

Spring 2020



Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) status report for Florida's Coral Reef. The report highlights the need to continue efforts to reduce the threats contributing to their decline in order to restore resilience to this valuable resource. It also reinforces the urgent need for more active restoration to bring back ecosystem function and ecosystem services critical to the way of life and economy of South Florida.

The report suggests reef coral growth and fish sustainability in Florida are severely impacted and have declined substantially. However, there are some glimmers of hope in this assessment. Fish diversity is good, suggesting the effectiveness of management actions for ornamental reef fishes in protected areas like parts of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the Dry Tortugas Research Natural Area. Initiatives like [Mission: Iconic Reefs](#) and the [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint](#) have strong potential to improve coral reef conditions in the Keys, as do the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area (Coral ECA) and Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative's Our Florida Reefs management planning process for the northern portion of Florida's Coral Reef.

It is important to note this product is a snapshot in time from 2014-2018. Data used for this product came from NOAA's National Coral Reef Monitoring Program, as well as partners in the State of Florida who use the same sampling methodology such as Florida's Coral Reef Evaluation and Monitoring Project and Florida's Disturbance Response Monitoring program. The scores on this product for corals and algae, fish, and climate indicators were derived from comparing data from 2014-2018 to the best available historical data. It is also important to note that the baselines this assessment used for some indicators were post-1996 for CREMP data and post-2005 for DRM data, and therefore may have already partially reflected the declining trajectory of reef health since the 1970s. As a result, the scores could be considered elevated given that they are compared to an already-affected reference point. Additionally, data from the 2019 field season were not yet available at the time this report was created and therefore the scores do not take into account the rapid progression of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease through the lower keys in that year. This disease, first identified in Miami-Dade County in 2014, was observed from the upper reaches of the reef tract south and west to past Key West in 2019, and readers should be aware coral scores in this report are not inclusive of 2019 data. The overall score is "Impaired" (69%), suggesting that few indicators meet reference values and have declined considerably.

The report is the product of collaboration among the NOAA Coral Program and numerous partners, including the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Integration and Application Network, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Nova Southeastern University, U.S. National Park Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, University of Miami, Miami-Dade County, The Nature Conservancy, Broward County, and University of South Florida. We hope this report informs continued discussion about the status of Florida's Coral Reef, and encourage you to contact the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program if you have any questions about the report.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Koss, Director, Coral Reef Conservation Program
Erica K. Towle, National Coral Reef Monitoring Program Coordinator