

Resolution of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Advancing the Ecosystem Protection: Ecological Reserves / Preservation Areas and Wildlife Protection Working Group Recommendations to NOAA for Analysis through a Draft Environmental Impact Statement Adopted August 19, 2014

1. Whereas, The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary harbors a tropical marine ecosystem unique in the continental United States, including the world's third largest barrier coral reef, and
2. Whereas, this State and National environmental treasure experiences intensive usage by local residents and an estimated three million annual visitors to the region including recreational divers, recreational fishers, commercial fishers and boaters and it is subject to water pollution, and climate change impacts originating within and beyond the Sanctuary, and
3. Whereas, visitation and environmental usage are increasing with each passing year, and
4. Whereas, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report (2011) noted stable or declining trends in the abundance and distribution of habitat types, fair to poor status of the condition of habitats, and fair to poor status of human influence on habitat quality in the Florida Keys, and
5. Whereas, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report (2011) noted declining trends in the condition of living marine resources in the Sanctuary including fair to poor status of biodiversity, fair status of non-indigenous species, poor status of key species, and fair to poor status of the levels of human activities that might impact the quality of such resources, and
6. Whereas, the boundaries, zoning, and regulations of the FKNMS are currently under review and it is expected that this review will result in changes that will guide the future of the FKNMS to adapt to and to withstand the environmental impacts associated with increased usage that are inevitable and currently underway, and
7. Whereas, as part of this review, the Sanctuary Advisory Council created an Ecosystem Protection: Ecological Reserves / Preservation Areas and Wildlife Protection Working Group charged with the following objectives:
 - Review and evaluate existing reserves designated for protection of coral reef ecosystems.
 - Review current exceptions to regulations in Sanctuary Preservation Areas and Ecological Reserves.
 - Review and evaluate Sanctuary Preservation Areas reduction of conflicting uses.
 - Recommend new or modified ecological reserves to ensure protection of a diversity of resources:
 - Spawning aggregations;
 - Full suite of marine flora and fauna (i.e., seabird, marine mammal, turtles, seagrass, soft corals, hard corals)
 - Consider temporal zoning to address seasonal impacts associated with intense uses or seasonal ecological activities (i.e., nesting, breeding, spawning).
 - Ensure the FKNMS zoning scheme promotes sustainable use of the sanctuary resources and protects areas that represent diverse habitats as well as areas important for maintaining natural resources and ecosystem functions.

Therefore, the Sanctuary Advisory Council of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary resolves as follows:

1. We acknowledge and applaud the commitment and contribution of Advisory Council and community members who served on the Ecosystem Protection: Ecological Reserves / Preservation Areas and Wildlife Protection Working Group.
2. We request that the Ecosystem Protection: Ecological Reserves / Preservation Areas and Wildlife Protection Working Group Concepts and Recommendations are forwarded to the Sanctuary Superintendent for consideration and analysis as part of the range of alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
3. We request the following also be considered as part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement:
 - Determine the additional area that is captured in working group zone recommendations. Evaluate if that is enough, not enough, or too much area proposed to be zoned.
 - Evaluate the use of user fees as a tool to support resource management.
 - Evaluate the purpose and intent of the working group recommendation “closed to all uses”. Consider exemption to allow research activities, purposeful monitoring of zones, and develop a plan to allow resource management activities (e.g. invasive species, restoration).
 - Consider EP-2 recommendation to create a new zone at Turtle Rocks and the potential impact to cultural resources and associated research activities.
 - Consider EP-6 recommendation to modify the zone at Alligator Reef and evaluate impact to user groups.
 - Evaluate additional areas or other ways to meet the SAC Goals to protect large, contiguous, diverse, and interconnected habitats (SAC Goal 2).
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of restricting access by making no anchor/mooring balls only areas. Evaluate options related to time limit for mooring ball use.
 - Evaluate options to allow pole spear fishing for lionfish in state waters (noted in particular for the Upper Keys region). Evaluate options to address lionfish throughout the Sanctuary.
 - Include an alternative that evaluates large marine zones, (e.g 25 square nautical mile zones, 20% of Sanctuary area), designed to limit and/or eliminate user impact on the ecosystem.
 - Evaluate a marine zone at Snapper Ledge.
 - Evaluate the use of a voluntary education program (using Everglades EcoMariner as a model) to address boater education.

The council is an advisory body to the sanctuary superintendent. The opinions and finding of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.