



Photos courtesy of FKNMS, Andy Collins, Larry Lipsky, Eastern Carolina University.

SANCTUARY REGULATIONS

This summary is only intended as a general reference to sanctuary regulations. These regulations have been separated into those that apply throughout the sanctuary and those that apply to specific sanctuary zones. The text of the sanctuary regulations can be found at 15 CFR 922 Subpart P and should be referred to for more specific information. A copy can be obtained by calling any sanctuary office or on the sanctuary web site at floridakeys.noaa.gov.

With certain exceptions, the following activities are prohibited sanctuary-wide:

- Removing, injuring, or possessing coral or live rock.
- Discharging or depositing trash or other pollutants.
- Dredging, drilling, prop dredging or otherwise altering the seabed, or placing or abandoning any structure on the seabed.
- Operating a vessel in such a manner as to strike or otherwise injure coral, seagrass, or other immobile organisms attached to the seabed, or cause prop scarring.
- Having a vessel anchored on living coral in water less than 40 feet deep when the bottom can be seen. Anchoring on hard-bottom is allowed.
- Except in officially marked channels, operating a vessel at more than 4 knots/no wake within 100 yards of residential shorelines, stationary vessels, or navigational aids marking reefs.
- Operating a vessel at more than 4 knots/no wake within 100 feet of a “divers down” flag.
- Diving or snorkeling without a dive flag.
- Operating a vessel in a manner that endangers life, limb, marine resources, or property.
- Releasing exotic species.
- Damaging or removing markers, mooring buoys, scientific equipment, boundary buoys, and trap buoys.
- Moving, removing, injuring, or possessing historical resources.
- Taking or possessing protected wildlife.
- Using or possessing explosives or electrical charges.
- Harvesting, possessing or landing any marine life species except, as allowed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Rule (68B-46 F.A.C.).

Sanctuary Regulations by Zone

With certain exceptions, the following activities are prohibited in the Ecological Reserves (ERs) and Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPAs):

- Discharging any matter except cooling water or engine exhaust.
- Fishing by any means; removing, harvesting, or possessing any marine life. Catch and release fishing by trolling is allowed in Conch Reef, Alligator Reef, Sombbrero Reef, and Sand Key SPAs only.
- Touching or standing on living or dead coral.
- Anchoring on living or dead coral, or any attached organism.
- Anchoring when a mooring buoy is available.
- Bait fishing is allowed in SPAs by FKNMS permit.

Additional regulations for Tortugas South ER:

- Vessels may only enter if they remain in continuous transit with fishing gear stowed. (Diving and snorkeling are prohibited.)

Additional regulations for Tortugas North ER:

- Access permit required to stop or use a mooring buoy.
- Anchoring is prohibited.
- Mooring by vessel(s) more than 100 feet in total or combined length overall is prohibited.
- No access permit necessary if vessel remains in continuous transit with fishing gear stowed.

Special-use Research Only Areas:

- No entry or activities without an FKNMS permit.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs):

- Public access restrictions in these areas are marked and include idle speed only/no wake, no access buffer, no motor, and limited closures.

Existing Management Areas (EMAs):

- Check with the appropriate State or Federal agency for applicable rules and regulations that apply in these areas.

Activities prohibited in the Key Largo and Looe Key Existing Management Areas:

- Removing, taking, spearing, or otherwise damaging any coral, marine invertebrate, tropical fish, plant, soil, rock, or other material. However, commercial taking of spiny lobster and

stone crab by trap and recreational taking of spiny lobster by hand or hand gear consistent with applicable State and Federal fishery regulations are allowed.

- Spearfishing.
- Possession of spearfishing equipment, except while passing through without interruption.

Note: There are other existing state and federal laws regarding fishing and vessel discharges that apply in the sanctuary.

State fisheries regulations may be obtained from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 1-888-404-3922 or www.myfwc.com

Federal fisheries regulations may be obtained from the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council, 1-813-348-1630 or www.gulfcouncil.org

South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, 1-843-571-4366 or www.safmc.net

National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Region, 1-727-824-5344 or <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/regulations/reg.htm>

No Discharge Zone regulations may be obtained from the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

WHAT ARE THE ZONES?

Ecological Reserves (ERs) are designed to encompass large, contiguous diverse habitats. They are intended to provide natural spawning, nursery, and permanent residence areas for the replenishment and genetic protection of marine life and to protect and preserve all habitats and species, particularly those not protected by fishery management regulations.

Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPAs) focus on the protection of shallow, heavily used reefs where conflicts occur between user groups, and where concentrated visitor activity leads to resource degradation. They are designed to enhance the reproductive capabilities of renewable resources, protect areas critical for sustaining and protecting important marine species, and reduce user conflict in high-use areas.

Special-use Areas are used to set aside areas for scientific research and educational purposes, restoration, monitoring, or to establish areas that confine or restrict activities. These areas minimize impacts on sensitive habitats and reduce user conflicts.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) have been established to minimize disturbance to especially sensitive wildlife populations and their habitats to ensure protection and preservation consistent with the sanctuary designation and other applicable laws governing the protection and preservation of wildlife resources in the Sanctuary.

Existing Management Areas (EMAs) have been established by NOAA or other agencies prior to designation of the sanctuary, with additional regulations. These zones delineate the existing jurisdictional authority.

WHERE ARE THE ZONES?

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| <p>Ecological Reserves (ERs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Sambo • Tortugas (North&South) | <p>Special-use Research Only Areas - Located in the vicinity of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conch Reef • Tennessee Reef • Looe Key Patch Reef • Eastern Sambo | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower Harbor Keys • Cayo Agua Keys • Bay Keys • Pelican Shoal • Big Mullet Key • Cottrell Key • Little Mullet Key • Woman Key • Boca Grande Key • Marquesas Keys |
| <p>Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPAs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carysfort/S. Carysfort • The Elbow • Key Largo Dry Rocks • Grecian Rocks • French Reef • Molasses Reef • Conch Reef • Hen and Chickens • Davis Reef • Cheeca Rocks • Alligator Reef • Coffins Patch • Sombbrero Key • Newfoundland Harbor Key • Looe Key • Eastern Dry Rocks • Rock Key • Sand Key | <p>Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eastern Lake Surprise • Crocodile Lake • Rodriguez Key • Dove Key • Tavernier Key • Snake Creek • Cotton Key • Horseshoe Key • Upper Harbor Key • East Content Keys • West Content Keys • Little Crane Key • Sawyer Keys • Tidal flat south of Marvin Key • Snipe Keys • Mud Keys • East Harbor Key | <p>Existing Management Areas (EMAs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Largo Existing Management Area • John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park • Looe Key Existing Management Area • Crocodile Lakes National Wildlife Refuge • Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge • National Key Deer Refuge • Key West National Wildlife Refuge |

What is a National Marine Sanctuary?

Our national marine sanctuaries embrace part of our collective riches as a nation. Within their protected waters, giant humpback whales breed and calve their young, coral colonies flourish, and shipwrecks tell stories of our maritime history. Sanctuary habitats include beautiful rocky reefs, lush kelp forests, whale migration corridors, spectacular deep-sea canyons, and underwater archeological sites. Our nation's sanctuaries can provide a safe habitat for species close to extinction or protect historically significant shipwrecks. Ranging in size from less than one square nautical mile to more than 4,000 square nautical miles, each sanctuary is a unique place needing special attention. Natural classrooms, cherished recreational spots, and valuable commercial industries - marine sanctuaries represent many things to many people.



Banded coral shrimp Photo: Larry Lipsky

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary System

The National Marine Sanctuary Program serves as the trustee for a system of fourteen underwater parks, encompassing more than 150,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington State to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has managed national marine sanctuaries since passage of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act in 1972. Protecting sanctuary resources requires a great deal of planning, management and cooperation among federal, state and local officials. The National Marine Sanctuary Program works cooperatively with its partners and the public to promote conservation while allowing compatible commercial and recreational activities. Increasing public awareness of our marine heritage, scientific research, monitoring, educational programs, outreach, and enforcement are just a few of the ways the National Marine Sanctuary Program fulfills its mission to the American people. The program's staff is ever mindful of its responsibility to protect America's ocean treasures for this and future generations.



Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic maps.



Queen angelfish Photo: Larry Lipsky

The State of Florida and the federal government have been working together for over 25 years to protect the marine environment in the Florida Keys. This effective partnership continues today in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Such a combined effort provides a comprehensive ecosystem management approach for the long-term protection of the diverse natural resources in Keys waters.

Ecological Reserve.

North America's only coral barrier reef and the third longest barrier reef in the world lies about six miles seaward of the Florida Keys, a 220-mile long string of islands extending south and west of the Florida mainland. In recognition of the significance of the coral reef ecosystem, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was created in 1990 by Congress, extending 2,800 square nautical miles on both sides of the Florida Keys. In 2001, the boundary was increased to 2,900 square nautical miles with the addition of the Tortugas Ecological Reserve.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

 A National Marine Sanctuary
Florida Keys

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
33 East Quay Road
Key West, FL 33040
Upper Region: 305.852.7717
Lower Region: 305.292.0311
<http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>



Redspotted hawkfish Photo: Larry Lipsky



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South Florida Ecosystem Restoration

Florida's famous author Marjorie Stoneman Douglas described the Everglades as the "river of grass." The Everglades are but a part of the South Florida ecosystem. In its natural state, the ecosystem extended from the middle of the state southward to the living coral reef.



Today, the South Florida ecosystem is stressed. Growing urban areas, agricultural runoff, ever-increasing tourist interest and various other human and natural occurrences have come together to adversely affect one of the planet's more unique and fragile ecosystems. Extensive efforts in the first half of this century to reclaim "worthless" swampland for development and agriculture have blocked and re-routed the natural watershed to change the way the ecosystem functions.

The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force is working toward the common goal of keeping South Florida healthy for generations to come. This effort involves federal, state, tribal, and local governments who are coming together to look beyond jurisdictional boundaries - artificial lines drawn on maps by human hands - to see the South Florida ecosystem at large. They are fitting the human component into the equation, and finding ways to restore the ecosystem so that natural habitats and human economies can thrive hand in hand. Among their goals is to restore the water quality, quantity, timing and distribution throughout the ecosystem.

The Coral Reef Ecosystem

The Florida Keys and the Florida reef tract extend some 220 miles to the south of the Florida peninsula. Covered primarily in mangrove and tropical hardwood hammock, the islands are formed of fossilized coral called Key Largo limestone, and layers of Miami Oolite - ancient layers of sand shoals cemented together. Tidal channels meander between the islands, connecting the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Florida Bay to the tropical currents of the Florida waters in the Florida Straits.

The coral reef ecosystem is alive with an abundance of fish, stony and soft corals, sponges, jellyfish, anemones, snails, crabs, lobsters, rays, moray eels, endangered sea turtles, dolphins, sea birds and other sea life. In fact, it is home to one third of Florida's threatened and endangered species.



Coral polyps Photo: FKNMS

Corals are delicate structures composed of hundreds of thousands of tiny slow-growing animals called polyps. Each one secretes a calcareous exoskeleton. Colonies of these coral polyps can form massive reef formations. It can take years for some corals to grow one inch. The reef is constantly growing new colonies on top of the skeletons of older corals.

Coral, for all its sturdy appearance, is fragile and vulnerable. Reef-building corals flourish only in unpolluted, low nutrient waters, usually between 25 degrees north and south of the equator. Coral reefs cannot withstand continued exposure to sea temperatures colder than 68 degrees F (18 degrees C) or warmer than 86 degrees F (30 degrees C), or great changes in water quality or salinity.

Mangroves are salt-tolerant trees that provide a nesting area for a variety of birds. The submerged roots are a nursery and breeding ground for most of the marine life that migrates to the reef. Mangroves trap and produce nutrients for food and habitat, stabilize the shoreline by trapping debris and silt, and filter land-based pollutants.



Seagrass meadow Photo: FKNMS

Seagrasses are flowering marine plants that are an important part of the food web. They provide food for turtles, manatees, and a variety of fish, and habitat for filter-feeding organisms and foraging sealife such as sea urchins and

sea cucumbers. Seagrasses are a nursery ground for pink shrimp, lobster, snapper, and other sealife. They filter the water by trapping sediments, release oxygen into the water, and stabilize the ocean bottom with their roots.

Maritime Heritage

The unique geological history of the Florida Keys, with its treacherous shallows and hidden reefs, set the stage for a colorful human history. Shoals, sand flats, storms, and the coral reef itself have stymied many navigators through the centuries, and taken their toll on many ships.



City of Washington shipwreck Photo: Indiana University

Since the 1500s more than 800 documented shipwrecks have occurred around the reefs and sand flats of the Florida Keys. These vessels, which now rest upon the ocean floor, carried a wide variety of cargoes throughout the centuries,

cargoes that ranging from settlers, slaves, and soldiers, to merchandise and treasure. During the early twentieth century, the "wreckers" of the Keys salvaged virtually everything they could find, leaving behind little of the original wrecks. These wrecks and the stories that surround them give the Keys a rich and exciting maritime culture. In addition to the human aspect, these shipwrecks, often referred to as "windows to the past," also serve as artificial reefs, providing an anchor and abode for the brilliant and diverse life that inhabits these waters.

People and the Environment

The special beauty of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary brings with it some unique challenges for protection. Every year, more than three million people come to the Keys to experience the wonders of the marine environment. Year-round, visitors and residents alike dive, snorkel, fish, boat, and swim in sanctuary waters. A system of mooring buoys, channel markers, and special marine zones is in place to assure that the diverse and delicate ecosystem of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary remains healthy for generations to come.

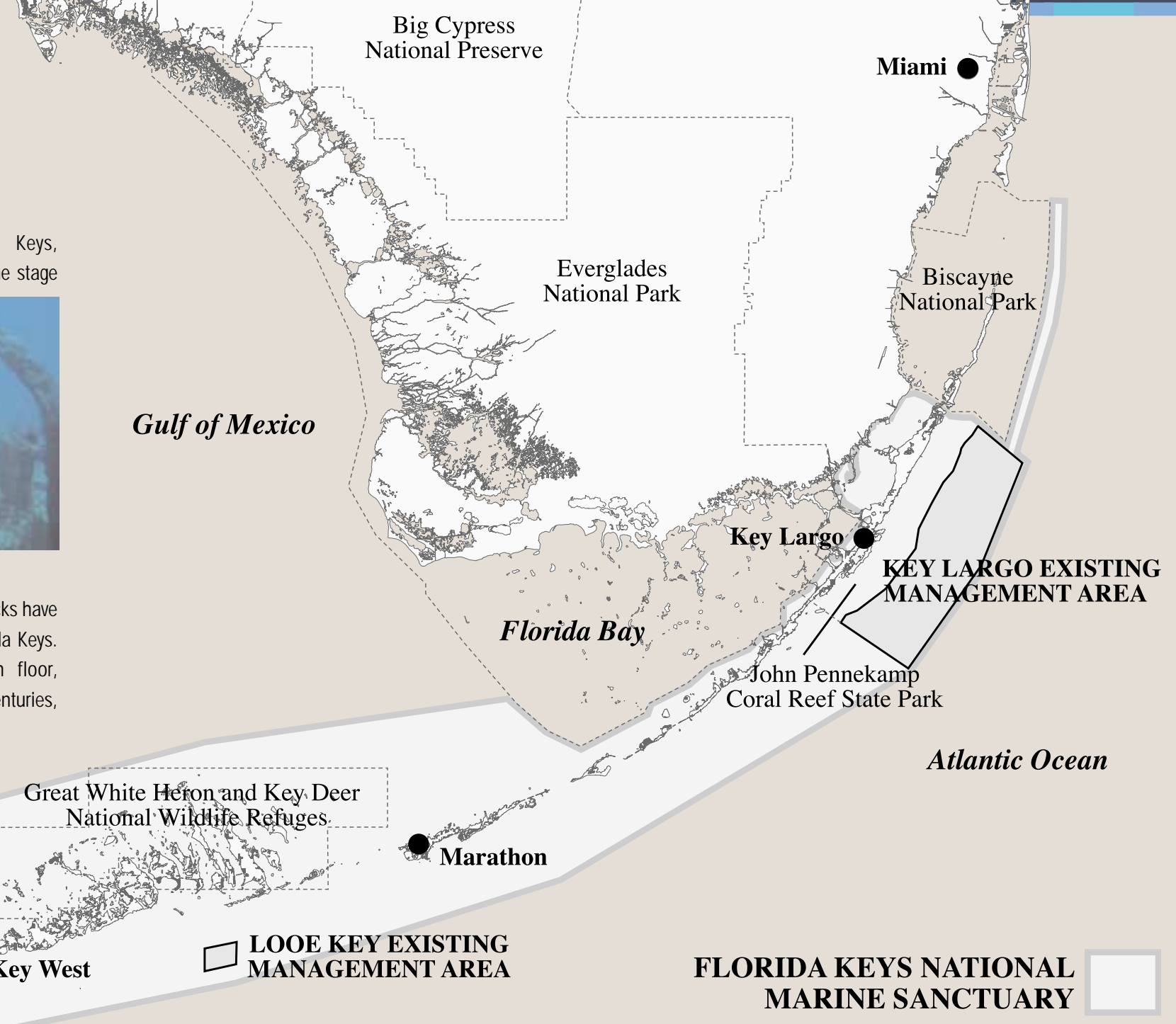


Alligator Reef lighthouse Photo: Larry Lipsky



A National Marine Sanctuary

Florida Keys



How You Can Help Protect the Coral Reef Ecosystem
What you do (or don't do) can make a difference

- **Dive In!** Get involved in events in your community. Your involvement can make a big difference.
- **Don't Use Chemically Enhanced Pesticides and Fertilizers.** Although you may live thousands of miles from a coral reef ecosystem, these products end up in the watershed and may ultimately impact the waters that support coral.
- **Be An Informed Consumer.** Consider carefully the coral objects that you buy for decoration. Many reef souvenirs are unsustainably or illegally harvested.
- **Ask Your Waiter.** Choose seafood from those fisheries and fish farms that have the least impact on the ocean and its inhabitants.
- **Pump It - Don't Dump It!** Use sewage pumpout facilities and biodegradable bilge cleaner. Never discharge bilge water at the reef.
- **Use Reef Mooring Buoys** or anchor in sandy areas away from coral and seagrasses so that anchor, chain, and line do not contact or damage coral or seagrasses.
- **Know Before You Go!** Carry and use nautical charts and know the draft of your vessel. If you run aground: STOP! Do

- not try to motor off. Wait until high tide to remove the vessel. Call for assistance when necessary.
- **Avoid Wildlife Disturbance.** Stay 100 yards or more offshore; keep speed, noise, and wakes to a minimum near mangroves.
- **Dive Responsibly.** Coral-friendly divers have good buoyancy control. The lightest touch with hands or equipment can damage sensitive coral polyps or remove the protective mucus layer.
 - To avoid contact with the ocean bottom, divers should only use the weight needed and practice proper buoyancy control. Areas that appear empty may support new growth if left undisturbed.
 - Avoid wearing gloves and touching or collecting marine life. Some species, such as queen conch and cushion sea star are protected, and cannot be taken.



Pumpout station Photo: FKNMS



Diver at outer reef Photo: Larry Lipsky

