

Florida Keys

(Florida)



Description:

The Florida Keys marine ecosystem supports one of the most diverse assemblages of underwater plants and animals in North America. Although the Keys are best known for coral reefs, there are many other significant interconnecting and interdependent habitats. These include fringing mangroves, seagrass meadows, hardbottom regions, patch reefs, and bank reefs. This complex marine ecosystem is the foundation for the commercial fishing and tourism-based economies that are so important to Florida.

Habitats and Key Species

Habitats

- Coral reefs
- Patch & bank reefs
- Mangrove-fringed shorelines & islands
- Sand flats
- Seagrass meadows

Key Species

Brain & star coral
Sea fan
Loggerhead sponge
Turtle grass
Angelfish
Spiny lobster
Stone crab
Grouper
Tarpon

Specifications

Location: The water surrounding the archipelago formed by the Florida Keys

Protected Area: 3,674-square miles

Designation: November 1990

Education Activities

Training workshops and school programs

On-site interpretive tours

Coral Reef Classroom combines classroom and field activities for eighth graders

Community education through television, radio, and print media

Volunteer programs such as Team OCEAN

Research Activities

Sanctuary monitoring of ecosystem health conducted with Environmental Protection Agency and State of Florida

Sanctuary-wide, multidisciplinary cruise to assess the current status of coral habitat

Maintain a geographic information system on the marine environment

On-site assistance for regional research projects

Administration and Support

Full time staff located at regional offices in the upper and lower Keys, and at the sanctuary headquarters in Marathon.

Management, education, and enforcement are accomplished through a cooperative agreement with the State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Sanctuary advisory council provides community participation in management, research, and education.

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