

July 2, 2008

For Immediate Release

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The Nature Conservancy in Florida

Reef Study Shows Need for Protection

Three years of monitoring shows largest coral colonies are the least protected.

ALTAMONTE SPRINGS, FL — Three years of intensive scientific monitoring along the entire Florida reef tract has revealed the need for protection strategies that many scientists and users are already willing to support, according to The Nature Conservancy. Conservancy scientists will present their findings at the International Coral Reef Symposium July 7-11 in Ft. Lauderdale. The Conservancy met with reef managers, commercial and recreational reef users, and scientists at a conference this spring to discuss actions needed to protect Florida's fragile coral reef system.

It does not appear that any reef zones from Key West to Martin County are immune to bleaching, the Conservancy's three years of analysis showed. Coral bleaching indicates stressed coral and has been linked to global climate change: When corals are too hot for too long or are otherwise stressed the colorful algae that live in their tissues are expelled, exposing the white skeleton under the coral colony. While none of the three years monitored — 2005, 2006 and 2007 — was considered a severe coral bleaching year for south Florida, every zone experienced some bleaching in every year.

The study also showed that reef zones with the largest number of coral colonies and the largest sized corals have only minimal protection from manageable impacts.

Key protection strategies identified by the conference participants include comprehensive marine zoning, boater licensing, minimization of lobster and crab trap damage to corals, reef user fees to pay for reef management, research and law enforcement, and reduction of greenhouse gases for increasing reef resilience in south Florida.

The study was led by The Nature Conservancy as part of the Florida Reef Resilience Program partnership. For more information, see nature.org/florida or www.frrp.org.

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The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. With funding from the Florida Forever program and our generous donors the Conservancy has helped protect more than 1.2 million acres in Florida since 1961. Visit us on the Web at nature.org/florida.