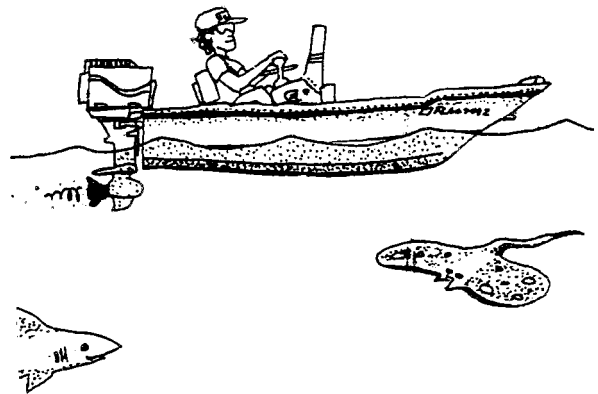
3.0 ACTION PLANS



BROWN, BROWN, RUN AGROUND



GREEN, GREEN, NICE AND CLEAN



BLUE, BLUE, SAIL ON THROUGH

What Are Action Plans?

Action plans are the means by which the Sanctuary identifies and organizes the wide variety of management tools it employs to manage and protect its marine resources. “Road maps” for management, action plans articulate the programs and projects used to address the resource issues identified in the Sanctuary and to fulfill the purposes and policies of the NMSA. Each action plan is composed of *strategies* sharing common management objectives and *activities*, which are the specific actions the Sanctuary and its partners will take to implement the strategies.

What Are The Action Plans In This Document?

The following chapters are the action plans that guide every aspect of sanctuary management. Readers should note that the 1997 *Final Management Plan* for the Sanctuary included ten action plans, presented in alphabetical order to address management needs related to:

- Channel/Reef Marking
- Education and Outreach
- Enforcement
- Mooring Buoys
- Regulatory
- Research and Monitoring
- Submerged Cultural Resources
- Water Quality
- Volunteer
- Zoning

In this revised management plan, four new action plans have been added: Science Management and Administration Action Plan, Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan, Operations Action Plan, and, Evaluation Action Plan. The Submerged Cultural Resources Action Plan has been changed to the Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan, while the Channel/Reef Marking Action Plan has been renamed to more accurately reflect the intent, which is “Waterway Management”, and the word “Marine” has been added to the Zoning Action Plan to clarify the title.

Management Divisions

In this revised management plan, the individual action plans have been grouped into five management divisions. This was done to both improve the organization of the plan as well as to highlight the management goals for each of the plans. The individual action plans for the Sanctuary are organized in the following divisions:

Sanctuary Science

- Science Management and Administration Action Plan
- Research and Monitoring Action Plan

Education, Outreach and Stewardship

- Education and Outreach Action Pan
- Volunteer Action Plan

Enforcement and Resource Protection

- Regulatory Action Plan
- Enforcement Action Plan
- Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan
- Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan

Resource Threat Reduction

- Marine Zoning Action Plan
- Mooring Buoy Action Plan
- Waterway Management Action Plan
- Water Quality Action Plan

Administration, Community Relations and Policy Coordination

- Operations Action Plan
- Evaluation Action Plan

Implementing Action Plans

The FKNMS defines a place where many governmental and non-governmental organizations work in partnership to achieve the Sanctuary’s goals: protect resources and their conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, research, educational, or aesthetic values through comprehensive long-term management. This management plan describes these collective efforts, and its implementation relies on resources and efforts from a variety of partners. Table 3.1 describes the extent to which each of the action plans and strategies within this revised management plan can be implemented under three funding scenarios. Funding from both NOAA and other partners, (e.g. EPA, Monroe County, etc.) is considered in ranking the level of implementation.

Table 3.1 Action Strategy Implementation Over Five Years Under Three Funding Scenarios

Implementation* with NOAA Funding	Implementation* with Partner Funding	Scenario 1: Level Funding	Scenario 2: 5% per year increase	Scenario 3: 10% per year increase
● - High ◎ - Medium ○ - Low	◆ - High ◇ - Medium ◇ - Low			
Sanctuary Science				
Science Management and Administration Action Plan				
	Strategy B.11 – Issuance of Sanctuary Research Permits	●	●	●
	Strategy W.29 – Dissemination of Findings	◎	◎	●
	Strategy W.32 – Maintaining a Technical Advisory Committee	●	●	●
	Strategy W.34 – Regional Science Partnerships and Reviews	◎	◎	●
	Strategy W.35 – Data Management	◇	◇	◆
Research and Monitoring Action Plan				

* Implementation ranking considers the priority of each strategy as well as the percentage of activities that could be initiated, maintained, and/or completed under differing funding scenarios.

	Strategy W.33 - Ecological Research and Monitoring	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
	Strategy Z.6 - Marine Zone Monitoring	⊙	⊙	●
	Strategy W.36 - Conducting Socioeconomic Research	●	●	●
	Strategy F.3 - Researching Queen Conch Population Enhancement Methods	●◆	●◆	●◆
	Strategy F.7 - Researching Impacts from Artificial Reefs	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
	Strategy F.6 - Fisheries Sampling	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
	Strategy F.11 - Evaluating Fishing Gear/Method Impacts	○◇	○◇	⊙◇
	Strategy F.15 - Assessing Sponge Fishery Impacts	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
	Strategy W.18 - Conducting Pesticide Research	○◇	○◇	⊙◇
	Strategy W.22 - Assessing Wastewater Pollutants Impacts	●◆	●◆	●◆
	Strategy W.23 - Researching Other Pollutants and Water Quality Issues	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
	Strategy W.24 - Researching Florida Bay Influences	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
	Strategy W.21 - Developing Predictive Models	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◆
Education, Outreach and Stewardship				
Outreach and Education Action Plan				
	Strategy E.4 - Developing Training, Workshops and School Programs	○	⊙	⊙
	Strategy E.6 - Continuing the Education Working Group	●	●	●
	Strategy E.10 - Establishing Public Forums	⊙	⊙	●
	Strategy E.11 - Participating in Special Events	⊙	⊙	●
	Strategy E.1 - Printed Product Development and Distribution	○	○	⊙
	Strategy E.2 - Continued Distribution of Audio-Visual Materials	⊙	●	●
	Strategy E.3 - Continue Development of Signs, Displays, Exhibits, and Visitor Centers	⊙	⊙	⊙
	Strategy E.5 - Applying Various Technologies	⊙	⊙	⊙
	Strategy E.12 - Professional Development of Outreach and Education Staff	○	○	⊙
Volunteer Action Plan				
	Strategy V.1 - Maintaining Volunteer Programs	⊙	⊙	⊙
	Strategy V.2 - Working with Other Organization/ Agency Volunteer Programs	○	○	○
	Strategy V.3 - Providing Support for Volunteer Activities	○	○	⊙
Enforcement and Research Protection				
Regulatory Action Plan				
	Strategy R.1 - Maintaining the Existing Permit Program	⊙	⊙	●
	Strategy R.2 - Regulatory Review	⊙	⊙	●
Enforcement Action Plan				
	Strategy B.6 - Acquiring Additional Enforcement Personnel	●	●	●
Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan				
	Strategy B.18 - Injury Prevention	○	○	⊙
	Strategy B.19 - Implementing DARP Notification and Response Protocols	○	○	⊙
	Strategy B.20 - Damage Assessment and Documentation	⊙◇	⊙◇	●◇
	Strategy B.21 - Case Management	◆	◆	◆
	Strategy B.22 - Habitat Restoration	◇	◇	◆
	Strategy B.23 - Data Management	○	⊙	⊙
Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan				

	Strategy MHR.1 - MHR Permitting	●◆	●◆	●◆
	Strategy MHR.2 - Establishing an MHR Inventory	○◆	○◆	◎◆
	Strategy MHR.3 - MHR Research and Education	○◇	○◇	◎◆
	Strategy MHR.4 - Ensuring Permit Compliance through Enforcement	●◆	●◆	●◆
	Strategy MHR.5 - Ensuring Interagency Coordination	●◆	●◆	●◆
Resource Threat Reduction				
Marine Zoning Action Plan				
	Strategy Z.1 - Wildlife Management Areas	○	◎	●
	Strategy Z.2 - Ecological Reserves	◎	●	●
	Strategy Z.3 - Sanctuary Preservation Areas	○	◎	●
	Strategy Z.4 - Existing Management Areas	●	●	●
	Strategy Z.5 - Special-use Areas	○	◎	●
Mooring Buoy Action Plan				
	Strategy B.15 - Mooring Buoy Management	●	●	●
Waterway Management Action Plan				
	Strategy B.1 - Boat Access	◆	◆	◆
	Strategy B.4 - Waterway Management/Marking	◆	◆	◆
Water Quality Action Plan				
	Strategy W.19 - Florida Bay Freshwater Flow	●◆	●◆	●◆
	Strategy W.3 - Addressing Wastewater Management Systems	◇	◇	◆
	Strategy W.5 - Developing and Implementing Water Quality Standards	◇	◇	◇
	Strategy W.7 - Resource Monitoring of Surface Discharges	◆	◆	◆
	Strategy W.11 - Stormwater Retrofitting	◇	◇	◆
	Strategy W.14 - Instituting Best Management Practices	◆	◆	◆
	Strategy B.7 - Pollution Discharges	◎◆	◎◆	●◆
	Strategy L.1 - Elimination of Wastewater Discharge from Vessels	◎◆	◎◆	●◆
	Strategy L.3 - Marina Operations	◆	◆	◆
	Strategy L.7 - Assessing Solid Waste Disposal Problem Sites	◇	◇	◆
	Strategy W.15 - HAZMAT Response	○◆	○◆	◎◆
	Strategy W.16 - Spill Reporting	○◆	○◆	◎◆
	Strategy L.10 - HAZMAT Handling	◇	◇	◆
	Strategy W.17 - Refining the Mosquito Spraying Program	◇	◇	◆
	Strategy W.10 - Addressing Canal Water Quality	◇	◇	◆
Administration				
Operations Action Plan				
	Strategy OP.1 - Addressing Administrative Policy Issues	◎	◎	◎
	Strategy OP.2 - Addressing Resource Policy Issues	◎	◎	◎
	Strategy OP.3 - Addressing Legal Issues	◎	◎	●
Evaluation Action Plan				
	Strategy EV.1 - Measuring Sanctuary Performance Over Time	●	●	●

STRATEGY V.1 MAINTAINING VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Strategy Summary

The Sanctuary volunteer programs are as varied as the people who donate their time. The activities range from assisting the vessel maintenance staff to picking up litter on a reef by participating in the Adopt-A-Reef program. There are several activities associated with this strategy.

Activities (9)

(1) Reef Medics. Reef Medics is an innovative, hands-on program designed to use volunteers to assist in Sanctuary restoration efforts. Volunteers have experience in vessel navigation and operation, snorkeling, and SCUBA diving. The Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (DARP) staff trains the volunteers in salvage and restabilization techniques. Currently, SCUBA certification is required for restoration efforts and DARP staff assists with the necessary approvals for diving through the NOAA Dive Program, The Nature Conservancy, Mote Marine Lab and other agencies. Reef Medics primarily assist DARP staff if the injury size falls below the threshold of a Natural Resources Damage Action claim or the responsible party is determined to be unviable or unknown, as in “hit and run” or “orphan” sites. Salvage and restabilization efforts of smaller viable fragments can be conducted by Reef Medics and trained volunteer divers using hand tools and cement or adhesives specifically formulated for marine applications.

Reef Medics support comes from compensatory funds from vessel grounding settlements, grants, and Sanctuary Friends of the Florida Keys, including contributions to purchase equipment and supplies, and vessel support.

Reef Medics are involved in follow-up documentation and monitoring repaired sites for two years after repairs. Expansion of the Reef Medics program will include activities not requiring SCUBA diving, with opportunities for participation by non-divers and volunteers. Mote Marine Laboratory has conducted a pilot Reef Medics “Base Camp” project and further development is underway. The content and materials for a new volunteer training course has been developed.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(2) Promote and Support Environmental Education in Monroe County and State Schools. Volunteers assist the education and outreach staff in bringing environmental education to schools in Monroe County. Coral Reef Classroom volunteers chaperone middle-school students during a snorkel trip to the reef and help students with water quality testing. The program is offered in the spring and fall. Volunteers are trained in the use of the equipment and procedures. Volunteers are also used to take programs such as Build a Coral Reef, Build a Seagrass Community, and Coral Reef Play to elementary classes in Monroe County.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff, The Nature Conservancy, the Ocean Conservancy, Monroe County Schools.

(3) Provide Mechanisms Outside of the Law Enforcement Sector that can Deliver Resource Education at the Site of the Resource - Team OCEAN. Team OCEAN volunteers donate their time promoting safe and enjoyable public use of the marine environment of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, while advocating the protection of our natural resources. Trained volunteer teams using Sanctuary owned vessels are stationed at heavily visited reef sites during the peak recreational boating seasons. They educate and inform the public about the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and encourage proper use of Sanctuary resources and basic safety precautions. Team OCEAN volunteers directly prevent groundings by being present, watching for errant boaters, and waving them off when they attempt to cross the shallow reef crest.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: The Sanctuary

(4) Adopt-A-Reef. Local dive operators and volunteer divers “adopt” a reef and run special trips to the site so scuba divers can remove trash, fishing line and other debris. Many shops offer substantial discounts or social events to mark the clean-up. Certified divers are briefed on proper methods of cleaning the reef without damaging resources.

Status: On-going; looking for opportunities to expand.

Implementation: The Sanctuary, The Ocean Conservancy, and dive operators.

(5) Maritime Heritage Resources Inventory. A bibliographic database has been created in a standard format and made accessible over the Internet. Volunteers and Sanctuary staff survey and identify site locations and site characteristics including name, age, integrity, and historical and cultural significance, sensitivity, and recreational value. Volunteers assist staff in collecting existing information, locating unrecorded sites, recording and documenting sites, assessing site significance, and developing sites for improved public access, interpretation, and protection.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Continue with assistance from FDHR. This activity is conducted in conjunction with the Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan.

(6) Vessel, Dock, and Mooring Buoy Assistance and Maintenance. Volunteers assist Sanctuary staff with marine and dock maintenance activities including mooring buoy installation, repair, and cleaning; vehicle and boat maintenance, grounds maintenance, and storage and dock cleaning. Qualified volunteers also assist as captains and mates. This activity is also included in the Waterway Management Action Plan.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(7) Gathering Support for Geographic Information Systems. Geographic information systems (GIS) technology can be used for scientific investigations, and resource management. Volunteers work with Sanctuary staff using GIS software and imagery to provide Sanctuary managers with information and photographs. Some of volunteer products include:

- Aerial photographs of sea bottom features near coral reefs that provide baseline data on the percent of coral cover at the various reefs.
- Research regarding the location of monitoring stations in relation to benthic cover, and assistance to the mooring buoy specialists in pinpointing a location of a mooring buoy anchor when the mooring balls have been torn away.
- A comparison between the 1995 and 1999 color infrared photographs that show the damage over time of seagrass destruction and turbidity increases by boats transiting shallow areas.
- Baseline information on the current status of nearshore areas as baseline information to measure future changes.
- Satellite views of the entire Florida Keys that can be used to show areas of Sea Steward monitoring and other monitoring efforts.
- Nearshore aerial photos of research areas where benthic habitat studies are being conducted.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff and other non-governmental organizations, also included in numerous other Action Plans.

(8) Maintain the Eyes On the Water Program. This new Program will provide professionals on the water, such as dive-boat captains and crew, with the opportunity to be the Sanctuary's "eyes and ears," by letting staff know when someone is behaving in a manner inconsistent with regulations. The Sanctuary will follow up on the report with a letter and educational materials to the vessel owner. This activity also included in the Damage Assessment and Restoration, Education and Outreach and Enforcement Action Plans.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff trains volunteers and facilitates this program. Project lead and partners include the Sanctuary, non-governmental organizations, and the public,

(9) Maintain Support For Other Volunteer Projects. Volunteer assistance is an integral part of Sanctuary projects not associated with specific strategies, such as general office and computer support tasks, maintenance activities, fundraising, and other special projects.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

STRATEGY V.2 WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATION/AGENCY VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Strategy Summary

The National Marine Sanctuary Program has a history of using volunteers to assist with activities ranging from maintenance to public education. Volunteers also work with organizations not associated directly with the Sanctuary but whose interests coincide with Sanctuary goals. The volunteer programs and projects are an integral part of the Sanctuary and the community, providing information relating to the overall health of the ecosystem. The information presented by the organizations assists Sanctuary managers in making better resource management decisions.

Activities (11)

(1) Florida Keys Watch. (formerly Florida Bay Watch). This program trains volunteers to collect seawater samples and environmental data using standard scientific methods; Florida Keys Watch is designed to augment and assist scientific studies conducted by universities, agencies, and other institutions. This activity is also included in the Water Quality and Sanctuary Science Action Plans.

Status: A redesign of this project is underway.

Implementation: The Nature Conservancy and Florida International University

(2) Reef Environmental Education Foundation. The Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) is a grassroots, nonprofit organization that uses recreational divers who regularly conduct fish biodiversity and abundance surveys in the Keys and the Caribbean. These surveys are conducted as part of REEF's Fish Survey Project (The Great Annual Fish Count) and become part of a publicly accessible database. This activity is also included in the Research and Monitoring Action Plan.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: REEF, Sanctuary staff,

(3) Queen Conch Restoration Activities. Volunteers assist with raising juvenile queen conchs at a hatchery located at Keys Marine Lab in Long Key, Florida. They also locate and tag wild adult conchs for population and reproduction studies and help relocate nearshore populations and monitor their progress. This activity is also included in the Research and Monitoring Action Plan.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: FWC and The Nature Conservancy

(4) Dolphin Ecology Project. Throughout the year, Dolphin Ecology Project staff, scientists and volunteers photograph individual dolphins for identification, observe their activities, sample environmental parameters, and identify and measure the abundance of important dolphin prey. Volunteers and experienced boat operators conduct photo-identification surveys of Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin. The project's educational goal is to increase public awareness about dolphins, the interrelated nature of the Keys' habitats, and the importance of South Florida ecosystem restoration. This activity is also included in the Research & Monitoring Action Plan.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Dolphin Ecology Project, Sanctuary staff, The Nature Conservancy,
(5) Reef and Coastal Cleanups. Reef and coastal cleanups are supported by a network of environmental and civic organizations, government agencies, industries, and individuals who volunteer to remove debris and collect information on the amount and types of debris. The information serves to educate the public on marine debris issues and encourage behavior that will reduce debris along beaches, coastal areas, reef tracts, and in the open ocean.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: A partnership among volunteers, Sanctuary managers and Sombrero Reef Sweep, Barley Bay Festival, Clean Florida Keys, The Ocean Conservancy, Reef Relief, Friends and Volunteers of Refuges, The Nature Conservancy.

(6) Marine Ecosystem Event Response and Assessment (MEERA). The MEERA Project seeks to provide early detection and assessment of biological events occurring in the Sanctuary and surrounding waters. The goal is to help the scientific community better understand the nature and causes of events, such as coral bleaching and disease outbreaks, fish kills, harmful algal blooms, “red tides,” and other events that adversely affect marine organisms. Understanding the events will help scientists and managers determine if the events are natural or linked to human activities. The project relies on observations made by people who are frequently on the water, such as captains, recreational boaters, environmental professionals, and law enforcement personnel. This activity is also included in the Research and Monitoring Action Plan.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Mote Marine Lab’s Tropical Research Center

(7) Sea Turtle Activities. Sea turtles are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and Florida law. Volunteers protect and preserve sea turtles and their habitats. Volunteers monitor known and potential nesting beaches in the Keys. They mark and record the location of nests and document nest success. Volunteers staff a sea-turtle stranding network. Injured turtles are ministered to and returned to the marine environment.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Save-A-Turtle, The Turtle Hospital, see also the Research & Monitoring Action Plan.

(8) Save the Manatee Club. Manatees are endemic throughout South Florida waters. Save the Manatee Club has volunteers in the Keys and is active locally for education and monitoring. Volunteers regularly assist in removing monofilament line, a particular danger for the species.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Save the Manatee Club, Dolphin Research Center, Monroe County,

(9) Marine Animal Rescue Activities. Volunteers throughout the Florida Keys regularly offer ready assistance to distressed marine mammals. Each stranding is unique, and the specific course of action depends upon individual circumstances. Volunteers assist marine mammal stranding to reduce the animal’s pain and suffering, provide appropriate first aid, minimize possible threats of marine

mammals to human health and safety, derive maximum scientific and educational benefits from both live and dead stranded marine mammals, and collect consistent, high-quality data to facilitate marine mammal conservation.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program and permitted partners.

(10) Wild Bird Rehabilitation. Several wildlife rescue organizations in the Keys respond to injured birds, including sea gulls, pelicans, egrets, herons, osprey, and eagles. Volunteers rescue and rehabilitate birds at major rehabilitation centers in Tavernier, Marathon and Key West.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Florida Keys Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center, Marathon Wild Bird Center, and Wildlife Rescue of the Florida Keys.

(11) Reef Ecosystem Condition (RECON). RECON trains volunteer divers to collect information about the reef environment, the health of stony corals, the presence of key reef organisms and obvious human-induced impacts. The goals of RECON are to broaden the scope of available information about the bottom-dwelling organisms on coral reefs, to alert local researchers and managers of changing reef conditions, such as coral bleaching and nuisance algal blooms, and to increase public understanding of the threats to coral reef ecosystems. This activity is also included in the Sanctuary Science Action Plan.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: The Ocean Conservancy, EPA

STRATEGY V.3 SUPPORTING VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Strategy Summary

The Volunteer Program requires staff and administrative support for the program to function efficiently. Thus, Sanctuary project managers strive to recruit, place, orient, train, evaluate, and recognize volunteers who work on a project. Just as each project requires specific training and orientation, each volunteer requires unique evaluation and recognition. Volunteers are asked to report to the project manager the number of hours worked on each project.

Because volunteers are capable of assisting Sanctuary managers in diverse ways, this strategy helps identify future volunteer programs. As management needs change over time, the volunteer program continues to identify future projects to recruit volunteers to accomplish objectives. Sanctuary staff determines where and how volunteers can assist in fulfilling management objectives. The staff continues to form partnerships with other organizations to use volunteers in a variety of projects. Areas that may be evaluated in the near future include volunteers for artificial reef monitoring and Sanctuary-wide ecological monitoring.

Activities

(1) Recruiting and Placement. Volunteers are recruited based on particular skills, experience, aptitude and especially their interest. Recruitment sources include community groups, churches, neighborhood associations, other volunteer groups, governmental agencies, universities, and local schools. Once recruited, volunteers are paired with a program matching their desire, expertise, and experience.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(2) Orientation and Training. Orientation is necessary so that volunteers become part of the Sanctuary program. Orientation allows new volunteers to feel welcomed and appreciated, and provides information that assists them in performing their work effectively. Training is specific to the volunteers and the project.

Status: Implemented and on-going. Orientation occurs two to three times a year in the Upper, Middle, and Lower Keys. Specific project training packages for volunteers and skills building training for project managers will be developed.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(3) Volunteer Safety. Volunteer safety is a priority for every project manager. Each project has its own set of safety measures that the project manager must be aware of. Project managers and staff strive to recognize work place hazards and to improve working conditions to the greatest extent possible.

Status: Development of safety manuals for volunteer activities will be a priority in the next five years.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(4) Recognition. Recognition begins with placing the volunteer in a fulfilling position. Thereafter, formal and informal recognition and awards include an annual party, notes, cards, plaques, uniforms, and similar appropriate items associated with the service.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(5) Evaluation. The benefits of evaluation include identifying a project's strengths and weaknesses; anticipating project issues and dealing with them in advance; improving morale and involvement of volunteers and staff; discovering which staff or projects have the highest volunteer turnover; and uncovering new opportunities.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff.

(6) Communications. Program managers, via a wide range of mechanisms including letters, telephone calls, and e-mail, communicate with volunteers. Volunteers are regularly highlighted through news articles, television specials and series, such as "Waterways," radio interviews and magazine articles that enhance recognition, funding, and recruiting. In addition e-mail and Internet sites are used to communicate goals and achievements. The Sanctuary maintains an information database about volunteer interests and skills, project activity, service hours, and other relevant data.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(7) Funding. Funding for the Sanctuary's volunteer projects is complex and achieved through a variety of partnerships and a range of sources.

Status: The Sanctuary regularly assists in developing funding sources for volunteer projects that provide Sanctuary management information.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(8) Internships. Sanctuary project managers regularly develop internships. The managers provide project descriptions, supervision, training, scheduling, and support activities for the intern.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

(9) Volunteer Program Development. Opportunities to use volunteers at the Sanctuary in both long and short term situations will be developed on an as-needed basis.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff

PREVIOUS STRATEGIES

This review of the FKNMS Management Plan identified some Action Strategies that no longer warranted the priority attention they originally received in 1997. These strategies have not been removed from the plan rather they have been incorporated into the new strategies under broader headings. Many of the previous strategies listed in the original plan were tied to activities in other action plans that did not occur and others were not feasible due to liability. It was found that to have the majority of the Plan simply list specific ways that volunteers can be utilized was not very useful due to changing needs. In the revised Plan, the mechanisms to identify volunteer opportunities and needs are identified rather than the activities themselves.

3.3 ENFORCEMENT & RESOURCE PROTECTION

This management division bundles all of the essential legal tools that are available to Sanctuary Managers to protect the natural and historical resources of the Sanctuary. These action plans include: the Regulatory Action Plan; Enforcement Action Plan; Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan; and the Maritime Heritage Resources Action Plan. Each of these action plans serves a direct role in protecting and conserving Sanctuary resources, whether they are natural or historic resources. Effective management requires a comprehensive set of regulations and an enforcement program to implement those regulations. The most successful marine protected areas are committed to enforcement of their regulations. The Sanctuary regulations and the interpretive approach to enforcing those regulations are described in this section.

Vessel groundings and damage to submerged Sanctuary resources are a major management issue in the Sanctuary. Over 600 vessel groundings occur every year in the Sanctuary and this prohibited activity has resulted in the need for a separate action plan to describe the Sanctuary's approach to damage assessments and restoration.

Historical resources are also protected within the Sanctuary and the action plan that describes the Sanctuary's approach to protecting these resources is described in this management division. A rich and colorful history of exploration and discovery of submerged historical resources in the Florida Keys has necessitated the development of an action plan that integrates the State of Florida and NOAA's trustee responsibilities for these resources.

3.3.3 Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan

Introduction

According to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) official dispatch records, there are between 500 and 600 vessel groundings reported in the Sanctuary annually. In addition, there are many grounding incidents that damage resources but are not reported. Groundings often result in significant injury to coral, sea grass and hard-bottom resources. Although large-vessel groundings often result in immediate long-term resource devastation, the vast majority of grounding incidents are caused by small, recreational vessels. Small-vessel groundings often result in minimal damage to the resources, but the cumulative detrimental effect can have long-lasting impacts.

Sanctuary managers use a database to assess trends in vessel groundings, identify “hot spots” where education and outreach activities can be enhanced, and determine what solutions, such as waterway marking, may be appropriate. At this time it is difficult to determine if groundings are increasing or decreasing. As the public becomes more aware of the issue the number of reports has increased, making it difficult to determine in only five years if there is a real increase in groundings or merely an increase in reporting. The number of boats in operation affects this statistic as well.

The Sanctuary is authorized to assess civil penalties and recover the cost of response, assessment and restoration from the responsible parties. The Sanctuary has damage assessment and restoration program (DARP) teams in the Upper Keys and the Lower Keys that, in conjunction with FKNMS education and outreach staff, managers, and law enforcement personnel, develop grounding prevention measures, minimize impacts, assess impacts, repair injuries where possible, and support the associated legal processes. Although this action plan is new to the management plan, many strategies and activities have been on-going since 1982.

Accomplishments

- Sanctuary staff conducted 121 biological assessments of vessel groundings that damaged greater than 10 square feet of coral or 10 square yards of seagrass from 1995 to 2001.
- Establishment of a vessel-grounding database to document grounding locations.
- Assessment of eleven freighter anchoring injuries in the Tortugas from 1997 to 2001.
- Assessment of nine freighter groundings since 1989.
- NOAA has established two damage assessment and restoration teams in the Sanctuary.
- The NOAA Damage Assessment Center established a Seagrass Injury Assessment Team
- Sanctuary staff has assisted with live-aboard mooring assessment in Cow Key Channel.
- Sanctuary staff continues to conduct monitoring of injured and restored sites.
- Sanctuary staff helped prepare a Regional Restoration Plan for the damaged seagrass meadows in the Florida Keys.
- Staff conducted or managed major structural restoration of coral reef areas at large-vessel damage sites at Molasses Reef, South Carysfort Reef, near American Shoal, and Looe Key Reef. Small vessel injury restoration sites include areas at Carysfort Reef, Newfound Harbor, and Western Sambo.
- Completion of multiple restoration and coral restabilization efforts at other sites.
- Sanctuary staff assists in all aspects of resource management including permitting, research, vessel grounding protocol development, and grounding prevention.
- Sanctuary staff has assisted in numerous seagrass restoration projects.

- Sanctuary staff has implemented the Reef Medics Volunteer Coral Salvage and Restablization Program in order to address sites where no responsible party can be identified. The program also provides a response team for small-vessel groundings where restoration costs may not be incorporated into the penalty assessed to the responsible party.
- Sanctuary staff has partnered with other agencies and commercial fishermen in trap retrieval and removal following storm events.
- Sanctuary staff has assisted in the development of Education/Outreach products that target user groups whose activities have the potential for causing injury to Sanctuary resources.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of this action plan are to:

- Prevent or at least minimize vessel grounding impacts;
- Assess and document Sanctuary resource injuries caused by vessel groundings and other human impacts;
- Restore resources, and
- Support Law enforcement and grounding litigation teams.

The objective of this action plan is to:

- Manage the program in a manner that protects and restores Sanctuary resources; and,
- Manage litigation cases.

Strategies

There are six non-regulatory management strategies in this Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan.

- B.18 Injury Prevention
- B.19 Implementing DARP Notification And Response Protocols
- B.20 Damage Assessment and Documentation
- B.21 Case Management
- B.22 Habitat Restoration
- B. 23 Data Management

Each of these strategies is detailed below. Table 3.8 provides estimated costs for implementation of these strategies over the next five years.

Table 3.8 Estimated costs of the Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan

Damage Assessment and Restoration Action Plan Strategies	Estimated Annual Cost (in thousands)*					Total Estimated 5 Year Cost
	YR 1	YR 2	YR 3	YR 4	YR 5	
B.18: Injury Prevention	25	26	30	32	33	146
B.19: Implementing DARP Notification and Response Protocols	50	53	59	62	65	289
B.20: Damage Assessment and Documentation	135	142	164	172	180	793
B.21: Case Management	105	110	115	129	135	594
B.22: Habitat Restoration	168	176	191	201	220	956
B.23: Data Management	60	63	68	71	75	337
Total Estimated Annual Cost	<i>543</i>	<i>570</i>	<i>627</i>	<i>667</i>	<i>708</i>	3,115

* Contributions from outside funding sources also anticipated.

STRATEGY B.18 INJURY PREVENTION

Strategy Summary

Prevention of resource injury is preferred to restoration. Working with the education and outreach staff, enforcement officers, volunteers, and Federal, state and local agencies, the Sanctuary's damage assessment teams carry out a broad range of activities to prevent injuries to Sanctuary resources whenever possible.

Activities (6)

(1) Assist Waterway Marking/Management. The staff will continue to coordinate with appropriate agencies to mark waterways, provide input and assistance regarding regional patterns and frequency of incidents to identify "hotspots" including seagrass, coral reef and hard-bottom areas that display patterns of chronic vessel grounding, and assist the waterway marking and management working group in developing and fine tuning activities to address these issues.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Primarily Monroe County and the US Coast Guard, assisted by Waterway Management team, FKNMS/DARP staff, and cooperating agencies.

(2) Assist Education and Outreach. The program staff assists the Sanctuary's Education and Outreach program to produce information and educational products aimed at preventing groundings. Products and information are provided to the media, boating interest groups, periodicals and publications, and environmental education organizations that disseminate the information. Information in products includes grounding statistics, avoidance techniques, and the legal and financial consequences to insurance companies. The program seeks to provide technical support, background information, quantitative data, videos and photographs.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: FKNMS staff

(3) Assist programs concerned with direct contact or intervention. There are several existing site programs that address injury prevention, such as:

(A) Law Enforcement - Believing that that law-enforcement presence is an effective deterrent to groundings, FKNMS staff will provide technical support, data, and professional advice to assist the Sanctuary's law enforcement team.

Status: Implemented and on-going

Implementation: Sanctuary and FFWCC.

(B) Team OCEAN - The Team OCEAN program is a body of trained volunteers who spend time on the water disseminating information about the environment, boating practices, regulations, and local navigation. Team members have prevented numerous vessel groundings through direct intervention by hailing operators, for example. Team OCEAN will have the full support of the damage prevention program, including sharing vessel and equipment resources.

Status: Implemented and on-going; schedule is as requested.

Implementation: Primarily FKNMS education and outreach team, assisted by DARP, Sanctuary staff and cooperating agencies.

(C) *Professional Guides Association* - The damage assessment program lends its full support to the Florida Keys Professional Guides Association's "Guides Educating Guides" initiative. The initiative enlists the services of professional backcountry fishing guides to instruct others in their profession on the ecological and economic value of seagrasses and how they and the public can better preserve and protect them. A by-product of this activity is that with increased awareness of the value of the seagrass habitat to their livelihoods, fishing guides become community leaders in protecting resources and preventing vessel groundings.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary staff and professional organizations.

(4) *Operating permits for towing and salvage professionals.* Staff will assist the implementation of a permitting system that requires towing and salvage operators in Sanctuary waters to notify injury response personnel about groundings to which they respond and to use minimal-impact gear and procedures when removing a grounded vessel. Staff will coordinate with other Keys and South Florida marine protected areas to develop best management practices for grounded vessel salvage. Sanctuary management, education and outreach, and law-enforcement personnel will develop procedural requirements and guidelines, assist in developing training materials, and administer a mandatory operators' permitting course.

Status: Awaiting implementation.

Implementation: Sanctuary management and DARP staff with assistance from law-enforcement and education and outreach programs.

(5) *Minimize or eliminate impacts from live-aboard, derelict or sunken vessels.* In an effort to reduce vessel impacts, staff will assist the Sanctuary management and other state and local water quality and regulatory programs to create mooring fields, install pump-out stations, etc., and provide technical and logistical support for the removal of derelict vessels when requested.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary Management, DARP and other agencies.

(6) Assist with development of oil and hazardous spill response. DARP staff coordinates with the USCG's Area Committee and other South Florida marine management and enforcement agencies to develop unified response protocols to deal with containment and cleanup of spills to prevent and minimize impacts on the ecosystem.. This activity will include participation in the development of best management practices that can be implemented in the instance of an oil- or hazardous-material spill to protect mangroves, coral reefs and seagrasses and minimize the adverse impacts. Additionally, all FKNMS staff will participate in Sanctuary's Hazardous Incident Emergency Logistics Database System (SHIELDS) training in November, 2004.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Primarily USCG; DARP participates as needed.

STRATEGY B.19 IMPLEMENTING DARP NOTIFICATION AND RESPONSE PROTOCOLS

Strategy Summary

The first step in a damage assessment action is incident notification from Sanctuary enforcement personnel, the USCG, other agencies and the general public. Once notification has been received, DARP personnel implement an appropriate response. This strategy addresses the technological and legal requirements of damage assessment and restoration by establishing injury assessment protocols. Detailed and repeatable procedures for assessing injury to natural resources must be adaptable, yet conform to accepted industry standards and advancements. Developing advanced methodologies will provide scientifically sound and legally defensible natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) claims and subsequent restoration planning efforts.

Activities (5)

(1) Further develop and fine tune the chain of notification for grounding incidents. This will be accomplished by coordinating with FFWCC, Sanctuary law enforcement, NOAA administrators and State partners to determine the level of notification following a vessel grounding, establishing criteria and thresholds to determine degree of response by the Sanctuary, and determining criteria and thresholds for notification above the Sanctuary and FFWCC level, such as NOAA, state attorneys, economists, litigation case team members, or marine protected area managers based on the scale and nature of each incident.

Status: In progress.

Implementation: NOAA, FFWCC, the State of Florida, and other cooperating agencies.

(2) Coordinate with other management and enforcement agencies to develop standardized vessel grounding and spill-response protocols. DARP coordinates with other management and enforcement agencies to develop standardized, uniform vessel grounding and spill response protocols that are adopted and followed within and among the various agencies managing South Florida's marine protected areas. This on-going activity is shared with FFWCC, enforcement managers and includes discussion, planning and cooperative implementation with South Florida marine safety, resource management and environmental protection agencies. Agencies include, but are not limited to, USCG, EPA, FWS, NPS, FFWCC, Monroe County and Florida's Divisions of Parks and Recreation, and Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary staff, FFWCC and other agencies as appropriate.

(3) Implement "Eyes on the Water." FFWCC's law enforcement dispatch records indicate that more than 500 reported groundings occur annually in the Florida Keys. Hundreds more undoubtedly go undetected or unreported. To effectively document injuries, allocate funds and distribute resources, DARP has joined with volunteer and education staff to develop and implement a volunteer training program for those who spend a significant amount of time on and around Keys waters. Training includes incident recognition, documentation, and notification. The volunteers include, but are not

limited to Team OCEAN, Reef Medics, and Mote Marine Laboratory volunteers, area charter-boat personnel, professional fishing guides, other volunteers.

Status: The initial phase of this program began in June 2002; the first training session in May, 2002; on-going thereafter.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary education and outreach staff, FFWCC

(4) Gain public involvement in grounding notification. DARP will assist the Education and Outreach and Enforcement programs to develop and implement public notification campaigns. Staff will promote use of FFWCC law enforcement dispatch as the clearinghouse for reporting groundings, in short, the creation of a "grounding hotline." This activity is being instituted in an effort to reinforce with the general public the vital role it plays in notification and to eliminate confusion as to which agency needs to be contacted.

Status: Awaiting implementation by FFWC.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary staff, FFWCC

(5) Gain towing and salvage operator cooperation in grounding notification. This is an on-going activity that seeks to establish rapport with local operators and includes regular meetings and training sessions to emphasize the importance of an operator's cooperation in the vessel grounding notification network.

Status: Awaiting implementation.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management.

STRATEGY B.20 DAMAGE ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENTATION

Strategy Summary

This strategy addresses the technological and the legal requirements of damage assessment and restoration by establishing assessment protocols, methodology and documentation necessary support for case management.

Activities (6)

(1) *Respond to and assess injuries to natural resources within the FKNMS resulting from vessel groundings; further develop and fine-tune associated protocols and methodologies for these kinds of injuries.* Various methodologies and protocols are recognized, including:

- (a) *Damage to live coral dominated substrate*- FFWCC law enforcement is authorized to issue summary settlement citations to vessel operators responsible for groundings that result in injury of 10 square feet or less to live coral substrate. The fines issued do not require involvement of DARP staff, NOAA, or state legal counsel. Coral injuries of greater than 10 square feet require a biological assessment by the Sanctuary through DARP staff, using a variety of assessment techniques to quantify, describe, illustrate, and document the injury. Depending upon the size and extent of the injury, the assessment is forwarded to either NOAA's General Counsel for Law Enforcement to be processed as a simple civil penalty or NOAA's General Counsel for Natural Resources for processing as a Natural Resources Damage Action (NRDA) claim. The latter may include response and assessment cost recovery, restoration, monitoring, and compensatory components.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, FFWCC law enforcement

- (b) *Damage to seagrass dominated substrate* - FFWCC law enforcement is authorized to issue summary settlement citations to operators responsible for groundings that cause 10 square yards or less of injury to seagrass dominated substrate. Seagrass injuries of greater than 10 square yards require a biological assessment by DARP staff, using a variety of assessment techniques to quantify, describe, illustrate, and document the injury. Depending upon the size and extent of the injury, the assessment is forwarded to either NOAA's General Counsel for Law Enforcement to be processed as a simple civil penalty or NOAA's General Counsel for Natural Resources for processing as a NRDA claim. The latter may include response and assessment cost recovery, restoration, monitoring, and compensatory components.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, FFWCC law enforcement

- (c) *Damage to mixed substrate* - The DARP team provides technical input to NOAA and state legal counsel and the litigation team, which is composed of attorneys, economists, research biologists and Sanctuary administrators, in order to determine appropriate legal action under Section 307 or 312 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) for vessel grounding injuries to mixed seagrass and hard-bottom communities or mixed *Thalassia* (turtle grass) and

Porites (finger coral) shoals and banks. Current assessment is based largely on protocols used in coral and seagrass injury assessment. The DARP team, in conjunction with the litigation team, determines if special or modified assessment techniques are needed.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, FFWCC law enforcement

(d) *Damage to non-living coral reef framework* - The DARP team provides technical input to NOAA and state legal counsel and the litigation team to determine appropriate legal action under Section 307 or 312 of the NMSA for vessel grounding damage to the non-living skeletal remains of reef-building corals that comprise the structural framework and attachment places for living reef components. The DARP team, in conjunction with the litigation team determines if special or modified assessment techniques are needed.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, FFWCC law enforcement

(2) Respond to and assess injuries to natural resources within the FKNMS resulting from large vessel (primarily freighter) anchoring activity; further develop and fine tune assessment protocols and methodologies for these kinds of injuries. This is a problem that has only recently received close scrutiny by Sanctuary management and DARP personnel and is almost exclusively confined to the remote reaches of the Tortugas region, usually in greater than 25 meters of water. Freighters weigh tons and are secured by extremely large chain. When freighters drop anchor, the heavy chain drags along the bottom, after causing extensive, catastrophic damage to corals and other sessile benthic organisms. As anchored vessels swing with the wind and wave action, continuing damage occurs. Current methodologies borrow largely from coral reef injury assessment procedures and valuation formulae. Likewise, restoration and monitoring methodologies and protocols will closely follow those currently used in shallow reef situations, while incorporating special planning for diving and working at greater depths.

Status: A no-anchor zone was established in the Tortugas region in 1998; assessment protocols and methodologies implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary managers, DARP, State of Florida legal counsel, FFWCC law enforcement

(3) Respond to and assess injuries to natural resources within the FKNMS resulting from live-aboard and derelict vessels; further develop and fine tune assessment protocols and methodologies for these kinds of injuries. The DARP team will provide technical input to NOAA and state legal counsel and litigation team to determine appropriate penalty schedules for injuries to seagrasses, corals and hard-bottom habitat due to the shading effects or direct contact by permanently or semi-permanently moored live-aboard vessels and derelict vessels.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: The DARP team, in conjunction with the litigation case team, will determine if special or modified assessment techniques need to be developed established for addressing injuries to these types of habitat.

(4) Respond to and assess injuries to natural resources within the FKNMS resulting from near-shore construction and repairs or modifications to existing structures, such as public utility structures, bridge pilings, and seawalls; further develop and fine tune assessment protocols and methodologies for these kinds of injuries. As a result of the permitting of improvements or alterations to existing coastal structures or features, or the construction of new structures or features, the DARP team will be called upon to assess coral, seagrass, or hard-bottom resources that may be impacted during the construction, repair or alteration phase of the project. The data and documentation gathered from such assessments may be used in the permit decision-making process, and in planning for possible mitigation or restoration. The current methods and procedures for coral and seagrass site characterization or assessment will be used, but the over-all process will differ significantly from grounding assessments in that an initial assessment is conducted before construction or alternation, followed by a post-project evaluation.

Many of these permitted construction projects result in the removal and relocation of sessile organisms to a suitable substrate by FKNMS staff or the permittee, as required.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: The DARP team will be requested by the permitting agency to make an assessment of the marine resource impacted during construction, repair or alteration phase of the project.

(5) Respond to and assess injuries to natural resources within the FKNMS resulting from fishing gear; further develop and fine tune assessment protocols and methodologies for these kinds of injuries. The DARP team will collect data and conduct assessments of injuries to various substrate types resulting from fishing gear. The information will be provided to Federal and state fisheries management and law enforcement personnel. DARP staff will also provide technical support to the Sanctuary litigation team cases involving illegally placed artificial finfish or shellfish aggregating structures. The frequency of this type of assessment may increase over time in support of increased enforcement efforts.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: The DARP team will collect data and conduct assessments of injuries to various substrate types resulting from the placement of fishing gear. Technical support will be provided to the Sanctuary litigation case team as requested.

(6) Respond to and assess injuries to natural resources within the FKNMS resulting from natural events; further develop and fine tune assessment protocols and methodologies for these kinds of injuries. Current assessment techniques are borrowed from coral reef and seagrass methodology, but no uniform or standardized protocols have been developed. Infrequency of injury by catastrophic natural events (primarily hurricanes) has provided little momentum to establish assessment protocols. Rapid assessment methodologies developed by other agencies or private institutions for coral reef observations may be utilized to assess large-scale catastrophic events.

Status: Implemented as needed

Implementation: DARP will participate on an as needed basis.

STRATEGY B.21 CASE MANAGEMENT

Strategy Summary

Case Management involves sharing information and documentation regarding an injury incident so that the litigation team may proceed with legal action against the responsible party. This strategy identifies the activities necessary to carry out case management.

Activities (3)

(1) Provide vessel grounding litigation case management participation. Vessel grounding case management involves processing the information and documentation gathered during the assessment phase of an injury to Sanctuary resources into a legal action against the responsible party. In instances where the size of the injury does not exceed the threshold of a summary settlement, DARP involvement will be minimal (an occasional verification of an FFWCC Officer's evaluation of the injury), if required at all. Cases that fall under NMSA Section 307 categorization will require at a minimum the production of an injury assessment report by a DARP biologist, and some processing by NOAA General Counsel for Law Enforcement. Grounding cases that will be handled as NMSA Section 312 or "mini-312" cases require the most DARP staff involvement, necessitating considerable coordination and information sharing NOAA's General Counsel for Natural Resources and other members of the designated case team.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: This is a joint DARP and Sanctuary litigation team activity that occurs with most cases.

(2) Provide vessel grounding litigation case management support. This is an on-going activity. DARP team is involved in the on-going task of providing reports, documentation, site reconnaissance, depositions, expert witness testimony, etc. in support of vessel grounding case litigation.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Depending on the severity of the incident, each case requires various portions of this activity.

(3) Document Costs. In conjunction with administrative staff, the DARP team tracks expenditures associated with response, field assessment work, reporting, etc. for each case. Recently developed procedures for more accurate and efficient cost documentation are being implemented. Future activity in this area includes development of a cost documentation reporting sheet for Sanctuary law enforcement.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP and administrative staff. DARP and administrative staff are developing additional procedures and reporting requirements.

STRATEGY B.22 HABITAT RESTORATION

Strategy Summary

The National Marine Sanctuaries Act permits NOAA to recover the cost of restoring resources that are damaged by human activities. Restoration may involve re-stabilization of damaged but viable corals, seagrasses or hard-bottom components, and/or the replacement of substrate, structure and habitat. This strategy describes the on-going efforts of the DARP teams to restore Sanctuary resources damaged by human activity.

Activities (8)

(1) Salvage, restabilize and repair living hard corals and octocorals, seagrasses, and the non-living reef framework injured by groundings or other non-natural impacts. FKNMS uses several resources to salvage and/or repair Sanctuary resources, including:

(a) Salvage, maintenance and restabilization of injured Sanctuary resources by DARP staff and private contractors - DARP team members, Sanctuary staff, and private contractors can be mobilized to take part in “rescue” and “first aid” activities following a grounding. Efforts will focus on the salvage and restabilization of large, viable fragments or entire colonies of stony corals *in situ*, or as closely as possible to the injury site on uncompromised stable substrate. If the substrate within the immediate vicinity of the injury site is deemed too heavily fractured or otherwise unstable, the dislodged fragments and/or intact colonies may be relocated temporarily to protected “nursery” areas for holding until the original substrate is restabilized, reconstructed or replaced.

Alternatively, if it is deemed impractical or unfeasible to restore the original substrate to a degree that would adequately support the dislodged colonies or fragments, or if the time required to restore the original substrate would surpass the expected survivability horizon of the salvaged material, then a Sanctuary restoration biologist may choose to transplant this material elsewhere. One such alternative can be a nearby site from a previous vessel grounding that did not receive restorative measures and has a suitable substrate for reattachment.

The DARP team participates in developing strategies for streamlining the acquisition of funds from litigation case settlements to implement restoration as swiftly as possible, especially when emergency salvage and restabilization is necessary. Improved materials/methods and other innovations are continually being developed, evaluated and incorporated into the program. Among these will be a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement that will expedite the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for restoration planning and implementation.

(b) Salvage, maintenance and restabilization of injured Sanctuary resources by Reef Medics Program and Other Volunteer Groups - Reef Medics is an innovative, hands-on program designed to use volunteers to assist in Sanctuary restoration efforts. Volunteers have experience in vessel navigation and operation, snorkeling, and SCUBA diving. The DARP staff trains the volunteers in salvage and restabilization techniques. Currently, SCUBA certification is required for restoration efforts and DARP staff assists with the necessary approvals for diving through the NOAA Dive Program, The Nature Conservancy, Mote Marine Lab and other agencies. Reef Medics primarily assist DARP staff if the injury size falls below the threshold of a Natural Resources Damage Action claim or the responsible party is determined to be unviable or unknown, as in “hit and run” or “orphan” sites. Salvage and

restabilization efforts of smaller viable fragments can be conducted by Reef Medics and trained volunteer divers using hand tools and cement or adhesives appropriate for use with living organisms in marine applications.

Reef Medics support comes from compensatory funds from vessel grounding settlements, grants, and Sanctuary Friends of the Florida Keys, including contributions to purchase equipment and supplies, and vessel support.

Reef Medics are involved in follow-up documentation and monitoring of repaired sites for up to two years after repairs. Expansion of the Reef Medics program will include activities not requiring SCUBA diving, with opportunities for participation by non-divers and volunteers. Mote Marine Laboratory has conducted a pilot Reef Medics “Base Camp” project and further development is underway. The content and materials for a new volunteer training course has been developed.

(c) Salvage or removal of living corals by researchers and public aquaria. Vessel groundings on coral reef substrate often produce fragments of living coral colonies too small or too compromised to be viable in the natural environment. Likewise, permitted repair or replacement of submerged or partially submerged structures sometimes sacrifices encrusting corals and other sessile marine organisms. The removal of unpermitted or deleterious structures, such as illegally placed fishing gear and derelict vessels, also may result in the loss of hard corals and gorgonians. In such cases, the preferred alternative is to transplant the material to a suitable substrate within the reef ecosystem. However, if size, fragility or other factors make successful relocation and restabilization unlikely or impossible, then the Sanctuary superintendent may allow the material to be collected by researchers and public aquaria with permits to procure coral specimens from Sanctuary waters.

DARP will work with permit personnel to include language that requires utilization of “sacrificial” material as primary source, removal of intact specimens from manmade structures as a secondary source, and using natural reef sources only if the target species cannot be found on artificial structures. DARP will investigate lab or aquarium propagation for subsequent return to the ecosystem.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: Sanctuary management, DARP, private contractors, and volunteer groups. Sub activities are currently in various stages of implementation.

(2) Restore injured or destroyed coral reef framework. The DARP team uses funds from case settlements to reconstruct or replace coral reef framework structures that have been compromised or destroyed. The goal of this activity is to restore the ecologic and structural functionality of the injured reef framework and to reestablish lost aesthetic aspects. The DARP team participates in developing strategies for streamlining the acquisition of funds from litigation case settlements to effect restorative efforts as swiftly as possible, especially when emergency salvage and re-stabilization is required.

In cooperative situations, private contractors may also be engaged to restore or replace impacted or destroyed coral reef framework.

Status: Implemented and on-going within the limitations of funding, human resources, and technology.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary managers, litigation case managers, private contractors

(3) Restore grounding-impacted seagrass meadows. DARP will participate or facilitate seagrass restoration in damaged areas. These cases will be handled on a case-by-case basis and involve coordination among seagrass scientists, DARP personnel, FDEP personnel, and resource managers. Other seagrass restoration efforts occur by:

(a) Use Of Sanctuary Staff And Private Contractors

The DARP team will participate in on-going projects utilizing settlement funds to restore seagrass dominated substrate injured in vessel groundings. Activities by staff or contractors includes backfilling prop scars, trenches and excavation craters (“blowholes”), installing seabird attracting roosts (bird stakes) placed to promote the concentration of natural fertilizer; replanting pioneer seagrasses in denuded areas, sodding with nursery-grown and mechanically planted shoal-grass plugs, and the development, evaluation and implementation of other innovative methods and technologies.

(b) Use Of Volunteer Groups

DARP personnel direct trained volunteers to begin “first aid” measures following grounding damage to seagrass meadows using hand tools to return unnaturally banked or piled sediments back into scars, trenches and excavation craters created by grounded vessels.

(c) Use Of Regional Restoration Programs

The DARP team uses various funding sources to identify seagrass areas in need of restoration, and to implement restoration efforts, especially of orphan sites that would otherwise not receive treatment. Other members of this regional restoration group include representatives from the NOAA Beaufort Lab/Seagrass Research Team, the NOAA Damage Assessment Center, and the State Division of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas.

Status: Related sub-activities are currently in various stages of implementation.

Implementation: NOAA Damage Assessment Center, NMFS Beaufort Lab, Sanctuary management, DARP, the State, private contractors, and volunteers.

(4) Monitor restoration. DARP staff schedules regular field visits to monitor restoration sites. The monitoring data gathered is used for the scientific evaluation of methodologies. Based on the evaluations, mid-course corrections can be made at existing restoration sites and future restoration planning will reflect the knowledge gained.

Status: Currently established for many existing incident locations.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, cooperating agencies.

(5) Acquire blanket permits for DARP activities. DARP will work with other restoration team members, including NOAA’s Beaufort Lab/Seagrass Research Team, NOAA’s Damage Assessment Center, and the State Division of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas to obtain blanket permits from regulating agencies (ACOE, DEP, and others as appropriate) for damage assessment and restoration projects.

Status: Applications are under review by issuing agencies.

Implementation: A joint activity requiring various agency approvals.

(6) Reintroduce indigenous living corals and seagrass. DARP staff will participate in the review of policies and regulations regarding the re-introduction of living corals and seagrasses indigenous to the Florida Keys, which were held or propagated in laboratories, aquaria, or nurseries. Concerns exist about the possibility of introducing exotic or foreign strains of diseases or parasites, and/or the possibility of reintroducing corals or seagrass with weakened immune and defense mechanisms, or defective genetic material.

Status: Workshop targeted for 2005.

Implementation: Multi-agency. DARP personnel are making preparations to convene a workshop of experts to assess the biological and ecological ramifications of reintroducing corals and seagrasses and to develop criteria regulating these and related activities.

(7) Development of seagrass donor beds. The DARP team will determine appropriate sites for developing, maintaining and enhancing donor beds of shoal grass for transplanting into restoration sites.

Status: This activity is currently under development. Donor site identification is underway; full implementation is anticipated during 2005.

Implementation: Sanctuary management, DARP, and appropriate agencies.

(8) Work with public outreach coordinator to inform the public about habitat restoration activities. This is an on-going DARP team activity in which DARP personnel regularly provide the Sanctuary Outreach Coordinator with information, photos, videos, and other materials for use in press releases, TV and radio spots, and magazine articles to inform the public about restoration projects and successes.

Status: Implemented and on-going.

Implementation: DARP will provide information for media output to keep the public informed on restoration projects.

STRATEGY B.23 DATA MANAGEMENT

Strategy Summary

This strategy describes the DARP efforts to document groundings in the Sanctuary in order to determine trends and implement prevention strategies. Additionally, this information is used to track restoration, repairs and monitoring in the Sanctuary to determine the success of restoration efforts.

Activities (3)

(1) Create and maintain vessel grounding database. There are several tasks associated with this activity, including:

(a) Refine and Maintain Vessel Grounding Database and provide adequate staffing for on-going management. Sanctuary and FFWCC data are archived in a multitude of formats gathered with varying degrees of detail. Archived data needs to be reevaluated and reprocessed to allow queries to fields and subcategories. DARP staff will develop a consistent format, document parameters, and help standardize reporting. Once the data are reprocessed, they will be shared with other Sanctuary programs such as Mooring Buoy, Waterway Marking/Management, and Regulatory. This data will also be incorporated as an element of the SHIELDS database.

(b) GIS component development and maintenance.

DARP staff assigned to database development and management have received ArcView GIS training and the processing of archived data has begun. The DARP team will investigate new databases and geospatial analysis technology to evaluate the feasibility of incorporation into DARP data management.

(c) Products for management, case tracking, outreach and research application - Full implementation is pending the complete development of a new database. Original data has limited value. DARP personnel will work with other Sanctuary program staff to create a database that is both useful and user-friendly.

Status: Partially implemented and on-going. Sub-activities are currently in various stages of implementation and most DARP personnel have received basic Geographic Information System (GIS) training.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, FFWCC, law enforcement, cooperating agencies, and reporting sources, including the public and volunteers.

(2) Develop GIS and database for tracking restoration, repairs and monitoring.

NOAA Damage Assessment Center's "Mini-312" seagrass injury assessment team has implemented this data management component. This technology is currently being adapted to other Sanctuary and DARP applications.

Status: This activity is in progress. Most DARP personnel have basic GIS training.

Implementation: DARP, Sanctuary management, and related agencies.

(3) Acquire and incorporate satellite and aerial photo images into GIS databases. The DARP team will participate in the acquisition of high-resolution, low-altitude aerial photographs of all special

management areas and known grounding “hotspots” as baseline documentation in support of natural resource injury litigation, basic research, and managerial decision-making. These images will be shared with all Sanctuary program staff to facilitate and enhance Sanctuary-sponsored projects.

Status: Implementation will commence upon acquisition of funds

Implementation: Funding is being sought and site planning is underway.