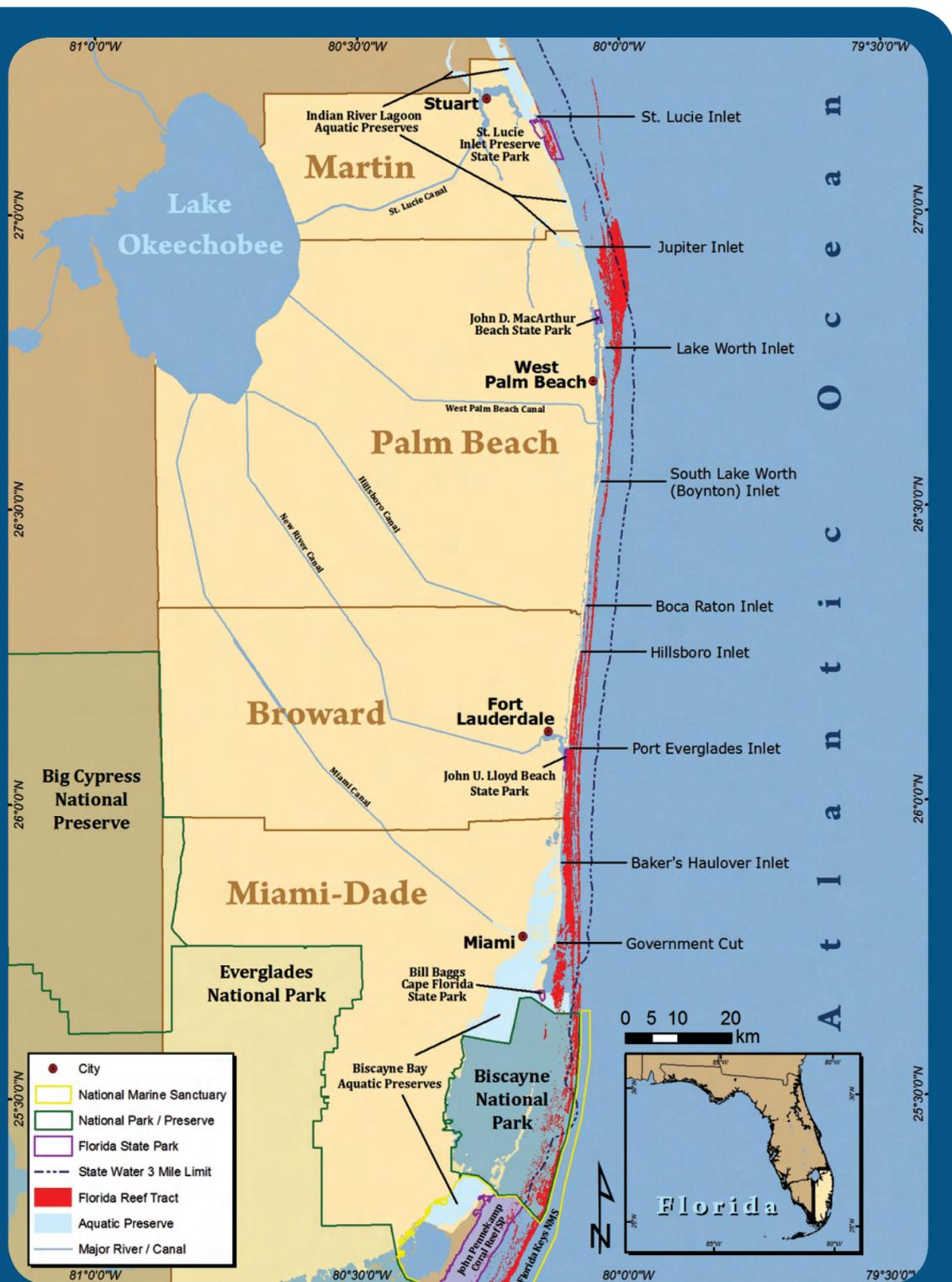


REEF PROTECTION CAMPAIGN FOR SCUBA DIVERS

SOUTHEAST FLORIDA'S CORAL REEFS

Did you know that the third longest coral reef in the world lies just offshore? The Florida Reef Tract spans over 350 miles and five counties. The coral reefs off southeast Florida comprise the northern third of the Florida Reef Tract, extending 105 miles from north of Biscayne National Park to the St. Lucie Inlet. Florida's coral reefs provide habitat for over 6,000 species and sustain south Florida's fisheries, tourism, and recreation, generating more than 71,000 jobs and \$6.3 billion in annual sales and income. Coral reefs protect coastal communities from storms and hurricanes, and help maintain southeast Florida's famous beaches.



PLEASE ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES:

- 1. MAINTAIN PROPER BUOYANCY CONTROL** Ensure you are weighted properly by performing a buoyancy check. Never stand, sit, kneel, or grab onto the reef! Descend to the seafloor over sand so you do not contact the reef.
- 2. BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY, FINS, AND EQUIPMENT** Swim above the reef and keep your gauges secured to your BCD to avoid contact with the reef. Watch where you kick – kicking coral can cause damage; and, kicking up sand can smother coral.
- 3. AVOID FEEDING, TOUCHING, OR RIDING ON MARINE LIFE** These actions may stress an animal, interrupt feeding and mating behavior, or provoke aggressive behavior in docile species.
- 4. RESPECT MARITIME HISTORY** Do not grab onto shipwrecks or disturb sand protecting them. Removing any part of a wreck, marine life attached to a wreck, and damaging artifacts, are prohibited.
- 5. BE A ROLE MODEL FOR OTHER DIVERS** by following all dive safety procedures and guidelines. If you see a diver causing damage or behaving recklessly, notify the captain or crew.
- 6. PRACTICE ECO-TOURISM** by leaving corals and shells as you find them. Empty shells create homes for other animals, and coral skeletons are a sand source for our beaches. Similarly, don't purchase products (e.g., jewelry) made from marine life.
- 7. COMPLY WITH FISHING REGULATIONS** Because objects appear larger underwater, only catch marine life that exceeds the size limit. Maintain licensing and obey size and bag limits (www.myfwc.com/marine). When lobstering, use a snare to minimize contact with the reef. Practice conservation by taking only what you need. To report wildlife violations, call: **(888) 404-FWCC**.
- 8. REPORT MARINE EVENTS** If you notice vessel groundings, marine debris, invasive species (e.g., lionfish), coral bleaching, or other disturbances in southeast Florida, call: **(866) 770-SEFL**.
- 9. BE SEAFOOD SMART** Use wallet-sized seafood guides (e.g., www.seafoodwatch.org or www.blueocean.org) to ensure you are selecting seafood from fisheries and aquaculture that are sustainable.



Photo credits: Mark Bailey, FDEP, Joe Marino, Jennifer Podis.



To learn more about coral reefs, visit: www.southeastfloridareefs.net or contact: coral@dep.state.fl.us

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