

# Sounding Line

News of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Winter 2006-Spring 2007

## Discover the Keys at the New Eco-Discovery Center

Nancy Diersing, Sanctuary Education Specialist

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live underwater where you could study the marine life on a Keys' coral reef? You might have a better idea after a visit to the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center in Key West where you can step inside NOAA's *Aquarius* exhibit, a model of an actual under-water laboratory located in sanctuary waters 60 feet below the surface on a coral reef. Once inside, you will learn how scientists live and study during a mission in this underwater habitat. The *Aquarius* is only one of the many professionally designed exhibits featured in 6400 square feet of exhibit space.

"We are thrilled to have the Eco-Discovery Center open free of charge to residents and visitors. It was a true partnership working with the other agencies in developing the exhibits and bringing the treasures of the Keys to life for everyone to learn about and enjoy," commented Mary Tagliareni, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Education Coordinator. Tagliareni coordinated the design and development of the interpretive exhibits in partnership with representatives from the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the South Florida Water Management District. "We are also very grateful for the many people who donated their photographs, video sounds and talent to make the exhibits truly reflect the beauty of the Keys," added Tagliareni.



Visitors who enter the *Aquarius* exhibit will learn how scientists live and study in the actual underwater habitat located near a coral reef off Key Largo in 60 feet of water.

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Colorful marine artwork depicting the deep sea, coral reef and mangrove shoreline decorates the outside wall of the Eco-Discovery Center and guides you toward the main entrance. Once inside, you are free to wander through exhibits that describe the ecology of Keys habitats—from the upland pinelands through the hardwood hammock, to the beach dune and then the mangrove shoreline. From there, you "enter the sea" to learn about the seagrass flats, hardbottom, coral reef and deep shelf communities. Touch screens with colorful photos and interesting marine life facts help make this section come alive.

The Eco-Discovery Center features a number of fun interactive exhibits. "You Be the Manager" gives you a better understanding of what is involved in making management decisions that affect the future of the Keys ecosystem. At the contour map exhibit you can watch the ocean currents swirl by the Keys or see the locations of lighthouses and historic shipwrecks found in Keys waters. The map, sponsored by the South Florida Water Management District, also points to the connection of the island chain to the South Florida mainland where restoration of the Everglades ecosystem is taking place.

"We expect visitors to come away with a better understanding of the Florida Keys ecosystem and the challenges we face in protecting this environment for future generations," commented Cmdr. Dave Score, superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. "The Eco-Discovery Center is the result of ten years of hard work by people from the

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Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Dave Score  
Superintendent

Stephanie Bailenson  
State Co-trustee

Sanctuary Advisory Council

Bruce Popham--Chair  
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Ken Nedimyer--Vice Chair  
Commercial Fishing-  
Marine/Tropical

Richard Grathwohl  
Charter Fishing-Flats Guide

Robert Simonds  
Charter Fishing/Sport Fishing

Jack Curlett  
Citizen at Large-Upper Keys

Dolly Garlo  
Citizen at Large-Middle Keys

David Hawtof  
Citizen at Large-Lower Keys

Jeff Cramer  
Commercial Fishing-  
Shell/Scale--Upper Keys

Debra Harrison  
Conservation and  
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Chris Bergh  
Conservation and  
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Todd Firm  
Diving-Upper Keys

Don Kincaid  
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George R. Neugent,  
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Gary Randolph  
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Mark Klingbeil  
Recreational Fisher

Deborah A. Shaw  
Research and Monitoring

Jerry Lorenz  
South Florida Ecosystem  
Restoration

Krueger Nicholson  
Tourism-Upper Keys

Kathleen Patton  
Tourism-Lower Keys

Dear Readers:

It's an exciting time of change for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) and the National Marine Sanctuary Program. Since the last time we published *Sounding Line*, the National Marine Sanctuary Program has taken an enormous step forward in management.

We are now applying a regional approach to management of our system of 13 national marine sanctuaries and our marine national monument. The sanctuary system is divided into four regions: the Pacific Islands Region, the West Coast Region, the Northeast and Great Lakes Region, and the Southeast Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Region, also called the *Southeast Region*. I have the honor of being named the Director of the Southeast Region, thus leaving my position as the FKNMS Superintendent. This region currently includes three sites: the Florida Keys NMS, the Flower Garden Banks NMS and Gray's Reef NMS.

The great news is that I have handed the duties and responsibilities of site superintendent over to Commander Dave Score. Dave is an extremely capable and dedicated individual who served as our Upper Keys Manager from 2001 to 2004. He is highly respected in the Keys community and engages extremely well with people and the issues of the sanctuary.

I have been blessed with the greatest team in state and federal government and a host of volunteers, including our Sanctuary Advisory Council, that have worked with passion and commitment to move the sanctuary forward. I will always remain indebted to all of them.

So...as I hand off this letter to the new superintendent of the FKNMS, Commander Dave Score, I want to thank everyone who has helped make the FKNMS an internationally recognized marine protected area with some of the most innovative management tools possible. Please accept my most sincere thanks to all of you.

Dave, welcome aboard!

Sincerely,

Billy D. Causey  
Regional Director



Three national marine sanctuaries are included in the Southeast Region of the sanctuary system: Flower Garden Banks, Gray's Reef, and the Florida Keys. The sanctuaries in this region are connected to one another by surface currents that move water throughout the region (shown by blue arrows).

**Thanks Billy and Hello Readers:**

I am humbled and grateful by the opportunity to return to the Keys as superintendent and work with all of you to make the best possible decisions to sustain and, in some cases, restore this precious ecosystem which we rely on to live, work, and play. The new regional approach to managing our national marine sanctuary system reflects the increased understanding and importance of “connectivity” between and among habitats and the species that use them.

Nowhere is this more illustrated than in our chain of islands, the Florida Keys. Coral reefs, seagrass beds, and mangrove shorelines are the framework habitats of this tropical treasure and the decisions made both locally and “upstream” unavoidably influence their short- and long-term health. It is our collective responsibility to ensure our “place” on the planet is properly managed and it is my responsibility to make sure you have a voice and choice in this regard. I am committed to making sure you achieve this end through continued implementation of our management plan. It is easy go to work when you believe in the mission. I am fortunate to fully support the *Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act* as good law and implementing it responsibly as “good government.” To read the Act again for yourself visit: [http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/regs/sp\\_act.html](http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/regs/sp_act.html).



**Southeast Regional Manager Billy D. Causey (left) and new Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent Cmdr. Dave Score (right) pose near the docks of the Truman Annex property in Key West where the Dr. Nancy Foster Florida Keys Environmental Complex and Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center are located.**

By way of introduction, I work for you and take that very seriously. I have been fortunate during my 16 year career as a commissioned officer with NOAA to work in 10 of the 13 national marine sanctuaries in a variety of capacities and take part in the growth and development of this important program. During each assignment, I was exposed to the fundamental importance of public involvement and critical need to ensure that the best science and information is available for decision making. The only thing I know for sure is that there is a ton that I don’t know. Together, we have a tremendous responsibility to ask and answer the right questions to find a way to sustain this ecosystem through responsible decision making. As Billy stated, we are fortunate to have a world class team and network of additional expertise to bring you the best available information needed to develop, make, and communicate informed decisions.

This is truly a landmark year for us as highlighted in this issue with the opening of the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center and delivery of a dedicated enforcement vessel for the Tortugas Ecological Reserve. It is my sincere pleasure to reintroduce the *Sounding Line* series as a web-based communication tool. We are excited about the extensive and timely content of this issue and trust you will agree that this is an important tool to communicate and archive accurate information about the complex management issues facing this ecosystem and the activities undertaken to address them. I trust you will find it informative and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Sincerely,

Cmdr. Dave Score, NOAA  
Superintendent





## Governor and Cabinet Approve Dry Tortugas Regulations

*Florida Department of Environmental Protection*

Expanding protection for Florida's coral reefs and underwater resources, Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Cabinet recently approved managing regulations by the National Park Service for the Dry Tortugas National Park. The regulations build upon the management agreement between the parties approved last year, and enhance protection for archaeological treasures, marine resources and habitat over 100 nautical square-miles. As part of the approval, the Department of Environmental Protection and the National Park Service will come back to the Governor and Cabinet in five years to review the performance of the newly approved regulations.

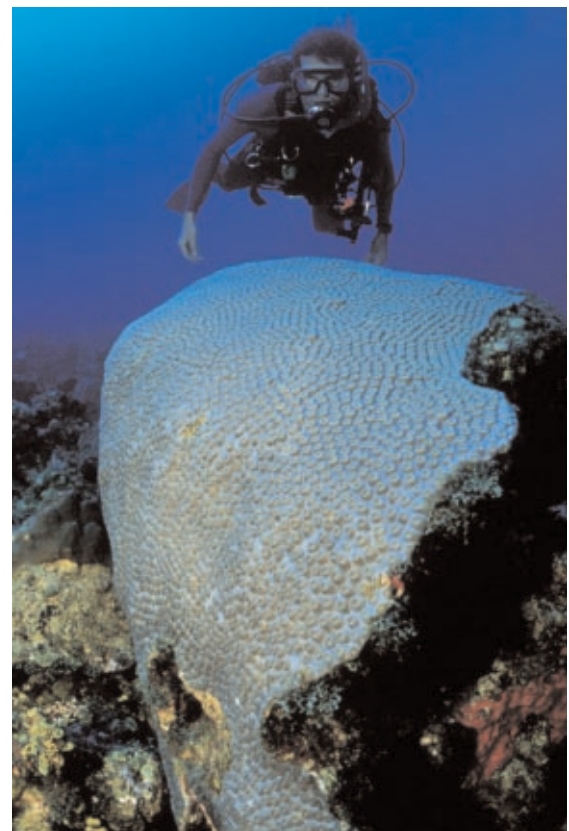
"Today's vote exemplifies the unwavering commitment of Governor Bush and the Florida Cabinet to protect the sensitive marine environment of the Florida Keys and North America's most extensive coral reef," said Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Colleen M. Castille when the vote was cast in Tallahassee on November 14. "This multi-agency collaboration to manage the Dry Tortugas will allow the partners to research and preserve a near pristine subtropical marine ecosystem, while still providing a range of recreational activities for visitors to enjoy."

The Dry Tortugas management plan separates the park into a 54 nautical square-mile Natural/Cultural Zone and a 46 square-mile Research Natural Area (RNA). Upon implementation, available activities within the Natural/Cultural Zone will continue to include recreational fishing, scuba diving, snorkeling and boating. The RNA will be reserved for non-consumptive recreation, research and educational activities, with a one mile radius surrounding Fort Jefferson remaining open for recreational fishing. The National Park Service published the final regulations in the Federal National Register on December 20, 2006. They became effective on January 19, 2007.

The Dry Tortugas plays a critical role in sustaining the health of Florida's coral reefs. The biologically rich, relatively undisturbed area is home to some of the clearest and cleanest waters in the Florida Keys. The diverse ecosystem also provides spawning and nursery grounds for more than 300 species of fish.

In 2001, Governor Bush and the Cabinet partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to establish the adjacent Tortugas Ecological Reserve as one of the largest marine reserves in the world. Designed to protect coral habitat, the Tortugas Ecological Reserve, which is included in the Florida Keys National Marine sanctuary, restricts consumptive activities such as fishing. The sanctuary includes both state and federal waters and is co-managed with Florida's Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA).

Located approximately 70 miles west of Key West, the Dry Tortugas is a cluster of seven islands composed of coral reefs and sand. Along with the surrounding shoals and waters, the islands make up the Dry Tortugas National Park, famous for its bird and marine life. Fort Jefferson, one of the largest coastal forts ever built, is a central feature of the park. For more information on the Dry Tortugas visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov> or <http://www.nps.gov/dрто/>.



**A diver observes a colony of Great Star Coral, *Montastrea cavernosa*, in the relatively deep waters of the Tortugas North Ecological Reserve. The north section of the reserve is located adjacent to the Dry Tortugas Research Natural Area with its shallow-water coral reefs.**

**Photo credit: William Harrigan for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.**