

REEF RELIEF®

Our Mission:

Reef Relief is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to improving and protecting our coral reef ecosystem. Our programs instill an attitude of stewardship in boaters, divers, fishermen and the general public when they are on the water and on land.

Our Goals:

- Increase public awareness of the importance and value of living coral reef ecosystems
- Increase scientific understanding and knowledge of living coral reef ecosystems
- Strengthen grassroots community-based efforts to protect coral reef ecosystems
- Design, develop, and help implement strategies for marine protected areas associated with coral reef ecosystems
- Encourage and support ecotourism as part of sustainable community development that protects and preserves coral reef ecosystems
- Strengthen our organizational capacity to carry out our mission



These efforts are not duplicated by any other organization in the Florida Keys or statewide, although we collaborate with many others who have similar interests but a different focus.

We have a 26-year history of measurable achievements, yet our job is far from over. The arrival of new people to the Florida Keys, throughout Florida and the wider Caribbean, makes coral reef ecosystem protection an ongoing task.

Coral Reef Advocacy

For 26 years, Reef Relief has made considerable progress to improve the water quality, fish, and wildlife of Florida's coral reef ecosystems by working with the environmental, scientific and governmental leaders in Florida from the state capital in Tallahassee. Reef Relief's State Program Director Dr. Jeff Sharkey and his staff with the Capitol Alliance Group are a driving force behind state level water quality policy.

Reef Relief is a member of the Everglades Coalition (Everglades Coalition is an alliance of 57 local, state and national conservation and environmental organizations). The



Coalition is dedicated to the full restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem that encompasses the lakes that connect to Lake Okeechobee, through the River of Grass, into the estuaries, out to Florida Bay and the Florida Keys. It works to inform decision-makers on the collective view of the conservation community regarding the greater Everglades ecosystem. Some of the tools used by the Coalition include policy papers,

comparisons of proposed policy decisions focused on sound science, and public comments on critical aspects of restoration. In the Keys, Reef Relief Board Member, Mimi Stafford sits on the Ecological Protection: Ecological, Reserves, Preservation Areas, and Wildlife Protection Working Group that makes recommendations for changes to sanctuary marine zones and regulations for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. As a member of the Florida Coastal and Oceans Coalition (FCOC), Reef Relief assisted with the preparation of the *Florida's Coastal and Ocean Future: An Updated Blueprint for Economic and Environmental Leadership* report. The report is available at www.flcoastalandocean.org/blueprint.

Additional advocacy work by Reef Relief helps ensure best state and national standards for water quality in coastal and nearshore waters, and to coordinate with federal efforts on ocean governance and policy at the national level. Reef Relief staff continues to monitor and respond to state and federal actions, Coalition issues and others request for coral reef and water quality information and positions that help protect these resources.

Reef Relief Environmental Center

Reef Relief's environmental education and advocacy programs are essential for growing awareness that leads to the active support of citizens for coastal resource protection in the Florida Keys and throughout the world. As part of this effort, our Environmental Center introduces visitors, school groups, and community members to the coral reef ecosystem, its threats and what can be done to protect our coastal and marine resources.

The center features a diorama of a healthy reef and a damaged coral reef that identifies commonly found coral species in the Caribbean and conditions needed for healthy coral growth as well as ways the coral reef ecosystem may be harmed as a whole. A Google Earth© Oceans exhibit enables the viewer to visit coral reefs around the world. A theater shows daily films related to coastal and marine resource issues. Brochures and other printed material are available to educate visitors about coral reefs and the issues affecting them. The center is located at the heavily trafficked Historic Seaport in Key West. We target the local community and large tourist population of over 2.5 million visitors each year with our educational efforts and materials. **The Reef Relief Environmental Center is located at 631 Greene Street in Key West, FL and is open Monday – Friday 10am-4pm.**

Environmental Education and Outreach



Reef Relief's environmental education programs are the core of our work in promoting active support for coral reef protection in the Florida Keys.

The outreach work we do includes the printing and distribution of educational brochures that detail tips for boaters, divers, snorkelers and fishermen on proper conduct on the water and at the reef.

Among the publications we distribute are the *Coral Reefs* educational brochure, the *No Discharge Zone for Boater Sewage* brochure, and Reef Relief's *Don't Teach Your Trash to Swim* mini-poster.

In 2013, over 42,200 educational brochures were distributed to locations throughout the Florida Keys including resorts, hotels, Chambers of Commerce, educational facilities, dive shops, charters and visitor centers.

Online Outreach

Reef Relief regularly informs our registered online community of over 6,400 members on coastal resource issues, trainings and volunteer opportunities. We send out the monthly *Reef News* online newsletter to these supporters as well as many others. We host an extensive website at www.reefrelief.org that posts the *Reef News* monthly, scientific studies, educational resources, and other coastal and marine resource news. The site is viewed by over 5,000 visitors each month.

We also network with nearly 9,000 people through other social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook to keep them informed on the latest in coastal and oceans related scientific studies, policy and community stewardship events.



Discover Coral Reefs School Program



The 2012/2013 school year was the 18th that that Reef Relief has provided the Discover Coral Reefs School Program to Monroe County students. This program is a continuing collaboration between Reef Relief and the Monroe County School District. The curriculum introduces students to the value and importance of the local coral reef ecosystem, and the ways that they can be good stewards of the marine environment. Students become familiar with answers to lesson points that are featured in the *Coral Reef Guide for Kids of All Ages* brochure. After the lesson, they get a chance to see for themselves what they were learning about on a glass-bottom boat trip. During the trips, students see fish, corals, and invertebrates while a presenter identifies and explains the functions of the marine life. For many students, it is the first time they have ever visited a reef. We offer this program throughout the Florida Keys. This past year 2,216 students participated in this environmental education experience. The success of this program is reflected in continuing requests from teachers for the program to return to their classrooms.

Coral Camp

Since 2008, Reef Relief has offered a unique summer opportunity for children 6-12 years of age to learn more about coral reefs, marine life, and threats facing the survival of the marine environment. Coral Camp is a nature-based educational camp experience for local and visiting children. Campers have both interactive classroom lessons in marine science and field trips. Camp activities include visits



to the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center, a snorkel school, Key West Aquarium, Key West Wildlife Center and two days of snorkeling at the reef. Reef Relief offers scholarships so that children regardless of income have a chance to participate in this program. In 2013, 222 children attended Reef Relief's Coral Camp.

Community & Environmental Stewardship

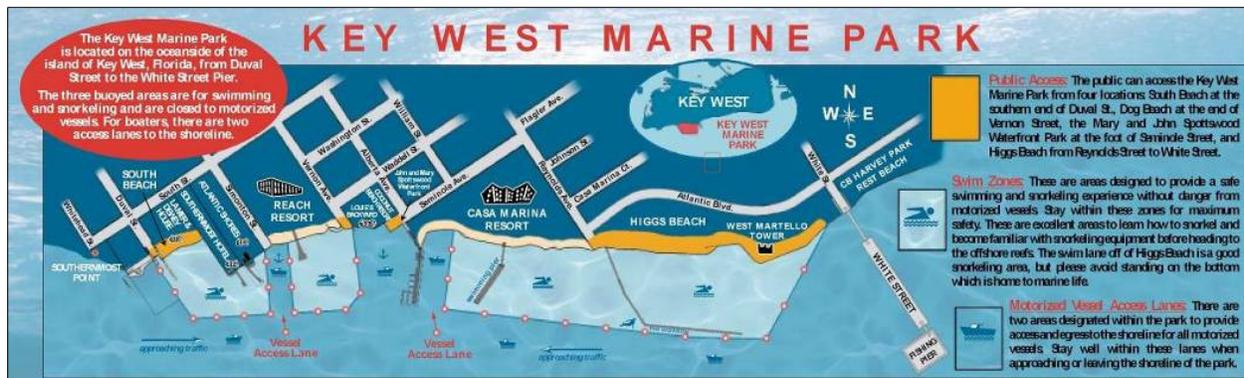


In partnership with community groups and government agencies, Reef Relief coordinates volunteer programs that cultivate an attitude of stewardship within our communities. Reef Relief's coastal clean-up program, has removed over 23,500 lbs of marine debris since it began in 2010.

In 2011, Reef Relief launched a storm drain-stenciling program to help protect near shore waters off the Florida Keys. *The Key West High School*

Reef Relief Club and *College Alternative Spring Break* volunteers have stenciled “No Dumping, Drains to Ocean” on storm drains throughout the City of Key West.

The Key West Marine Park



Reef Relief and the City of Key West, established Key West Marine Park in 2001. In January 2012, the City Commission passed a resolution to make Reef Relief the manager of this marine park. The park encompasses over 40 acres of diverse benthic communities along the nearshore waters off the south side of the island. A variety of hard and soft corals, seagrasses, fishes, and invertebrates make their home in the park's boundaries. This swim park will become a focal point for Reef Relief's marine education and scientific programs. These will include the design and implementation of a snorkel trail by Reef Relief staff, partners, and volunteers within the Key West Marine Park (see history below). This will be the first interpretive snorkel trail in North America. The park provides an interactive outdoor learning site for students of all ages. Other plans include the installation of a coral nursery within the park. The Key West Marine Park will provide a first class experience for the visitors from around the world and local residents.

History: 26 Years of Coral Reef Conservation

Reef Relief's founders DeeVon and Craig Quirolo retired in July 2009 after 22 years of exemplary commitment and service to coral reef conservation. Craig has in recent years focused on chronicling the decline of the reef ecosystem through photographs and video.

The Quirolos, Lower Keys residents since the 1970s, became coral reef advocates after Craig observed the reef damage that some boats caused with careless anchoring. They campaigned for increased education of reef visitors to prevent inexperienced snorkelers and divers from standing on coral or handling it. Reef Relief was established as one of the first environmental groups to focus solely on coral reef ecosystems.



Reef Relief's first tangible projects included installation of mooring buoys later turned over to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary system, the creation of the Key West Marine Park accessible to snorkelers, and an environmental education center. Photographs and video of underwater transects helped scientists report on changes at the reef, and discover new coral diseases. The online archive now offers more than 10,000 images.



Reef Relief has supported the creation of marine protected areas such as the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the Negril (Jamaica) Marine Park, and established the Key West Marine Park in cooperation with the City of Key West. Additionally, we have helped to establish programs throughout the Caribbean, including installing reef-mooring buoys.

Our Clean Water Campaign has led the effort to identify problems with sewage, agricultural runoff, cruise ships waste, boating impacts, and other sources of pollution that are affecting water quality at coral reefs in South Florida and around the globe.

We have studied the issues, identified solutions, and guided policy. A few of our past achievements include advanced wastewater treatment for the City of Key West, establishment of a boater No Discharge Zone for sewage in the Florida Keys, passage of a phosphate ban for laundry detergents sold in Monroe County, approval of bans on offshore oil drilling and exploration in South Florida, increased state standards for shallow injection wells, and a host of other actions. Reef Relief has been a watchdog for coral reefs.

Awards

Reef Relief efforts have been recognized with numerous local, state, national, and international awards, including the President's Council on Sustainable Development, Take Pride in America, Take Pride in Florida, Renew America, Governor's Environmental Achievement Award, Rodale's Scuba Diving First Environmental Achievement Award, White House Point of Light Award, Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program Environmental Award and others from local organizations including the Key West Jaycees, Last Stand, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Key West Hotel Motel Association. Most of all, we have the members, volunteers, and supporters of Reef Relief to thank for our ability to achieve protection for Florida's coral reefs.

From left to right: Top: (1) Reef Relief's President, Peter Anderson and Executive Program Director, Millard McCleary. (2) Coral campers prepare to explore the reef. (3) (5) Florida Keys divers observe a Southern stingray
 Middle: (4) Coral campers learn about coral spawning (5) A Coral camper snorkels the reef (6) Dive and snorkel company crew receive certificates after completing Reef Relief's coral reef conservation program.
 Bottom: (7) The results of a Reef Relief community mangrove clean-up (8) Reef Relief volunteers get into the mangroves to remove dangerous trap and fishing line and other marine debris.

