

Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI) Team and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting

August 13, 2024

Tree Tops Park

MEETING OBJECTIVES

- Presentations on what the Aquatic Preserve designation will mean for the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area.
- Overview of feedback on Chapter 5 of the Coral ECA Plan Goals, Objectives, and Strategies from the last SEFCRI meeting.
- Review Chapter 5 of the Coral ECA Plan with an understanding that it will inform the Coral ECA Aquatic Preserve management plan.

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 13, 2024

SEFCRI Team Primary Attendees: Griffin Alexander, Archie Ammons, Jennifer Baez, Andrew Bauman, Patrick Bennet, Tyler Bouma, Jessica Clawson, Angela Delaney, Michael Dixon, Joana Figueiredo, Alastair Harbone, Christie Hurley, Gary Jennings, Cristin Krasco, Katelyn Armstrong, Amanda Montgomery, Nick Morrell, Stephanie Pravata-Clark, Patrick Quinn, Melissa Sathe, Sara Thanner, Lauren Theis, Ana Zangroniz, Eric Neugaard, Shana Phelan, April Price, Christopher Boykin, Laura Eldgredge, Elizabeth Kelly, Leneita Fix

SEFCRI Team Alternate Attendees: Kirk Kilfoyle, Rebecca Ross, John Waszak, Jessica Garland, Jena McNeal, Dan Clark

SEFCRI TAC Attendees: Dave Gilliam, Joshua Voss, Joe Lopez, Caitlin Lustic, Arthur Mariano, Stephanie Schopmeyer, Brian Walker, Dana Wusinich-Mendez, Piero Gardinali.

DEP CRCP Staff Attendees: Mollie Cordo, Alycia Shatters, Lara Bracci, Stephanie Stinson, Maya Bhalla-Ladd, Jessica Price, Patrick Connelly, Taylor Tucker, Matt Ringstad, Megan Miller.

Public Observer Attendees: Sam Cook, Kathleen Czaia, Teal Kawana, Joanna Walczak, Sydney Linebeger, Jackeline Bonilla, Sam Van Leer, Fraser, Cassandra Scott, Hannah Medd, Paloma Pimentel, Brad King.

Welcome

Alycia Shatters, DEP CRCP

Allie welcomed the SEFCRI Team and TAC to the meeting, reviewed the agenda and general housekeeping items. She also reviewed the public comment process and thanked our partner Friends of Our Florida Reefs for supporting and providing lunch/refreshments. Allie reviewed the mission and structure of the SEFCRI Team and TAC meeting including DEP CRCP staff roles.

Introduction to the Kristen Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area Aquatic Preserve

Alycia Shatters, DEP CRCP

- How did we get here?
 - Developed Local Action Strategies (LAS) in 2004 and 2017. In 2018 (and renamed in 2021) the formal boundaries of the northern portion of the reef were formally recognized as the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area, but with no additional protections/designated management.
 - As of July 1st 2024 the Florida Legislature passed a bill that included approving and aquatic preserve designation for the Coral ECA that took effect July 1st. Includes the same boundaries as the designated Coral ECA from St. Lucie Inlet to the northern border of Biscayne National Park.
- Aquatic Preserve overview.
 - The Aquatic Preserve Act was enacted in 1975 in order to ensure the continuation of aquatic preserves natural conditions so their aesthetic, biological and scientific values may endure for the enjoyment of future generations.
 - The Florida Administrative Code Chapter 18-20, entitled Florida Aquatic Preserves, governs all aquatic preserves with the exception of Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve (which has extra protections).
 - Florida Statute Ch. 258 covers aquatic preserve legislative intent, types of aquatic preserves, and boundaries.
- What the new aquatic preserve designation means for the Coral ECA
 - The Coral ECA was an already-designated marine managed area, but the original bill language lacked management authority and does not specify an office to oversee management of the area. A new aquatic preserve designation would formalize the managing relationship between the Coral ECA and ORCP's Coral Reef Conservation Program, as well as provide additional biological, aesthetic, and scientific protections for the northern portion of Florida's Coral Reef.
 - Included a list of items that will and will not be impacted with the new designation.
 - Florida Administrative Code 18-20 mandates the creation of a management plan that would provide an overview of the aquatic preserve and programs, and detail goals, objectives, and strategies for long term conservation.
 - The current Action Plan will be used as the base to form an Aquatic Preserve Management Plan.
 - Finalizing the management plan will involve a larger review and public comment process, which we hope the SEFCRI Team would help develop and implement.
 - Some of the steps included in that public process are establishment of an advisory committee to review and provide feedback on the draft plan, incorporation of feedback from public meetings, a formal review from FWC and the Counties, and submittal and acceptance by the Acquisition and Restoration Council, ARC.
 - After the acceptance of the formalized management plan the strategies would need to be prioritized and developed into projects, with the help from SEFCRI Team and TAC members.

Restoration Strategies Update

Caitlin Lusic, TNC

- Restoration Planning: Tier 1
 - Large-scale ecological goals for restoring resilience of Florida’s Coral Reef.
 - Goals include enhancing coral populations and coral community resilience, enhancing habitat quality for recruitment, and increasing survivorship.
- Methods:
 - Excludes areas deeper than 60 ft or likely to be impacted by humans.
 - Utilizes long term data sets to prioritize areas that can support both juvenile and adult corals.
 - Uses hydrodynamics and larval connectivity modeling to better understand larval behavior.
- Results:
 - Identified 4 key species.
 - Kept *Acropora Cervicornis* separate from other key coral species identified.
 - There will be an executive summary out soon.
- Restoration Planning: Tier 2
 - Establish resilient and self-sustaining reefs by 2034.
 - Restore reefs that provide ecosystem services by 2034 including coastal protection, habitat for reef fish populations, and reef-based tourism opportunities.
- Methods:
 - Use tier 1 results and add data to achieve tier 2 goals.
 - Datasets used in tier 2 planning included
 - Identifying correlates of coral-reef fish biomass on Florida’s Coral Reef to assess potential management actions (Zuercher et al., 20
 - Mapping the global value and distribution of coral reef tourism (Spalding et al., 2017)
 - Rigorously valuing the potential coastal hazard risk reduction provided by coral reef restoration in Florida and Puerto Rico (Storlazzi et al., 2021)
- Results:
 - Considering expert opinion, meeting with practitioners, counties, state etc., to look at existing efforts, funding opportunities, proximity to protected areas, and further justification to considering human impact.
 - Hopeful for 3 to 6 areas within each county. Tier 3 will include site specific restoration plans.

Overview of Chapter 5. Feedback

Alycia Shatters, DEP CRCP

- Here we will discuss the last SEFCRI/TAC meeting in August of 2023 where we used small group discussions to gather feedback on chapter 5 of the draft Action Plan. We wanted to take some time to review some of the major themes and comments and present how we incorporated them into the plan.

- We went forward with only suggestions that fit under DEP’s direct purview but will include roadblocks and ongoing work in an internal document that can be referenced during project development.
- Issue A: Water Quality
 - Included defining/quantifying “improvement” or “reduction”.
 - Creating water quality standards/criteria/benchmarks.
 - Creating unified water quality monitoring.
 - Expanding the list of analytes to be studied, including/updating Inlet Contributing Area studies and Watershed Management Plans.
 - Identifying sources of pollution.
- Issue B: Sustainable Economic and Recreational Use
 - Better definition of “use” and related terms.
 - Updating use studies and collection of data on long-term use changes.
 - More targeted outreach and expanding relationship with SEFCRI.
 - Utilizing fisheries use patterns data in management.
 - Incorporate use of new technologies to gather use pattern data (drones, remote sensing, etc.).
- Issue C: Ecosystem Disturbance Response and Recovery
 - Continue and adapt existing monitoring programs.
 - Adjust monitoring and standards related to turbidity caused by coastal construction.
 - Expanding rapid response programs, including data dissemination.
 - Conflict between when to standardize/streamline monitoring protocols and when to use project or location specific protocols.
- Issue D: Education, Engagement and Access
 - Addressing gaps in access (physical and through information) in historically underserved communities.
 - Better clarification of modes of access, visitor types, equity of access, and types of access (physical vs. virtual).
 - Identification of targeted ways to reach Coral ECA audiences.
- Issue E: Building Ecosystem Resilience
 - Defining terms such as ecosystem services.
 - Some debate on whether to keep focused on climate change or consider other environmental changes.
 - Making strategies adaptable to keep up with changing stressors.
 - Will be hard to define changes with a shifting baseline.
 - Need clearly defined, measurable restoration and resilience targets.
 - Including ecosystem restoration, not just restoration of coral species.
 - Increase collaboration with partner agencies.

Public Comment

Melissa Sathe, Friends of Our Florida Reefs

- Quickly introduce FOFR and their recent accomplishments.
- Announced their upcoming plans for the new year.
- Solicit Board Directors.

Sam Van Leer, Urban Paradise Guild

- Miami Beach Reef.
- Near shore: 600' off Florida's busiest beach developing mitigation plan, seeking partner.
- Safety First.
- Working with city of Miami beach to move swim Bouy line east to protect reef and divers.

Daniel Clark

- Port Everglades; 4-5 year of dredging. Most have better than 29 NTU Outstanding Florida Water.

Jackeline Bonilla, Urban Paradise Guild

- Miami Beach Near Shore Reef.
- Collective responsibility to ensure preservation and safety for marine life + human beachgoers.
- Need for safety and access in areas adjacent to reef.
- Let's not repeat the tragedy that happened Boca Chica Bridge few weeks back.
- Can we create nearshore reef management plan and zoning options for community to follow.

Overview of Breakout Group Goals

Alycia Shatters, DEP CRCP

Allie described the breakout group process and goals.

- There were 5 tables, one for each of the Issues in chapter 5 of the draft aquatic preserve management plan. SEFCRI and TAC members got the opportunity to choose what their top 3 issues of interest were and join that assigned table during the 3 breakout sessions.
- A SEFCRI Vice Chair facilitated conversations and recorded feedback on flip charts at each one of the tables. A CRCP staff member was also present at each table to capture notes on group discussions and help Vice Chairs facilitate conversations.
- 10 minutes were allotted to review goals, objections and strategies.

Group discussions revolved around looking at chapter 5 of the draft plan and reviewing it through the lens that it will form the basis of the management plan for the new aquatic preserve. The following questions were considered during each breakout group:

- Is there anything missing from these Issues that needs to be included in a management plan?
- Are there other agencies/groups already working on these issues?
- What are potential roadblocks?
- Are any of the goals or strategies a priority to complete now?
- Post meeting homework will allow for feedback to be given for those who were not able to attend.
- After this meeting CRCP staff will incorporate feedback again into chapter 5 of the draft plan.
- A list of all LAS projects can be found at <https://southeastfloridareefs.net/las-project-status/>
 - Table organized by focus area that shows LAS status and links to products

Coral Champion 2023 Announcement

Alyca Shatters, DEP CRCP

Allie announced Joanna Walzack as the 2024 SEFCRI Coral Champion and presented her with a certificate of recognition for her 17 plus years devoted to protecting Florida's Coral Reef. Joanna started at DEP's Maritime Industry and Coastal Construction Impacts Coordinator, and later became the Southeast Regional Administrator for the Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, overseeing CRCP along with Biscayne Bay and Florida Keys Aquatic Preserves and co-managing the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Joanna recently helped develop the Coral Protection and Restoration Program among many other accomplishments to further coral reef protection in all jurisdictions.

Wrap Up and Adjourn

Alycia Shatters, DEP CRCP

Allie thanked everyone for a successful meeting and let everyone know that they will be receiving post meeting homework to incorporate feedback to issues they may have not had an opportunity to address.