

Florida Keys



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Overview

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (NMS), established in 1990, was the ninth NMS to join the sanctuary system. The establishment of the NMS responded to increasing concerns over deteriorating water quality, oil drilling, and deteriorating coral health by prohibiting oil exploration and mining, restricting large shipping traffic, and anchoring on, touching, or collecting coral.

The establishment of the NMS also called for a Sanctuary Management Plan, which resulted in a network of marine zones. The Sanctuary Management Plan was completed in 1997 and a revised version was released in 2007. Currently, the Sanctuary staff and its Advisory Council are leading a review of zoning and regulations to respond to changing environmental and socioeconomic conditions. The review is a public process conducted via a series of working groups and Advisory Council meetings, intended to gather information from community experts, user groups, and the scientific community to address specific priority areas identified by the Sanctuary Advisory Council.

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Goals and objectives for the review process include:

- Improving the diversity of natural biological communities and to protect, restore, and/or enhance natural habitats, populations, and ecological processes
- Facilitate all allowable public and private uses of the marine areas to the extent that is compatible with resource protection

Guiding principles of the review process include:

- Recognition and consideration of bordering and overlapping marine management regimes
- Classification of all areas within the NMS as part of a specific zone, changing any “un-zoned” areas to either “general use areas” or “multiple use areas”
- Representation of each habitat type in a non-extractive marine zone in all of the biogeographically-distinct sub regions of the NMS
- Accounting for information on resilient reef areas that can serve as refugia
- Consideration of temporal zoning as a tool for protecting spawning aggregations and nesting seasons
- Recognition that the size, cumulative total area, and spatial relationship among non-extractive zones have an impact in achieving resources protection purposes

TNC’s Role

- Scientific/technical Expertise
- Implementation
- Advisory
- Stakeholder engagement

TNC played a vital role in establishing the Florida Keys NMS and helped to fund and manage a volunteer program to help with specific science and management actions. TNC provided scientific expertise to inform the current management plan, including assistance with data collection and analysis to characterize recreation and tourism activities in the area. A TNC staffer currently occupies a non-governmental seat on the [Sanctuary Advisory Council](#) (SAC), representing conservation and environmental interests. Through this role, TNC provides scientific expertise and encourages stakeholder participation during the current regulatory review process.

Project Partners

Lead Institutions: The Sanctuary is co-managed in a federal/state partnership headed by the NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program and Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Other Partners: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Status

The SAC has reviewed all major marine zoning and other regulatory issues. NOAA and FWS are currently reviewing ideas that came forward in SAC motions and are working on analyzing impacts and developing a set of management alternatives that will be released as part of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Fact Sheets and Project Links

[Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Home](#)

[Regulatory Review Process Home](#)

Contact

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Photo credit: © Kyle P. Miller

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