

SOUTHEAST COASTAL OCEAN TASK FORCE

Draft Recommendations

5/28/2015

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Apply to the appropriate government agencies to develop a holistic management plan for the southeast Florida coastal waters. The plan shall include stakeholder input and address measures to maximize water quality, improve fisheries, and minimize the impacts of coastal construction. Options for this include application to NOAA for National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) status and request to the State of Florida for management status similar to that of a NMS.
- 2 The Task Force will encourage the establishment of a committee to coordinate actions and activities that will further the implementation of the management actions endorsed by the Task Force.
- 3 The Coastal Ocean Task Force opposes any and all actions to investigate, support or allow offshore oil exploration on the Florida coast, including seismic air gun 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 encourages the construction of additional water storage reservoirs, stormwater treatment areas, flow equalization basins, and use of appropriate technologies to reduce nutrient levels before release of freshwater to southeast Florida estuaries and to modulate salinity changes in those estuaries.
 - Wastewater
 - i. Update and replace wastewater infrastructure where necessary to improve surface and groundwater quality.
 - ii. Replace all septic systems with common sewer hookups to prevent the addition of 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 flow to increase habitat, improve water quality, and support nursery area for reef fauna.
 - iv. Support incentives and initiatives to restore and preserve wetlands north of Lake Okeechobee to reduce discharges to coastal estuaries to protect estuaries and reefs.
 - v. Identify point-source inputs into estuaries and retro-fit them as needed to reduce pollutant loadings to restore healthy estuaries.
 - 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 the feasibility 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 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 free pump-out stations to encourage boaters use these services and minimize overboard discharges.
- iii. Promote southeast Florida coral reef awareness and education and coral-specific boater and marina 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. 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.
 - iii. Reduce yard clippings and other yard waste from entering water bodies to reduce nutrients in estuarine habitats.
 - iv. Promote community compost programs where people can take their organic wastes for composting and receive free compost to reduce the use of inorganic fertilizer.
 - v. Promote existing “rain garden” programs to relevant landowners to reduce contaminated rainwater runoff.
 - vi. 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.
 - vii. Provide 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, such as the Palm Beach County Beach Management Agreement (BMA). All inlets in Florida be based on a regional approach to sand management for beaches.

- Inlet sand bypassing
 - i. Seek 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.
2. Modify federal agreements for inlet maintenance to recognize the importance of Regional Sediment Management, and require placement of beach quality sand on adjacent impacted beaches and minimize cost to local sponsors. Beach nourishment
- Standardize input parameters for 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.
 - Modify federal agreements to allow General Reevaluation Reports (GRR) for beach nourishment, as required by the USACE, to remain valid for the life of the project (50 years) unless major substantive changes are made to the federal project.
 - 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 enhance sea turtle nesting beaches.
 - Consider alternatives to domestic sand, including use of sand from international sand sources.
 - 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 to reefs and associated habitats from coastal construction projects.
 - Create/enhance a “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 the coastal permitting process to restrict or limit development and coastal construction projects 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 beaches to eliminate losses of sand due to scouring. .
- Promote land acquisition by the state and local governments 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 habitable storm-damaged structures near coast and estuarine shorelines.
- 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), and consult with NOAA, academics and others as appropriate to promote the recovery of reef organisms, including reef fish, coral, and related species by using appropriate available tools and incorporate assessment monitoring to evaluate the success of these activities. Tools can include, but are not limited to bag limits, size limits, seasonal closures, special use areas, no-take areas. Additional guidance may also be provided by the recommendations of the Our Florida Reefs working groups.
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

- Encourage 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., 4th 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. Encourage the placement of color-coded, clearly labelled recycling bins with lids on docks for staff and customers.
 - ii. Encourage boaters and fishermen to bring their trash back to the docks for proper disposal.

- 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. Encourage these industries to develop and adapt educational effective messages especially with better signage on docks about marine debris issues.
- vi. Encourage marinas to offer Educational workshops/classes on marine debris issues to motivate and inspire people to take action at their marinas.
- vii. Inform the public 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. Encourage funding by the legislature of the derelict vessel program managed by FWC.