Background

We request that anyone that wishes to speak at this public meeting contact us using the contact information above so that we can ensure that everyone is given enough time to express their opinions. We request that everyone who speaks at this meeting also give us their comments in writing. If you are unable to attend the meeting but still wish to comment, you may submit your comments by any one of several methods. You may mail comments to the following address: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of the Assistant Director for International Affairs, 1849 C Street, Room 3245, Washington, DC 20240. You may comment via the Internet to r9oma_cites@fws.gov.

Please submit Internet comments as an ASCII file, avoiding the use of special characters and any form of encryption. Please also include “Attn: Public Meeting on U.S. Coral Reef Task Force”, and your name and return address in your Internet message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that we have received your Internet message, contact us directly at the telephone number listed above. Finally, you may hand-deliver comments to the above address. We will consider comments and information received by December 10, 1999.

Coral reefs are recognized as being among the most diverse and valuable ecosystems on earth. Reef systems are storehouses of immense biological wealth and provide economic and ecosystem services to millions of people as shoreline protection, areas of natural beauty and recreation, and sources of food, pharmaceuticals, jobs, and revenues. According to one estimate, reef habitats provide humans with services worth about $375 billion each year, despite the fact that they cover less than one percent of the earth’s surface.

Unfortunately, coral reefs are also recognized as being among the most threatened marine ecosystems on the planet. Coral reefs are being seriously degraded by human activities, especially overexploitation of resources, destructive fishing practices, coastal development, and runoff from improper land-use practices. The international trade in coral, reef fish, live rock, and other coral reef organisms contributes to the decline and degradation of reefs. Coral reef resources traded internationally supply a wide number of markets and industries, including the seafood industry, live food fish markets, the aquarium trade, the curio and jewelry trade, and the pharmaceutical and research industries. As a major consumer of coral reef organisms and a...