



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

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

9:00 AM – 12:20 PM

Virtual Meeting: Zoom

Meeting Objectives:

1. Overview of Florida's Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery Initiative (FCR3) and site selection process.
2. LAS Project updates from Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP).
3. Update on Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve (Coral AP) Management Plan.

Attendees:

DEP Staff: Allie Shatters, Mollie Cordo, Taylor Tucker, Patrick Connelly, Lara Bracci, Maya Bhalla-Ladd, Stephanie Stinson, Matthew Ringstad, Kathleen Czaia, Britney Swiniuch, Allison Holevoet, Megan Miller, Kimberly Platt, Maurizio Martinelli

SEFCRI Team Members: Stephanie Pravata, DD Halpern, Lisa Carroll, Casey Coy, Tyler Bouma, Melissa Sathe, Nick Morrell, Shana Phelan, Butch Olsen, Pat Bennett, Katelyn Armstrong, Jennifer Baez, Mike Dixon, Joey Massa, Alastair Harborne, Cristin Krasco, Valerie Tovar, Kristen Donofrio, Stephanie Schopmeyer, Laura Eldredge, Leneita Fix, Angela Delaney, Joana Figueiredo, Morgan Benggio, Jocelyn Karazsia, Jessica Clawson, Amanda Montgomery, April Price, Lauren Theis, Zach Boudreau, Gary Jennings, Brian Walker, Erik Neugaard, Andrew Bauman, Sara Thanner, Mike Jenkins

SEFCRI Team Alternates: Katy Brown, Joanna Walczak, Rob MacKeen, Erick Ault, Xaymara Serrano, Derek Cox

TAC Team Members: Kurtis Gregg, Piero Gardinali, David Gilliam, Jay Grove, Dana Wusinich-Mendez, Caitlin Lustic, Richard Dodge

Public Observers: WFSU-TV The Florida Channel, Phillip Dustan, Speridon Stamates, Ken Banks, Layne Legget, Sarah Leinbach, Caity Savioa, Leslie Reed, Kylie Shivers, Craig Raffenberg, Nia Wellendorf, Jessica Ganim, Jessica Price, Megan Moore, Nicholas Jones, Kaitlyn Sutton, Ileana Suarez, Dave Whiting, Josh Kilborn, and five unknown attendees

8:30 – 9:00 Registration, Sign-In, and Activate Audio in
Zoom platform is open.

9:00 – 9:15 Welcome, Meeting Overview, and Introductions

Allie Shatters, DEP CRCP

Welcomes everyone to the combined SEFCRI Team and TAC Meeting. She provides an overview of the Zoom platform and reviews the meeting ground rules in addition to the agenda.

Lara Bracci and Taylor Tucker, DEP CRCP

Introduces herself as Technical Support and the TAC Contact. Taylor Tucker introduces herself as the Note Taker and SEFCRI Contact.

Allie Shatters, DEP CRCP

Introduces two new SEFCRI Team Members, Casey Coy has filled the vacancy in the ‘Other’ stakeholder group and Valerie Tovar has filled the vacancy in the ‘NGO’ [non-governmental organization] stakeholder group. Additionally, she states that The Florida Channel may sign on and post this meeting online.

Reviews Zoom meeting icons, additional meeting tips, and how to submit a public comment.

Maya Bhalla-Ladd [chat]: <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5614401/Public-Comment-Submissions>

9:15 – 9:50 DEP Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) Location Action Strategy (LAS) Project Updates

Allie Shatters, DEP CRCP

Each of the CRCP coordinators are going to present their respective focus areas and LAS project updates (ongoing & completed). Please keep in mind that CRCP staff work on SEFCRI–recommended projects in addition to DEP CRCP priority projects. But these updates will focus on current SEFCRI LAS projects. Please hold questions for after the presentations.

Awareness & Appreciation (AA)

Maya Bhalla-Ladd, DEP CRCP

Discusses the ongoing projects for AA, including Earth Month webinars, outreach events, and a new managerial website that will include updated branding for Meta and Google platforms, and may also be on the Brightline electronic displays. In addition to those projects, the teaching trunk program has been running smoothly. This project ships coral reef educational trunks to different classrooms in the Coral AP region. New teaching trunk videos are in final production and will be in English and Spanish when it is complete. Communications Working Group co-lead, helping with strategic communication materials such as BOLOs. Outreach and community events include SOS Conservation Village and Miami International Boat Show. Excited to get to know locals and tourists.

Fishing, Diving, and Other Uses (FDOU)

Stephanie Stinson, DEP CRCP

Discusses active ongoing FDOU LAS Projects. Provides updates on FDOU 51 – Holistic Assessment of Aquatic Resources and Habitats in the Coral AP. Phase 2A has been completed and it was agreed upon to undergo phase 2B that will generate final products that will be concise enough for community outreach.

Update on FDOU 55 which refers to Coral AP Management Plan that Allie S., Lara B. and Stephanie S. have been working on to synthesize and incorporate feedback. Combining all the feedback from various stakeholder groups is nearly complete. Once completed, the plan will move into the next phase, an at-large public process for stakeholders across the four counties of the Coral

AP.

Reef Resilience (RR) & BleachWatch

Taylor Tucker, DEP CRCP

Discusses RR Project 1 – Collection and synthesis of available regional data on the concentration and distribution of potentially toxic chemicals on Florida’s Coral Reef (FCR). The project identified contaminants of greatest concern and assessed potential interactive/synergistic effects of multiple stressors. This project was completed in fiscal year (FY) 23-24 by Abby Renegar’s lab at NSU [Nova Southeastern University]. An ArcGIS database was created for the contaminants of concern and a final report is available on DEP’s website. The data has been disseminated to relevant stakeholders to incorporate into decision making systems, such as the Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) Decision Support System.

In 2024, SEAFAN BleachWatch became a PADI Distinctive Specialty Course, which divers can use towards their advanced and master diver certifications. This PADI designation helps expand the program’s reach at local dive centers, increases reporting (as it becomes a course requirement), and provides a structured approach for dive instructors to manage in-water sessions with large groups.

In the past year, 10 new BleachWatch Instructors and 140 new BleachWatch Observers were trained and the program received over 110 reports regarding coral health on FCR.

Southeast Florida Action Network (SEAFAN) & Marine Debris

Matthew Ringstad, DEP CRCP

Shares updates on SEFAN, a community-based reporting and response program for marine incidents affecting Southeast Florida’s coral reef ecosystem. In addition to incident reports from citizen scientists, SEAFAN is being utilized to track tires for removal on the outskirts of the Osborne Tire Reef. Additionally, the report form was updated with a new marine incident for invasive seagrass.

The Southeast Florida Annual Reef Cleanup, part of the Southeast Florida Marine Debris Reporting and Removal Program, occurred throughout the summer of 2024 (July through mid-August). Planning efforts for the 2025 reef cleanup is ongoing. This year’s cleanup will be a one-day event, a new format replacing previous years that included various cleanups over multiple months, with a new goal to lower costs for participants in an effort to make the event more accessible. Future cleanup goals include further reducing costs, including more dive operators and featuring a post-cleanup celebratory event.

Land-Based Sources of Pollution (LBSP)

Lara Bracci, DEP CRCP

Shares updates on two ongoing LBSP LAS Projects. LBSP 25, Water Quality Assessment, has three primary goals: establish a baseline for a larger program that will assist in evaluating coral reef condition; identify potential impacts on water quality from upstream water management activities; and provide water quality data for other programs operating in the Coral AP. Samples were collected monthly from the nine Inlet Contributing Areas [ICAs], with samples collected from inlet, reef, and outfall sites, and four co-located Southeast Florida Coral Reef Evaluation and Monitoring Project [SECREMP] sites, for a total of 119 sample locations. Coordination continues with the United States Coral Reef Task Force [USCRTF] Watershed Working Group, Florida’s Coral Reef Coordination Team [FCRCT], Florida’s Coral Reef Resilience Program [FCRRP], internal water quality working groups, and the coordination of the upcoming Government Cut Watershed Management Plan Implementation Group. The data has also been uploaded to the Watershed

Information Network [WIN], where it will be available for viewing.

In an effort to make sample results more comparable with other water testing around the state, a YSI ProDSS was implemented in August to measure various parameters, including salinity, dissolved oxygen [DO] specific conductance, pH and temperature. As part of updating the measurement equipment, standard operating procedures [SOPs] are being updated with input from Broward County to improve the sample collection and processing.

Shares graphs showing the results from the sampling for nitrites, chlorophyll-a and TSS, between July and November. The large spikes were found at the St. Lucie inlet for all three parameters, and a large spike in chlorophyll-a at Boca inlet. A potential cause of the spikes at St. Lucie Inlet, could be due to a sudden influx of organic matter from a seven-day discharge from Lake Okeechobee totaling about 2,100-cfs.

Maritime Industry & Coastal Construction Impacts (MICCI)

Patrick Connelly, DEP CRCP

Shares that the work on the removal of tires from the Osborne Tire Reef is ongoing. Tire distributions were characterized by a sonar survey. Industrial Divers Corp has been removing tires from the sand with over 500,000 tires removed so far. The implementation of the Osborne Tire Reef Restoration Plan is beginning, with the primary objectives being to remove tires from both the reef and sand, and to outplant corals to the habitat damaged by tires. NSU has been removing corals from the tires for the past two fiscal years and is set to continue the work. DEP is working on contracting a second team to speed up the coral removal process and is currently in the process of obtaining competitive bids to continue the tire removal process from both sand and reef habitats. The corals that are removed from the tires will be outplanted back onto the reef areas in Broward County.

Turbidity and sediment projects have been ongoing to expand capabilities for compliance and evaluate effects on corals and larval settlement. These include a proposal to update FT1600 (Standard of Procedure for Field Turbidity) to include guidance and procedures for ISO [Internal Organization for Standardization] instrumentation to measure turbidity; an investigation by Cheryl Woodley at the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA] to look at the survivorship and sublethal effects of turbidity; an investigation on the impact of different sediment sources and turbidites on *Orbicella faveolata*; and a study on the effects of sediment thickness and grain size on larval settlement and recruit mortality. The results from the studies have been shared with the Department of Environmental Assessment and Restoration [DEAR] to incorporate into their management strategies.

Reef Injury Prevention & Response (RIPR)

Kimberly Platt, DEP CRCP

Introduces herself as the new RIPR specialist. The Coral Crime Scene Investigation [CSI] Annual Training will be taking place on May 20-21. Clipper Lasco and Spar Orion 10-year monitoring report coming next year. Mooring buoy brochures are in the process of being updated with the new Coral AP name. New supplies were given to Palm Beach County as part of the mooring buoy grant.

Megan Miller, DEP CRCP

Introduces herself as the new RIPR coordinator. A Deep Trekker ROV was purchased to help with site assessments and the monitoring program. The ROV will improve accuracy of data collection and will be used to generate photomosaics to better monitor recovery. A small-scale restoration site has been selected and will use corals removed from the Osborne Tire Reef. The site was a previous RIPR injury site and was selected based on benthic characteristics, feasibility of restoration

operations, and with considerations to planned dredging work at Port Everglades.

Questions:

Brian Walker [chat]: What happened to FDOU 51?

Stephanie Stinson: Concluded phase 2 and decided to do a phase 2B to further refine the data that came out of phase 2 so that it will make a more effective management implementation tool – updates coming for phase 2B at the end of the fiscal year.

Brian Walker [chat]: Have there been any new reef injuries?

Melissa Sathe [chat]: How deep is the AFRA site?

Megan Miller: New case at the northern end of the anchorage, been assisting John Pennekamp State Park in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) with a sailboat grounding that occurred a few weeks ago. These injuries have happened in the last few months. I will get mooring buoy brochures to April Price. AFRA site is at about 50-60 ft but far from Port Everglades.

Dana Wusinich-Mendez [chat]: For the FDOU project that is assessing the AP resources...what data sets are feeding into that? Couldn't remember the project number.

Allie Shatters: FDOU 51

Dana Wusinich-Mendez [chat]: Yes, FDOU 51

Stephanie Stinson: RVC [Reef Visual Census] and NCRMP [National Coral Reef Monitoring Program] are being combined, put email in the chat.

Josh Kilborn [chat]: FDOU 51 is primarily driven by NCRMP LPI [Line Point Intercept] and RVC data.

Stephanie Stinson: Thanks, Josh, for jumping in. Can send out updated SOW [Scope of Work] on phase 2B. Extra phase into the project.

Morgan Benggio [chat]: Regarding Anchoring off PE [Port Everglades], were the vessel/s in the designated anchorage?

Megan Miller: Vessel was outside of the anchorage

Allie Shatters: Announces 10-minute break

9:45 – 9:55 Break

Participants break for 10-minutes.

Maya Bhalla-Ladd [chat]: <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5614401/Public-Comment-Submissions>

9:55 – 10:10 Introduction to Florida's Coral Reef Restoration & Recovery Initiative (FCR3)

Britney Swiniuch, DEP CPR

Shares the objectives and rationale behind scaling up land-based coral restoration. Reviews the economic and ecological benefits of coral reefs, listing shoreline protection, fisheries habitat and

tourism. The overriding objective of the FCR3 initiative is to support the long-term recovery of no less than 25% of FCR. FCR3 is specifically targeting the enhancement of coral reefs for shoreline protection. Current funding has been focused on seeding the expansion of land-based coral propagation infrastructure and to train new workforce.

Reviews the objectives of FCR3 Phase 1 (FY 23-26)

- Objective 1 – Initial expansion of in-state facilities to hold and propagate Florida’s Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease [SCTLD] rescue corals and enhance existing propagation capacity.
- Objective 2 – Support the initial architecture for the implementation and evolution of the FCR3 initiative and identify and assess the regulatory and logistical hurdles.
- Objective 3 – Develop tools, address research questions, implement monitoring and adaptive management actions necessary to effectively carry out the objectives of the initiative.
- Objective 4 – Finalize site selection and initiate development of detailed plans and specifications for the restoration of five to ten priority reefs (no less than one per county) in the mold of Mission: Iconic Reefs project taking place within the FKNM.

The Governor’s initiative gives appreciation to all the people helping in the process to develop the plans. Discusses species prioritization for propagation, specifying characteristics that were considered. Continuing to review results and have conversations about how to strengthen the selection process. There is potential to update and change certain species, but it will need to be done through collaboration, and it will be necessary to make sure the selected species are feasible.

Shared the programs that received funding from FY 23-24 grants, totaling \$9.5 million. All grants have now been executed.

Reviewed the land-based coral propagation pipeline, highlighting the existing activities and areas where there is a lack of activity and potential for expansion. FCR3 is going to aid in expanding and improving the movement through the pipeline.

FY 24-25 funding for FRC3 is anticipated to be maintained at \$9.5 million but waiting on the state to finalize the approval.

Final site selection for restoration activities is anticipated to be completed by December 2025 and the detailed restoration planning for at least two sites will begin by January 2026. There are various tools that are being utilized to help guide site selection, as well as the FCR Tier 1 and Tier 2 Restoration Strategies. Dave Gilliam (UM) and Nick Jones (NSU) have been selected to lead the site selection process.

10:10 – 10:50 Presentation and Discussion on FCR3 Site Selection Process

Nick Jones, NSU

Dave [Gilliam] and I have been asked by DEP to refine FCR3 for site selection. The three goals within the process are to:

1. Compile and evaluate data to determine the best areas (no less than one per county: Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe) to achieve the FCR3 initiative goals and restoration goals identified by resource managers.
2. Initiate and/or attend meetings with key management and stakeholder groups throughout the process.

3. Compose a document detailing the process, decisions, and final maps of the focus areas for ground-truthing.

The Ecological Restoration of Florida's Coral Reef: Tier 1 Strategy, along with numerous other resources were utilized to refine the site selection. The Tier 1 Restoration Strategy identified multiple focal areas throughout FCR by starting with the benthic habitat map and slowly narrowing down areas by eliminating sites deeper than 18 meters, reviewing demographics for each habitat across regions, and looking at larval connectivity models to determine areas where mature corals would be more likely to contribute larvae to FCR. Exclusion areas have already been identified and include areas like long-term monitoring sites, dredging zones, beach renourishment projects, vessel anchoring areas, ports/inlets and outfalls. Tier 1 includes a larval connectivity model and persistence and size structure of certain species to feed within this model. Models were processed based on different groups, *Acropora cervicornis*, three boulder species (*Montastraea cavernosa*, *Orbicella faveolata*, and *Pseudodiploria strigosa*), and all four species. The Coral AP was broken up into four focus areas from the Tier 1 Strategy, Broward-Miami, Deerfield, South Palm Beach and Martin (note: North Palm Beach was removed from consideration because there is no suitable habitat less than 18 meters), and suitable habitat in each region was quantified. The next step will be to determine 25% of the total focal area per county for the four selected species, incorporating data on coastal protection, fisheries, tourism, ecological and environmental metrics, and utilizing local expertise.

Feedback and local expertise are welcome as they continue looking for additional knowledge as they move through the selection process.

Questions:

Casey Coy [chat]: Why remove all potential sites deeper than 18M? That eliminates a lot of potentially good sites in northern Palm Beach County (Jupiter)...

Nick Jones: Yeah, it does, I mean these were removed in the prior Tier 1 process. To really go into the reasons to remove them, you need to discuss that with management. They have determined that these are the workable areas for restoration work and this was determined prior to us refining the site selection.

Britney Swiniuch: I can answer to that a little bit. Nick basically said it, but it's because we feel that, well management feels that we will be trying to restore in shallower sites anyways, so 18 meters is a little too deep for what we are trying to target.

Joanna Walczak [chat]: They were removed because the depth restricts the amount of restoration that could be accomplished with the very limited resources available.

Richard Dodge [chat]: How do the proposed restoration sites relate to sites that are being proposed to be used to accept corals saved from or to be created for as a result of the Port Everglades Dredging project?

Casey Coy: Can I jump in with a comment. We have done DRM [Disturbance Response Monitoring] surveys in the northern Palm Beach County area for the last six years and it is a subjective observation, we're often drifting over sites that are 20-22 meters deep, and those areas look very good. A lot of those species that we are surveying, there's a lack of disease. They seem to have suffered less impact from the thermal events of the southern part of the state the last couple years. I am wondering if there is a negotiation or option to bring that to the table as potential

restoration in those areas just as a comment/suggestion.

Britney Swiniuch: No, no. I think that is valid. It will just depend on the species that are there because I know that the state is really focusing on five main priorities right now. So that will kind of draw that line, but we can also give you some contacts. Caitlin Lustic can also probably answer to that as well, but that was prior to this activity.

Brian Walker [chat]: Asking the broader group: Is there value in considering the OFR [Our Florida Reefs] results into this site selection process?

Britney Swiniuch: I'm not sure how to answer that.

Allie Shatters: Reads Brian Walker's question from the chat ...Can you come off mute to discuss with broader group?

Brian Walker: About ten years ago we spent a number of years doing this Our Florida Reefs process where we developed a decision support process. We engaged the public in many different venues to try and understand their needs and their opinions on what the best decisions could be made and to start to develop marine protected areas in the region was one of the goals. But there are other goals as well. And it was very large process, and we ultimately came up with a bunch of different polygons, associated with each of those polygons were different activities that were defined by the stakeholders and determined that those would be ideal places to conduct the activities. And so, I was just curious if you know if that process was put away because nobody is following up on it. That process was kind of tanked by the fisheries lobbyist groups back in the day. But I'm just curious if there's, you know, still value in cross referencing those results with our Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3?

Allie Shatters: Opens the floor to the SEFCRI Team or TAC.

Dana Wusinich-Mendez: Yeah, I think that's an interesting criterion to add to the mix because of the stakeholder input on identifying those areas that are our iconic reefs. I think you know that there are a lot of objectives that we are trying to achieve in terms of species, in terms of keeping this logistically feasible, in terms of site selection, location, depth, but I think it would be, I think we should consider adding that as a criteria. There were priority areas that came out of that process that were based on other objectives than just restoration, these ended up being identified as priority areas for overall conservation. But seeing how those sites overlap with what is coming out, will come out of Tier 2 to achieve the specific restoration objectives that we have identified, would be a worthwhile endeavor.

April Price: I just wanted to say, I think a lot of stuff came out of the OFR process and there was some good science in there. But I think the science part needs to be vetted from that public comment part and there is a reason that, you know, DEP and FWC and everybody else kind of said we got to relook at this. Because a part of the association wasn't completely represented in the public comment part. So that's the only reason I am cool with the science, not cool with all the public comment being on the record...*thanks Brian for his work...* We all want to make a difference on the reefs.

Dana Wusinich-Mendez [chat]: I agree with Brian that looking at the priority sites for conservation that came out of the OFR process would be a good criterion to add to the mix.

Melissa Sathe [chat]: Agree!

Nick Morrell [chat]: How well do the existing restoration sites map onto the Tier 1 recommendations?

April Price: Well, I think looking at the priority sites is definitely good criteria to look at. But I don't think the public comment that went along with it is. The science part is definitely something to look at and to be considered whether it fits a final report or not.

Butch Olsen: I just want to kind of echo what April said, OFR, and she's 100% right. Just to add a little bit to it. OFR was missing a lot during the process. Which is why there was actually a fisheries committee that was set up, after OFR, to relook at some of those things, which I sat on it and April did as well, and I'm sure a few people on this Zoom. But yeah, I just want to again echo what April said and just add that there was a lot missing, a lot of industry people missing from OFR. I just wanted to add that.

Stephanie Pravata [chat]: I didn't know that the work we did during the OFR meetings was not being use where it could be used.

Allie Shatters: Reads Stephanie Pravata chat... I will say that the recommendations that came out of the OFR process, they are still being used, a lot of them, some of them have been completed. That was one of the places that we pulled from in order to create the management plan for the Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve. So, they are being continued. Any other thoughts on this train of conversation?

Brian Walker [chat]: Yes, they are being carried on in many ways. Sorry to give that impression.

Allie Shatters: Reads Brian Walker's comment in chat...reads Richard Dodge question from chat...

Britney Swiniuch: Yeah, I was just going to say that they are not related.

Xaymara Serrano: Yeah, I was just going to add, when we were discussing Tier 2, the next step in the process of identifying restoration areas within the Coral AP. Back a year and half ago when we provided some shape files regarding Port Everglades impact area. The mitigation areas were still being surveyed for suitability, so they weren't finalized yet. I think they are now potentially. But I do they are not related and probably shouldn't. But I don't think there has been any more discussion on that.

Caitlin Lustic: We haven't thought about if those should be included in Tier 2 or excluded, because they weren't finalized. So, if they are, we need to think about that, we should have that conversation soon.

Xaymara Serrano: Okay. Absolutely.

Xaymara Serrano [chat]: Regarding Richard Dodge question - I think the thought was to exclude the mitigation areas considered for the Port Everglades mitigation from the Tier 2 restoration areas for consideration.

Caitlin Lustic: I think we were just kind of like, we just kind of thought about that as a separate thing. But that maybe it could inform port everglades because that was not finished yet. But if things have changed with that, let's follow up on that.

Xaymara Serrano: Well, we just got the final report for the for those surveys of those areas, so let's

talk some more later.

Brian Walker [chat]: I don't know. If they are the best areas for coral restoration, it seems like they shouldn't be excluded.

Brian Walker: I guess what my point is here, if this process is choosing the best areas for coral restoration in Southeast Florida, why would we then exclude the port activities, if they are able to infuse thousands or tens of thousands of corals into those areas.

Mollie Cordo: I'll just add that it's not necessarily excluding any of those areas. It's more the thought process of some of the funding that we are having available coming from the governor's initiative and through our state funds, we don't want to be in a situation where we're paying for mitigation for the Port Everglades project. Our consideration was how we can work together with what's being planned by the Army Corps so that we are not having our funds go to mitigation accidentally. Just trying to keep them separate while still working together to cover all of the areas that we need to.

Richard Dodge [chat]: Potentially millions!

Brian Walker [chat]: Yes, understood

Allie Shatters: Reads Nick Morrell's question from the chat and asks Nick Jones to respond.

Nick Jones: The answer to that, at the minute, is that we haven't actually looked at how the existing restoration sites align with the Tier 1 recommendations. If we identify a site that is doing particularly well from a restoration point, then that should be something used to weight our process and narrow down site selection. So, if there are places you know that have done particularly well, that's the kind of expert knowledge that we are looking for to help us narrow down these site processes. So yes, we will definitely consider them.

Dave Gilliam: One of the tasks that we are going to ask those involved in our TAC is to address that issue as well. So, we are including restoration practitioners from all three counties in our TAC, so we will have that discussion as part of our work with that group of experts.

Britney Swiniuch [chat]: We plan on utilizing the same data that has gone into the mapped locations from Tier 1 to decide the breadth of total restorable area.

Katelyn Armstrong [chat]: They line up okay in Palm Beach County so far because we used the same models and methodology to find our sites as the state used to write Tier 1 strategy.

Allie Shatters: Reads Britney Swiniuch's comment in chat...Reads Katelyn Armstrong's comment in chat.

Britney Swiniuch: I would just like to add, that's why I said the dining room table analogy kind of puts it into perspective because it's all layered on top of each other. From the big table, to plates, to the food that you're eating and where it goes.

Allie Shatters: Announces that there is still time for discussion and moves to discussing the guiding questions...Are there any additional data sources that need to be incorporated? I think we hit on that a little bit. Brian mentioned the OFR and polygons, and the some of the recommendations that came out of that.

Britney Swiniuch: Kathleen do you want to speak on this?

Kathleen Czaia: No, we were just checking the box to see if there are any other datasets. Thank you for the OFR recommendation. We just want to make sure that we are using all the best available data to inform our decision. So not much more to elaborate there.

Brian Walker: Thanks for bringing that up, Kathleen [Czaia]. We are working with FWC to gather information that is needed to help in creating a decision support system that will be publicly accessible to all to explore different datasets, and both visualize data and filter for criteria similar to the last marine planner that is in development with SeaSketch and FWC at the moment. And we are trying to compile all the datasets that we can that we think are pertinent to that effort. A couple that came to mind are updating our reef injury layers because it sounds like those continue to happen. The last time we updated the injury layers was 2021 or something so I feel like there are a couple of datasets out there that could be included. So please contact me if you have any ideas in that way and we will continue to push those forward.

Megan Miller [chat]: Hi Brian, I can get you updated reef injury data that includes all of our closed cases.

April Price: I think we need to incorporate adding the U.S. Coast Guard, FWC, DEP, local government, any of the agencies that have data about that reef system and boating incidents. We have been working through the state to try to get a local map on where people can go, what the rules are, adding all that into our datasets to give everybody and our decision makers real data is what we need. So, I think that is something that needs to stay on the table, be considered. We all want to work together. We all want a healthy environment. We all want safe boating. We all want these things. We all want tourism progress. I think we really need to work together and have the same set of data and information, that's why I really like Brian's program that he's putting together. Cause you could layer it and pull out the different sectors. But if we don't get the right data from these sectors, his great model is nothing. We need a full picture to have good decision making. So, when we're working with a lot of state dollars, federal dollars and trying to support our families, we need to know what data we are really working with. It shouldn't be a guess when we all have the data. So, let's bring all that data together.

Morgan Benggio: [I'm] from the Coast Guard. We have certain data for marine incidents but the complete effect from those marine incidents, I don't believe we have data for.

April Price: Well and I agree with that, and we don't necessarily, from the Coast Guard need every incident or anything like that. We just need to know if it's going to impact something, what the incident was so we can put the other people out there so we can figure out what the impacts were. Or whether it was a big problem or an accident or what caused it, so we have the information. I think there are some data sets out there that can be defined. And it might be agency-wide that we have to do that. I think that might be a very big possibility that it's just something that we need to come to agreement that this information would be good for all of us to work together on the same playing field.

Morgan Benggio: Agreed and I'm definitely interested. That's why I asked the question about the anchorage in Port Everglades because I do know that an assessment of that anchorage took place to move that further offshore was a pretty big undertaking with a lot of public comment and involvement on that.

April Price: Absolutely, and the other level of that is the captains know that this is why this is the protocol, having the advance notice so they aren't caught off guard without plans. I mean there's a lot of pieces to this puzzle. It's not an easy fix but we need to be able to take the time and understand all that. Not just jump to the next grant cycle to see where we are going to get the data. There have been a lot of good things that have come out of this committee and everybody talking. And I really feel like this is one of those years that we can all make some progress together. I think we need to work together more than we ever have on every level.

Morgan Benggio: Agreed. If there is any additional information that we may be able to provide. This committee primarily resides within one sector so it's not too much for us to pull certain marine incidents that may occur. Just speaking of groundings would have the greatest potential to effect. Spills don't happen that frequently but groundings certainly. I don't think that would be too hard of a pull for us and would welcome opportunities to work together.

April Price: Awesome, I like that. I think that these are the kinds of things, also we have DEP, FWC and other state agencies on this call, I think being able to give good information with real results, and know that we are working with the people that are trying to keep the habitat that we bring everyone here for. Let's think about how we can bring all that together, I think opening a dialogue where we can ask for this kind of dataset, and for you to know specifically would be good for what you are tracking for your grant cycles would be a really efficient way to start moving this in a more positive and production way without everybody pointing fingers at how much money that was a waste of time for. So, lets try and get past that and get to where we can fix things for everybody, including our habitat, oceans and our grandkids.

Allie Shatters: Calls on Brian Walker and acknowledges Megan Miller to follow

Brian Walker: Yeah, I just wanted to say that we do have numerous management layers in there and we have carried over a lot of the same data that we had from the original marine planner, so it is going to function in a useable way for lots of different things. But it is focused on coral reef restoration at the moment. I didn't mean to give the impression that the OFR process was thrown away. I probably should have been more careful with my words, but in terms of the areas, the GIS layers that were created, I don't think they have been used very much. I would be happy to coordinate with the US Coast Guard on any grounding data that they may have. I think we're going to have to touch base with NOAA, marine sanctuary and FWC as well. We will follow through with that.

Brian Walker [chat]: We need to also get from the FKNMS.

Megan Miller: I wanted to respond to April [Price] and Morgan [Benggio]. If you wanted, we could definitely set up a meeting. I would be happy to share updated data. You guys probably have some outdated maps of our reef injury history cases because we are not allowed to put those [on the maps] until they are a closed case. But I would definitely be willing to work with you guys. I am still getting my footing here in the RIPR program. I have been here for a year. We can definitely work together. I will say with the anchorages, we do share our educational information each time these incidents happen, even if they anchored just a little outside of the anchorage. We try to share our educational material about making sure that the vessels are anchored inside the designated anchorages. Even if we don't have an open case with them. We have their vessel agents share it company-wide, with the entire fleet. So that is something that we are working on since that anchorage reconfiguration, just to get that information out there. But we would definitely be willing to meet with guys to work together, with the Coast Guard as well, to try to get more information into their safety manual systems.

Mollie Cordo: I just wanted to add, and I apologize if maybe I'm confusing things, but as I try to bring us back to the original marine planner tool from OFR, to my understanding, Brian correct me if I'm wrong, but the issue was that was the company we were working with went out of business and the software was not able to be updated. So, it's not that we ever wanted to shut it down. We were in a situation where we had to rebuild it. So that is the current process we are in with the decision support tool, in rebuilding this whole tool, putting all these same layers back, adding anything new and building this all out. But that takes time. And right now, we're in a situation where we want to move forward with some of our restoration planning, but the timing just isn't lining up. So, in the future when the decision support tool is more fully formed and ready for us to use in this restoration planning, we will fully be able to do that. And we'll be able to review things against the decision support tool, potentially make some tweaks and refine our process. But for right now, we are using the best available science and data that we have and compiling it all together through this Tier 1 and Tier 2 process, and all the work that Dave [Gilliam] and Nick [Jones] are doing, to help us out and get us started on the restoration front. So, these two process will eventually work together, but we are in a bit of a timing issue right now, where we still want to move forward with restoration and planning and what that would look like, but we don't have everything ready at the same time. Hopefully that kind of makes sense.

Brian Walker: Yes, you are correct, and the timing is becoming more in alignment now and the ability to develop the tool while Dave [Gilliam] and Nick [Jones] lead the discussions into the next stage is going to be very helpful to both efforts.

Britney Swiniuch: The findings from this site selection process can also be integrated into other tools. So, as a decision support tool from FWC does come online, its just the timelines are not working out quite yet to inform us. So that's why we have contracted Dr. Gilliam's lab to help out with this.

Nick Jones: Just to further that, if we do create it, they will be open to be used in the decision support tool. They are going to be open access layers with DEP, anyway. So, if there is any kind of additional things that may be useful, that will be made to be available.

Allie Shatters: Brings up the next topic for discussion...I know Nick [Jones] you did kind of give an overview of some of that tiered planning processing and did explain how some areas were originally excluded recently through some of the maps of the areas that were being focused on. But because we have everyone in the room right now, are there any areas that should be avoided or prioritized for restoration? So, keeping in mind that original work was already completed, is there anything that can be added on to that?

Dave Gilliam: Certainly, many ideas have already been discussed. If there's any more additional information on reef injury areas either in the Coral AP or the Keys, that is definitely something that we would like to incorporate. I think the discussions we had on the OFR process was very relevant. And we will definitely look into that and those results as well. In terms of additional areas that need to be avoided, I think TNC [The Nature Conservancy] and the groups that worked for the TNC during the Tier 1 process did a really good job in capturing those areas which really help our effort because we just don't need to go into that quite as much unless there's areas that weren't included in that process. I can't think of any today, off the top of my head. That Tier 1 process was pretty thorough. So, we have those polygons that were developed in the Tier 1 process that we will be working with and those were all developed with that in mind as being one of the criteria.

Nick Jones: Nothing to add on my side.

Allie Shatters: Says thank you to the presenters and announces a 15-minute break

10:50 – 11:05 Break

Participants break for 15 minutes.

Maya Bhalla-Ladd [chat]: <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5614401/Public-Comment-Submissions>

Allie Shatters: Welcomes everyone back from break.

11:05 – 11:15 Coral Protection and Restoration Program (CPR) Research Priority Update

Kathleen Czaia, DEP CPR

Introduces herself and the CPR program. CPR was established to support the holistic management of FCR. Addressing the many stressors affecting coral reefs by guiding regional and national policy, by guiding leadership of coral reef initiatives and effective administration of funding for coral reef priorities. Since 2017, CPR has administered \$99 million in funding including the recurring \$20 million in Biscayne Bay Water Quality (BBWQ) grants. This year CPR is funding 27 research projects. CPR aligns with state and federal partners to share information and communicate research to protect FCR. CPR has two main priority areas, protection and restoration. Cannot have one approach without the other.

Strategic priorities:

- Funding Administration.
- Holistic Management of Florida's Coral Reef.
- Protect and Restore Florida's Coral Reef.
- Coordination and Information Sharing.

State priorities:

- Enhancing Coral Reef Resilience.
- Restoring Florida's Coral Reef Ecosystem.
- Assessing and Addressing Water Quality Impacts to Florida's Coral Reef.

We align with state and federal partners to share information and communicate research.

Introduces Maurizio Martinelli, CPR Programs Administrator

Maurizio Martinelli, DEP CPR

Introduces self as the new administrator for CPR. Worked first for coordination of state response for coral disease followed by coordinating FCRRP. Works with partners to bring people together and use strong partnerships to advance large scale coral conservation projects and looking to bring that into CPR.

Kathleen Czaia: CPR now has a program page and all final reports for research funded over the past few years. Currently, CPR is reviewing research project proposals for the next fiscal year, receiving twice as many as last year, and will be making announcements next week. Awaiting the announcement of the grant awardees for FY 24-25. CPR is currently awaiting final legislative approval of the next fiscal year (25-26), and the portal should be open around May-June for both FCR3 and Biscayne Bay Water Quality grants. The upcoming year will be the last year of FCR3 Phase 1, so CPR is actively preparing for Phase 2, that will begin implementation of the Tier 3

plans. CPR appreciates the feedback they have received and are looking to ground truth sites this summer to finalize where restoration will take place.

11:15 – 11:35 Presentation on NOAA’s Coral Reef Monitoring Program (NCRMP)

Jay Grove, NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS)

Provides an update on NCRMP 2024 sampling. NCRMP uses biological indicators to characterize the status and trends of coral and reef fish populations and communities. The program is overseen and coordinated by NOAA, NOAA Fisheries leads the fish data and NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) leads the benthic data. However, to be effective NCRMP relies on strong partnerships with many local partners. Collectively, the biodata can be used to provide perspective during ecologically important events (e.g., invasive species, disease, and bleaching), evaluate severe weather events (e.g., hurricanes, cold snaps, red tides, El Niño and La Niña), monitor endangered species (e.g., abundance, size and distribution), support fisheries management (e.g., data for stock assessments and response to fisheries management activities) and to create a framework to build upon and/or compliment regional efforts (e.g., reef restoration, fixed site monitoring, etc.). NCRMP’s data have been used for numerous peer-reviewed publications, are available through online dashboards and can be downloaded as R packages (separate packages for benthic and fish data), in addition to regular status reports and summary reports.

The NCRMP surveys are completed every other year, with Florida and Flower Garden Banks completed in even years, and Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands completed in odd years, for coral reefs in the U.S. Atlantic and Caribbean. In Florida’s 2024 sampling effort, the large collaborative effort with many state and local agencies, and university groups completed over 4,000 dives, and the data collected are currently in the QA/QC process.

NCRMP works to keep up with the ongoing changes, but updates to the survey and data collection processes are typically slow to ensure that data collection is comparable across the entire program. In Florida, in 2024, new additions to the benthic data collection included counts of juveniles for ESA [Endangered Species Act] species, major reef-builders and SCTLD-susceptible species, identification of restoration site or restored coral, and large area imaging trials.

Preliminary data from the reef fish surveys showed how the data can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of newer fisheries management regulations enacted by FWC in 2017. Examples included how this long-term dataset is being used to evaluate mutton snapper and hogfish populations in Southeast Florida and how densities and sizes in the region compare to other parts of Florida’s reef tract (i.e., Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas).

Questions:

Brian Walker: I was curious with all the talk about the government situation, the federal side, is there any talk of the monitoring programs getting defunded?

Jay Grove: I don’t know the answer to your question, but what I can say is that I had a call with the NOAA CRCP folks that fund NCRMP, [recently]. NOAA CRCP responds to Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA), so there is a congressional act that the program is supporting. They believe that they will receive full funding through the end of the FY. They have to tease it apart over the next three weeks and they will tell us in about a month. That gets us through this year, and then I’m not sure after that. That will be based whatever the next year’s budget is. But at the moment it looks pretty good.

Government, federal travel and the ability to implement these surveys is actually the more precarious situation at this point in time. So, the money's there, but will we have the liberty to go and survey...

Katelyn Armstrong [chat]: We hope to get involved in assisting with NCRMP surveys up here in Palm Beach County soon. Just building up the team.

11:35 – 11:50 Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve management plan update

Allie Shatters, DEP CRCP

Shares updates on the Coral AP management plan. What was the Kristin Jacobs Coral Ecosystem Conservation Area (Coral ECA) is now the Coral AP, and we are all very excited to continue working with SEFCRI in this new format to protect coral reefs. The official name is the Kristin Jacobs Coral Ecosystem Conservation Area Aquatic Preserve, but moving forward it will be known as the Kristin Jacobs Coral AP, or Coral AP for short. We have had a lot of names in the past and it can be annoying for project titles but wanted to share the name change.

To do a little recap, Florida Administrative Code 18-20.013 mandates that a management plan that will detail goals, objectives and strategies for cohesive management for long term conservation be created for each preserve. The management plan will afford CRCP the ability to identify issues that are impacting the reef and habitat and outline solutions for those impacts. The management plan will be updated every 10 years and will be approved by the Acquisition and Restoration Council [ARC]. Other management plans for aquatic preserves are posted on the DEP website.

The current draft of the Coral AP management plan has been created by pulling from SEFCRI LAS projects, OFR Recommended Management Actions (RMA), recommendations from fishery working groups (FDOU 52), as well as CRCP priorities. Now that we have the AP designation, the management plan has had further input from counties located along the Coral AP, SEFCRI and TAC team members, CRCP staff, and FWC. This feedback is all being incorporated into the final draft of the management plan that will move forward through the larger public process.

Looking forward, we will be establishing an advisory committee to provide feedback on the draft and aid in drafting the final language. This advisory committee can overlap with SEFCRI and TAC membership, but it will be a smaller group, with more details to come on how it will be selected. This review will be followed by public feedback. We are planning at least two in-person public meetings, one located in the northern portion of the Coral AP and one covering the southern portion, with a potential third virtual meeting, but the planning for public comment is still ongoing. After incorporation of feedback from the public and review by CRCP, there will be a final, formal review by FWC and the counties. The final step of the process is submittal and acceptance through the ARC.

Once the management plan is finalized, the strategies will be prioritized and developed into projects, and we plan to utilize the SEFCRI and TAC teams to aid in this process. We will also be looking for assistance in developing metrics and project tracking to ensure that we are meeting the goals, objectives and strategies that are outlined in the management plan.

Questions:

Brian Walker: Is the Government Cut Watershed Management Plan and expanding that further north, connected to this in anyway? Or is that totally separate?

Allie Shatters: That was Lara [Bracci] earlier who mentioned that. The Government Cut Watershed Plan was a project that was funded through NOAA, and they contracted out to a group. It is the

same process that had previously been done for the Boynton ICA [Inlet Contributing Area]. So that was a continuation of that into the other ICAs. What Lara [Bracci] was talking about, is that the Government Cut Watershed Management Plan has been finalized and we can share that, it's available, but what Lara [Bracci] was talking about, was that we had a working group that was helping with the creation of that and it was led by those contractors. Lara [Bracci] was talking about the desire to keep the momentum of that plan moving. The contractors did a great job of coming up with projects. In that plan, they actually have a whole table listed out of different projects that they think can come out of that plan and that they would recommend. So, moving forward is formatting that working group into an implementation group. So that is a difference in the AP management plan that I was talking about.

Brian Walker: How do the [Coral AP management plan and Government Cut Watershed Management Plan] connect? Or is there a consideration of one into the other?

Allie Shatters: Definitely, there is. We actually call out that process of developing and implementing watershed management plans for the different ICAs in the Coral AP region. We call out supporting the continued development of those, and the implementation of ones that already exist as one of the strategies in the AP management plan.

Dana Wusinich-Mendez: The watershed management plan is focused on land-based sources of pollution, identifying priority land-based sources of pollution that are feeding into Government Cut and the contributing area, and then being carried offshore affecting our coastal water quality. So, it's a concentrated focus on land-based sources of pollution. Although, now that the watershed management plan is complete, it probably does make sense to look at the water quality related actions that are being recommended in the management plan and cross referencing those with the both the Boynton and Government Cut ICA watershed management plans, and seeing if there anything that was called out in those watershed management plans that would be good to reemphasize and pull into the broader AP management plan?

Brian Walker: Yes, I think so because a lot of our data is showing that the Government Cut is a huge contributor to the water quality in the Coral AP. Any of the waters going north, at least in the adjacent waters, so it would make sense to incorporate them.

Allie Shatters: That is a great idea. We do have the implementations of those individual watershed management plans called out in the AP management plan language. The strategies written in the AP management plan are intentionally not as specific as some of the solutions that are laid out within those watershed management plans. But I definitely agree with wanting to keep the momentum from those efforts moving forward. So, we do call it out in more of a general sense as in implementing the recommendations of those plans.

Caity Savoia [chat]: How often will this group/ the TAC meet moving forward?

Allie Shatters: We will be having another meeting some time later this year to make sure that you guys are involved, as we are going through this process of incorporating feedback and finalizing the management plan for the AP. Then after that, the TAC normally meets twice a year and the SEFCRI team once or twice depending on what the needs are. I will mention, however, as we are looking into individual project development, we will have some sort of project team structure like we had in the past. I don't know if it will look the same, but that is a conversation we can have at some point with the Team, to see what you would like to get out of that project team structure. In the past, SEFCRI team members have signed up for specific projects that they are interested in and

can provide some expertise for. As a project is developed and goes through, we will have smaller teams meet. That is something that has slowed down a little bit in recent years, in large part because a lot of those LAS projects that have been identified have been checked off the list. So, once we are developing projects from this management plan, once it's finalized, we will be looking into what that project team structure should be, and those teams might meet more often depending on the individual project needs.

11:50 – 12:10 Public Comment

Melissa Sathe, Friends of Our Florida Reefs [FOFR]:

Comment: I want to share with FOFR's upcoming event at LauderAle with the SEFCRI team. And pass along information about the Reef Cleanup.

12:10 – 12:20 Wrap-up and Adjourn

Allie Shatters, DEP CRCP

Closes the meeting. Meeting minutes will be posted on the DEP website. Team members to fill out meeting evaluation following this call.