



Southeast Florida Reef Review Newsletter – 2024 In Review

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) [Coral Reef Conservation Program](#) (CRCP) presents the [Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative](#) (SEFCRI) 2024 Recap Newsletter.

Action Items:

- Out on the water? Report marine incidents to the [Southeast Florida Action Network](#) (SEAFAN).
- In the water? Become a trained [BleachWatch](#) observer.
 - To view an [online training](#), fill out your information and the session will start automatically. Once completed, email the program coordinator at Coral@FloridaDEP.gov to receive a certificate and officially join the Observer Network!
- Can't make it to the water? Check out the Florida's Coral Reef [PSA video](#) and [website](#) to read about conservation work throughout Florida's Coral Reef.
- Want to get more involved? Follow our citizen support organization, [Friends of Our Florida Reefs](#) (FOFR), across Instagram, TikTok and Facebook (@FloridaReefs) or sign-up for their [newsletter](#) for extra coral content.

Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve

Alycia Shatters (CRCP Manager)

With the designation of the [Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve](#) (Coral AP), we are honored to be able to participate in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Florida Aquatic Preserves Act in 2025. Visit [DEP's Aquatic Preserves Program](#) webpage for more information on all Florida's aquatic preserves and to stay informed about upcoming 50th anniversary events.

A heartfelt thank you to all the SEFCRI Team and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members who participated in the last SEFCRI meeting and provided feedback on the draft management plan for the Coral AP. Your feedback has been incorporated into the next draft of the plan. We





appreciate your engagement and will be sending updates as scheduled opportunities to get involved arise.

Overview of the Coral Protection and Restoration Program

Kathleen Czaia (CPR Program Manager)

Since establishment in 2017, the [Coral Protection and Restoration Program](#) (CPR), within DEP's Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (ORCP), has administered more than \$90 million to support the holistic management of Florida's Coral Reef. This funding allows the CPR Program to support universities, local agencies, and NGOs in priority projects like water quality sampling, nutrient reduction, and stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD) research, intervention, coral rescue and coral propagation and restoration actions. In 2024, CPR was integrated into DEP's Southeast Region to expand collaboration and strengthen management priorities. For more information about CPR, please visit the [CPR Program](#) webpage. Final reports for previously funded projects can be found on the [Coral Disease Response: Completed Projects](#) webpage.

Florida's Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery Initiative

The Florida Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery Initiative is focused on building the infrastructure, technology, skilled workforce and logistical capabilities needed by 2050 to facilitate the recovery of at least 25% of Florida's Coral Reef. Established through [Executive Order 23-06](#) by Governor DeSantis, the Florida Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery Initiative will be carried out in three phases, with funding from DEP and the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#) (FWC) to meet long-term restoration goals.

SEAFAN Updates

Taylor Tucker (CRCP Assistant Manager and Reef Resilience Coordinator)

Annual Southeast Florida Reef Cleanups

The 13th Annual Southeast Florida Reef Cleanup took place throughout July and early August of 2024. This collaborative effort included 10 partner dive shops that completed 20 total dives across 17 different reefs throughout the Coral AP. A dedicated group of 135 volunteers worked tirelessly to remove 440 pounds of debris from the reef.

This year, the 14th Annual Southeast Florida Reef Cleanup introduced a new approach, consolidating the event into a one-day cleanup on **July 13th**, 2025. In partnership with FOFR, we





are working to raise awareness about the impacts of marine debris and make the event more accessible to divers by reducing cost.

BleachWatch

2024 was a highly successful year for the BleachWatch program. A SEAFAN BleachWatch Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) Distinctive Specialty Course was designed and implemented, specifically for the Coral AP, which enables PADI instructors to teach BleachWatch as a course at their local dive shops. This means more certified divers will be able to report on the changing conditions of Florida's Coral Reef.



Above: Kyalami Scuba Club displays marine debris collected during the 13th Annual Southeast Florida Reef Cleanup.



In 2024, 11 new BleachWatch Instructors joined the network after a workshop at the Frost Museum of Science and have been actively engaging with local divers to educate them on monitoring coral bleaching and disease. With over 100 reports submitted and 171 new observers in 2024, the CRCP extends its gratitude to the BleachWatch Network for its significant contributions to monitoring this vital coral reef habitat.

Community Connections

Maya Bhalla-Ladd (Awareness and Appreciation Coordinator) and Stephanie Stinson (Fishing, Diving and Other Uses Coordinator)

To raise awareness and greater appreciation for Florida's Coral Reef, CRCP facilitates the traveling Coral Reef Teaching Trunk program to bring coral reef ecology into your schools. Offering four tiers of curricula, the trunks cater to students in kindergarten through second grade, third through fifth grade, sixth through eighth grade and ninth through twelfth grade.

- [Sign-up](#) to participate for the 2025-26 school year.

Outreach highlights from 2024 include connecting with stakeholders at Loggerhead Marinelife Center's TurtleFest, Coral Carnival at Cox Science Center and Stoked on Salt's Conservation Village.

CRCP Raises Awareness and Appreciation of Florida's Coral Reef at ReeFLorida 2024

2024 marked the second annual ReeFLorida Symposium at the Frost Museum of Science, put on in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program with oversight from local agencies, like DEP and FWC. DEP's former Chief Resilience Officer, Dr. Wesley Brooks, gave the opening plenary in Miami, during which he mentioned the designation of the Coral AP and walked attendees through the Florida Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery Initiative.

CRCP's Reef Injury Prevention and Response (RIPR) Program delivered a presentation highlighting the Coral Reef Protection Act (CRPA) and related education and outreach, including resources for [mooring buoys](#) and [Florida's Coral Reef Locator](#) mobile application.





Above right: Dr. Brooks' Opening Plenary at the 2024 ReeFlorida Symposium. Above left: Miami-Dade Mayor, Daniella Levine Cava with former DEP Chief Resilience Office, Dr. Wesley Brooks at the 2024 ReeFlorida Symposium. Source: DEP

Environmental Monitoring

Taylor Tucker (CRCP Assistant Manager and Reef Resilience Coordinator)

Participation in state and national coral reef monitoring facilitates collaboration, knowledge sharing and provides local, state and federal resource managers with reports on the status and condition of Florida's Coral Reef. During the summer of 2024, CRCP staff conducted coral reef monitoring with partners including FWC, Palm Beach County, Nova Southeastern University and others. Notably, CRCP completed assessments at more than 60 sites in Martin, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties, as well as Dry Tortugas National Park.

Land Based Sources of Pollution

Lara Bracci (Land Based Sources of Pollution Coordinator)

The [Government Cut Inlet Watershed Management Plan](#) was funded by NOAA's CRCP and written by the Horsely Witten Group in partnership with DEP, Miami-Dade County, NOAA, U.S.



Environmental Protection Agency and the South Florida Water Management District. It includes an action plan for implementing pollution reduction projects and examples of how to retrofit certain sites chosen from within the watershed.

Updates from our Reef Injury Prevention and Response Team

Megan Miller and Kimberly Platt (RIPR Coordinator, RIPR Specialist)

The [RIPR Program](#) closed a CRPA enforcement case from an anchoring event that damaged 107 square meters of coral reef habitat in 2022. The RIPR Program worked with Broward County Resource Trustees to respond to the incident and a total of \$227,559.63 was paid to the Water Quality Assurance Trust Fund.

Welcome to our New Staff Members!

Kimberly Platt joined the RIPR team as the new RIPR Specialist in December 2024. Kimberly will focus on education and outreach for the RIPR Program, sharing educational materials and connecting with local stakeholders to increase collaboration in the protection of Florida's Coral Reef.



For questions or further information, email Coral@FloridaDEP.gov or visit DEP's [Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve](#) webpage.

Learn more about [Florida's Coral Reef](#) here.

