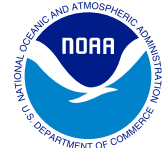
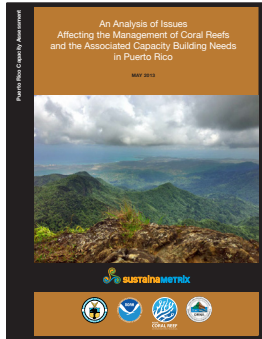


# Puerto Rico



NOAA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM

## Coral Reef Management Capacity Challenges and Recommendations



Puerto Rico is the smallest and easternmost island complex of the Greater Antilles, with the north shore of the main island falling in the Atlantic Ocean and the south shore falling in the Caribbean Sea. This coral reef ecosystem spans much of the archipelago, including the municipal islands of Culebra and Vieques and others such as

Mona, Desecheo, and Caja de Muertos.

The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico is the territorial agency with jurisdiction over coral reef resources up to nine nautical miles, including all shallow reef ecosystems and some benthic ecosystems. Puerto Rico has a coral reef conservation program in need of additional, dedicated staff members and structure.

A team of experts supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program conducted an assessment of the programs working to manage and conserve coral reefs in Puerto Rico. The resulting report, *An Analysis of Issues Affecting the Management of Coral Reefs and the Associated Capacity Building Needs in Puerto Rico*, is available on the coral program's website at [www.coralreef.noaa.gov](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov). Some of the findings are summarized below.

### NATIONAL SUMMARY

As part of a capacity-assessment process, a team of specialists identified challenges common to all seven U.S. coral reef jurisdictions and provided recommendations to overcome them. These findings are summarized below.

#### CHALLENGES

- A lack of political will and formal commitment for increased coral reef management
- A lack of long-term and sustainable financing
- A lack of supportive and informed constituencies
- A need to move from planning to implementation
- A need for improved enforcement and compliance
- A need for increased support for the effective function and structure of management agencies

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support for a collaborative approach for the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000
- The expansion and institutionalization of staff capacity-building programs in the jurisdictions
- Establishment of a working group of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force focused on improving the enforcement of laws that safeguard coral reefs
- Strategic engagement of governors to champion coral reef conservation and management
- Facilitation of peer-to-peer learning exchanges among the jurisdictions

Read the full report, *A Synthesis of Issues Affecting the Management of Coral Reefs and Recommendations for Long-term Capacity Building in U.S. Jurisdictions*, at [www.coralreef.noaa.gov](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov).

# Puerto Rico

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## CHALLENGES

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**Political will and formal commitment for coral reef protection:** The 1999 Coral Law 147 is the main legal tool for the protection of coral reefs. However, this law is often not enforced and lacks high-level institutional and political support.

**Sustainable financing of coral reef management efforts:** Puerto Rico's Department of Natural and Environmental Resources completely relies on NOAA funds for coral reef management efforts. The agency provides in-kind support but does not receive any other form of monetary support from Puerto Rico. This lack of funding greatly limits resource management efforts and staffing.

**Supportive and informed constituencies for effective coral reef management:** Puerto Rico's 3.7 million residents have an overall low level of awareness of marine resources and anthropogenic impacts on the reef. There are several groups dedicated to education and outreach to specific communities, but their reach is limited.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**Increase staff member capacity for coral management:** The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources has one full-time person dedicated to coral management efforts. To increase the capacity of the coral program, it is imperative that more full-time staff members are recruited.

**Sustainable finance plan:** To increase reach and capacity, the department cannot solely rely on NOAA funding for coral reef management. Some suggest that the territory provide an account for coral reef management. Funding could be collected from different sources, such as tourism activities. An annual funding allotment from the central government is another potential source. An island-wide valuation study might be needed before the legislature can see coral reef protection as a priority. But the establishment of a sustainable and increased financial source mechanism is imperative.

**Create and adopt improved management plans:** Not all marine protected areas in Puerto Rico have management plans. Some of the existing plans need to be revised and updated. All management plans need to include feasible short-term recommendations and incorporate significant stakeholder involvement and feedback.

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## MORE INFORMATION



This capacity assessment was conducted by Sustainamatrix under contract to the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program. We would like to thank the many partners who participated in this process. The assessments are available online at [www.coralreef.noaa.gov/aboutcrctp/strategy/reprioritization/capacityassessments](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov/aboutcrctp/strategy/reprioritization/capacityassessments).

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