

Mud Damages Hawaiian Coral Reefs

2000 – 2004

Scientists from the USGS, the University of Hawaii (UH), and the University of Washington (UW) are studying the coral reefs near several Hawaiian islands. Using air photos, satellite photos, underwater photos, and underwater instruments, we've found that mud washed offshore by large storms can damage coral reefs. Corals need sunlight and clear water to grow. When sunlight is blocked by muddy water, the corals stop growing and sometimes die.



Air photo of West Maui

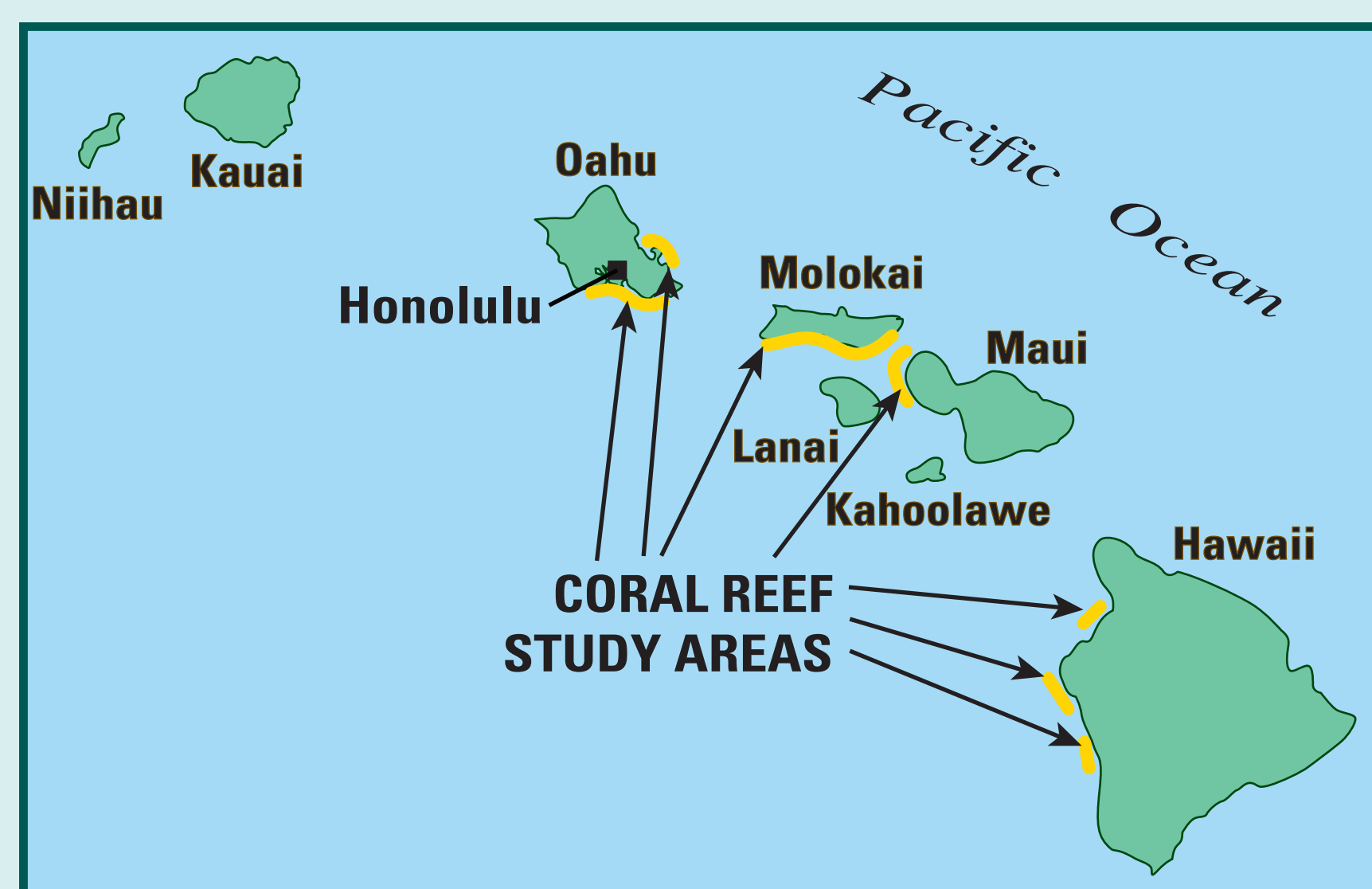


Healthy coral reef



Mud-damaged coral reef

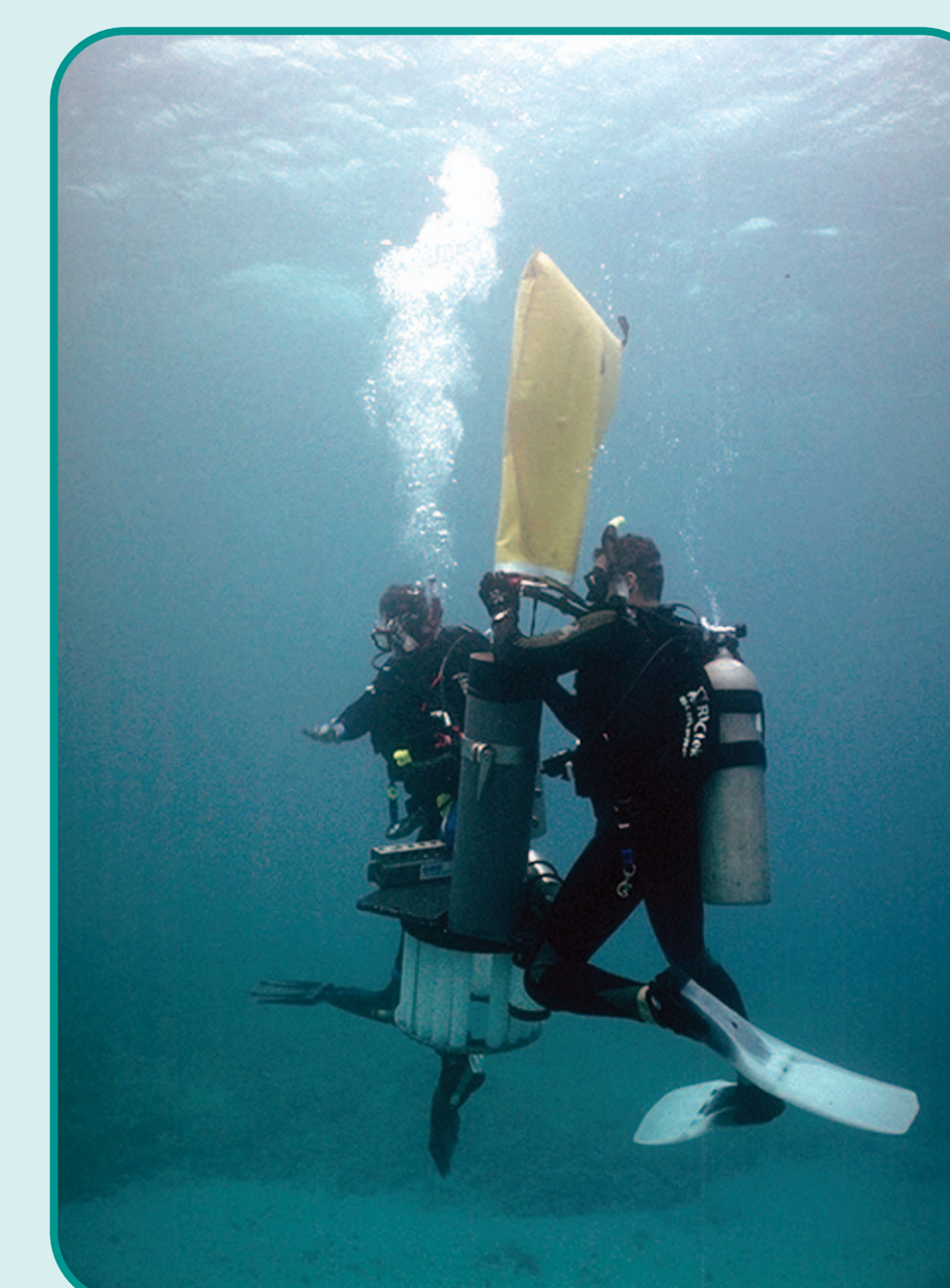
Healthy coral reefs provide homes for thousands of different plants and animals; storm protection for beaches and coastal communities; recreation for scuba divers and beachcombers; medicines for cancer and AIDS; and local jobs in tourism and fishing. If local land use managers reduce the mud washed offshore, coral reefs will stay healthier.



Hawaiian Islands

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Curt Storlazzi and Rick Rendigs installing underwater instrument

More information on the web: <http://walrus.wr.usgs.gov/posters>