

MARES to provide comprehensive view of south Florida marine ecosystems

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Marine and Estuarine Goal Setting for South Florida (MARES) is a new collaborative initiative, funded by NOAA designed to guide regional resource managers in protecting the fragile marine coastal environment in South Florida. The three-year study will also establish an annual report card (Total Marine Ecosystem Assessment Report) that will allow resource managers to evaluate their management strategies to continuously improve programs to protect the local ecosystem. Credit: Evan D'Alessandro/UM-RSMAS

A new \$1.5 million NOAA-funded project, MARES will provide a comprehensive view of south Florida marine ecosystems. This will be the first study to include human dimensions science and deliver guidance for resource management from the Sunshine State's Charlotte Harbor south to the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas, and from the lower East Coast up to the St. Lucie.

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collaborative initiative, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), designed to guide regional resource managers in protecting the fragile marine coastal environment in South Florida.

Through MARES academic scientists, federal and state agency experts and non-governmental organizations will work closely with federal and state environmental managers, private industry and the general public to develop comprehensive ecosystem models and reach consensus as to feasible management goals for the South Florida coastal ecosystem from Charlotte Harbor south to the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas and the lower East Coast up to the St. Lucie. The three-year study will also develop an annual report card (Total Marine Ecosystem Assessment Report) that allows resource managers to evaluate their management strategies to adequately protect the local ecosystem.

"Here in South Florida we have a unique subtropical environment - we are home to the only [coral reefs](#) in the continental United States, most of our population lives along the coast and our economy hinges on the protection of our marine environment," said Dr. Peter Ortner, professor of biological oceanography at the University of Miami and director of the Cooperative Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Studies (CIMAS). "Human society is part of the larger ecosystem. A unique feature of MARES is the specific consideration of societal processes through the inclusion of human dimensions science, to study what is taking place within the ecosystem and how we are impacting its sustainability."

Input from agencies and the community will be gathered during a series of public meetings leading to a "Total Marine Ecosystem Assessment Report". The first in a series of technical workshops to develop the groundwork for the report is scheduled to take place in Miami, December 9 and 10, 2009 at FIU's MARC Pavillion. Additional information for public meetings throughout the region will be publicized

as they are scheduled.

MARES builds upon NOAA's 15 year commitment to improve the understanding of the South Florida coastal ecosystem and associated changes resulting from Everglades Restoration activities. The outcomes from MARES will be used to focus and prioritize future research and management of South Florida coastal waters for NOAA and the other federal and state agencies.

"This is the first time a "Total Marine System" analysis will be developed as a resource management tool", said Joseph Boyer, Director of the Southeast Environmental Research Center at Florida International University. "The results of this effort will also assist South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force managers in 'defining success' with respect to Everglades Restoration."

Provided by University of Miami

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