

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, FY11-14



Healthy coral reefs are among the most biologically diverse and economically valuable ecosystems on Earth.

Background

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) was established in 1998 by Presidential Executive Order 13089 to lead U.S. efforts to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems. It is made up of 12

Federal agencies, seven States, Territories, and Commonwealths (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Florida, Guam, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and three Freely Associated States (Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia). The USCRTF helps build partnerships, strategies, and support for on-the-ground action to conserve coral reefs.

Since its establishment, the USCRTF has recognized the urgent need for actions to address coral reef science and management and reduce threats to coral reef ecosystems to increase the resilience of reefs in the face of climate change. Today, the USCRTF continues to provide an invaluable opportunity for jurisdictional managers, leadership, and Federal agencies to interact at a national level under a shared goal of conserving the nation's coral reefs.

Here, we detail a handful of the many Fiscal Year 2011 to 2014 accomplishments of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. Every accomplishment of the

USCRTF underscores the value of partnerships and the opportunity for collaboration that is inherent in the Task Force.

National Accomplishments



Combating Climate Change Impacts to Coral Reefs

- The Task Force facilitated science-to-management information sharing between federal agencies and local resource managers on coral bleaching events and response.
- The Climate Change Working Group led the *Coral and Climate Adaptation Planning Project*, providing a framework that can be used by resource managers to include climate change adaptation in their planning.
- An Ocean Acidification Working Group was formed in 2014 to address the critical impacts of ocean acidification on coral reefs.

Meeting National Ocean Policy Action Items

By 2016, the USCRTF will have completed all three of the NOP action items for which it is responsible:

- By 2014, implemented coordinated land use and watershed projects in targeted jurisdiction reef locations to reduce land-based pollutants.
- By 2014, established state and territory specific coral bleaching or crisis response plans and resilience/adaptation strategies.
- By 2016, will develop a reference handbook for use when responding to impacts, assessing, mitigating, and restoring coral reef ecosystems.

Puerto Rico's Sunia Interns, 2013.



Promoting Coral Reef Conservation

- A reinvigorated Education and Outreach working group planned and conducted local outreach events during the St. Croix 2013 and Maui 2014 Task Force meetings.

- The Governor Tauese P.F. Sunia Memorial Coral Reef Conservation Summer Internship Program provided students an invaluable, local learning experience.

Providing Science to Management

- The Task Force continues to facilitate and host scientific discussions and coordination to meet the needs of local resource managers and enhance the overall effectiveness of coral reef ecosystem management through workshops, panels, and public presentations.

Local Accomplishments

Implementing the Watershed Partnership Initiative

Launched in 2009, USCRTF's Watershed Partnership Initiative continues to help improve watershed management, reduce stressors to coral reefs at priority watershed sites, and support robust monitoring and stewardship programs. Current priority watersheds include: Guánica in Puerto Rico, West Maui in Hawai'i, and Faga'alu in American Samoa. This Initiative is coordinated through a Watershed Working Group and Metrics Subcommittee.

Below are just a few examples of the many successes in these priority watersheds.

Guánica: Protectores de Cuencas, Inc., in collaboration with coffee farmers, NGOs,

territorial, and federal agencies, developed the Shade Coffee Roundtable Initiative. This method of growing coffee reduces soil erosion and thus the impact of runoff on coral reefs.

West Maui: An agency funding support team and local working group was formed to guide activities within the watershed. The team is made up of key state and federal agency representatives.

Faga'alu: A collaborative Corrective Action Plan was developed based on sound science, implemented to reduce sediment runoff from quarry operations onto coral reefs, and will be monitored to determine long-term effectiveness.

Addressing Local Priority Issues

By highlighting emerging issues through the USCRTF, federal agencies provided support to address issues, such as the crown of thorns starfish outbreak in American Samoa. Additionally, the Task Force has provided support and assistance to jurisdictions in planning for and mitigating the effects of global climate change through the development of bleaching and crisis response plans and resilience and adaptation strategies.

The USCRTF continues to identify ways to address local needs and could increase their work in addressing jurisdictional management priorities through greater federal-local integration and a shift in focus towards place-based management and resource outcomes.

Coral reefs in the West Maui Watershed, HI.



For more information on the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force visit
www.coralreef.gov.