

# SOUTHEAST COASTAL OCEAN TASK FORCE

## Draft Recommendations

5/5/2015

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Apply to NOAA for National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) status for the entire SEFCRI region. Sanctuaries are managed to protect and conserve their resources and to allow uses that are compatible with resource protection. In addition to application to NOAA, apply to the State of Florida for management status similar to that of a NMS.
- 2 The Task Force will establish a committee to coordinate actions and activities within and between their members, respective entities, and agencies that will further the implementation of the management actions endorsed by the Task Force.
- 3 The Coastal Ocean Task Force should oppose any and all actions to investigate, support or allow offshore oil exploration on the Florida coast, including seismic airgun testing.

### WATER QUALITY

1. Address issues concerning water quality impacts to the reef by developing regional initiatives to reduce nutrient loading from all human sources and pathways, including surface water management (Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan [CERP] and Central Everglades Planning Project [CEPP]), septic systems and ocean outfall discharges (e.g., advanced treatment), to improve conditions for estuarine and marine habitats.
  - Stormwater treatment
    - i. The COTF should address issues concerning water supply and freshwater discharges by working collectively to advocate for construction of additional water storage reservoirs, stormwater treatment areas, flow equalization basins, and use of appropriate technologies to reduce nutrient levels before release of water to southeast Florida estuaries and to modulate salinity changes in those estuaries.
  - Wastewater
    - i. Update and replace wastewater infrastructure to improve surface and groundwater quality.
    - ii. Replace all septic systems with common sewer hookups to prevent septic systems from adding contaminated sewage and nutrients to groundwater.
    - iii. Close all outfall pipes and build infrastructure for advanced water treatment and reuse to improve ocean water quality, reduce destruction algal blooms, and increase water reuse.

- Water flow and estuaries
  - i. Support restoration of historical/natural “Everglades” water flow to minimize pulses of freshwater and protect marine ecosystems from poor water quality (nutrients).
  - ii. Enhance existing estuaries and restore potential estuarine areas to support coral reef ecosystem function.
  - iii. Restore and create estuarine habitats and redirect historical freshwater flows to increase habitat, improve water quality, and support nursery area for reef fauna.
  - iv. Support and provide money incentives and initiatives to restore and preserve wetlands north of Lake Okeechobee to reduce discharges to coastal estuaries to protect estuaries and reefs.
  - v. Require governmental entities to ID point-source inputs into estuaries and retro-fit them as needed to reduce pollutant loadings to restore healthy estuaries.

*NOTE: NPDES MS4 requires a reduction in load to the Maximum Extent Possible (MEP), but it does not say to retrofit each outfall. Following is the exact language:*

*“The stormwater management program must be designed and implemented to reduce the discharge of pollutants from each permittee’s MS4 to surface waters of the State to the MEP. Narrative effluent limitations requiring implementation of best management practices (BMPs) are generally the most appropriate form of effluent limitations when designed to satisfy technology requirements (including reduction of pollutants to the MEP) and to protect water quality. Implementation of BMPs consistent with the provisions of the stormwater management program required pursuant to this permit constitutes compliance with the standard of reducing pollutants to the MEP. The MEP standard is applied to MS4s in recognition of the fact that an operator typically does not have total control over the quality or quantity of stormwater entering its system and ultimately entering waters of the State. Stormwater management programs must be assessed and adjusted by the permittee, as part of an iterative process, to maximize their efficiency and make reasonable further progress toward an ultimate goal of reducing the discharge of pollutants to the extent necessary to protect receiving waters.”*

- vi. Direct funds from the water and land legacy amendment toward acquiring properties that will help preserve and restore coastal/wetland habitats to benefit coral reefs.
- Solid waste
  - i. Investigate a state-wide deposit for plastic and glass bottles to reduce plastic in the ocean and on reefs.

- Nutrient pollution
  - i. Develop/Improve water quality monitoring to include inlet discharges and offshore reef areas to track stormwater on reef and improve water quality
  - ii. Develop TMDLs and mass balance for water going to tide to help prioritize effective management actions and make informed management decisions.
- Groundwater
  - i. Enact a Florida Aquifer Protection Act that establishes guidelines to regulate pollutants introduced into the aquifer
  - ii. Reduce ground water pollution in targeted watersheds associated with priority reef areas to improve water quality and reef health.
- Boating
  - i. Improve sewage and solid waste disposal services at marinas, including recycling, to minimize overboard discharges into water bodies.
  - ii. Promote/offer free pump-out stations to encourage boaters to take advantage of these services.
  - iii. Incorporate and promote coral reef (specifically SECFRI Region) awareness and education and coral-specific boater and marine BMPs to augment Clean Marina Programs
  - iv. Encourage development of less toxic marine products for boat maintenance and construction
- Yards, gardens, and golf courses
  - i. Ban lawn fertilizing during the rainy season as well as limit the types of fertilizer that can be sold to the public to reduce elevated nutrient levels in canals, rivers, lakes and estuaries.
  - ii. Remove phosphate chemical treatments and fertilizers in south Florida through legislation per the Florida Keys to reduce LBSP washing out to the coral ecosystem.
  - iii. Promote the use of environmentally friendly fertilizers, weed killers, and insecticides to reduce or eliminate toxic chemicals from entering bays, estuaries, and oceans through storm runoff.
  - v. Reduce yard clippings and other yard waste from entering water bodies to reduce nutrients in estuarine habitats.
  - vi. Promote community compost programs where people can take their organic wastes for composting and receive free compost to reduce the use of inorganic fertilizer.

- vii. Promote existing “rain garden” programs to relevant landowners to reduce contaminated rainwater runoff.
  - viii. Develop and implement a “Green Club’ certification program for golf courses (similar to Blue Star for dive industry and clean marina programs) to provide an incentive mechanism for golf courses to reduce their impact on the marine environment
  - ix. Provide financial incentives for land owners who convert to “ocean friendly” landscaping, especially the conversion of golf courses and lawns to a native *Paspalum* turf varieties to reduce pollutants to reefs and conserve water
- Public education
    - i. Educate the public on the effects of land-based sources of pollution to reduce the amount of pollutants entering storm drains and waterways.

## BEACHES

1. FDEP shall require that ***beach sand be managed in a regional context***. all inlets in Florida update their inlet management plans and those plans should be based on a regional approach to sand management for beaches
  - Inlet sand bypassing
    - i. Obtain Congressional authorization and direction to require the USACE to share in the cost of design, construction, and operation of inlet sand by-passing systems at federally maintained navigation inlets.
    - ii. All beach quality sand dredged from federally maintained navigation inlets during maintenance or expansion projects shall be placed on downdrift beaches without cost to local governments.
2. Beach nourishment
  - Revise/create HEA (Habitat Equivalency Analysis) and UMAM (Uniform Mitigation Assessment Method) for coral reef environments to improve application of this rule to coastal ecosystems, to provide more consistent/accurate calculations, and to ensure ecological functions are maintained.
  - General Reevaluation Reports (GRR) for beach nourishment, as required by the USACE, shall be good for the life of the project (50 years).
  - Improve methods of offshore sediment dredging for beach nourishment to reduce muddy runoff turbidity and sediment stress on corals, eliminate damage from dredging “accidents,” and degradation of sea turtle nesting beaches.
  - International sand sources should be considered as alternatives to domestic sand.

- Encourage the use of recycled glass, if economically feasible, as a source of beach fill.

### 3. Coastal construction

- Set new and appropriate water turbidity standards for marine construction to limit damage from coastal constructions to reefs and associated habitats.
- Create/enhance “LEED”-like certification program for coastal construction companies and projects, as well as individuals working in the industry, to encourage smart development and best practices for coastal construction.
- Revise coastal permitting process to restrict or limit development and coastal construction projects activity during periods when corals are more susceptible to impacts (e.g. bleaching, spawning, other disturbance events) to reduce cumulative impacts to reefs.
- Ensure that coastal construction permits contain best management and permitting practices and use available resources to educate contractors, consultants etc., on the importance and value of our reef systems. If impacts to reefs are expected to occur, understand and account for the direct and indirect impacts

### 4. Beach raking

- Reduce negative impacts from beach raking/cleanup practices to minimize negative impacts to the beach ecosystem by limiting mechanical beach raking to high public use beaches and eliminated raking in front of lower density residential properties.

### 5. Shoreline Development

- Eliminate coastal storm water runoff to eliminate land-based sources of beach erosion reducing the need for re-nourishment projects and improve near shore water quality.
- Provide assistance for the state to engage in land acquisition projects to limit shoreline industry and maintain coastal wetlands to protect mangroves and coral reefs.
- Increase and protect public access for sustainable use of coastal resources to increase appreciation of reef resources (and their value) by the general public.
- Evaluate and enforce lighting regulations to make sure they are effectively protecting sea turtles
- Include consideration of sea level rise in revisions of Florida’s coastal construction control line (CCCL).
- Eliminate/discourage government subsidies/funds to rebuild structures with substantial storm damaged near coast and estuarine shorelines in same area/footprint to protect the shoreline.

- Coordinate regional “living shoreline” objectives to promote the use and protection of natural infrastructure (e.g. coral reefs, native vegetation, mangroves, and wetlands) to provide natural barriers to storm surge and maintain coastal biodiversity.

## **FISHERIES**

1. Work with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), NOAA, academics, and others to identify appropriate avenues for accomplishing near-term and long-term goals identified for the conservation of fishery and coastal ocean resources. This should include adequately characterizing the goal(s), accurately identifying the source of concerns to be addressed, and the implementation and evaluation of solutions that could be achieved through FWC and local government actions. The intent of this recommendation is to identify sub-regional approaches that can be used by the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative to complement the larger FWC regional approaches for species management.
2. Consideration of forage fish should be included in fisheries management plans

## **CORAL REEFS**

- 1 The State Legislature should mandate the incorporation of best management practices (BMP) for coral reef protection in coastal construction permits.
- 2 Develop a best management practice for the dive industry
  - Recommend that dive charter operators provide a substantive pre-dive briefing on awareness, etiquette and low-impact techniques
  - Discourage the use of gloves (If diver’s hands are bare, they are less likely to touch coral); emphasize buoyancy control and “fin awareness” during diver training and practice; teach new divers the “fins up” diving position; encourage divers to descend over sand, and, when possible, take this into consideration in siting mooring buoys; encourage in-water supervision of divers and overtly correct inappropriate diver behavior; consider using environmental success stories in advertising campaigns; encourage dive tour operators to invest in professional development dive guides;
  - Consider implementing a program like the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) Blue Star Program and appoint a Northern Reef Tract diver education committee to develop a “Blue Star” like program with a dive shop certification in the four-county area.

## **ESTUARIES**

- 1 Manage muck sediments on both the freshwater and estuarine sides of estuaries to prevent them from entering coastal waters.

- 2 Place a priority on restoration of shallow-water estuarine habitats and locate restoration projects strategically to improve connectivity among habitats.

## **SOCIOECONOMICS**

- 1 Update the 2001 Socio-economic study of coral reefs in southeast Florida and expand the scope to include beaches.
  - Require valuation and consideration of ecosystem services in determining benefit/cost ratios as part of local, state, and federal project planning and land use decisions.
  - Members of the Task Force shall work collaboratively to identify and target all possible funding sources to support work necessary to document the value of the Southeast Florida marine ecosystem, based on socioeconomic and use pattern studies, and use that information in a public awareness campaign to 1) increase public support for marine protection, 2) change individual behavior/reduce impacts, 3) inform state, local and federal project planning 4) provide a real basis for impact assessment and 5) provide information to leverage county, state and federal organizations for increased funding.

## **MARINE DEBRIS**

1. Provide trash and recycling containers at beach entrances.
2. Solid waste
  - Cigarette litter
    - I. Promote the placement of visible cigarette receptacles at beach public access points.
    - II. Work with Florida legislature and local municipalities to implement smoking bans on beaches, yet provide for designated smoking areas.
    - III. Increase shoreline cleanup efforts
  - Straws/Stirrers, plastic utensils, plastic food-ware
    - i. Work with beachside restaurants and businesses to limit single use plastics and switch to compostable or reusable alternatives.
    - ii. Follow the model set by Miami Beach and ban plastic straws from beachside use.
  - Expanded Polystyrene Foam (EPS)
    - I. Ban use of EPS foam food ware at all beachside establishments.
    - II. Ban use of EPS foam coolers on beaches.

- III. Expand EPS foam food ware bans on beaches to cover coastal counties in the region.
- Plastic, glass and recyclables
  - i. Encourage the placement of visible recycling receptacles at public access points, dune crossovers and popular beach sites.
  - ii. Encourage frequent recyclable pick up and mandate additional pickup after special events or large beach holidays (e.g., 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Labor Day, etc.).
  - iii. Work with Florida Legislature and municipalities to create a statewide “bottle bill” or container deposit law.
- Plastic bags
  - i. Encourage local municipalities to adopt “voluntary bag bans” encouraging businesses to use only reusable bags
- Boating, Marinas and their Responsibilities
  - i. Place color-coded, clearly labelled recycling bins with lids on docks for staff and customers.
  - ii. Ask boaters and fishermen to cooperate by bringing their trash back to the docks.
  - iii. Encourage boaters to set up an onboard system to segregate trash for easy disposal and recycling on shore.
  - iv. Reduce the amount and impacts of derelict fishing gear by collaborating with the fishing and recreational industry to develop best practices to minimize the impact of lost gear or gear thrown into the ocean.
  - v. Ask these industries to develop and adapt educational effective messages especially with better signage on docks about marine debris issues.
  - vi. Ask them to offer Educational workshops/classes on marine debris issues to motivate and inspire people to take action at their marinas.
  - vii. Let the public know that they can call the Coast Guard National Response Center at (800) 424-8802 to make a formal report on those who do not comply with the recommendations. Place large signs with this information near the recycling bins on the docks of the marinas.
  - viii. Promote funding for derelict vessel management