



**Meeting Highlights**  
**U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting**  
**Washington DC**  
**February 2009**

Additional meeting materials (agendas, presentations, etc.) are available on the Task Force web site ([www.coralreef.gov](http://www.coralreef.gov)). For more information contact Sarah Bobbe ([Sarah\\_Bobbe@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Sarah_Bobbe@ios.doi.gov)) or Beth Dieveney ([beth.dieveney@noaa.gov](mailto:beth.dieveney@noaa.gov)).

**General Summary**

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) held a public meeting in Washington D.C., February 25, 2009 with associated events taking place throughout the week. The main goal of the meeting was to engage the new administration leadership in the USCRTF and enhance action and partnerships for coral reef conservation. The meeting also provided an opportunity for USCRTF Member Governors to share recent accomplishments, existing challenges, and needs in addressing coral reef research and conservation issues locally and to provide their perspective of the USCRTF; its value and their vision for how the USCRTF and its members can work to meet the challenges facing coral reefs and local communities.

Highlights of the week include:

- Three USCRTF **Governor Members** provided remarks to the USCRTF, sharing their vision for more effective partnership and action.
- Senior leadership from the Obama Administration addressed meeting attendees, including Secretary Ken Salazar, U.S. Department of the Interior; and Chairwoman Nancy Sutley, The White House Council on Environmental Quality.
- **Dr. Richard Aronson** provided a **Keynote** on “Setting Priorities for Coral Reefs”
- The USCRTF heard **public comment** from eight individuals and organizations.
- Three USCRTF working groups, **Education and Outreach**, **Climate Change**, and **Injury Response and Enforcement**, held working sessions.
- The USCRTF Federal members hosted a **Watershed Forum** on promoting better collaboration in coral reef jurisdiction priority watersheds

**Governor Remarks**

Governor Togiola Tulafono of American Samoa, Governor Felix Camacho of Guam, and Governor Benigno Fitial of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands shared with the USCRTF each of their jurisdictions unique opportunities and challenges for coral reef conservation. In addition, they shared their perspective and vision for how the USCRTF and its members can better work to meet the challenges facing coral reefs and local communities.

*Governor Togiola* expressed the importance for the USCRTF to renew its determination, enthusiasm, and urgency in addressing the threats facing coral reefs and the communities dependent upon them.

*Governor Camacho* recognized the value the USCRTF can provide in developing and implementing comprehensive and holistic approaches to coral reef conservation and management.

*Governor Fitial* highlighted the important role that community engagement and public awareness play in our efforts to promote an ethic of conservation for our marine and coastal resources.

### **DOI Secretary Remarks**

Ken Salazar, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, shared with the USCRTF the Obama Administration's commitment to quick action on global warming—a key threat to coral reefs. Secretary Salazar, as head of the nation's principal conservation agency, expressed his focus on promoting clean energy, community service programs, and an ethic of preserving natural treasures. All of which, he noted add up to good news for coral reef conservation. The Secretary expressed support for the service of the USCRTF, which he noted was started by President Clinton and continued to work under President Bush. He extended particular appreciation to the governors of U.S. territories, which contain world-class coral reefs.

### **Council on Environmental Quality Chairman Remarks**

Nancy Sutley, the new chair of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, stressed the Administration's commitment to addressing global warming and promoting ocean conservation in general and protection of coral reefs in particular. Chairwoman Sutley highlighted the importance of strong partnerships, particularly to address international environmental issues, and highlighted the work of the USCRTF as a model for such partnership action and demonstrated progress toward achieving a common goal. She praised the Local Action Strategies as a model that can connect expertise and resources to effectively target local issues. Chairwoman Sutley left the USCRTF with a challenge to consider new and innovative ways for addressing the threats impacting coral reef ecosystems.

### **Keynote: Setting Priorities for Coral Reef Conservation – Dr. Richard Aronson**

Dr. Richard Aronson, Department Head of Biological Sciences at the Florida Institute of Technology and President of the International Society for Reef Studies, gave the keynote address. He highlighted current trends in coral reef research and the need for science to be available and accessible to managers and policy-makers who will set the course for coral reef conservation. He cited some recent investigations of coral versus algal dominated systems to show how various scenarios can result in different outcomes depending on management action. He expressed the need for better communication and translation of science for managers and decision-makers. In response to the question regarding how much time is left for us to act, Dr. Aronson responded that we have a window of opportunity but that it is closing.

### **USCRTF Member Announcements**

- **Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** – Acting Administrator, Mary Glackin, announced the pending availability of funds for coastal habitat restoration projects under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The effort is designed to create resilient and healthy American communities by

generating and saving jobs, employing several thousand people, and restoring valuable coastal and marine habitat.

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture** – Acting USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief, Dave White, provided information on resources available through the 2009 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill provides \$2 billion per year for conservation efforts and includes increased provision for cost-sharing abilities with USDA and other partners. Additionally, the Conservation Innovative Grants program, the purpose of which is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production, provides up to \$5 million for the Natural Resource Concerns category, \$6 million dollars for the Technology Category, and \$4 million for the Grant Leveraging Category. While there are no corals in the Chesapeake Bay, there is also \$5 million available for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Category. NRCS stands ready to assist the coral reef jurisdictions. Please note that grant proposals are due March by 20, 2009. For more information on the CIG categories and proposals, please go to: [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/pdf\\_files/Fiscal\\_Year\\_2009\\_Announcement\\_for\\_Program\\_Funding.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/pdf_files/Fiscal_Year_2009_Announcement_for_Program_Funding.pdf)
- **Department of Justice** – Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resource Division, Eileen Sobock, announced the successful arraignment of an individual on charges of smuggling protected coral into the United States. This is a significant case in addressing the impacts of this type of criminal activity, which have a significant impact on the dwindling coral reefs, globally.
- **U.S. Agency for International Development** – James Hester, Director of the Office of Natural Resources Management, informed the Task Force that the U.S. had made a strong commitment of support to the Coral Triangle Initiative, a new multilateral partnership to safeguard the region's extraordinary marine and coastal resources. The objectives of the Initiative are to promote food security through improved fisheries management and adaptation to climate change. Six countries are in the Initiative -Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and East Timor. The U.S., Australia, large multilateral donors, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have committed to working with the Coral Triangle countries to improve conservation and management of these critical marine and coastal resources.
- **Department of State** – Acting Director, Office of Ecology and Natural Resource Conservation, Christine Dawson, shared information regarding the U.S. support for the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), which assists islands in sustainably conserving and utilizing their natural resources. GLISPA could serve as a resource and network for our jurisdiction and other international partners.

### **Public Comment**

Public comment was provided by the following nine individuals and organizations:

- Judith Lang, Sierra Club
- Richard Dodge, National Coral Reef Initiative
- Brian Huse, Coral Reef Alliance
- Jenny Miller-Garmendia, Project Aware Foundation
- Mary Ann Lucking, CORALations
- Cara Cooper, Environmental Defense Fund
- Richard Appeldoorn, Caribbean Coral Reef Institute
- Emily Woglom, The Nature Conservancy

Advance public comment was received from the following four individuals and organizations:

- Dan and Stephannie Clark, Cry of the Water
- Thomas Goreau, Global Coral Reef Alliance
- William Torode, Greater Ft. Lauderdale Dive Association
- Ed Tichenor, Palm Beach County Reef Rescue

### **Highlights of Associated Meetings**

#### USCRTF Federal Agency Watershed Forum

This forum provided an opportunity for Federal Agency representatives to share information on current watershed management activities in the Caribbean and Pacific. The discussion focused on how cooperating Federal agencies can build, coordinate and collaborate with each other in areas of mutual geographic interest or through programmatic activities. Broadly, the discussion focused on how agencies can implement meaningful action, show success, and transfer such action across and between jurisdictions. Participating agencies included Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of the Interior's U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In addition partners from the Center for Watershed Protection and the Horsley Whitten Group were invited to share their particular technical expertise. Future plans include hosting similar meetings with jurisdiction partners in the Pacific and Atlantic/Caribbean regions and identifying particular projects for near-term partnership and action.

#### Education and Outreach Working Group

The Education and Outreach (E&O) working group held a conference call to discuss the value of its work, consider how they could be more effective, and develop recommendations to the USCRTF related to education, outreach, and communication concerns. The working group recognizes that one of its most valuable aspects is the breadth of participation, which ranges from state, territory, and commonwealth to the national and international levels of governments and NGOs; and in geographic scope that includes coral reef areas in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific. The issues and challenges identified include the need for: education of the public about the value of coral reef ecosystems and how they contribute to the local economy, and on-going education of city and county officials, management plans in many regions, and increased funding. The working group also specifically noted that there is a gap between public comment made at the USCRTF business meetings and official USCRTF response and communication.

The E&O working group members expressed their individual commitment to help implement the agenda of the group through volunteering for, and completing tasks and to collectively take advantage of the large membership to more actively lead national communications and outreach campaigning efforts.

#### Climate Change Working Group

The Climate Change Working Group met and discussed next steps. These include exploring options for improving communication amongst the Federal agencies and jurisdictions concerning

current and future projects pertaining to climate change with the goal of better coordination, partnerships, and leveraging; a discussion on how to promote a higher profile for coral reef research in the next Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) process; and to compile a list of priority research topics needed for identifying successful adaptive management techniques.

#### Injury Response Tools Working Group

The Injury Response Tools (IRT) Working Group discussed current issues and needs within the jurisdictions in responding to and conducting restoration for coral injury events. There is a general consensus that the jurisdictions would appreciate federal assistance with these events. The working group also agreed that increasing awareness and raising visibility of this threat to coral reefs is a need and a project that this working group should take on. Potential next steps include holding a panel at Capitol Hill Oceans Week, compiling guidelines on vessel removal for responders to minimize impacts to reefs, and holding a workshop. Leadership of this working group was passed to Tom Moore and Matt Parry, both from the NOAA Restoration Center, as the new co-chairs. Tom Moore is based in Florida and Matt is based in Hawaii and both are heavily involved in responding to coral injury events. Additionally, the IRT Working Group will merge with the Enforcement Working Group as the concerns and issues of both groups have a fair amount of overlap.

The **U.S. Coral Reef Task Force** was established in 1998 to lead U.S. efforts to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems. It includes leaders of 12 Federal agencies, seven U.S. States, Territories, Commonwealths, and three Freely Associated States.