

The Abandoned Vessels Project

Addressing the impacts on coral reef ecosystems

Thousands of abandoned vessels litter U.S. coastal and inland waters. Toxic chemicals and destructive gear often remain on these vessels, threatening nearby coastal and marine resources. Pieces of the vessel and its contents can physically destroy coral reefs and seagrass beds. These vessels entrap wildlife and impede navigation and are often used as illegal dumpsites for hazardous materials.

As a natural resource trustee, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration understands the impact on coral reef ecosystems from vessel groundings. NOAA's Damage Assessment Center (DAC) initiated the Abandoned Vessels Project to inventory and remove such vessels from sensitive coral ecosystems.



Threats to Corals

Coral reefs provide habitat for over 25 percent of all marine life—including sponges, urchins, lobsters, snails, and turtles—and support 93,000 fish species in just 0.3 percent of the sea area. Threatened by coastal development, overfishing, and water pollution, coral reefs are considered one of the world's most diverse ecosystems, support multi-billion dollar fishing and tourism industries worldwide, and protect coastal areas from storm surges. Vessel groundings and abandoned vessels pose additional threats to the future of corals.

Inventory

Over the last year, DAC has developed a comprehensive database of abandoned vessels that threaten coral ecosystems. This inventory is a compilation of existing data from sources such as the U.S. Coast Guard, states, U.S. territories, and the maritime industry. The inventory also includes original data from maps and personal interviews with local sources.

To date, the database includes over 75 vessels around the U.S. Pacific Island territories, over 70 vessels around the U.S. Caribbean Islands, and roughly 550 vessels in the Florida Keys.

The inventory also includes hundreds of grounding sites where the vessels have already been removed. All of this information is linked by a Geographic Information System to data on natural resources and benthic habitats.

DAC is currently validating data and prioritizing vessels for future removal based on an evaluation of environmental threat, human safety risk, and accessibility. This inventory will assist resource managers in understanding the extent and nature of the threats posed by abandoned vessels.

Removal

DAC has also been analyzing existing authorities and funding mechanisms for the removal of abandoned vessels. This analysis is important because no single federal agency has clear authority or funding to address the suite of issues related to abandoned vessels. A legal review of state, territorial, federal, and



international laws, combined with the inventory, will guide NOAA's future efforts to address threats posed by these vessels.

How You Can Help

NOAA is requesting information about the vessels listed on the Abandoned Vessels Project's website, as well as information about vessels that are not currently included in the inventory.

Please visit the website at—

response.restoration.noaa.gov/dac/vessels

NOAA acts as a trustee on behalf of the public to restore coastal and marine resources injured by oil spills, hazardous substance releases, and vessel groundings. To learn more or to provide information on abandoned vessels, please contact—

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