



Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Team Meeting

Thursday, February 19, 2026
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

In-Person Meeting at Fern Forest Park: 201 Lyons Rd, Coconut Creek, FL 33063

Meeting Objectives:

- Projects updates for Fishing, Diving and Other Uses ([FDOU](#)) 51
- Update on the National Coral Reef Monitoring Program ([NCRMP](#)) Schedule & Benthic Data
- Overview of Florida's Coral Reef Resilience Program ([FCRRP](#))
- Update on the Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve ([KJCAP](#)) Management Plan Progress
- Discussion of the past 4-Year Term and Vice Chair Panel
- Reminder of [SEFCRI](#) Recommitment and Application Process & Thank You

Attendees:

Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Staff: Allie Shatters, Mollie Cordo, Taylor Tucker, Lara Bracci, Maya Bhalla-Ladd, Stephanie Stinson, Mo Morrow, Megan Miller, Kimberly Platt, Elena Kampian, Amanda Lewan

SEFCRI Team Members: Alastair Harborne, Lisa Carroll, Nick Morrell, Shana Phelan, Abigail Davis, Gary Jennings, Patrick Bennett, Angela Delaney, Jennifer Baez, Katelyn Armstrong, Sara Thanner, Jessica Ganim, Valerie Tovar, Casey Coy, Christie Hurley, Amanda Montgomery, April Price, Troy Craig, William Boudreau, Kirk Kilfoyle

SEFCRI Team Alternates: Bernard Riegl, Jessica Price, Jessica Garland, Jena McNeal, David Moss, Lindsay Humbles, Dan Clark, Katie Steinhoff

TAC Team Members: Brian Walker, Dana Wusinich-Mendez, Dave Gilliam, Jack Stamates, Josh Voss, Xaymara Serrano

Public Observers: Teal Kawana

9:30 – 10:00 Registration & Sign-In

10:00 – 10:15 Welcome, Meeting Overview, and Introductions

Taylor Tucker, DEP

Taylor opens the meeting and reviews the following:

- Ground rules/ housekeeping (bathrooms, silence phones, marina topics etc.)
- Public comment process
- Agenda and presentation schedule
- Florida's Coral Reef PSA video
- KJCAP boundaries
- DEP staff

Taylor reminds attendees that priority is given to SEFCRI/TAC members for questions and comments.

10:15 – 10:45 Fishing, Diving and Other Uses (FDOU) 51 Project Update

Josh Kilborn, University of South Florida

Josh Kilborn virtually shares his presentation titled: *Coral Reef Regime Discovery in the Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve using Combined Benthic Composition and Fish Abundance Data*

Project Overview:

- Study investigated coral reef regimes using combined benthic composition and fish abundance data.
- Assessment included:
 - Fish diversity, abundance and size trends.
 - Relationships between changes to water quality and benthic habitat.
- Background - The project relates to the Local Action Strategy Project #51 under the fishing, diving and other uses (FDOU) focus area identified by SEFCRI team and carried out by DEP's Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP).

Data and Methodology:

- Sampling universe and benthic data - final sample design structured from recreating studies done in Hawaii to combine fish functional groups and benthic data to identify regimes.
- Dataset: 2014-2022 National Coral Reef Monitoring Program (NCRMP) fish and benthic data within Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve (KJCAP).
- Final sample size: 398 samples
- Approach to identify reef regimes:
 - Combined fish trophic guilds and benthic data.
 - Standardized fish data to catch per unit effort.
 - Applied clustering methods to identify reef regimes.

Reef Regimes: degraded, healthy, and transitional

Degraded Regimes:

- Regime 2: most prevalent; highly degraded reef, turf algae dominated, no hard coral

cover, depleted fish communities. Prevalence increased with a spike in 2022.

- Regime 5: rare; degraded habitat, turf and macro algae dominated, minimal hard coral cover, very depleted fish communities.
- Regime 8: increasing in prevalence; most prevalent in northern part of KJCAP; most degraded, completely collapsed regime; dominated by macroalgae, no hard coral cover, weakest fish community across all regimes.

Healthy Regimes:

- Regime 3: low prevalence peaking from 2016-2018; has not been observed since 2020; very healthy regime with abundant benthic habitat; healthiest fish communities, highest abundance of herbivores, corallivores and sessile invertivores.
- Regime 6: decline in regime beginning in 2016; healthy regime with second highest hard coral cover; most benthic categories; substantial herbivorous community. Declined habitat then increased perhaps to restoration efforts.
- Regime 7: relatively stable overtime, peaking in 2020; highest hard and soft coral cover with significant sponge cover; strongest and most diverse benthic/coral reef habitat.

Transitional Regimes:

- Regime 1: moderate hard and soft coral cover; dominated by sponges and cyanobacteria; supports moderate fish abundance.
- Regime 4: low prevalence; dominated by turf algae with highest crustose coralline algae observed; no soft coral cover, high macro invertivore abundance; invertivore dominated habitat.

Future considerations:

- Potential expansion of the study to include inlet contributing areas.
- Continued monitoring to assess restoration impacts and regime shifts.
- Identification of fish indicator species for reef condition.

Questions:

Gary Jennings: Is this due to loss of corals from stony coral tissue loss disease and habitat shifts from disturbance events?

Josh Kilborn: Don't know what mechanism is driving these changes; this is one of the weaknesses to these kinds of analyses; might look like a predator refugia. It's possible that by restoring these habitats to their original state, then we might see some of the trophic communities bounce back.

Dan Clark: Have you looked at the beach filling/dredging. Are you looking at truck-hauled sand?

Josh Kilborn: Looked at that back in 2021. Problem was they didn't have data to incorporate that. It would be useful.

10:45 – 11:15 NCRMP Update for the KJCAP

Shay Viehman, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Shay Viehman virtually provided an update on the National Coral Reef Monitoring Program ([NCRMP](#)) including recent findings from 2024 surveys and plans for upcoming surveys in 2026.

She reviewed the:

- Program focus areas: corals, fish, changing environmental conditions, socioeconomics.
- NCRMP biological component: characterize status and trends of reef corals and benthic communities.
- 2026 survey dates in Florida.

Shay reviews 2024 NCRMP survey data:

- Geographic regions (Southeast Florida, Florida Keys, Dry Tortugas National Park):
- Key metrics
 - 1,828 sites sampled
 - 474,744 m² area surveyed
 - 3,656 dives
 - 10,676 coral colonies surveyed
 - 613,091 fish surveyed
- Multi-agency participation: FWC, NOAA, DEP, NPS, UM, NSU, Miami-Dade County, Broward County and The College of The Florida Keys.
- Surveys and data collection methodology
 - Benthic community assessment: LPI, rugosity, invert count, ESA listed species.
 - Coral demographics: coral species, size and condition.
- Reminder to use the [NCRMP Data Visualization Tool](#) to keep track of progress of the surveys.

Key findings from 10-year NCRMP data collection period (2014-2024):

- Overall decline in Scleractinian coral cover.
 - Percent coral cover on reefs in 2024:
 - Southeast Florida 0.8%
 - Florida Keys 5%
 - Dry Tortugas 3%
- Overall decline in octocoral and sponge cover.
- Disease prevalence: notable peaks in southeast Florida in 2016 and 2023.
- Bleaching prevalence: much higher prevalence of bleaching than disease.
 - Big spike in 2023 in Dry Tortugas.

Species Observations:

- Highest density species in 2024 for Southeast Florida only:
 - *Porites astreoides* (PAST), *Montastraea cavernosa* (MCAV), *Siderastrea siderea* (SSID), *Siderastrea intersepta* (SINT).
- Changes in size distribution:
 - *Meandrina meandrites* (MMEA): decline in overall number surveyed, shifted to much smaller size distribution in 2024; significantly decreased in density.
 - *Montastraea cavernosa* (MCAV): significantly increased in density.
 - *Orbicella faveolata* (OFAV): no significant change in density.
 - *Siderastrea siderea* (SSID) decreased significantly in density.
- Continued decline in coral cover and density across Florida's Coral Reef.
 - Associated factors:

- Stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD)
- Bleaching prevalence increasing (e.g. 2023 brought extreme heat stress)
- Synergistic impacts/dual stressors have reduced coral diversity and density

Data Usage and Reporting:

- NCRMP biological data is being used to support evaluations of ESA listed species and fisheries management as well as compliment regional efforts.
- Mission: Iconic Reefs restoration sites are possible additions to NCRMP sites so that they can be surveyed for comparing pre- and post-restoration efforts.
- NCRMP data and reports can be found on the [NCRMP dashboard](#).
 - Shows examples of scientific publications and data [summary reports](#).
 - 2024 report final review will be publicly available soon.
- Status reports were updated with 2018 data.
- Same sampling commitment will be conducted in 2026 for Florida.
- Requests for future participation can be made to Jay Grove (jay.grove@noaa.gov).

Questions:

No Questions.

11:15 – 11:25 BREAK (10 Minutes)

11:25 – 11:40 Overview of Florida’s Coral Reef Resilience Program (FCRRP)

Allison Holevoet, University of Florida Sea Grant

Overview:

- Introduction to the purpose of FCRRP and the highly collaborative public-private partnerships.
- Leadership bodies include:
 - Two state agencies ([DEP](#), [FWC](#))
 - Two federal agencies ([NOAA](#), [NPS](#))

Historical context:

- The previous Florida Reef Resilience Program (FRRP) addressed conservation needs and brought adaptive management and reef practitioners from different locations together.
 - FRRP encompassed the Disturbance Response Monitoring Program ([DRM](#)) and Florida’s Coral Reef [Resilience Action Plan](#).
 - In 2014, a highly collaborative, rapid mobilization response to SCTLD was implemented and a designated response team was formalized in 2018.
 - Creation of the FCRRP came from merging the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Response group and FRRP in 2023. FCRRP became a program, not to replace or duplicate but to align with the historical initiatives, to create an overall collaborative space that is dynamic and adaptable in structure.

FCRRP focus areas and associated teams:

- Restoration, Rescue & Propagation, Communications, Regulatory, Intervention, Caribbean Cooperation, Water Quality, Research, Surveillance, and Data Management
- Disturbance Advisory Committee (DAC), Executive Coordination Team (ECT), Steering

Committee, and Coordinators.

Partnership Dynamics:

- A key component of FCRRP is “cross-pollination” between groups.
- FCRRP is an amorphous blob, but it is not faceless and the partners are what make it successful.

Future Goals:

- Annual meetings focused on intentional goal setting, “poly-centric governance” and evolution of FCRRP design.
- A formal coral reef stewardship partnership with the state to establish FCRRP as an organization that partners can turn to for resources or funding.

Questions:

Brian Walker: Curious about stewardship idea, isn't FCRRP a DEP program and isn't DEP already a stewardship partner?

Allison Holevoet: Taking FCRRP from state to federal, with FCRRP being the “steward” and DEP being a partner.

Mollie Cordo: FCRRP is led by four agencies not just DEP, the stewardship partnership was mandated to formalize the types of collaboration we have in Florida, which isn't the case for other U.S. territories with coral reef management.

Dana Wusinich-Mendez: In the application process, FCRRP will reach out to partners to let them know their names are being included.

11:40 – 11:50 KJCAP Management Plan Progress Update

Allie Shatters, DEP

Allie reviews the timeline for the KJCAP Management Plan in steps and incorporated changes to the plan from the three public meetings.

Step One: Aquatic Preserve Designation

- Early discussions about the creation of an action plan were held during SEFCRI meetings which shaped the foundation for the management plan.
- Designation as an Aquatic Preserve took place in July of 2024.

Step Two: Advisory Committee and Public Meetings

- Baseline information was shared with an advisory committee.
- The second meeting allowed the advisory committee to give feedback on the draft management plan.

- In December of 2025, the draft management plan was posted for the public comment, and three meetings (two in-person and one virtual) were held to incorporate public feedback into the draft.

Step Three: Final Review and Approval

- All feedback was incorporated into the plan.
- Submission to the acquisition council for overall management plan approval.

Next steps:

- SEFCRI and TAC will stay informed on the plan's progress and help to develop projects once the plan is approved.
- Creation of management plan project trackers and annual reports.

Goals:

- The goal is an adaptive framework. Outlined in chapter 4 of the plan, which contains the goals and strategies, the strategies were not meant to be static but rather flexible or ongoing based on the project(s).
- Different structures for projects will be hypothesized by SEFCRI/TAC and generated by partner collaboration and feedback.
- SEFCRI can help to disseminate projects to their partner networks.

Questions:

Josh Voss: How was the process of incorporating the feedback from the public meetings? Were they minor changes or will there be shared information about what might change from their comments?

Allie Shatters: We had a large advisory committee, so we did not receive a ton of feedback during the public meetings. The advisory committee changed a lot, but the public comments will not change much.

Dan Clark: Is there a projected time the management plan will be done?

Allie Shatters: The plan is to present the management plan to Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) in Tallahassee on June 12th. The ARC can in theory give final approval on the day the plan is presented. We will share the news of acceptance with this SEFCRI cohort.

Dan Clark: Does the plan have enough teeth for saving corals at Port Everglades and stopping dredging?

Allie Shatters: Section 1820 references dredging, but the entire dredging project won't be stopped because dredging is seen as being in public interest. The plan can outline how monitoring and mitigation is done, but water quality standards cannot be changed.

Brian Walker: Though the timeline for project funding has changed, the Coral Protection and Restoration Program (CPR) funds a lot now with slightly different but overlapping priorities. Is there any tracking of how KJCAP/CRCP and CPR projects align? If we had a project that didn't get funded by CPR, would it be advantageous to apply through KJCAP/CRCP?

Allie Shatters: CPR is Florida's Coral Reef wide and CRCP is regional to the KJCAP. We will be tracking ongoing projects that weren't specifically called out in the management plan, but we will be considering new projects through a new tracking form for the KJCAP. CPR will continue to help KJCAP with additional funding for regional projects. KJCAP projects are focused on less contracting out and more in-house partner efforts.

11:50 – 12:00 BREAK (10 Minutes)

12:00 – 12:30 Vice Chair Panel

Vice Chairs, Taylor Tucker, DEP

Introductions of Vice Chairs

- Alastair Harborne, **Academic**
- Mike Dixon, **Fishing**
- Leneita Fix, **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)**
- Melissa Sathe, **Private Business**
- Jocelyn Karazsia, **Federal Agency**
- Stephanie Schopmeyer, **State Agency**
- Katelyn Armstrong, **Local Agency**

Due to some of the Vice Chairs not being able to attend the meeting, CRCP staff represented Mike, Leneita, Stephanie, Jocelyn and Melissa during the meeting. The Vice Chairs who did not attend in person provided responses to the questions through email and they are captured below.

Question 1: *Looking back over the past four years, what is one meaningful accomplishment you and/or your stakeholder group achieved, and what impact did it have on the organization or its members?*

Katelyn Armstrong: Collaborating with the counties and the state during quarterly meetings where there was space to discuss issues and solutions as well as policy updates.

Alastair Harborne: Proud of the outreach footprint as academics. There are now a number of students who are more aware of coral reefs, the threats they face and the SEFCRI Team.

Mike Dixon: I believe that the story of the last 4 years for FDOU - of which I was VC for only a short spell - was largely the undertaking of the FDOU 52 work group. The pandemic served as a significant interruption to SEFCRI progress. Much occurred in the absence of our regular gatherings and engagement. The FDOU 52 process was a significant example of coordinated and coherent debate within clearly defined goals and objectives. At the end of it all, I think all were not only pleased, but energized, by the coherent set of specific (and thematic, in some cases) recommendations that the group was able to summate and put forward. A particular takeaway for me was the specific verbiage

that the breadth of stakeholders represented within "Fishing, Diving & Other Uses" found much common ground and ultimately decided that they would speak with a powerfully unanimous voice with regards to any both shared interests and shared sacrifice. That any curbs to access/enjoyment of either specific areas of the tract or specific temporal periods would be shouldered by all, thus eliminating the dangerous return of intra-group conflicts and enforcement disparity/confusion.

Leneita Fix: One of the most meaningful accomplishments was actively contributing to the feedback and development of the Tier 2 plan, and a focus on rebuilding reefs in the Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve. Representing the nonprofit sector in that process ensured that the operational realities, resource constraints, and on-the-ground implementation challenges faced by NGOs were thoughtfully considered. Bringing nonprofit voices into the conversation about not just the plan but also rebuilding the KJCAP strengthened the plan by making it more practical and implementable across diverse organizational structures. It helped ensure that the framework supports not only large institutions but also mission-driven NGOs, which are critical to advancing restoration efforts and lending a voice to what matters. The result was a more balanced and actionable strategy.

Jocelyn Karazsia: I wanted to share that I am so proud of the talent we have recruited to the SEFCRI team. All team members make sacrifices to provide this service by taking time away from their day jobs, competing priorities, and/or families. Thanks to everyone's collective efforts to fill vacant seats, the SEFCRI team is stacked with dedicated individuals working together (sometimes across the aisle) to learn about and identify solutions to the problems our coral reefs face locally. While my stakeholder group cannot take credit for this achievement, I think we did our part.

Stephanie Schopmeyer: Assisted with the development of the KJCAP management plan and Tier 2 Restoration Plan to ensure adequate protection and conservation of reef resources in Southeast Florida. The development of such plans brought together all SEFCRI groups to create cohesive management and restoration strategies for Florida's Coral Reef.

Question 2: *How do you envision the Vice Chair serving as a bridge between leadership and members, and what specific strategies would you propose to improve communication, transparency, and knowledge sharing across the organization?*

Melissa Sathe: I see the Vice Chair as a connector between DEP and the stakeholder group. The role should help take the bigger strategic conversations happening at the leadership level and turn them into clear, practical next steps for members, with consistent follow-up so things don't stall out. Communication back to the stakeholder group needs to be more structured and predictable. Vice Chairs should have a regularly scheduled check-in — whether that's a standing email update or a brief call — to share updates, flag upcoming decisions, and ask for input. That kind of routine communication would go a long way toward improving transparency and keeping members more informed and engaged.

Stephanie Schopmeyer: As a Vice Chair, I try to ensure that planning and action are based on the best available science and meet the needs and priorities of state agencies for the protection and improvement of Florida's marine and coral resources. Moving forward I would like to improve communication via regular meetings and/or emails to the state agency members of SEFCRI with updates on overall progress and needs of SEFCRI, in particular for Local Action Strategies and management planning.

Leneita Fix: I envision the Vice Chair serving as an active connector who intentionally cultivates two-way communication rather than simply relaying information. To strengthen this bridge, I propose implementing structured listening channels, such as regular stakeholder roundtables or virtual sessions, to surface emerging needs early. This approach must be supported by clear feedback loops and transparent updates so that members can see how their input influences decisions, even when recommendations are not adopted. Furthermore, the Vice Chair should facilitate cross-sector knowledge sharing among NGOs, academic institutions, and government partners while ensuring that all key documentation remains accessible and easy to understand for every stakeholder group. Ultimately, the role is as relational as it is administrative; by fostering strong communication, we build the cohesion necessary to accelerate our collective impact.

Katelyn Armstrong: I think meeting more often or hosting virtual calls frequently would be helpful to continue sharing information.

Mike Dixon: I believe better communication amongst the stakeholder groups will come with the next phase of clearly defined and attainable objectives put forth by the SEFCRI body. The recent KJCAP MGT Plan AP meeting was a great example. What are we here to ACCOMPLISH. More engagement, less listening session. The next steps for KJCAP are going to be exciting. And the challenges to ensure the health of the reef and enhancement of all its benefit to the SE FL communities will remain dynamic and profound. Shared sacrifice may be necessary...and SEFCRI should allow for discussion of what that might look like.

Alastair Harborne: Academic research needs to be more attainable. The Vice Chair and academic group should be synthesizing research and publications to make it more available to public.

Questions:

No Questions.

12:30-12:45 SEFCRI Recommitment

Taylor Tucker, DEP

Taylor reviews the:

- Application process, timeline, expectations and new project format for the new SEFCRI Team.
- Team member expectations, funding mechanisms, management plan implementation.
 - 40 open positions intended to create a balanced representation of the resource use.
 - No term limits for team members and new team member applications encouraged.

12:45 – 1:00 Public Comment

Taylor Tucker, DEP

April Price: Quick promo for Captain Sandy's charities.

Dan Clark: What is the status of north Broward outfall pipe? We need to put the port into the meeting.

1:00 – 1:15 Coral Champion Award

Taylor Tucker, DEP

Kathy Fitzpatrick is awarded the Coral Champion Award.

1:15 – 2:00 Stakeholder Gathering

Taylor Tucker concludes the meeting and announces that the Team will take a group photo and celebrate the conclusion of the 4-year term.