

Improving Coordination and Accountability



GOAL: Increase communication, collaboration, and accountability in and among Task Force members.

Rationale for Action

Effective communication and collaboration are essential for successfully implementing the coral reef conservation efforts recommended in the *National Coral Reef Action Strategy* (NOAA 2002) and *National Action Plan To Conserve Coral Reefs* (USCRTF 2000). Because threats to

coral reef ecosystems frequently span a broad range of geographical and organizational jurisdictions, coordination across federal, state, and local governments and with nongovernmental organizations is essential for designing and implementing effective solutions.

Executive Order 13089 on Coral Reef Protection recognizes the value of

OBJECTIVES

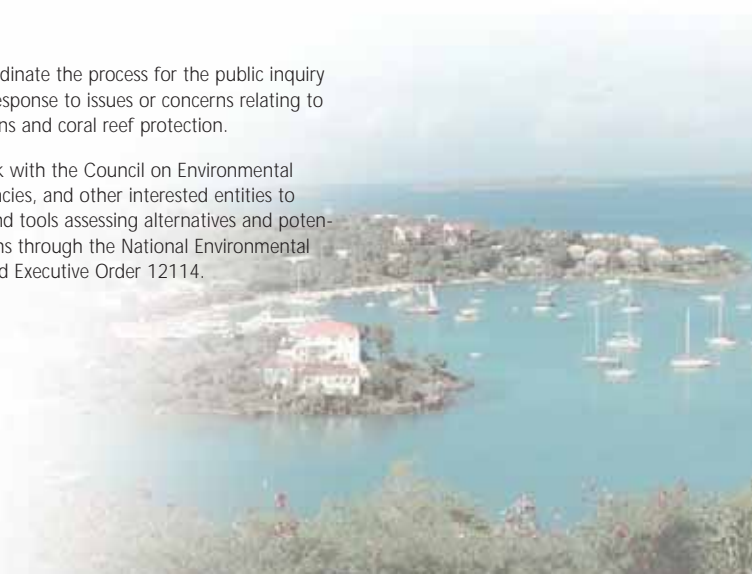
OBJECTIVE 1: Coordinate the submission of coral reef protection implementation plans, annual reports, and other documents by USCRTF member agencies.

OBJECTIVE 2: Coordinate planning and development of crosscutting initiatives; promote exchange of information on activities, needs, and concerns; and facilitate resolution of issues related to coral reef conservation.

OBJECTIVE 3: Coordinate the annual submission of agency reports of programs, policies, and actions.

OBJECTIVE 4: Coordinate the process for the public inquiry about and agency response to issues or concerns relating to federal agency actions and coral reef protection.

OBJECTIVE 5: Work with the Council on Environmental Quality, federal agencies, and other interested entities to develop guidance and tools assessing alternatives and potential impacts of actions through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Executive Order 12114.





U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meetings provide a forum for scientific information exchange and discussion.

coral reef ecosystems and directs U.S. government agencies to work independently “to ensure actions they authorize, fund, or carry out will not degrade the conditions of such ecosystems.” Federal agencies are also directed to work together through the USCRTF to collectively and strategically address the threats to coral reef ecosystems. Among its first actions to further enhance coordination, the USCRTF expanded its membership to include the governors of the seven states and territories with coral reefs. In 2002, the presidents of the Freely Associated States (the Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia) were included in the USCRTF as non-voting members.

Summary of Implementation

The USCRTF uses a variety of mechanisms, including the *National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs* and the *National Coral Reef Action Strategy*, to promote planning, priority setting, coordination, and partnership building. The Strategy, prepared by the USCRTF and NOAA, respectively, with input from federal agencies and state and territory partners, identifies the key threats to coral reef ecosystems, ranks high-priority threats in each region, sets objectives to address key threats, and creates implementation plans to attain the objectives.

The USCRTF provides several venues to promote coordination at the federal, regional, and state levels to support stewardship of coral reef resources. The USCRTF steering committee brings together representatives from each of the participating federal agencies, states, and territories to highlight new and existing opportunities for collaboration. USCRTF meetings are held twice a year and provide an opportunity for members to discuss key issues, propose new actions, present progress reports, and update the coral community on past accomplishments and future plans. The meetings provide a valuable venue for the exchange of information in which members can voice concerns and issues about their coral reef conservation efforts and collaborate to find more effective alternatives. Intergovernmental collaboration allows members to match resources with opportunities and to leverage funding and other resources for interagency efforts. Through these biannual meetings and working groups, the USCRTF provides opportunities for public input and inquiry about coral reef conservation efforts.

USCRTF members have passed multiple resolutions and launched a variety of initiatives to advance U.S. efforts to protect and sustain coral reef ecosystems. These initiatives have enhanced partnerships that

produce new information, tools, and actions to reduce threats to coral reefs. Most significant among these was the USCRTF's commitment to develop 3-year local action strategies (LASs) in each jurisdiction to address the major threats of overfishing, land-based sources of pollution, climate change, coral bleaching, disease, recreational overuse and misuse, and lack of public awareness. These bottom-up strategies have directly involved stakeholders in the development of state-level action plans to address these issues and are significantly:

- Improving coordination between federal and state/territory priorities;
- Raising the profile of coral reef issues and concerns in related projects (e.g., nonpoint source pollution, coastal zone management initiatives); and
- Strengthening national policy and support for coral reef conservation by updating national goals for reef management.

Highlights of Task Force Member Activities

OBJECTIVE 1: Coordinate the submission of coral reef protection implementation plans, annual reports, and other documents by USCRTF member agencies.

Biennial Report Identifies Monitoring Gaps

The second biennial *State of Coral Reef Ecosystems of the United States and Pacific Freely Associated States: 2004* details the current condition of reef ecosystems in seven states and territories, numerous remote islands under U.S. jurisdiction, and the

three Micronesian countries in free association with the United States. Written in collaboration with interagency working groups in each jurisdiction, the report describes the results of national monitoring efforts and helps decision-makers by identifying gaps in current monitoring activities. The report will be available online in 2005 at <http://www.coris.noaa.gov>.

OBJECTIVE 2: Coordinate planning and development of crosscutting initiatives; promote exchange of information on activities, needs, and concerns; and facilitate resolution of issues related to coral reef conservation.

States and Territories Develop Participatory LASs

Each of the seven states and territories with coral reefs has implemented a process of stakeholder meetings and workshops to develop LASs. These LASs are 3-year, locally driven roadmaps for collaborative and cooperative action among federal, state, territory, and nongovernmental partners that identify and implement priority actions needed to reduce key threats to valuable coral reef resources. Through extensive workshops, briefings, and public meetings involving a variety of different local interest groups, including the tourism industry, fishermen, and nongovernmental organizations, each jurisdiction developed strategies containing a variety of projects designed for implementation over a 3-year period (FY 2005–2007). These efforts were led by state management agencies with the assistance of federal partners, including NOAA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). Presently, most jurisdictions have final-draft 3-year LASs and began implementing first-year projects in 2004 (see table 7).

Expert Workshop Targets Responses to Climate Change

In 2002, the USCRTF passed two resolutions highlighting the impacts of climate change and coral bleaching on coral reefs. In response, NOAA, EPA, and DOI organized an expert workshop in June 2003 to explore collaborative approaches to better understand and address the threats to coral reefs associated with climate variability and change. More than 100 U.S. and international coral reef management and science representatives shared information on the science, modeling, monitoring, and management of coral bleaching and identified specific actions and new research priorities to help reduce impacts and increase the resiliency of these valuable ecosystems. As a result of the meeting, NOAA, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Nature Conservancy, and other partners are developing *A Coral Reef Manager's Guide to Coral Bleaching*.

Regional Technical Workshops Address Land-Based Sources of Pollution

Land-based sources of pollution are perhaps the biggest direct threat to coral reefs and addressing this threat is central to effective LASs. In 2003, EPA and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service hosted a workshop to further the development and implementation of LASs addressing land-based sources of pollution in the Pacific Islands. More than 100 managers and scientists participated; reviewed draft versions of their LASs for land-based sources of pollution in Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; and highlighted further development and implementation needs. In May 2004, NOAA, EPA, and USDA hosted a similar workshop to further the development and implementation of LASs addressing land-based sources of pollution in Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Table 7. Local Action Strategy (LAS) Completion Status by Jurisdiction

Information in this table represents LAS status as of October 2004.

LAS Threat Area	American Samoa	Northern Mariana Islands	Florida	Guam	Hawaii	Puerto Rico	U.S. Virgin Islands
Land pollution	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
Fishing	●	●	○ ^a	●	●	●	●
Recreational overuse		●		●	▲	●	●
Lack of awareness		●	○	●	●	●	●
Climate change	●						
Disease							
Other	● ^b		○ ^c		● ^d		

● Final document available. ○ Development phase complete; final document available in 2005. ▲ Development in progress.

^a Strategy addresses fishing, diving, and other uses.

^b Strategy addresses population density.

^c Strategy addresses maritime industry and coastal construction impacts.

^d Strategy addresses invasive species.

OBJECTIVE 3: Coordinate the annual submission of agency reports of programs, policies, and actions.

Mapping Plans Keep Public and Decisionmakers Abreast of Progress and Needs

The USCRTF’s Mapping and Information Synthesis Working Group developed several regional mapping implementation plans—used to identify high-priority mapping sites—and status reports in collaboration with federal, state, and local stakeholders.

For instance, the *Status of Coral Reef Ecosystem Mapping Activities* (August 2003) outlines activities conducted by NOAA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the U.S. Geological Survey and, where applicable, describes how the resulting data were applied.



Regional U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meetings provide a venue to highlight accomplishments and challenges for coral reef ecosystem conservation in the jurisdictions.

OBJECTIVE 4: Coordinate the process for the public inquiry about and agency response to issues or concerns relating to federal agency actions and coral reef protection.

Website Source of Information and Exchange

The USCRTF website (<http://www.coralreef.gov/index.cfm>) provides the public with an opportunity to learn about the USCRTF and its coral reef conservation efforts. Users who submit comments and inquiries receive responses from USCRTF representatives.

Public Participation Critical to USCRTF Success

In 2003, the USCRTF passed a resolution emphasizing the important role of public participation in its efforts. The resolution recognized that it is vital to

make the public aware of and involve them in coral reef protection and preservation to ensure the long-term survival of coral reefs. As a result, the USCRTF established a mechanism for responding to concerns raised in public-comment sessions at USCRTF meetings. While the USCRTF receives many requests for general information, there have been fewer than five formal petitions to the USCRTF questioning the consistency of federal action with the Executive Order Policy (Section 2) to “ensure that any actions they authorize, fund, or carry out will not degrade the conditions of such ecosystems.”

OBJECTIVE 5: Work with the Council on Environmental Quality, federal agencies, and other interested entities to develop guidance and tools assessing alternatives and potential impacts of actions through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Executive Order 12114.

Interagency Team Established on Impacts to Palau Reefs

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers led an inter-agency National Environmental Policy Act Cooperating Agency Team that provided environmental oversight of the Palau Compact Road project



U.S. Coral Reef Task Force member agencies, for example, the National Park Service and NOAA, collaborate and share resources on many initiatives to better understand and conserve our coral reef ecosystems.

to reduce project-related impacts on coral reefs. This project is being built under a treaty between Palau and the United States and is the largest project ever undertaken in Micronesia. The Team, including NOAA, DOI, and EPA, developed the Federal Environmental Impact Statement for the project and is now involved in the environmental oversight of the actual construction. Two large protected areas have been designated as compensatory mitigation for the project, including a 30,000-acre (121-km²) marine protected area (Ngaremeduu Conservation Area).

Future Challenges

The USCRTF has brought federal, state, and local agencies together to address the threats facing coral reef ecosystems. By leveraging funds and resources, exchanging ideas, and seizing opportunities, the USCRTF has raised awareness of coral reef conservation issues and, through the combined efforts of its members, spearheaded U.S. efforts to protect, restore, and sustain the Nation's valuable coral reef ecosystems. However, a number of challenges remain regarding increased coordination and effectiveness, including the following:

Implement LASs. States and territories have drafted their LASs and prioritized certain needs, but implementation requires commitment from USCRTF members and other organizations. LAS implementation also requires funding and capacity building at the local level. States and territories need to work closely with federal government and nongovernmental partners to ensure high-priority needs are met.

Coordinate funding requests at the federal level. At present, no effort to coordinate budget planning across federal agencies exists to ensure agencies leverage their budgets and collectively address high-priority state and territory needs. Developing interagency budget requests could improve agency planning efforts by highlighting joint priorities, goals, performance indicators, and implementation plans.

Improve planning and performance tracking. While USCRTF members have conducted a wide range of conservation activities, no centralized system exists to assist in planning, track progress, and report accomplishments. In addition, no standardized set of performance measures exists to ensure federal, state, and local agencies identically measure their levels of success. The USCRTF is examining development of a centralized database to achieve these goals, but is still considering the manner in which to proceed.

Increase opportunities for agency and nongovernmental participation. The USCRTF has sought input on how best to engage organizations and the public in USCRTF efforts and coral reef conservation activities. The USCRTF is committed to continuing and expanding engagement in these activities. In addition, while most federal agencies have been active in conservation efforts, participation could be improved by more active involvement of several important agencies.