



Superintendent Sarah Fangman
Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
33 East Quay Road
Key West, FL 33040

October 26, 2022

Dear Superintendent Fangman,

On behalf of 47 youth and student organizations from across Florida and the United States, we write to ask you to help protect the Florida Keys, one of the most unique places on our planet. Over the course of our lifetimes, the health of this ecosystem has declined rapidly and is on the brink of collapse. You, as elected officials, must do all you can to preserve it for generations to come.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) is a national treasure. Home to the continental U.S.' only barrier reef and over 6,000 species of ocean life, its corals, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests make it an ocean wonderland.

Unfortunately, this wonderland is at risk. Climate change, water pollution and coral disease are taking a toll on the Key's habitats, exacerbated by overfishing and overuse.

These threats have tangible impacts on the health of the Keys and its myriad marine ecosystems: Coral cover has declined by half in the last 25 years and hovers at 2-5%.¹ 30,000 acres of seagrass beds, a critical food source and habitat for many species like manatees and gamefish, have been damaged by boats.² Spawning aggregations for important gamefish are stressed.³ The Sanctuary's own scientists in 2011 found that the overall health of the Sanctuary's marine resources was "fair/poor"--and it has only gotten worse in the intervening years.³

As young people working to protect our climate and get others engaged in our political system, we recognize the importance of the FKNMS and the value it adds to Florida's economy and environment. The labyrinth of mangroves, flowing seagrass beds, and colorful coral reefs are critical to the health of this ecosystem and all the creatures that inhabit it: seabirds, sharks, sea turtles, and manatees.

We must do everything in our power to save this place, and we are writing to you today to implore you to incorporate the following considerations into your Florida Keys Restoration Blueprint, so we may have a Florida worth inheriting:

- We were glad to see an increase in the number of strongly protected marine zones and expansion of the sanctuary boundary. However, large, contiguous, highly protected



marine reserves are the most effective way to preserve biodiversity and create resilience to climate change. That is why we urge NOAA to include large areas like the Tortugas Corridor, and two shore-to-reef protected areas from Key Largo to Carysfort Reef and Long Key State Park to Tennessee Reef in its final rule.

- Thank you for strongly protecting deeper, healthier corals at Western Sambo, Alligator Reef, Tennessee Reef, and Carysfort Reef. We urge you to maintain consistent Sanctuary regulations and keep these deep reefs closed to all forms of fishing and anchoring. We also applaud your inclusion of Pulley Ridge in the draft rule and support keeping this coral haven safe from anchoring.
- While we were glad to see a number of shallow areas, home to seagrass meadows and fish nurseries, protected with idle speed or no motor zones, these safeguards leave too many shallow areas of the Sanctuary vulnerable to destruction and scarring from props. We urge NOAA to adopt a Sanctuary-wide regulation that would require idle speeds within 100 yards of all shorelines throughout the Sanctuary. This will protect seagrass habitats vital to Florida's climate resilience now and in the future.

These protections, if established, will ensure that we are one step closer to saving the Florida Keys. Clearly, there is much more to be done but we cannot wait any longer to implement these changes. It is your duty, as scientists, as politicians, and as leaders, to ensure that this national treasure is protected for America's posterity.

Sincerely,

CC: Secretary Gina Raimondo
Administrator Rick Spinrad
Director John Armor

Alpha Kappa Psi- The University of Texas at Austin
Biology Graduate Student Organization (BGSO)- University of Miami
Blue Scholars Initiative
California Academy of Sciences- Youth Programs
CALPIRG Students- University of California Schools
Coalition on the Environment and the Jewish Life
Delta Sigma Pi- Chapter Upsilon Phi- Eckerd College
ECOS Environmental Responsibility Committee- Eckerd College
Environment and Conservation Organization- University of Miami
Environmental Club- Palm Beach Day Academy
Environmental Health Graduate Student Association- University of Georgia
Environmental Law Society- University of Miami School of Law
Environmental Toxicology Student Association- Texas Tech University



Florida PIRG Students- Eckerd College
Florida PIRG Students- Florida State University
Georgia 4-H
Graduate Business Student Association- Miami Herbert Business School, University of Miami
Green Grad Group- University of Miami
Marine Biology Club- Florida Atlantic University Honors College
MHG Ocean Impact, LLC
Ornithological Society of Eckerd- Eckerd College
Surfrider Chapter- Emerald Coast
Surfrider Club- Adolfo Camarillo High School
Surfrider Club- California State University Channel Islands
Surfrider Club- Capistrano Valley High School
Surfrider Club- Crossroads School
Surfrider Club- El Cerrito High School
Surfrider Club- Foothill High School (Santa Ana, CA)
Surfrider Club- Georgetown University
Surfrider Club- Greenwich Academy High School
Surfrider Club- Los Osos High School
Surfrider Club- Loyola Marymount University
Surfrider Club- Manhattan Beach Middle School
Surfrider Club- Oceanside Collegiate Academy
Surfrider Club- Orange County School of the Arts
Surfrider Club- San Pedro High School
Surfrider Club- The George Washington University
Surfrider Club- University of Hawaii
Surfrider Club- University of Miami
Surfrider Club- University Of Pennsylvania
Surfrider Club- University of San Diego
Surfrider Club- University of Tampa
Sustainable Business Club- Miami Herbert Business School, University of Miami
Taylor Swift Society- Eckerd College
The Surfrider Foundation
TU Thrift- Tulane University
Tulane for UNICEF- Tulane University

¹NOAA Fisheries (n.d.), *Restoring 7 Iconic Reefs: A Mission to Recover the Coral Reefs of the Florida Keys*, Accessed 1 September 2022.

²Curtis Kruer, *Florida Keys Shallow Water Boating Impact Analysis and Trends Assessment - Mapping Summary Report*, March 2017.

³NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries, *Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries*, 2011.