



NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program Fiscal Year 2007 Accomplishments

In fiscal year (FY) 2007, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) received just over \$27 million to support activities to conserve, manage, and understand coral reef ecosystems in the U.S. and around the world. The funding allowed NOAA to implement over 150 projects within the agency, fund three coral reef research institutes, and provide just over \$6.4 million in grants for additional projects. Below are just a few of the many accomplishments of the NOAA CRCP and its partners in FY2007.

NOAA CRCP Convenes an Expert Panel to Conduct a Five-Year External Program Review. As the culmination of months of planning by NOAA's CRCP, a seven-member panel of distinguished experts came together in September. The panel meeting included presentations from the CRCP and input from a variety of CRCP customers and stakeholders. The panel is charged with assessing CRCP effectiveness over a five-year period (FY2002-2006). The CRCP provided the panel with a comprehensive "self-assessment" of activities, outputs, impacts and challenges during FY2002-2006. The panel will provide its findings and recommendations in a final report in November; the report will be used to help guide CRCP planning for FY2009-2013.

Administration Releases Proposal for Reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act. On May 8, the Department of Commerce transmitted to Congress an Administration proposal, the Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendments Act of 2007 (CRECAA), which strengthens the protection and restoration of our nation's coral reefs by providing expanded authorities to the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior. The proposed legislation, which reauthorizes the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, directs NOAA's CRCP to address emerging issues such as coral bleaching, disease, and climate change. The proposal also provides the authority to seek damages from those responsible for physical damage to coral reefs from such causes as vessel groundings, anchors, towlines, and lost cargo. The proposal mandates that the recovered damages be used to fund coral reef restoration. As of late October 2007, the House of Representatives passed HR 1205 and the Senate Commerce Committee is working to refer S 1580 to the Senate floor for a vote. Both incorporate some features of the CRECAA.

NOAA Releases First Agency-wide Coral Reef Ecosystem Research Plan. NOAA's first agency-wide coral reef ecosystem research plan was released on March 1 by NOAA's CRCP. The document, entitled *NOAA Coral Reef Ecosystem Research Plan for Fiscal Years 2007 to 2011* is designed to guide priority-setting for coral reef ecosystem research through FY2011. The Coral Reef Research Plan provides coastal and ocean managers, scientists, and policy makers with an up-to-date scientific assessment of the threats facing coral reef ecosystems, and identifies priority research needed to advance management action. Covering all coral reef ecosystems under the jurisdiction of the U.S. and Pacific Freely Associated States, the plan provides a national perspective on the research needed to address the range of stresses affecting the health of coral reef ecosystems, summarizes the management and other issues that will drive research at the regional level, and focuses on the use of research to guide effective implementation of ecosystem-based management strategies.

First Status Report Issued on U.S. Coral Reef Protected Areas. On March 1, the first-ever inventory and assessment of U.S. marine protected areas (MPAs) managed by State and Territory governments was released by NOAA's CRCP, as called for by the National Action Plan of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. The publication, *Report on the Status of Marine Protected Areas in Coral Reef Ecosystems of the United States Volume 1: Marine Protected Areas Managed by U.S.*



The CRCP released the first two documents in its new technical memorandum series.

States, Territories, and Commonwealths, was funded by the CRCP and coordinated by the Coastal Programs Division, both housed in NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. The report utilizes data collected in the National Marine Managed Inventory as well as the expertise of NOAA and state and territory co-authors to explore the management status of 207 MPAs located across the seven U.S. jurisdictions containing coral reefs. The report also identifies major challenges to effective MPA management and offers a series of recommendations both at the national and local levels to improve MPA success.

NOAA and USDA Pilot New Partnership to Address Land-Based Impacts to Coral Reefs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and NOAA's CRCP partnered to launch a new Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), located in the Jobos Bay Watershed in Puerto Rico. CEAP is an effort by the USDA to quantify environmental effects and benefits of conservation practices, highlighting interactions between upland and coastal ecosystems. This project established a CEAP Special Emphasis Watershed (SEW) co-located at the Jobos Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Puerto Rico. SEWs are strategically located watersheds with ongoing research and demonstration activities addressing specific resource concerns such as water quality. The Jobos Bay project will be the first SEW in the tropics, and initiates a collaborative partnership between USDA and NOAA to address natural resource issues in the coastal environments of U.S. coral reef areas.



A bleaching tools workshop participant conducts a resilience survey of an American Samoan reef. Credit: NOAA Coral Reef Watch

NOAA and GBRMPA Develop Training Program to Help Managers Address Coral Bleaching. NOAA's CRCP and Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) have developed a four-day "Bleaching Tools Workshop" for an intensive hands-on training on the recently published *Reef Manager's Guide to Coral Bleaching* (Guide). The workshop is designed for marine park managers, reserve managers, coral scientists, and other interested stakeholders involved in coral reef monitoring and bleaching response. The training includes formal instruction on the Guide, hands-on experience with satellite tools, practice in the field, and informal discussion to exchange ideas and foster collaborations that help increase managerial capacity to manage coastal resources. The first two workshops were conducted this summer: the first in Australia with participants from five nations, and the second in American Samoa with participants from the U.S. Pacific Islands and Fiji.

NOAA Awards \$9 Million in Coral Reef Conservation Grants. In FY2007, NOAA's CRCP awarded almost \$9 million in grants to external partners in support of coral reef research, education, management, and conservation. Representing over 34 percent of the CRCP budget for FY2007, these awards reflect NOAA's strong support for cooperative partnerships and conservation efforts outside the agency. Funds supported a range of activities, from community conservation projects to large-scale coral reef observation systems, and included support for three coral reef research institutes – one each in Hawai'i, Florida and Puerto Rico. Grants were awarded through both NOAA's six category Coral Reef Conservation Grants Program and the jointly managed NOAA-National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Coral Reef Conservation Fund. To date, this fund has awarded \$19 million in federal and non-federal matching funds to support over 190 on-the-ground coral reef conservation projects in 35 countries.

NOAA Assumes Coordination of the Global Socioeconomic Monitoring Initiative. The Global Socioeconomic Monitoring Initiative (SocMon) facilitates community-based monitoring of coastal areas, increasing coastal managers' capacity to assess and manage the human communities that use and depend on coastal resources. In FY2007, NOAA's CRCP began coordinating the program, which is currently active in six global regions with over 30 active sites. NOAA's leadership facilitated the first two domestic applications of the SocMon protocols through trainings held in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and Puerto Rico. The workshop for the USVI Coastal Zone Management Program, held in cooperation with The Ocean Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and USVI government, trained local resource managers in socioeconomic monitoring methodologies. A similar workshop was held in Puerto Rico, where 30 protected area managers were trained in the SocMon methodology. On the international front, SocMon continued to expand its geographic scope and depth of coverage, training regional trainers and monitors from nine countries. All of these efforts further the goal of improving and expanding socioeconomic monitoring of coral reef areas in terms of site coverage, use of standardized comparative methods, and developing a global picture of the social health of coral reef areas.