

**The Key West Marine Park is made possible by the following:**



The Key West Marine Park is operated by the city of Key West in cooperation with Reef Relief- a grassroots non-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving and protecting living coral reef ecosystems. Join Reef Relief as a member for as little as \$30 per year. Visit the Reef Relief Environmental Center and gift shop at the Historic Seaport.



# REEF RELIEF

For Information: (305) 294-3100  
631 Greene Street, Key West, Florida 33040



Photographs by Dora DeMaria, Reef Relief

## MARINE PARK RULES

Rules that apply to all areas of the park:

- This park is a no take zone; no collecting, removing, injuring, or possessing any dead or living marine life (i.e. coral, tropical fish, plants, conch, live rock, etc). No fishing, netting, or spear fishing of marine life. State law prohibits spear fishing within 200 feet of a public beach. It is illegal to collect Queen Conch.
- Don't teach your trash to swim! Please dispose of all trash in receptacles.
- Do not move, remove, or take these or other historical resources within the park. The park boundaries include the underwater cable from the Western Union line that once provided communications between Key West and Cuba.
- Please be a good boater! Operating a vessel in a manner which endangers life, limb, marine resources, or property is prohibited.
- Do not damage or remove buoys. The demarcation buoys provide navigational aids to identify the swim lanes and motorized vessel access lanes. Report all missing buoys to Reef Relief at (305) 294-3100.

**Prohibited Activities in Swim Zones:**

- No operating a motorized vessel within the boundaries of the swim-only areas. Motorized vessels must stay within the designated access lanes. Do not operate a vessel within any of the no-motor swim zone areas identified and marked by demarcation buoys.
- No anchoring within the swim zones. This area is designated for swimmers and snorkelers.

**Prohibited Activities in Vessel Access Lanes:**

- The access lanes are slow speed/no wake areas.
- No overnight mooring or anchoring in the access lanes: these are designed to allow vessels to approach and exit the park.



## REEF THREATS

Physical Impacts:

- **Touching coral kills coral.**
- **Standing and kicking** corals causes severe injuries that can lead to infections.
- Dropping **anchors** on corals.
- Boat groundings and prop dredging.
- **Ghost fishing gear** such as traps, nets, and fishing line causes entanglement.

Water Quality:

- Agricultural runoff in the form of **pesticides** and **fertilizers**.
- Excess **nitrates** and **phosphates** entering the ecosystem.
- Chemical sunscreen with **oxybenzone** and **octinoxate** cause genetic damage to corals.
- Inadequate **wastewater treatment** with sewage and storm water.
- Trash, such as **plastic**, entering the ocean and becoming **marine debris**.
- **Harmful Algal Blooms** caused by excess nutrients decreases oxygen levels in the ecosystem and produces toxins that are lethal to marine organisms.

Other Stressors:

- Burning of **fossil fuels** for electricity, transportation, and production creates greenhouse gases, driving **climate change**.
- Drastic **changes in water temperature** from human driven climate change causes **coral bleaching**.
- Lowering of ocean pH due to **carbon dioxide** production leads to **ocean acidification**.
- Becoming infected with **Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease**.
- **Overfishing** and **bycatch** of marine species.

# REEF RELIEF

# KEY WEST MARINE PARK

*THIS PUBLIC UNDERWATER PARK HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO ENHANCE PROTECTION FOR THE NEARSHORE CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEM, AND TO PROVIDE FOR COMPATIBLE USE BY BOATERS, SWIMMERS, AND BEACH VISITORS.*

**Public Access:** The public can access the Marine Park from four locations: South Beach at the end of Duval St, Dog Beach at the end of Vernon St, the Mary and John Spottwood Waterfront Park at the foot of Seminole St, and Higgs Beach from Reynolds St. to White St.

**Swim Zones:** These are areas designed to provide a safe swimming and snorkeling experience without danger from vessels. Stay within these zones for maximum safety. These are excellent areas to learn how to snorkel and become familiar with equipment before heading to the offshore reefs. The swim lane off of Higgs Beach is a good snorkeling area, but please avoid standing on the bottom which is home to marine life.

**Motorized Vessel Access Lanes:** There are two areas designated within the park to provide access to the shoreline for all motorized vessels. Stay within these lanes when approaching or leaving the shoreline of the park.



The Key West Marine Park runs along the coast of Key West from Duval Street to the White Street pier. This public underwater park has been established to enhance protection for the nearshore coral reef ecosystem and to provide for compatible use by boaters and swimmers. The three buoyed areas are for swimming and snorkeling and are closed to motorized vehicles. For boaters, there are two access lanes to the shoreline.

**Corals:** Although it may look like a rock or a plant, corals are living animals. They are colonies of small polyps containing a symbiotic organism inside of their tissue. This organism is called Zooxanthellae and provides the corals with their color and 90% of their energy. The Key West Marine Park is home to several hard corals such as Brain Coral, Star Coral, Rose Coral, and Mustard Hill Coral that create an exoskeleton made from calcium carbonate called Limestone. Soft corals include Sea Fans, Sea Plumes, and Sea Rods can be seen swaying with the ocean currents. Corals can take thousands of years to grow but are very delicate and can get stressed very easily.

**Seagrass:** A flowering marine plant that is an important part of the coral reef ecosystem. It can be considered an indicator species for coral reef health. Without a successful seagrass ecosystem, you cannot have a healthy coral reef. They filter the water by trapping carbon dioxide, release oxygen into the water, and stabilize the ocean floor with their complex root structure containing rhizomes. Many animals such as turtles, manatees, juvenile fish, and marine invertebrates depend upon seagrass for food or shelter. Seagrass beds are a delicate ecosystem containing many small animals living on the individual blades.

**Fish:** The Key West Marine Park is home for many varieties of fish. Grunts produce an unusual grunting sound and are closely related to snappers, but are generally smaller. Snappers snap their jaws when threatened. Large schools of bait fish such as pilchards, minnows, mullets, and ballyhoo can be seen. Another popular resident is the parrotfish. There are many species of parrotfish, but all can be identified by their beak like mouth. They use this special mouth to break into the limestone skeleton of coral polyps to consume harmful algae. We can actually thank the parrotfish for our beautiful beaches because once they have finished digesting, they actually defecate sand!

*The organisms you see in the Key West Marine Park are all part of a delicate ecosystem that surrounds the Florida Keys. Unfortunately, they are all in peril and need our help. Please remember to look but not touch. We encourage you all to take only photos and leave only bubbles. Only stand in the sand, be sure to properly dispose of all waste in the proper areas, be conscious of the sun protection you use as many chemical sunscreens cause immediate harm to these organisms and pick up your pet waste. Most importantly, keep learning about the organisms you see and educate others!*

