



**23rd U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE MEETING
Report of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee
Washington, D.C. February 24, 2010**

Hola, Hafa adai, Talofa, Aloha, and Good Day,

It is my great pleasure, on behalf of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) to present this report on our activities and accomplishments since we last met in Puerto Rico in November, 2009.

Earthquake and Tsunami in the Samoan Islands

With natural disasters such as the earthquake and tsunami in the Samoan Islands, we need to develop initiatives to address mitigation of coral reef damage and clean up marine debris caused by natural disasters.

In 2006 the Injury Response Working Group recommended that the USCRTF follow up with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Stafford Act authority to address coral reef injury events associated with storms and other natural disasters. Since 2005, there have been resolutions and actions focused on addressing federal response to natural disasters affecting coral reefs.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Olaf in American Samoa, an aid request was rejected for non-compliance with the Stafford Act. In the aftermath of the recent Tsunami in American Samoa, again disaster assistance was disapproved. Recovery from these natural disasters depends upon healthy, safe coastal areas and the present system does not address this need. Studies certainly show that public health depends on healthy coastal systems. The US policy needs to revisit this issue for coral reef areas and a solution needs to be developed.

It is critical that we find ways to improve rapid response to natural disasters and restore natural systems, as island communities are dependent on these resources. At the last meeting in Puerto Rico, the USCRTF asked the Steering Committee to develop a structure for the Task Force to actively engage in American Samoa disaster recovery activities as one of the action items.

Stimulus Funding for Coral Reefs

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 funded five large-scale projects related to coral reefs in the USVI, Florida, Hawai'i, and CNMI. These projects, with funds

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totaling \$15 million, will have major restorative impacts in four AIC member jurisdictions. The large funding levels awarded to these projects will significantly advance coral reef conservation efforts that are central to the AIC's mission.

The following are updates on some of these projects:

- *USVI Watershed Stabilization* (St. John and St. Croix, USVI)
The VI Resource Conservation and Development Council (award recipient) has initiated work in all 3 target watersheds. In each of East End, Fish and Coral Bays monitoring stations have been installed to gauge stormwater flow and resulting sediment loads in coastal waters. In Fish Bay, work has begun to install several BMPs to reduce erosion and sedimentation from improperly designed and dirt roads.
- *Threatened Coral Recovery and Restoration* (Florida and USVI)
Working with national and local partner, The Nature Conservancy, The Coral Restoration Foundation, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Mote Marine Laboratory, Nova Southeastern University, University of Miami and the University of the Virgin Islands—this effort will focus on active enhancement of Caribbean staghorn and elkhorn *Acropora* coral.
- The short-term habitat restoration goal of this project is to enhance coral populations at 34 degraded coral reefs in 8 distinct areas of the coral reef ecosystems of Florida and the USVI by propagating Acroporid corals in situ in seafloor nurseries and then transplanting nursery-grown coral fragments to depleted reef sites.
- This project will have significant and tangible ecological impacts through an increase in local biodiversity accompanied by enhanced ecosystem services for various user groups, including recreational divers and snorkelers, commercial dive tour operators, commercial fishers and recreational anglers.
- It will also create or directly support nearly 60 jobs and will produce economic, ecological, and social benefits.
- It will also involve state/territorial/county Governments, local community groups, the National Park Service, and NOAA in the design and implementation of the restoration effort.
- In the Virgin Islands, The Nature Conservancy (award recipient), in consultation with the VI DPNR, has established 3 coral nurseries (2 in St. Croix and 1 in St. Thomas) to recover opportunistic fragments of *Acropora palmata* and *A. cervicornis* damaged from physical impacts or heavy surf and grow them for use in reef restoration activities. Two Floating Underwater Coral Apparatus have also been constructed in collaboration with NOAA's Restoration Center and are expected to be deployed soon.
- *Laolao Bay Coastal Restoration* (Laolao Beach, Saipan, CNMI) – The CNMI will soon begin to monitor coral reef and reef-flats along Laolao Bay to establish baseline data prior to the start of road and drainage improvements. Plans to revegetate the upper watershed area have also started. NOAA expects to wrap up negotiations on the road paving by June, 2010, and will only pave the first half mile of the road and funding A&E designs for Gapgap Road, a different scope than originally proposed. Remaining funds targeted for paving the entire road has been redirected to other efforts in Laolao such as a road grading training for the Department of Public Works, and installation of bollards to protect turtle

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nesting habitats and enhancing water quality and coral reef monitoring for Laolao Bay.

Local Action Strategies (LAS)

In previous reports to the USCRTF the AIC has consistently highlighted the need for improved communication and partnerships with federal agencies on the implementation of Local Action Strategies (LAS). After over ten years of working on LAS, strong partnerships with all federal agencies on the Task Force will help us see significant improvement in healthy coral reefs in our jurisdictions.

Tomorrow, the AIC will be holding meetings with four federal agencies - USDA/NRCS, USEPA, DOT and DOJ - to explore more ways to establish and strengthen partnerships.

Updates from some Coral Jurisdictions

USVI Phase II Local Action Strategies

Since we last met, the USVI has been moving forward on implementing Phase II of its LAS. The USVI will be focusing efforts to reduce major threats to our coral reefs such as land-based sources of pollution, fishing impacts, lack of awareness and others in 4 priority geographic areas – the St. Croix East End Marine Park, St. Thomas East End Reserve and Fish and Coral Bays in St. John. Initial community meetings to begin planning efforts for each site have occurred and the VI anticipates reaching out to USCRTF member agencies during project planning and implementation to take advantage of the assistance and resources your agencies can offer.

Florida's Gold Coast Reefs

We would like to draw your attention to a brief guidance document for policy makers and resource managers developed by the scientists on the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SECFRI) Land-Based Sources of Pollution Technical Advisory Committee. The document makes specific recommendations to reduce pollution and help preserve coral reefs, including ways to stop the "flow" of pollution, facilitate best management practices, restore natural and clean water flows from the Everglades and inland waterways to Florida's reefs, and invest in the future of the Florida Reef Tract. Copies of this document have been distributed to all Task Force Members.

Apologies from the State of Florida for not being able to send a representative to attend this Task Force meeting.

Roadway Stormwater Management Resolution

We thank the USCRTF for adopting the resolution to improve stormwater management from roads in order to protect coral reefs at the Puerto Rico meeting. We endorse this Roadway resolution which established a Working Group temporarily led by the USCRTF Secretariat to review and recommend BMPs for during and post-construction roadway design. We request that the Department of Transportation and US Environmental Protection Agency take leadership of this Working Group and provide their full report at the Fall Task Force Meeting.

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Coral Mitigation

We appreciate the group presentation made by USACE, USEPA, USFWS and NOAA/NMFS on the coral mitigation at our last meeting in Puerto Rico. We all recognize the need for continued efforts to implement the coral mitigation regulations as they apply to lost coral reef ecosystem functions which resulted from the Reauthorization of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

The Marianas Islands are about to experience one of the largest single impacts to their population, resources, culture and social fabric since World War II with the proposed military build-up. The environmental risks are great and there is a pressing need to define the process and practices in working through compensatory mitigation on coral reefs. We wish to impress upon our Task Force partners the immediate importance of, and need for, the federal resource regulatory agencies to form a working group and define a vehicle to include the local expertise in Guam and the CNMI in developing interim guidance and long-term standards for compensatory mitigation. There are a number of additional large national projects that represent unprecedented impacts to coral reefs. Existing tools to define appropriate replacement of lost ecosystem functions need to be refined to ensure unavoidable impacts are appropriately mitigated for. In developing these tools, it is also critical that adequate local expert capacity is built.

Endangered Corals

The current petition to list 83 species of coral found in the Atlantic/Caribbean and the Pacific on the Endangered Species List requires that directed effort be given to the impacts on coastal development and local governance capacity. In most US jurisdictions almost all in-water actions along the coast will require Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This will potentially significantly lengthen permit timelines and dramatically increase the need for specialized professional expertise to complete assessments and process permits. We ask the CRTF to take responsibility for ensuring an open dialogue with local jurisdictions to ensure these issues are addressed.

In conclusion, the Committee recommends the following actions by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force:

- Follow up on active engagement in natural disaster recovery activities, including post-tsunami recovery in American Samoa.
- Request DOT and USEPA provide leadership for the Roadways Resolution Working Group and report back at the Fall 2010 meeting.
- Request federal resource regulatory agencies form a working group to develop interim guidance and long-term standards for compensatory mitigation.

Sincerely

Evangeline Lujan, Chair