

# Two more corals become threatened species

May 8 2006

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Two types of corals have been declared threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act -- reportedly the first time coral has been placed on that list.

Elkhorn and staghorn corals have been deteriorating for years in the shallow waters off Florida and in the Caribbean, the Naples (Fla.) Daily News reported Monday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says elkhorn and staghorn corals -- the main building blocks of the region's coral reef ecosystems for 500,000 years -- have declined by approximately 97 percent since the 1970s.

Disease, rising sea temperatures and hurricanes are the corals' biggest threats, according to a March 2005 federal study. They can become stressed by as small as a 2-degree change in water temperature. In addition, coral can be adversely affected by pollution, runoff and bleaching.

Jack Sobel, an ecosystem scientist with The Ocean Conservancy, a non-profit group based in Washington, said listing under the Endangered Species Act demands aggressive actions.

"It (the ESA) does have some hammers associated with it," he told the newspaper. "If you're going to arrest the decline in these species you're going to have to use those hammers."

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Citation: Two more corals become threatened species (2006, May 8) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-05-corals-threatened-species.html>

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