

Coral reef and hardbottom habitats

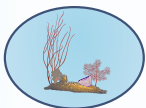
Marine and Estuarine Goal Setting for South Florida



IN A NUTSHELL

- Coral reefs and hardbottom communities provide a **vital habitat** to numerous species of fish and invertebrates.
- People **value** coral reefs and hardbottom communities as a place to find large numbers and varieties of fish, for protecting coastlines, a critical habitat for protected species, and for their aesthetic beauty.
- Coral reefs and hardbottom communities are **vulnerable to damage** from boat groundings, anchors, fishing, and impacts arising from beach renourishment, coastal construction, nutrients carried by freshwater inflow, and invasive species.
- Coastal **management** promotes access and protects coral and hardbottom communities by restricting activities in vulnerable areas, restoring habitat in damaged areas, and reducing land-based sources of pollution.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?



The reef communities of the Florida Reef Tract represent the only living tropical coral reef system in the continental U.S.



Florida's reefs provide habitat for over 6,000 marine species, protect south Florida's shorelines from tropical storms and hurricanes, and sustain Florida's fisheries, famous beaches, tourism, and recreation.



Florida's reefs are worth \$6.3 billion and support more than 71,000 jobs annually.

Dry Tortugas Key West

Coral Reefs and Hardbottom



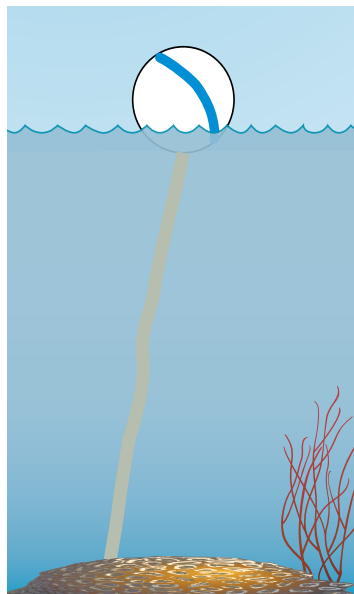
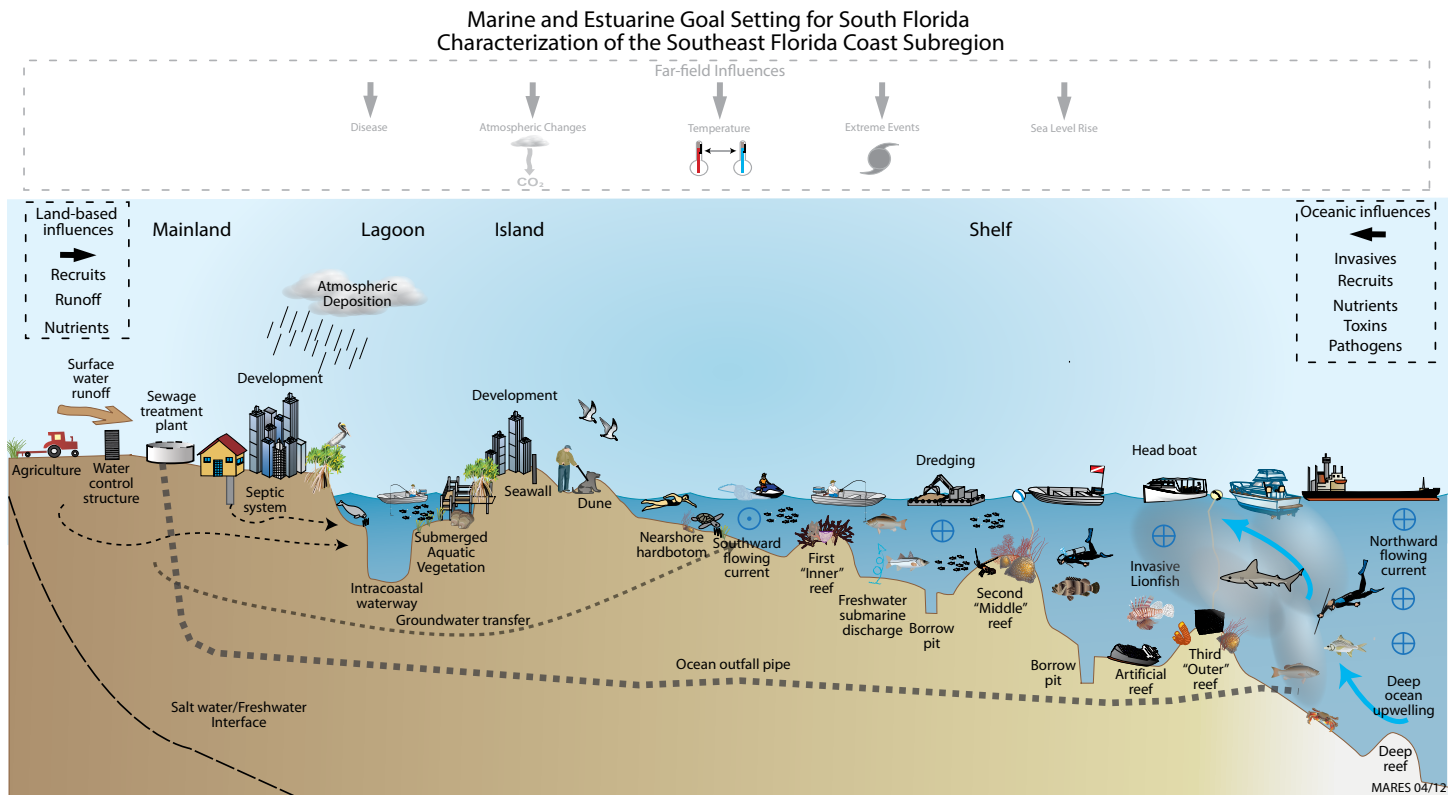
Dave Gilliam, NSU

CORAL AND HARDBOTTOM HABITATS ON THE SOUTHEAST FLORIDA COAST

Coral reef and hardbottom communities of the Florida Reef Tract span more than 330 nautical miles from the Dry Tortugas to the St. Lucie Inlet. Multiple factors influence the condition of these communities, shown here are some of the factors affecting the northern portion of the Florida Reef Tract (St. Lucie - Miami-Dade counties). The northern portion of the Florida Reef Tract is characterized by more than 30 stony coral species and a diverse assemblage of octocoral, sponges, and fishes.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Trend analyses of stony coral, octocoral, and sponge abundance and health data collected since 2000 has indicated that the benthic community on the Southeast Florida Coast has remained relatively stable. In the Florida Keys, monitoring of nearshore extreme coral habitats indicates a decline in both species richness and coral cover at the stations surveyed, and no significant recruitment has occurred since the monitoring program began in 1996.



MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Management actions are activities to promote use and that protect and conserve natural resources. They consist of gathering information, decision-making, and program implementation that are carried out by agencies responsible for making policies and implementing management actions that affect reef and hardbottom habitats.

Mooring buoys are one example of management actions to protect and promote use of coral reef and hardbottom habitats. Mooring buoys have been installed along the Florida Reef Tract to reduce physical impacts to coral reefs and hardbottom habitats caused by anchoring.

In addition, the Coral Reef Protection Act recognizes the importance of coral reefs to Florida's ecology, beauty and economy. The act affords protection to the entire Florida Reef Tract. The act authorizes the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, as the state's lead trustee for coral reef resources, to protect coral reefs through timely and assessment and recovery.