

REEF RELIEF®

a nonprofit membership organization dedicated
to improving and protecting our coral reef ecosystem

Post Office Box 430, Key West, FL 33041 • reefrelief@gmail.com www.reefrelief.org
Reef Relief Headquarters & Environmental Center 631 Greene Street, Key West, Florida • Tel: 305-294-3100 • Fax: 305-293-9515

Key West Marine Park Update May 2013



Overview

Reef Relief took over management of Key West Marine Park in January 2012. The park is a 40 acre area on the south side of Key West, stretching from Higgs Beach to South Beach. It includes two vessel access lanes, one in front of Casa Marina and the other in front of the Reach Resort. Our responsibilities include outdoor educational signage, educational brochure distribution about the park, maintenance to parameter buoys and vessel lane buoys and participation in the Higgs Beach improvement programs with reference to the marine environment at Higgs Beach. Additional goals include developing a year round educational program with the Sigsbee Charter School 7th grade and Key West High School Reef Relief Club, working with MOTE Marine on developing new educational brochures and a coral nursery within the park, replacing the vessel lane buoys with green and red marker buoys, improving water quality at Higgs Beach, helping with designing exhibits with the future development of the Higgs Beach nature center and working with Casa Marina, the Reach Resort and Southernmost Hotel Collection on marine park education programs as well as the design and installation of an underwater interpretive snorkel trail.

Buoy Maintenance

Over the past year we have located all but a few of the anchors where the demarcation buoys had broken free. We have replaced all but two of the perimeter buoys. We have been unable to locate the anchors for these two. We are presently working to replace the vessel lane buoys. We have been in the water weekly to inspect the standing buoys for basic maintenance.

Water Quality

With regards to water quality, we at Reef Relief feel that there is a strong possibility that if we were to install metal bird deterrents on top of the old pier supports that extend above the water line, we could certainly decrease the amount of fecal material entering the marine park and lower the bacterial load. Also, if we can increase water flow through the area by cutting out sections of the metal wall support from the old pier, water flow would be increased, dramatically leading to better flushing of the site.

With the support of Monroe County, we have placed dozens of bird deterrents on the old pier. It has been effective with keeping the birds from landing there. We are continuing to maintain the deterrents at least on a bi-weekly basis.

In partnership with the City of Key West, Reef Relief's Stormwater Education Program has stenciled messages (No Dumping, Drains to Ocean) next to over 800 stormdrains in the city including the Higgs Beach area.

No sections of the old Higgs Beach wall has been removed as of yet.

Since January 2012, there have been zero advisories for fecal coliform.

Educational Information

Three outdoor signs are currently placed around the park. In the coming year, we hope to replace these with new signs. We are also in the process now of redesigning the educational brochure. Though we do have a few thousand park brochures left to distribute from the first printing.

Sigsbee Charter School

During the 2012/2013 school year, Reef Relief and the Sigsbee Charter School 7th grade classes have been developing a year round and ongoing educational program at the marine park. The students are learning to sample water, make observations of conditions within the park, learning underwater photography and species identification.

Future goals for the program include designing a webpage about the park that will include a virtual underwater trail and helping to design an exhibit for the Higgs Beach Nature Center.

Benthic Observations

Reef Relief staff, volunteers, students from the Key West High School Reef Relief Club and the 7th grade classes from Sigsbee Charter School have been conducting observations of the flora and fauna found within the park. We have found a large diversity of benthic organisms including hard corals, soft corals, algae beds, and many forms of benthic invertebrates such as queen conch, other species of conch, lobster, Bahamian sea stars, sea cucumbers, many different species of urchin, including *Diadema* (long-spined urchin), and a large diversity of fishes. In terms of its biodiversity, the park contains species from a large number of phyla that are worthy of interpretation; in fact animals and plants are both well represented in the waters of the park. Representatives from nearly every invertebrate phylum can be found in the park from the sponges to the chordates.

Funding

- Monroe County has helped us with purchasing the bird deterrents and the wire used for installation.
- MOTE has offered to help fund the reprinting of brochures and possibly replacing the outdoor signage.
- Key West donated several buoys that we have used to replace parameter and vessel lane markers.
- Volunteers continue to assist Reef Relief staff with bird deterrent and buoy maintenance.
- All other expenses have been paid by Reef Relief including: boat expenses, tools, and buoy line.
- Our needs include one two line electrical powered hookah rig and accessories.
- We have had meetings with Casa Marina and Southernmost Hotel Collection about funding support.