

SUMMARIZING THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Coral reefs protect lives, livelihoods, and valuable coastal infrastructure, yet these ecosystems are under constant threat, regularly experiencing both chronic stress and episodes of severe damage.

The strategic plan for NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program defines ways to reduce the three main threats

to coral ecosystems—climate impacts, unsustainable fishing, and land-based sources of pollution—and incorporates a newly added programmatic focus: coral restoration.

The four focus areas, or pillars, of the strategic plan are outlined below.



VISION

Thriving, diverse, resilient coral reefs that sustain valuable ecosystem services for current and future generations.

Increase resilience to climate change

Strategy 1. Support a resilience-based management approach

Improve fisheries' sustainability

- Strategy 1.** Provide data essential for coral reef fisheries management
- Strategy 2.** Build capacity for coral reef fisheries management

Reduce land-based sources of pollution

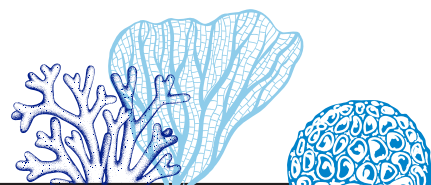
- Strategy 1.** Develop, coordinate, and implement watershed management plans
- Strategy 2.** Build and sustain watershed management capacity at the local level

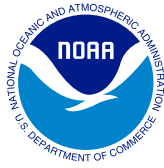
Restore viable coral populations

- Strategy 1.** Improve coral recruitment habitat quality
- Strategy 2.** Prevent avoidable losses of corals and their habitat
- Strategy 3.** Enhance population resilience
- Strategy 4.** Improve coral health and survival

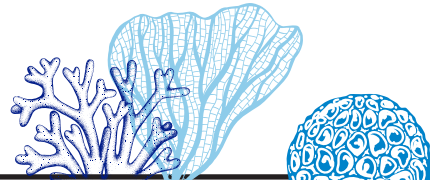
A resilience-based management approach is guiding these investments, with measurable long-term conservation goals set for 2040. By implementing strategies specific to each pillar, the program is increasing the nation's capacity to restore and preserve corals; maintain ecosystem function; and improve coral populations, coral recruitment habitat, water quality, and key coral reef fishery species.

Collaboration is critical. While the plan guides investments in the near term, it is ambitious and covers far more work than one program can achieve. To increase overall success, the plan identifies opportunities to create partnerships across the conservation community.





BACKGROUND



Coral Reef Threats

- Over the past 50 years, 50 percent of the world’s tropical coral reefs were lost—20 percent from the last global bleaching event (2014 to 2017).
- Corals are threatened with a severity and scale never before seen. Heat stress events of 1998 and 2010 affected 48 percent of corals worldwide. During the third global coral bleaching event (2014 to 2017), all tropical coral reefs experienced above-normal ocean temperatures. Scientists warn that these events are occurring more frequently than in the past, shortening the time that corals have to recover.
- Twenty-five percent of all ocean fish species depend on coral reef habitat during some portion of their life. A 50 percent habitat reduction has repercussions for an estimated one billion people dependent on these fisheries.

Coral Reef Benefits

- Annually, U.S. coral reefs provide flood protection benefits of \$1.8 billion in averted damages to property and economic activity.
- The total economic value of coral reef services for the U.S.—including fisheries, tourism, and coastal protection—is over \$3.4 billion each year.
- NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service estimates that the annual value of U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries dependent on coral reefs is \$100 million each.
- Coral reefs can reduce wave energy by 97 percent, providing storm surge and flooding protection for coastal communities.

The NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program

Established in 2000, this program fulfills NOAA’s responsibilities under the Coral Reef Conservation Act and Presidential Executive Order 13089 on Coral Reef Protection.

The program brings together expertise from across NOAA and other partners, including federal managers, state and territorial governments, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and community groups. We work in the following locations:

- American Samoa
- Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- Florida
- Guam
- Hawaii
- Puerto Rico
- U.S. Virgin Islands

The program also supports coral reef research and conservation in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the Pacific Remote Island Areas, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico, and international areas, including the Coral Triangle, Micronesia, South Pacific, and wider Caribbean.

