



### Meeting Highlights

Additional meeting materials (agendas, presentations, etc.) are available on the Task Force web site ([www.coralreef.gov](http://www.coralreef.gov)). For more information contact Sarah Bobbe ([Sarah\\_Bobbe@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Sarah_Bobbe@ios.doi.gov)).

### General Summary

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) met in San Juan, Puerto Rico, October 30-November 5, including holding public meetings on November 3 and 5. The purpose of the meeting was to take action on key issues related to coral reef conservation. The meeting also provided an opportunity for USCRTF members to share recent accomplishments, existing challenges, and needs in addressing coral reef research and conservation issues locally and globally. Much of the content and discussion at this meeting focused around watersheds, partnerships, and Caribbean area issues and initiatives.

Highlights of the week include:

- USCRTF passed two decision items:
  - **Implementation of the Framework for Action** – USCRTF coral conservation efforts will focus on four priority actions, including: adopt and refine action plans that target priority stressors and threats; coordinate authority to reach goals; prioritize, fund, and implement necessary science; and enhance communication, outreach, and education.
  - **Roadway Resolution-** The USCRTF Secretariat will establish a working group, temporarily led by the Secretariat, to review and recommend best management practices for during and post-construction roadway design.
- In light of comments regarding the difficulty of monitoring development activities that are obscured by the island's variable topography and complex shoreline, the U.S. Coast Guard has offered assistance to agencies managing land based impacts to coral reefs. Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen will review requests and attempt to provide support for State and Federal agency partners to accompany CG aircrews on routine, regularly scheduled over-flights of these areas to assess potential impacts to the marine environment (science community) or monitor compliance with regulations (cooperating agency) having a nexus to living marine resources and coral reefs. If successful, this collaboration may be regarded as a pilot project and the development of similar arrangements may be explored in other areas.
- USDA will provide one million dollars in Fiscal Year 2010 to projects in the Guanica Bay Watershed in southwest Puerto Rico.

- USDA will lead the United States Coral Reef Task Force Partnership Initiative (CRTFPI). USDA will match up to \$250,000 to partners to enhance NGO capacity in Guanica Bay. NOAA plans to dedicate \$550,000 total in 2010, \$100,00 will go to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for community grants and \$450,000 will be directed to technical assistance.
- The USCRTF and associated members hosted four workshops in association with this meeting:
  - Recreational Stewardship
  - Watersheds and Partnerships
  - Socioeconomic Assessments
  - *Acropora* and *Montastraea* Restoration
- Three expert panels presented key findings during the USCRTF business meeting on
  - Watersheds and Partnerships
  - Local Action Strategies
  - Caribbean Region Issues
- Senior leadership from Federal agencies, states and territories addressed meeting attendees.
- The USCRTF heard public comment from 18 individuals and organizations.
- The USCRTF presented six awards to regional individuals and organizations.
- Field trips took Members and staff to one of two unique areas of Puerto Rico.

### **Implementation of the Framework for Action**

The USCRTF released a call to action for coral reef conservation at the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting in Kona, Hawaii, in 2008. The implementation of this call to action focuses USCRTF efforts on four priority actions, including: adopt and refine action plans that target priority stressors and threats; coordinate authority to reach goals; prioritize, fund, and implement necessary science; and enhance communication, outreach, and education.

### **Resolution 22-1**

#### **To Improve Stormwater Management for Roads in Order to Protect Coral Reef Ecosystems**

Runoff from roadways significantly contributes to land-based pollution adversely impacting coral reefs, and therefore, the USCRTF Secretariat will establish a working group, temporarily led by the Secretariat, to review and recommend best management practices for during and post-construction roadway design. The working group will provide interim briefing at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Task Force Meeting, and provide final report at the 24<sup>th</sup> Task Force Meeting.

### **Update on the Success of No-Take Reserves**

Results and early trends from creation of no-take coral reef reserves in Florida and Puerto Rico were presented by Mr. Billy Causey of NOAA and Ms. Aida Rosario, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

### **Report Out on USCRTF Climate Change Working Group Response to the Honolulu Declaration on Ocean Acidification and Reef Management**

At the August 2008 USCRTF meeting, Dr. Rod Salm of The Nature Conservancy presented the Honolulu Declaration on Ocean Acidification and Reef Management. The Declaration laid out a

course of action to address the threat of ocean acidification through policy and management recommendations. The USCRTF Climate Change Working Group was tasked with developing a response to the Honolulu Declaration, and collated responses from USCRTF agencies and jurisdictions on each of their ongoing actions to address ocean acidification and climate change. The Climate Change Working Group recommended that the USCRTF and/or its agencies and jurisdiction partners contact the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Global Change Research Program to request rigorous complete consideration of marine impacts of climate change and ocean acidification in the IPCC 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report.

### **Special Session: Report on Local Action Strategies & Jurisdiction Management Priorities**

Local Action Strategies (LAS) are a USCRTF led initiative to identify and implement priority actions needed to reduce key threats to valuable coral reef resources in each U.S. coral reef jurisdiction. At the 21st meeting of the USCRTF, the co-chairs requested that the steering committee include a discussion on involvement of the federal government agencies in the LAS initiative on the agenda of the 22nd meeting. In preparation for this discussion, a survey was developed and completed by all seven state and territory members and many of the Federal members of the USCRTF. The objective of this survey was to both assess levels and mechanisms of Federal agency support for LAS and to identify ways in which USCRTF members can work together to better support coral reef conservation at the local level. Ms. Kacky Andrews of the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program presented the survey results. Mr. Howard Hankin, US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) shared the Federal perspective on LAS. Ms. Vangie Lujan, AIC Chair shared the jurisdiction perspective to working with Federal agencies to implement LAS.

### **Special Session- Caribbean Region Highlights**

The Caribbean region has experienced a variety of stressors to coral reefs. Bleaching events, *Acropora* die offs, invasive lionfish, and marine debris all threaten the health of coral reef ecosystems. However, steps have been taken to address these stressors, and through initiatives like the Caribbean Challenge, the Caribbean region continues to fight for healthy coral reef ecosystems. Presentations conveyed where Federal agencies and jurisdictions came together as partners to address stressors in the Caribbean, where challenges still exist and how the USCRTF as an effective partnering body can come together to address these challenges and craft next steps. Topics covered and presenters included: Marine Debris by Dr. Holly Bamford, NOAA Marine Debris Program; *Acropora* Recovery Plan by Ms. Jennifer Moore, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region; Lionfish: Invasive in the Caribbean by Mr. Lad Akins, Reef Environmental Education Foundation; Caribbean Challenge Update by Mr. Aaron Hutchins, The Nature Conservancy; and Vessel Groundings by Mr. Tom Moore, NOAA Restoration Center.

### **Special Session- The USCRTF and Watersheds: Partnering Against Land- Based Sources of Pollution**

The Kona declaration identified land-based sources of pollution as a key threat to coral reef ecosystems. This session, moderated by Paul Sturm of the Center for Watershed Protection, increased awareness of how several Federal and local agencies are partnering to address land based sources of pollution. Several successful partnerships were highlighted, including their structure, how the partnerships have addressed management gaps, and how their successes can be used as examples to assist the jurisdictions. Presentation topics and presenters included Coral

Reefs of Molokai, Hawaii by Dr. Michael Field, US Geological Survey; La Parguera: Coral Reef Ecosystem Study by Dr. Richard Appeldoorn, University of Puerto Rico; and Jobos Bay Watershed Activities by Mr. Jose Castro, USDA NRCS.

### **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Funds for Coral-**

Dr. Steven Thur of the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program reported on NOAA's Recovery Act habitat restoration grant process and results. 50 projects were chosen from a pool of 814 proposals totaling more than \$3 billion in requests. Of the 50 projects selected, 5 coral-relevant projects in Hawaii, USVI, Florida, and CNMI were selected, totaling approximately \$15 million.

### **USDA Gaunica Watershed Funding Announcement**

Ms. Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment, USDA, announced USDA will provide \$1 million from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in Fiscal Year 2010 to reduce sediment and nutrient run-off from the watershed to help protect near shore coral reef ecosystems in the Guanica Bay Watershed in southwest Puerto Rico. The \$1 million dedicated to improving coral reef health in the watershed in Fiscal Year 2010 will come from funds NRCS allocates to Puerto Rico, and NRCS is planning to fund similar projects in Florida, U.S. Virgin Islands, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands area in the future.

In response to an appeal from NGOs to enhance partnership opportunities and stakeholders to conserve and protect coral reef ecosystems, federal agencies on the USCRTF have created a new initiative; the United States Coral Reef Task Force Partnership Initiative (CRTFPI). A first year goal of \$1 million has been identified for USCRTF member agencies to pool together for the CRTFPI. NRCS has guaranteed that it will match USCRTF member contributions up to \$250,000. NOAA announced it will contribute \$100,000 to this initiative through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and \$450,000 worth of technical assistance.

### **Coral Threat Mitigation Panel**

This panel addressed the regulations issued jointly by the Corps of Engineers and EPA in 2008 to address compensatory mitigation for dredge and fill of wetlands or harbors. Presentation topics and panel members included Corps of Engineers Mitigation Rule Overview by Mr. George Young, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; CWA Compensatory Mitigation: Challenges and Opportunities by Dr. Wendy Wiltse, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and Functional Coral Reef Assessment by Mr. Gerry Davis, NOAA and Mr. Dwayne Minton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Steering Committee Meeting**

The USCRTF Steering Committee met on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Highlights from the meeting are as follows:

- The Steering Committee discussed the Implementation of the Framework for Action document and Resolution 22.1. They made appropriate modifications to ready Resolution 22.1 for final review and approval by USCRTF members at the business meeting.
- The DC 2010 business meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 24, 2010.
- The 2010 jurisdiction meeting location will be announced at the February DC meeting.
- Jose Castro of USDA presented on the Conservation Effects Assessments Project in Jobos Bay, Puerto Rico.

- Steven Thur, NOAA Steering Committee co-chair, provided an updated on the status of the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act.
- Roy Armstrong of the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez presented on Mesophotic Corals Ecosystems Research Strategy, found at [http://www.cop.noaa.gov/ecosystems/coralreefs/current/MCE\\_Res\\_strat.html](http://www.cop.noaa.gov/ecosystems/coralreefs/current/MCE_Res_strat.html)
- Pat Bradley and Bill Fisher of EPA presented on “The Human Component of the Coral Reef Ecosystem: A Framework for Sustainability.”
- Howard Hankin and Yahaira Lopez of USDA discussed the USCRTF Partnership Initiative, which was later announced at the business meeting.
- Steering committee members reviewed and discussed six public comments submitted in advance to the USCRTF Secretariat.

### **Public Comment**

Public comment was provided by the following 18 individuals and organizations.

- Richard Appledorn, Caribbean Coral Reef Institute
- Grant Cambell, South Florida Audubon Society
- Dr. Raymond F. McAllister, Citizen
- Geroge Carvos, Esq., Citizen
- Dave Raney and Dr. Judith Lang, Sierra Club
- Ed Tichenor, Director Palm Beach County Rescue
- Dan Clark, Cry of the Water
- Stephanie Clark, Cry of the Water
- Jose Menendez, Sierra Club
- Osmoldo Romero, Citizen
- Evelyn Martinez-Clark, San Juan Government
- Kristal Ibarra Rodriguez, Citizen
- Ricardo de Soto, Citizen
- Billy Causey, NOAA
- Mary Ann Luckings, Citizen
- Francisco Lopez Mujica, Citizen
- Ricardo Laureano, Citizen
- Mario Perez, Citizen

### **Workshop Highlights**

#### **Recreational Stewardship**

The Coral Reef Alliance, in association with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and other local partners, hosted a free learning workshop to give dive and marine tourism professionals a background in coral reef ecology, conservation, and best environmental business practices. This interactive workshop gave tourism operators the chance to learn about local coral reef issues, see examples of strategies that are working in other coral reef jurisdictions, while developing their own local response to reduce reef threats from marine recreation.

#### **Watersheds and Partnerships Workshop**

This full-day workshop explored watershed case studies and highlight Federal/local partnerships making a difference in watershed management. The needs of watershed managers and opportunities for partnership were identified in facilitated discussions.

### **Restoration: *Acropora* and *Montastraea* Workshop**

This workshop focused on the process and criteria to list a species of coral in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) including the criteria used to list *Acropora* (palmata and cervicornis), and reviewed the status of the species. There were a series of short presentations on the work, projects and monitoring of *Acropora* in the Caribbean. Discussions generated specific recommendations that will be provided to the US Coral Reef Task Force to protect the *Montastraea* complex.

### **Using Socioeconomic Information for Management in the US Caribbean Workshop**

This workshop provided a forum for presenting results of socioeconomic assessments completed in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands in 2008 and 2009. Attendees heard from reserve managers on how they are using the socioeconomic information collected for management decisions and how the information is being integrated with biological data.

## **Field Trips and Site Building Opportunities**

### **Guanica Watershed**

This trip explored 2 land-based project sites impacting Guanica and nearby environments with a ridge to reef theme. Federal/state/local partnerships making a difference in watershed management in the south of Puerto Rico were highlighted. Attendees met with local users, state, and federal managers, scientists, and others to discuss the current status of Guanica and how to address its nearshore reefs, ideas for response plans, lessons learned, and planning for future projects.

### **Isla Caja de Muertos**

Attendees were taken on a special guided tour - by boat and by foot - of the newly re-inaugurated Isla Caja de Muertos, a special nature preserve of high ecological importance, corals, caves, birds, and marine life.

### **Awards**

The USCRTF presented six awards to regional and local individuals.

### **Outstanding Public Awareness and Education**

- Maria Falcon
- San Juan Bay Estuary Program

### **Outstanding Community Level Participation**

- The Virgin Islands Resource Conservation and Development (VI RC&D) Council, Inc
- Kathy Valentine Hall

## **Outstanding Scientific Advancement and Knowledge**

- Dr. Samuel Suleiman
- Dr. Jorge Garcia Sais