

# Take the Initiative: Enjoy and Protect Our Coral Reefs

For more information on how you can protect southeast Florida's reefs, mooring buoy locations, detailed coral and fisheries regulations, the Florida Coral Reef Protection Act, and the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative; or, how to report coral reef injuries, marine debris, invasive species sightings, and marine ecosystem disturbance events, visit [www.southeastfloridareefs.net](http://www.southeastfloridareefs.net), email [coral@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:coral@dep.state.fl.us), or call 866-770-SEFL (7335).

WWW.SOUTHEASTFLORIDAREEFS.NET

## Our Coral Reefs

Did you know that the third longest coral reef ecosystem in the world lies just offshore? The Florida Reef Tract spans more than 350 miles and five counties from the Dry Tortugas in Monroe County to the St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County. The coral reefs off mainland southeast Florida comprise the northern third of the Florida Reef Tract, spanning 105 miles from the northern border of Biscayne National Park in Miami-Dade County to the St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County.

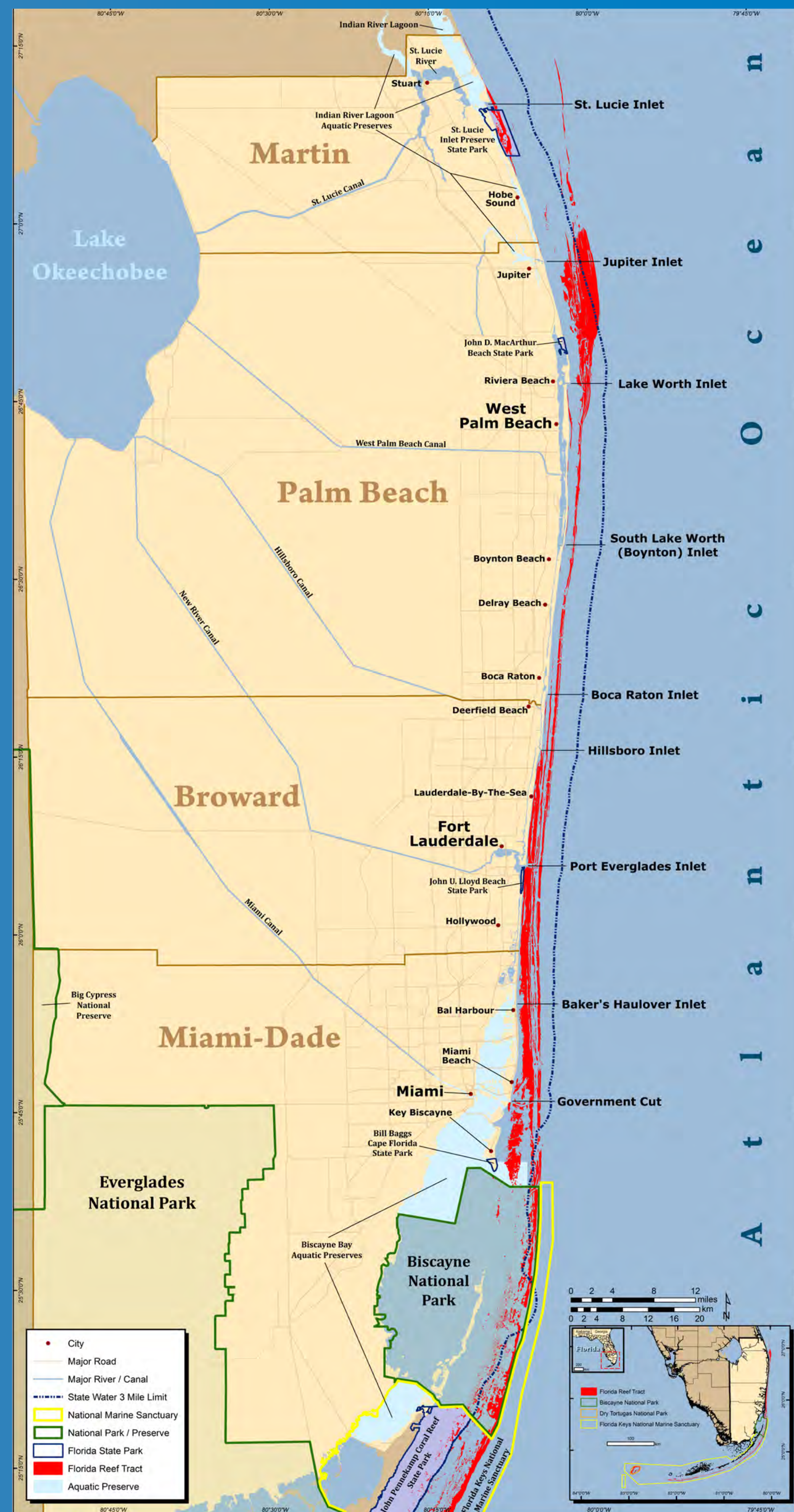
Florida's coral reefs provide habitat for over 6,000 marine species and sustain south Florida's tourism, fisheries, and recreation, generating more than 71,000 jobs and \$6.3 billion dollars in annual sales and income. Coral reefs protect coastal communities from storms and hurricanes, and they contribute to beach stabilization which helps maintain southeast Florida's famous beaches.



## Legal Protection

All hard corals within Florida waters are protected from illegal take, destruction, sale, or possession under the Florida Administrative Code, and from vessel groundings and anchor-related injuries under the Florida Coral Reef Protection Act. Additionally, pillar coral (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*), is listed as an endangered species by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; and elkhorn (*Acropora palmata*) and staghorn (*Acropora cervicornis*) corals are threatened species protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

## Coral Reefs of Southeast Florida



## What You Can Do To Protect Coral Reefs

The oldest known living coral off southeast Florida is a great star coral (*Montastraea faveolata*<sup>1</sup>) that has been dated back to 1693 and is the size of a small truck. Corals take decades and often centuries to grow, but fragile coral polyps can be damaged or destroyed in an instant.

### When Boating:

- DO NOT ANCHOR ON THE REEFS OR SEAGRASSES! Use mooring buoys<sup>2</sup> or anchor in the sand to avoid penalties for illegally damaging coral reef resources.
- Use current nautical charts and fish/depth finders to locate reefs and avoid anchoring on reefs.
- Obey marine disposal regulations and use marine pump-out stations.
- Never discharge wastewater or dispose of debris in the water.

### When Diving or Snorkeling:

- Maintain proper buoyancy control<sup>3</sup> throughout your dive; grasping the reef with your hands or kicking it with your feet can damage fragile corals.
- Be aware of your body, fins, and equipment placement.

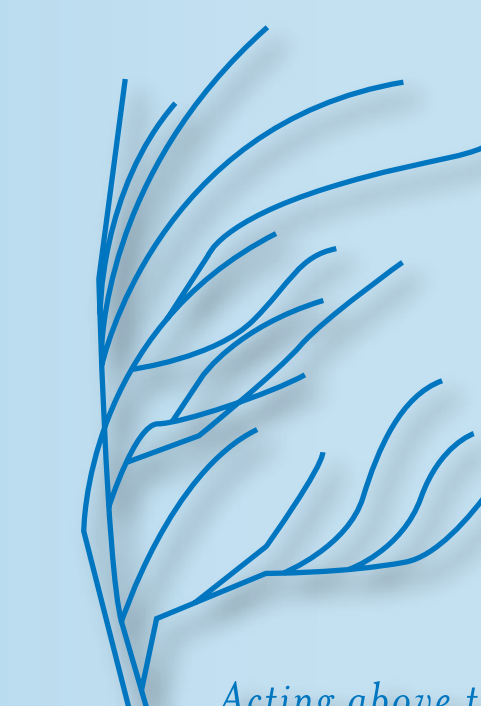
### When Fishing:

- Maintain proper licensing, learn to identify fish species, obey current regulations, and take only what you need.
- Retrieve your fishing gear and recycle monofilament line<sup>4</sup>. Anything thrown overboard can injure or kill marine animals.

### At Home, School and Work:

- Properly dispose of garbage and recyclable items<sup>5</sup>.
- Fertilize minimally and irrigate efficiently to keep phosphorus, nitrogen and other pollutants from entering waterways.
- Dispose of household chemicals, antifreeze, used motor oil, and old batteries at a household chemical collection center.
- Use sustainable seafood guides when eating out or purchasing seafood.

Tell your family and friends about our coral reefs and what everyone can do to protect them.



Southeast Florida  
Coral Reef  
Initiative

Acting above to protect what's below.

