

Middle Keys Region

Ecosystem Protection Working Group concepts presented for potential modifications to marine zones in the Middle Keys region. The below table reflects working group discussion, zone and regulation concepts, issues to note, and status of working group decision. The following are Ecosystem Protection Working Group Middle Keys Region recommendation for the Sanctuary Advisory Council.

Area	Rationale	Zone Concepts	Regulation Concepts	Consensus
Tennessee Reef	The areas under consideration include ESA listed coral species, high fish abundance and diversity, and high coral reef resilience. Fish movement is seasonal and includes juvenile to adult stages and movement through the area and from in-shore to off-shore. This would modify and build off an existing area that is already protected through zoning. For Concept 3: proposed to meet the Advisory Council goal to protect large, contiguous, diverse and interconnected habitats, including for fish moving in-shore to off-shore through their life cycle. Achieves deep reef protection, area where this might be done with minimal impact to users	<p>Concept 1: Extend Tennessee Reef Special Use Area to the 90' drop off, which is approximately 0.6 miles.</p> <p>Concept 2: Extend Tennessee Reef Special Use Area to the 90' drop off, which is approximately 0.6 miles and expand westward by about 1.2 miles. This encompasses the resilient reef area adjacent to and offshore from Tennessee reef Special Use Area.</p> <p>Concept 3: Create a zone that extends from the shoreline at Long Key State Park to the 90' drop off and include Tennessee Reef Special Use Area in the zone.</p>	Concept 4: Close area to all use.	<p>Show of hands for Concept 1 & Concept 4: 9 in favor of 13. Show of hands for Concept 2 & Concept 4: 2 in favor of 13.</p> <p>Consensus: Do not consider Zone Concept 3.</p>
<p>Issues to Consider for Tennessee Reef and associated Concepts:</p> <p>No action alternative should be considered</p> <p>Impact to fishing, both commercial lobster and recreational, not known. Noted good yellowtail fishing in this area.</p> <p>There will be impacts to fishing but noted the impact not likely detrimental.</p> <p>Area that would likely be detrimental for fishing the Tennessee Reef light area near the Fishery Management Plan No Lobster Trap Gear zone.</p> <p>For Concept 3: impact to fishing and to individuals using areas along the shoreline; potentially not worth extending zone to shore</p> <p>For Concept 3: Consider the idea of a seasonal (May to July) catch and release / idle zone from shore to about 4' to 6' of water</p>				
Alligator Reef	This area includes a lot of diversity and has possible significance to the life cycle of groupers	Concept 1: Extend outer boundary of the existing Alligator Reef SPA seaward by 2/10ths of a mile	Concept 2: Close area to all uses but still allow exception for catch and release by trolling.	Show of hands for Concept 1: 3 in favor; no show of hands taken for Concept 2.
<p>Issues to Consider for Alligator Reef and associated Concepts:</p> <p>Clarify that the exception to allow trolling was discussed in relation to the expanded zone; noted that the exception to trolling could be removed from the current Alligator reef SPA area (Islamorada Fishing Guides have considered this issue and agree to removing exception to allow trolling)</p> <p>Grouper are already protected through Fishery Management Plan during spawning season and bag limit</p> <p>If the nearby Fishery Management Plan No Lobster Trap Gear zone becomes a no-anchor zone, leave Alligator Reef alone.</p> <p>This area would be too difficult to close to all uses as it is a large area and is likely used for catch and release trolling.</p>				

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Turtle Shoals	Includes ESA and State listed coral species including staghorn, elkhorn and pillar; high stony coral cover and fish diversity. Includes resilient reefs. This area is more protected from Florida Bay water and environmental conditions than other areas in the Middle Keys.	Concept 1: Create a zone around the patch reef at East Turtle Shoals.	Concept 4: Close area to all use.	Show of hands for Concept 4: 10 in favor of 13. Show of hands for Concept 1: 11 in favor; Show of hands for Concept 2: none in favor. Consensus none in favor of Concept 3.
		Concept 2: Create a zone around the patch reefs at East and West Turtle Shoals.		
		Concept 3: Create a zone that extends from the shore at Curry Hammock State Park, extends to the deep reef and encompasses the area at Turtle Shoals with the greatest species abundance and diversity.		
<p>Issues to Consider for Turtle Shoals and associated Concepts:</p> <p>Close to all use - need to allow transit and access to evaluate/research effectiveness of zone.</p> <p>This area has a lot of patch reefs so should evaluate more closely to determine the premium habitat areas to protect in the smallest way possible while also impacting the fewest users.</p> <p>This area is a good historical site for coral so could be a good site for further coral restoration work</p> <p>Note from commercial fisherman present that they could live with not fishing in this area (this is better than Tennessee Reef suggestion).</p> <p>This is an important area for the dive and marine life protection industries; however are willing to give this area up for its high ecological value.</p> <p>If taking this high value area need to consider impact to economy particularly the recreational charter fishing, marine life protection. West portion will be greater impact to marine life protection.</p> <p>To allow for some fishing, could set a line of buoys at the southern edge of zone to allow some use; however noted that if this area is significant should be protected, concern about angling gear.</p>				
Coffins Patch	Consider opening area back up	Concept 1: Remove current Sanctuary Preservation Area	Concept 2: Remove the current regulations for Coffins Reef Sanctuary Preservation Area	Consensus: No Action, leave as zoned.
<p>Issues to Consider for Coffins Patch and associated concepts:</p> <p>Note that there are only 4 SPAs in the middle keys, they are spread out widely, and are heavily used by dive community, this area serves purpose to separate use, is known, includes resources.</p> <p>Not against giving back, but if give this area back would increase user conflict and would impact the dive industry.</p> <p>There are four distinct areas in Coffins patch, which are managed by where the mooring bouys are placed</p> <p>Large area of pillar coral is included in the SPA</p>				
Mid-Channel Patch Reefs	Mid-channel patch reefs support high coral cover and diversity and provide the opportunity to protect large number of species in a small space. This habitat type is under-represented in the current zoning scheme.	Concept 1: Create at least one zone to protect mid-channel patch reefs	No specific regulation concepts discussed or identified.	No further discussion. Noted that mid-channel patch reefs for the Middle Keys Region are protected through Turtle Shoals concepts.
<p>Issues to Consider for Mid-Channel Patch Reef zones</p> <p>Washer Woman was proposed as a potential area for consideration. Note that Turtle Shoals area is a significant Mid-Channel Patch under discussion for potential protection through zoning.</p> <p>Generally support one area selected for further protection. Area selected should be based on science.</p> <p>Washer Woman likely gets more use than Turtle Shoals due to proximity to population center.</p>				
Fishery Management Plan Areas Closed to Lobster Trap Gear	Existing Fishery Management Plan areas with significant amount of Endangered Species Act listed coral.	Existing Zones. No new or modified zone proposed.	Concept 1: Mark these existing zones	Consensus: Mark zone near Alligator Reef
			Concept 2: Prohibit anchoring in these existing zones	Consensus: Prohibit anchoring in these zones
<p>Issues to Consider for Fishery Management Plan Areas Closed to Lobster Trap Gear</p> <p>When an area is not defined or marked, enforcement is difficult. Individuals do not know where these areas are or what the regulations are.</p> <p>Due to the number of these zones in the Upper Keys region, marking all of these zones could create confusion and complications. Considering marking zones where feasible and makes sense.</p>				