

FLORIDA'S CORAL REEF PROTECTION ACT



Photos by Dave Gilliam, Ph.D and Jennifer Podis

Spanning 358 miles from the Dry Tortugas to the St. Lucie Inlet, the Florida Reef Tract is one of the greatest natural resources in the United States. Florida's reefs provide habitat for marine species, protect South Florida's shorelines from tropical storms and hurricanes, and sustain Florida's fisheries, famous beaches, tourism and recreation.

Threats to Coral Reef Health

- » The Florida Reef Tract is susceptible to a range of threats, including but not limited to direct injuries caused by vessels grounding and anchoring on the coral reefs.
- » Direct damage from large vessel groundings and anchor or cable drags can cause immediate and long-term injuries to coral reefs. Small vessels that anchor on corals cause widespread cumulative damages.
- » Vessel hulls, anchors, propellers and cables can fracture and crush coral reef framework and dislodge corals, sponges and other marine animals and plants.

How You Can Protect Reefs

- » Avoid anchoring on coral reefs; use mooring buoys instead. Mooring buoys are located off the coasts of Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin counties. [Mooring buoy locations](#) can be found online.
- » When anchoring near reefs, anchor in the sand beyond the edge of the reef or in a sand patch and make sure that the anchor will remain in the sand.
- » Use the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Coral Reef Conservation Program map on the ESRI ArcGIS mobile app to find a sandy spot for anchoring. The free app uses GPS to show a vessel's live position and distinguishes between sand and reef. [Download the app](#) from your app store, and search for the "Southeast Florida Coral Reef Locator" map.
- » [Report reef damage](#) to the Southeast Florida Action Network (SEAFAN) online or call 866-770-7335 or emergency grounding hotline at 786-385-3054.

FAST FACTS

- The Florida Reef Tract spans 358 miles
- Florida's Coral Reef Protection Act (CRPA) was enacted in July 2009
- The CRPA makes it illegal to anchor on or otherwise damage coral reefs in Florida
- The CRPA authorizes DEP to pursue fines and compensation for coral reef damages

Reef Map Mobile App Instructions:

VIEW SOUTHEAST FLORIDA'S REEFS ON YOUR MOBILE DEVICE

1. Download the free Esri ArcGIS mobile app on your smartphone or tablet from an app store.
2. Search for the map by tapping the search icon  and typing **Southeast Florida Coral Reef Locator**.
3. Tap the **Southeast Florida Coral Reef Locator** map to view.
4. To show your location on the map, tap the compass icon.  A blue dot depicting your location should appear on the map.



continued

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In 2009, the Florida Legislature passed the Coral Reef Protection Act to increase protection of coral reef resources off the coasts of Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin counties.

Act Authorizations

- » Florida's Coral Reef Protection Act (CRPA) authorizes DEP as the state's lead trustee for coral reef resources, to protect coral reefs through assessment and recovery of damages resulting from vessel impacts to coral reefs.
- » DEP can delegate reef protection authority to other state or local government agencies.
- » The CRPA allows DEP to fine those who damage coral reefs.

Damage Recovery for Restoration

Those who damage coral reefs may be subject to fines and compensation for damages.

» Compensation

- Cost of replacing, restoring or acquiring the equivalent value of the injured coral reef, including the value of the lost use and ecological services of the injured coral reef.
- Cost of damage assessments.
- Cost of actions taken to minimize or prevent further injury to the coral reef.
- Cost of monitoring an injured, restored or replaced coral reef for at least 10 years depending on the injury size.
- Cost of enforcement actions taken in response to coral reef damage, including court costs, attorney fees and expert witness fees.

» Fines

- Less than or equal to 1 square meter of coral reef damage: \$225 per square meter.
- More than 1 square meter and up to 10 square meters: \$450 per square meter.
- More than 10 square meters: \$1,500 per square meter.
- Penalties may be increased for incidents occurring within a state park or aquatic preserve, repeat violations, or for other aggravating circumstances.

Guidelines for Vessel Operators

- » Notify DEP within 24 hours if your vessel has run aground, struck or otherwise damaged a coral reef.
- » Remove the anchor or grounded vessel within 72 hours after the initial incident if it is safe to do so *and* if the U.S. Coast Guard approves. Discuss removal plans with DEP and make sure removal does not further damage coral reefs.
- » Cooperate with DEP to assess damage and restore the injured coral reef.

For more information, visit:

[Coral Reef Conservation Program
Reef Injury Prevention and Response](#)

[Florida Coral Reef Protection Act Statute](#)

[Reef Injury Prevention and Response
Coral Reef Protection Act](#)

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