

Education and Outreach Strategic Plan

Note: This outline of education and outreach recommendations for the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) was developed by a small team of individuals from States and Insular Areas, the Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency. It is recommended that the USCRTF formally endorse an Education and Outreach working group to refine and implement the concepts outlined in this preliminary report.

Summary:

In order to protect coral reefs adequately, people must understand the importance of these ecosystems and support reef protection. In addition, people must be informed about how their actions may affect coral reefs and what they can do to minimize negative impacts on these ecosystems. In response to these needs, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) asked each of its five working groups to address education and outreach as a cross-cutting theme. This plan pulls together the working group recommendations and highlights concerted actions that are needed to create a multi-year public awareness campaign about the value of coral reefs and the threats that they face. The campaign will build upon current education and outreach efforts, showing the public and policy makers that by conserving our coral reef resources, we also protect our economies, lifestyles, and cultures. As part of this campaign, we recommend that the USCRTF establish (1) a small grants program to promote local education and outreach projects, and (2) a USCRTF education and outreach coordinator position to further develop partnerships and outreach efforts among USCRTF members, NGOs, the private sector, and others.

Purpose: Build upon and coordinate current education and outreach efforts to (1) raise public awareness and appreciation for coral reef ecosystems, (2) inform the public and policy-makers about accomplishments and recommendations of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, (3) reduce negative anthropogenic impacts on coral reefs, and (4) promote local education and outreach on coral reef issues.

Need:

While those who manage or study coral reefs are well aware of the rapid decline of these ecosystems, much of the general public is unaware of the current deterioration of coral reef resources. Perhaps more importantly, many people do not understand how their own actions may affect coral reefs or why the destruction of coral reefs is an issue that should concern them. In addition, even those members of the general public and policy community who are aware of coral reef decline are often not well-informed about current actions, policies, or recommendations that contribute to the conservation of coral reef ecosystems.

Many measures to protect coral reefs involve changes in human behavior. If people are knowledgeable about why coral reefs are important to their lives, how humans affect coral reef health, and what individual actions can protect coral reefs, they will be more likely to alter their own actions and support other efforts to further understand and conserve coral reefs. This kind

of broad-based interest in coral reef protection is critical to meeting the goals of Executive Order 13089 on Coral Reef Protection. Similarly, all of the proposed actions of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force will have a greater chance of success if they have the support of the general public, local and regional coral reef user-groups, and policy decision-makers.

Overview:

In order to increase awareness of coral reef issues, we propose a multi-year public awareness campaign focused on the unique benefits of coral reef resources and the actions needed to protect them. This campaign will build on the multitude of education and outreach efforts that already exist within Federal, State, Territorial, local, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other communities, working to coordinate these activities and create collaborative efforts among these partners. In addition, with education and outreach to specific user-groups, the campaign will seek to reduce any negative impacts that these groups have on coral reefs and enlist them in promoting practices that reduce stress on coral reef ecosystems. The education and outreach campaign will demonstrate the biological, economic, and social importance of coral reefs, raising peoples' interest and appreciation for coral reef resources.

Education and outreach efforts will be divided into four categories:

- (1) education and outreach to raise general awareness and understanding of the importance of coral reef ecosystems
- (2) outreach to decision-makers and the general public on the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force's mission and accomplishments
- (3) issue-driven education targeting specific domestic and international threats and user groups
- (4) local or regional education and outreach efforts to raise awareness about the importance of local coral reef resources and modify behaviors that affect coral reefs on a local scale

Within each category, the specific educational message and method of delivery will vary, based on the target audience. For example, an in-flight coral reef video would be used to give a general overview of coral reef ecology, economic value, and conservation efforts to tropical island tourists, while detailed navigational aids and information about anchor damage would be used to inform boaters in specific coral reef areas. Some audiences will fall within more than one category, receiving information from various sources that reinforce and complement each other. In addition, some education and outreach materials will be applicable to a variety of audiences and reach a broad range of user-groups. Individual States and Territories, as well as the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force will determine specific target audiences and the messages that they receive. All

of the outreach activities will highlight the relevant proposed action items and accomplishments of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

With the recent Year of the Ocean and Year of the Reef campaigns, and the numerous outreach efforts by coral reef NGOs, many coral reef educational resources already exist. The USCRTF education and outreach program will work to coordinate current coral reef education programs and incorporate existing educational materials from each of the States, Territories, Federal agencies, and NGOs into its outreach campaign. This coordination will ensure efficiency and build links between various coral reef outreach projects.

Education and Outreach Action Items

1) Raising General Awareness and Understanding of Coral Reef Ecosystems

Coral reef biologists and managers agree that increases in the frequency of bleaching events, the amount of sediment in coral reef waters, destructive fishing practices, and other pressures on coral reefs have drastic consequences for these ecosystems. However, the decline in coral reefs is often viewed as having little, if any, significance for the vast majority of the people living within the United States: coral reefs are a long way from home and only seen on television or vacations to warm water destinations. Increasing awareness of how the products and functions of coral reef ecosystems are an important component of our everyday lives is a critical element of coral reef protection.

Recommended Actions:

- A. Utilize and build upon existing material and successful outreach activities developed during the Year of the Ocean and Year of the Reef campaigns within individual governmental agencies and NGOs.
- B. Work with NGOs, educational institutions, States and Territories, and the scientific community to compile a compendium of general information that currently exists on coral reef resources.
- C. Develop and coordinate distribution of a series of media articles on the decline of coral reef resources, how this will affect our lifestyles, and what actions are being proposed locally, regionally, and nationally to slow this decline. Identify appropriate venues to display these articles, focusing on magazines and other publications that are read regularly by the general public.
- D. Produce a series of public service announcements about specific coral reef issues (e.g. live coral trade, products from coral reefs that are part of everyday life, etc.). Identify media

venues that are available to air this information and coordinate distribution to the appropriate entities.

- E. Produce an in-flight public service video announcement about the value and decline of coral reefs, including information about how people can help protect coral ecosystems. Target commercial flights with destinations in coral reef areas. Set up similar programs with the cruise ship industry. This same public service message can be placed in hotels on their visitor information channels.
- F. Develop images and information that can be printed in the guest guides for major hotels and cruise lines or run as public service announcements in airline in-flight magazines.

(2) Outreach on the Task Force's Mission and Accomplishments

The USCRTF working groups are proposing several important action items to limit further degradation of the health of our nation's reefs and to further protect our coral reef ecosystems. However, many of these actions cannot be implemented without additional funding. The USCRTF needs to develop support to ensure implementation of the action plans and continued cooperation among federal, state, and territorial partners as well as with non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Given the predictions for continued decline in the health of coral reefs worldwide, we need to ensure that the recommended action items are realized and that the commitment to the protection of U.S. coral reefs continues.

Recommended Actions:

- A. Inform key constituencies about USCRTF activities, accomplishments, and recommendations by developing a USCRTF brochure, booth, and slide show or video presentation. Specific target audiences for presentations will include:
 - Congressional staffers, Pacific and Caribbean delegates in particular
 - The scientific community
 - Industries that impact coral reefs and/or are interested in how they can contribute to coral reef protection
 - Relevant non-governmental organizations
 - The media and agency public affairs specialists
 - Fisheries Management Councils
- B. Create an U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Secretariat, including a position for an Education and Outreach Coordinator. The Education and Outreach coordinator would develop a USCRTF logo; research, coordinate, and involve the USCRTF in ongoing coral reef education activities

in all sectors; and manage a small grants program for local coral reef education and outreach projects (See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

(3) Issue-Driven Education Targeting Specific Threats and Users

The USCRTF working groups have identified numerous human activities that contribute to coral reef decline. Many of these human-induced stresses on coral reef ecosystems could be lessened with changes in human actions and behavior. The user-groups that have the highest impact on coral reef resources should be targeted for specific education and outreach efforts. These groups should be informed about the importance of coral reefs, how their actions affect these ecosystems, and what measures they can take to protect coral reefs. They should also be made aware of resources that can help them reduce negative impacts on coral reefs and existing legislation that affects their interactions with reefs. In addition, as the USCRTF makes specific recommendations for coral reef protection, those user-groups that might be affected need to be knowledgeable about the proposals and involved in the decision making process.

Recommended Actions:

- A. Develop and implement outreach programs to address specific issues and user-groups identified by the USCRTF. Examples of priority education and outreach topics, cross referenced with examples of user-groups that should receive information on these issues, are contained in Table 1. The USCRTF working group reports that identify the need for education and outreach on a particular topic, or contain more detailed information on the listed issue, are also listed in Table 1.
- B. Develop materials for distribution that outline how the user-group may be contributing to the decline of coral reefs by some of its actions, what current or future regulations may affect the group's coral reef-related activities, and how changes in the group's actions can help coral reef conservation.
- C. Work with the National Sea Grant Program and other existing outreach entities to identify distribution nodes for each of the target user groups. Numerous methods exist to distribute information to targeted user-groups. The method chosen will be based, in part, on the specific target group and the focus of information to be relayed. In all cases, more than one method will need to be used to ensure that all users have access to the information. For example, it will not help to distribute information through Internet web pages, if the majority of the target users are unlikely to own a computer. Examples of distribution nodes available to inform various user-groups are listed below:

- Public service announcements
- Videos
- Training workshop

- Signage
- Brochures
- Web pages and links to other organizations
- Articles in print media, including journals, newsletters, magazines, and newspapers
- Radio shows
- Television shows
- Trade show displays
- Conference presentations
- Commercial sponsorship (e.g. information on retail shopping bags, milk cartons, etc.)

A key component of ensuring that an educational message reaches a particular audience is to utilize organizations, magazines, and other venues that the user is likely to already be interested in. Examples of potential distribution centers are listed in Table 2.

(4) Local and Regional Education and Outreach Efforts

Locally relevant education and outreach efforts are crucial to the success of coral reef conservation: coral reef protection policies will be most effective if they are initiated and supported by local people. Local residents in coral reef areas need to understand how their daily actions affect the health of the coral reef ecosystems adjacent to their shores. We need to develop messages that result in a change in behaviors and limit further degradation to coral reefs.

Recommended Actions:

- A. Create a small, competitive grants program to support local and regional coral reef education and outreach programs (see Appendix 2 and the Water and Air Quality Working Group report).
- B. Implement local education and outreach projects as funds become available. Projects proposed by State and Territorial coral reef scientists and managers are listed in Table 3. More detailed explanations are contained in the 1999 U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Initiative Strategy and Appendix 3.