

US researchers create frozen coral 'bank' to protect species

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This handout shows fungia, one of the corals deposited into the frozen repository at the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology. Scientists at the institute and the Smithsonian Institution have created the first frozen bank for Hawaiian corals in an attempt to protect them from extinction and to preserve their diversity in Hawaii.

US scientists have created the first bank of frozen coral cells, intended to preserve endangered coral species in Hawaii and protect their diversity.

The bank so far contains frozen sperm and embryonic cells from mushroom coral and rice coral, but researchers say they plan to expand the cell library to include more of Hawaii's coral species.

"Because frozen banked cells are viable, the frozen material can be

thawed one, 50 or, in theory, even 1,000 years from now to restore a species or population," said Mary Hagedorn, a faculty member at Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology.

"In fact, some of the frozen sperm samples have already been thawed and used to fertilize coral eggs to produce developing coral larvae," she said.

The project, a joint program of the Smithsonian Institution and the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, is located on Coconut Island in Oahu.

Hawaii's reefs are threatened by pollution caused by poor agricultural practices, run-off from farms and plants, and destructive practices including dynamite fishing, the researchers said.

"Unless action is taken now, [coral reefs](#) and many of the animals that depend on them may cease to exist within the next 40 years, causing the first global [extinction](#) of a worldwide ecosystem during current history," they added.

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