

The logo for Florida's Coral Reef is a circular emblem. The words "FLORIDA'S" and "CORAL REEF" are written in white, sans-serif, uppercase letters along the top and bottom inner edges of the circle, respectively. In the center of the circle is a stylized coral reef graphic. It features a blue curved line on the left, a red branching coral structure in the middle, and three yellow circles on the right. The background of the entire image is a vibrant underwater scene with various types of coral, including tall, thin, brownish-purple branching corals and lower, yellowish, porous table corals.

FLORIDA'S CORAL REEF

**Help Conserve one of
Florida's Most Precious
Natural Wonders**

FloridasCoralReef.org

Discover Florida's Hidden Treasure

Florida's Coral Reef stretches almost 350 miles from the Dry Tortugas to the St. Lucie Inlet.

It's the only coral reef system in the continental United States and is home to over 40 species of reef-building corals that provide shelter, food and breeding sites for millions of plants and animals.



ST. LUCIE INLET
MARTIN COUNTY

WEST PALM BEACH

SE FL CORAL REEF
ECOSYSTEM
CONSERVATION AREA

FORT LAUDERDALE

MIAMI

BISCAYNE BAY
AQUATIC PRESERVES

BISCAYNE BAY
NATIONAL PARK

JOHN PENNEKAMP
CORAL REEF STATE PARK

DRY TORTUGAS
NATIONAL PARK

KEY WEST

FLORIDA KEYS
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Florida's Coral Reef is an Integral Part of Florida's way of Life

From our beaches, mangroves and seagrasses, to our surfers, divers, fishers and beach lovers, Florida's Coral Reef is a delicately balanced and interconnected community.

Floridians and visitors alike benefit from healthy and productive coral reefs. It's up to us to help ensure that a strong and diverse ecosystem exists now and into the future.

Why are Living Corals Valuable?

Coral reefs are incredible natural resources that support the economy while providing opportunities for recreation, education, scientific research and public inspiration. The fish we catch rely on corals to build the reef structure where they can breed and grow.

Current medicines that combat cancer, pain and inflammation have also been derived from coral reef organisms. The total tourism value of Florida's Coral Reef is estimated at \$1.1 billion annually. Coral reefs are estimated to annually support 71,000 jobs in South Florida. Healthy and resilient coral



**Florida's Coral Reef protects
our coast, provides a home
for the seafood we eat
and sustains our
tourism-based economy.**

Photo courtesy of Joe Marino

reefs safeguard against extreme weather, shoreline erosion and coastal flooding.

Florida's Coral Reef provides more than \$355 million per year in flood protection benefits to buildings and protects nearly \$320 million in annual economic activity.

Corals – Animals That Build and Live on Florida's Coral Reef

Corals are some of the most unique and oldest living animals found on the planet. Living close to our beaches, they construct massive reefs, often called the “rainforests of the sea,” that support a rich and diverse web of life in our ocean.

Corals are animals that range in size from a pinhead to a DVD. They can live as individual animals called polyps or in large communities containing thousands of individuals.

Most corals grow extremely slowly, adding less than an inch each year. A single community – called a colony – can live for hundreds of years. The oldest known colony in southeast Florida is over 300 years old!

Our coral reefs are made up of 2 different types of corals:



Photo courtesy of Dave Gilliam

Stony Corals

Stony corals have calcium-based, limestone skeletons and are the primary reef-building corals. New colonies grow on top of old colonies, which, over time, build the reef foundation.



Soft Corals

Soft corals include sea fans and sea whips. Soft corals don't have a hard limestone skeleton, so they don't add to the reef foundation. Their flexible skeleton allows them to sway with the waves and ocean currents.



Florida's Coral Reef is an incredible natural resource that protects our coastline and supports the economy, providing opportunities for recreation, education and medical research.



Photo courtesy of Joe Marino

The Future of Florida's Coral Reef is Being Threatened

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), warming ocean temperatures, ocean acidification and many other threats contribute to reef degradation.

Florida's Coral Reef is also susceptible to local stressors, including impacts associated with coastal construction, poor water quality, irresponsible fishing and diving practices, vessel groundings, and anchor drags, and marine debris impacts, to name a few.

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Outbreak

Florida's Coral Reef is experiencing a multi-year outbreak of SCTLD. While disease outbreaks are not uncommon, this event is unique due to its large geographic range, extended duration, rapid progression, high rates of mortality and the number of reef-building coral species that are affected.

But, there is Hope

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection and its partners are working daily to support the reef's natural recovery processes through the

large-scale cultivation, outplanting and monitoring of genetically diverse, reef-building corals.

Priority coral disease response activities:

- **Strategic sampling** and laboratory analyses to understand how the disease affects corals and what factors may influence the disease outbreak.
- **Intervention experiments** and field trials to assess the effectiveness of treatment techniques and prevent the further spread of disease.
- **Coral rescue efforts** to preserve some of the remaining genetic diversity in land-based facilities across the country.
- **Large-scale propagation** of corals in land-based facilities for future restoration.
- **Restoration trials** to determine where corals can be outplanted.
- **Caribbean-wide cooperation** focuses on information sharing.

The exact cause and contributing factors for this outbreak will likely take years to identify; however, addressing other known coral stressors, including water quality, will increase the ability of the corals to recover. We can all do our part to increase the resilience of our coral reefs.

For more information about Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease response efforts in Florida, visit FloridasCoralReef.org.

5 Ways You Can Help Protect Florida's Coral Reef

Help protect Florida's Coral Reef for future generations. When you're enjoying Florida's beautiful beaches, remember the following:

1. Use Mineral-Based Sunscreens

Chemicals like oxybenzone and octinoxate, used in many sunscreens, decrease a coral's defenses against bleaching, damaging their DNA and harming their development.

2. Avoid Touching Coral

Coral reefs are alive. When you dive, don't touch the reef, and avoid stirring-up sediment while swimming or diving. Once the sediment settles, it can smother corals.

3. Pack It In, Pack It Out

Millions of tons of trash end up in the ocean. Whether you're on the beach or on the water, pick up your own trash and any that others may have left behind.

4. Reduce Waste

There are many ways to reduce waste. Travel with your own reusable drinking bottle, cutlery set, mug and reusable bag. Recycle as much as possible, and deposit trash into receptacles for proper

disposal. Recycle or properly discard used fishing gear. Reduce or eliminate single-use plastics.

5. Join Florida's Coral Crew

As a member of Florida's Coral Crew, you will be a champion for the rescue and restoration of Florida's Coral Reef.

Visit FloridasCoralReef.org to take the pledge and find out how you can become an advocate for the protection of Florida's Coral Reef.



Photo courtesy of Joe Marino

Dive in and explore Florida's Coral Reef in 360°

For visitors that would rather visit the reef virtually, visit FloridasCoralReef.org/VR to fully immerse yourself underwater in this delicately balanced and interconnected community.





Photo courtesy of Adam Eurbín



NOAA



OUR FLORIDA
REEFS
YOUR VOICE, OUR FUTURE



FLORIDA
STATE PARKS
...the Real FloridaSM

Sea Grant
Florida

FROST
SCIENCE

The Nature
Conservancy



NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARIES
FLORIDA KEYS

CORAL
RESTORATION
FOUNDATIONTM



MOTE
MARINE LABORATORY
& AQUARIUM

Audubon
FLORIDA



NOAA
CORAL REEF
CONSERVATION PROGRAM



Florida Keys
& Key West



SFRPC
South Florida Regional Planning Council



NSU | NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Florida

REEF RELIEF

THE FLORIDA
AQUARIUM



Smithsonian