



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.

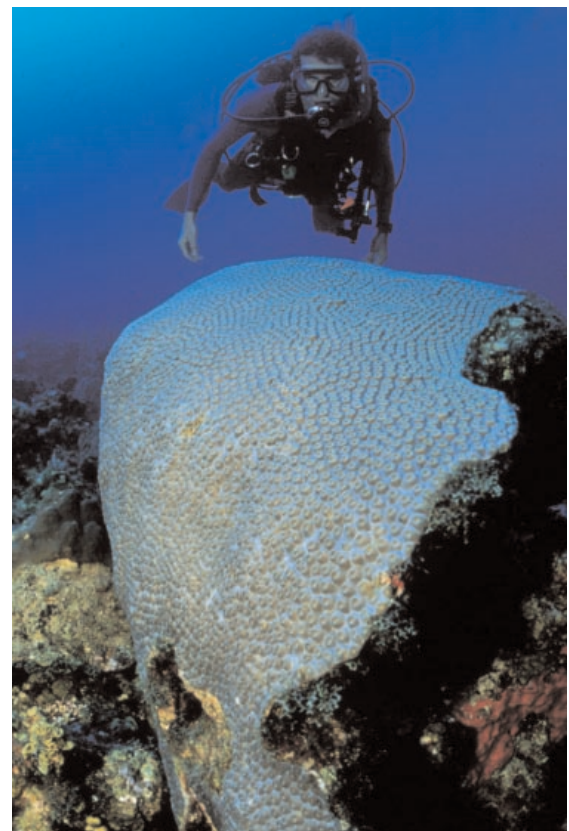
"Today's vote exemplifies the unwavering commitment of Governor Bush and the Florida Cabinet to protect the sensitive marine environment of the Florida Keys and North America's most extensive coral reef," said Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Colleen M. Castille when the vote was cast 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.