

## **The Nature Conservancy Comments for the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting 2-25-2009**

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to provide public comment during the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

The Nature Conservancy is an international non profit organization dedicated to the conservation of biological diversity. With over 150 marine conservation practitioners and more than 100 marine conservation projects in 31 countries, we endeavor to turn the tide of ocean degradation by working with partners around the world to create lasting conservation results that benefit marine life, local communities, and economies.

Over the years we have strongly valued our partnerships with Task Force members. Together we have worked to use science-based ecosystem approaches to coral reef conservation; develop effectiveness measures and employ adaptive management approaches; incorporate the human dimensions into ecosystem management; use spatial management such as resilient marine protected area (MPA) networks in order to protect and replenish coral reef ecosystems; provide global leadership to reduce global threats such as climate change; and develop and support strong domestic and international partnerships.

We applaud the Task Force's efforts to protect, restore and sustainably use coral reef ecosystems through promoting interagency and intergovernmental collaboration, and providing high-level leadership. As the leadership changes in many of the Task Force member agencies, The Nature Conservancy strongly supports the continuation of these efforts and the Task Force's strong leadership and coordination role. This leadership is vitally important as we struggle to address increasing threats to coral reef ecosystems, such as land-based sources of pollution and overfishing, and to understand the new threats associated with a changing climate and ocean acidification.

States, territories, non-governmental partners, and others are developing strategies and tools that can make a difference to stem the decline in the health of coral reef resources. For example, the Conservancy is working with partners in Florida to develop a reef resilience monitoring protocol which will be applied throughout the Caribbean as marine managers work to address factors that exacerbate the risk of bleaching. In addition, we, along with several members of the Task Force, support the five jurisdictions in the Micronesia Challenge in many ways, including the development and implementation of sustainable finance plans for coral reef conservation. Continued high-level leadership provided by the Task Force will support the necessary partnerships and on-the ground action to protect and conserve these important resources.

Given the linked nature of coral reef ecosystems around the world, the Conservancy appreciates the United States playing a leadership role internationally through the efforts of the Task Force. Support for ecosystem-based adaptation responses to protect coral reef ecosystems and coastal communities from the impacts of climate change will be of particular importance as the world prepares for a post-Kyoto agreement.

The Nature Conservancy is an active partner on the Micronesia, and Caribbean Challenges and Coral Triangle Initiative. The United States has already made commitments to each of these ambitious actions that bring together broad coalitions of partners. We encourage the Task Force to identify ways to continue to support these international efforts.

We also ask the Task Force members to support the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA). The proposed new protections for coral reefs ecosystems throughout US waters, and additional support for international coral work will significantly advance the conservation of coral reefs and benefit the local communities who depend on these resources. With the publication of its new Roadmap for the Future, the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program is poised to build off past successes and advance coral reef efforts according to three strategic priorities: land-based sources of pollution; overfishing; and climate change. We strongly support these priorities and this renewed strategic focus. A reauthorized CRCA will authorize new funding for this program and enable successful implementation of the detailed workplans now under development.

Finally, we note that the deep sea coral provisions in the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Steven Fishery Conservation and Management Act provided new authorities that will allow the U.S. to understand and address the full range of coral reef ecosystems. We encourage the Task Force to support research, protection, and conservation for these deep water ecosystems.