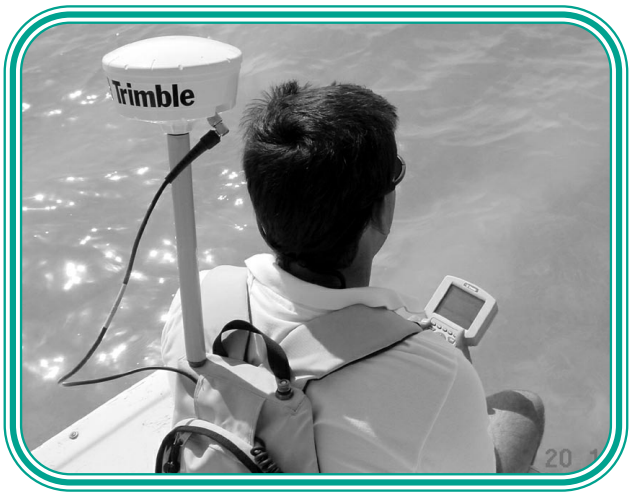
Damage Assessment Team Surveys Groundings



A detailed protocol is followed by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Damage Assessment Team when assessing coral or seagrass communities. An initial inspection of the grounding site is the first step in documenting vessel damage (above left). Detailed site mapping and measurement of injuries such as prop scars and blowholes follows the site inspection. A Trimble Differential Global Positioning System Receiver unit (survey quality GPS) is used to map, record location, and document the dimensions of the injury site (above right).

To aid in measurements and detailed site mapping, a flyover may be conducted to obtain aerial photographs of the site (above left). In order to produce a detailed site map, site attributes and map data are transferred to the Geographical Information System (GIS). Statistical analysis and modeling based on monitoring of other grounding sites is used to predict recovery rates and determine the monetary compensation that will be required of the responsible party. Restoration techniques may be applied to speed the growth of new seagrass. One promising technique involves placing a series of small "bird stakes" along the length of the prop scar or throughout the blowhole (above right). These stakes are attractive landing posts for cormorants, gulls, and other birds whose waste products stimulate the growth of shoal grass, *Halodule wrightii*. Recolonization by this pioneering seagrass species stabilizes the loose sediments often exposed after dredging, thereby preventing further erosion of the grassbed by currents.

Note: This article first appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of ***Sounding Line,*** *the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. For more information, visit:* **www.fknms.nos.noaa.gov.**