



Photo: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Marine Debris in Florida & the Caribbean

Florida and the Caribbean are surrounded by clear blue water full of diverse coral reefs, fish, and other marine life. However, this beautiful habitat also contains unsightly marine debris. Plastic containers, derelict vessels, and abandoned fishing gear can be found on the ocean floor, in the water column, and on beaches, negatively impacting wildlife and humans alike.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program's (MDP) Florida and Caribbean region includes the state of Florida and the territories of Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands (USVI; St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas). The MDP works with state agencies, coastal communities, academic institutions, industry, and non-governmental organizations to address marine debris in the region.

Marine Debris Impacts in Florida and the Caribbean

- Derelict fishing gear (DFG), especially lobster or crab traps and fishing line, can be found in seagrass beds, coral reefs, and sandy habitats. DFG can continue to trap animals, destroys habitat, and creates navigational hazards.
- Abandoned and derelict vessels (ADV) are also an issue in Florida where they can become navigational hazards and can smother or damage habitat.
- Severe weather (i.e., hurricanes) can increase the amount of land-based consumer and large debris that enters the ocean.



Photo: Coral Bay Community Council

Marine Debris Initiatives in FL & the Caribbean

The following are recent projects funded by the MDP. For more, visit <https://marinedebris.noaa.gov>.

Prevention

The University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) is modifying a marine debris curriculum with the goal of preventing land-based sources of marine debris in USVI. The curriculum will include hands-on beach cleanups and development of student-led projects, such as public service announcements and creative marine debris art displays. Eckerd College will reduce consumption of single-use plastics across the college campus in St. Petersburg, Florida by educating students on marine debris, providing access to alternatives to common debris items, and working with the college administration to institute campus-wide initiatives.

Removal

Ocean Aid 360 will mobilize a diverse group of boaters, anglers, industry, and more to detect and remove 15,000 lbs of derelict crab traps and other fishing gear from Florida's Tampa Bay estuary through awareness campaigns and a Ghost Trap Rodeo event series. The Ghost Trap Rodeo Event Series will be comprised of at least six weekend-long marine debris removal event competitions. Following the removal activities, data will be collected on the species removed from the crab traps.

Coordination

The MDP helped lead efforts to develop the Florida Marine Debris Reduction Guidance Plan. The Plan is a compilation of recommended strategies and actions toward reducing the impacts and amount of marine debris in Florida. It is the result of multiple years of collaboration between stakeholders including federal and state agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations, universities, and industry. Since its release, the Plan has acted as a guide to measure progress toward addressing the marine debris problem in Florida.



FL & Caribbean Coordinator

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Regional Coordination

The MDP has regional coordinators across the United States to ensure stakeholders have the best information available.



Photo: University of the Virgin Islands
USVI teachers participate in a teacher workshop at the University of the Virgin Islands



Photo: NOAA
Derelict vessels in Boot key Harbor following Hurricane Irma.

3 Easy Steps to Keep Florida & the Caribbean Free of Debris

1 Be a responsible boater
When boating, be conscientious of trap buoys to reduce the number of traps lost to cut lines. Properly dispose of or recycle monofilament fishing line. Be cautious not to discard fishing line in the marine environment.

2 Prepare for storms
Secure vessels or remove them from the water to prevent loss. Tie down any large items in your yard that may be swept away by wind or water.

3 Keep it clean
Help remove debris from beaches, rivers and inland waters by organizing a cleanup or by participating in a cleanup event with a local organization.