

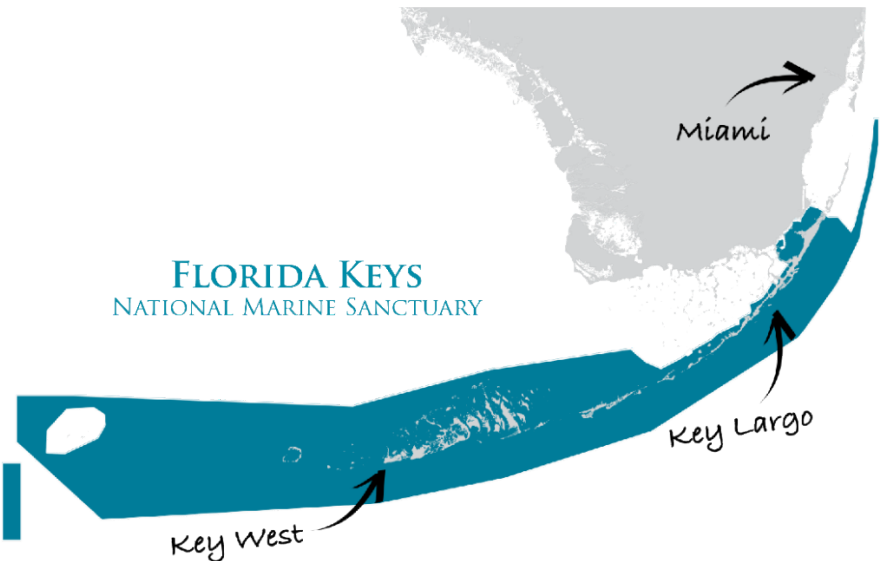


## Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2022

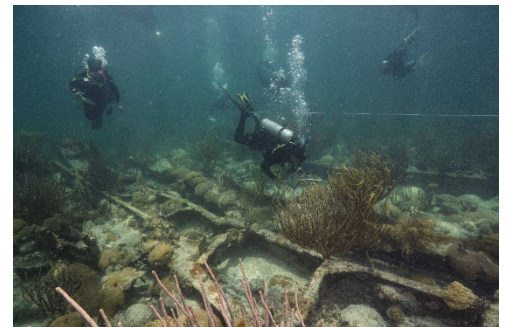
Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1990 to protect and preserve spectacular, unique, and nationally significant marine resources. Within the 3,800-square-mile sanctuary is North America's only coral barrier reef, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove fringed islands, and more than 6,000 species of marine life. The sanctuary also protects an estimated 800 underwater historical sites.

Visit [floridakeys.noaa.gov](https://floridakeys.noaa.gov) for more information.



### Diving with A Purpose Shipwreck Mapping

The sanctuary renewed its partnership with Diving with A Purpose, an avocational archaeological training program, to map a shipwreck at Hen and Chickens Reef off Islamorada. Almost 30 divers joined the sanctuary team to investigate the "Brick Barge" sunk in 20 feet of water. Many snorkelers and divers visit the site, but little was known about it prior to the project. In addition to documenting the site for an interpretative dive map, researchers connected it to a shipwreck carrying a cargo of brick to Key West.



Diving with a Purpose participants explore the Brick Wreck. Photo: NOAA.

### Eco-Discovery Center Completes \$1 Million Renovation

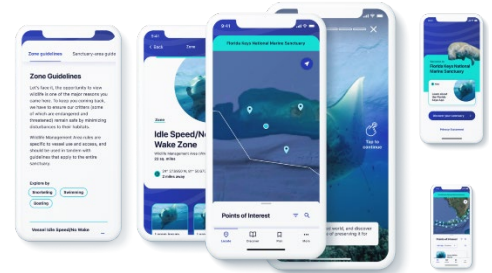
A two-phase refresh has given new life to the 15-year old Eco-Discovery Center, creating brand new hands-on components including interactive digital touchscreens, immersive sounds of the mangroves and underwater, tactile touch boxes to explore sea grass beds, and activities to create awareness of the precious natural and cultural resources of the Florida Keys. Visitors will now be able to create memories while posing on paddle boards in the "Get Into Your Sanctuary" exhibit, while the Maritime Heritage exhibit uncovers cultural stories and artifacts from prehistoric through modern times.



A paddle board exhibit is designed to include wheelchair accessibility. Photo: NOAA

## Free App Aids Exploration of the Sanctuary

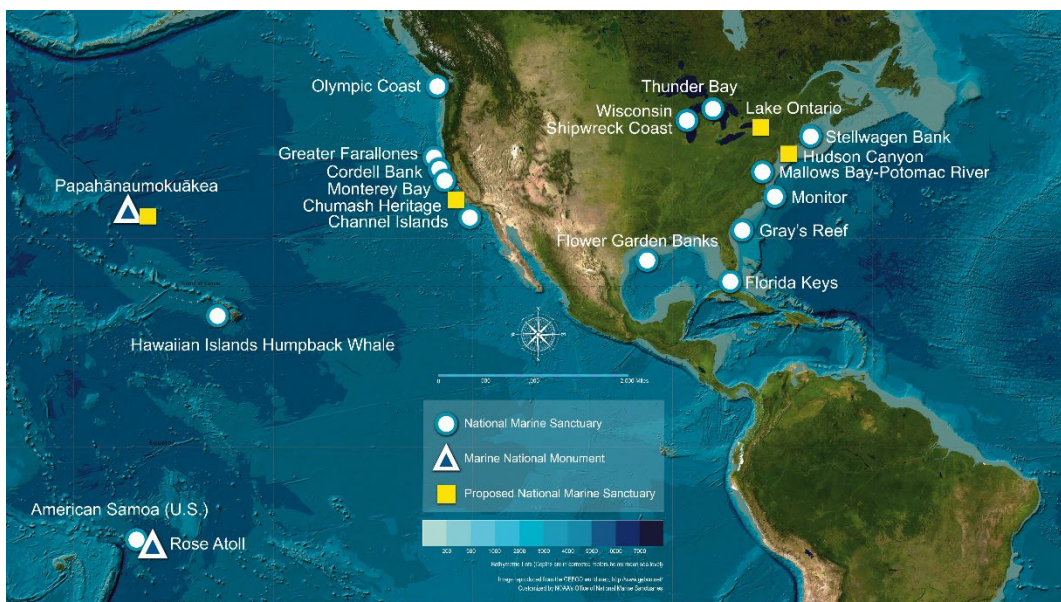
After a year and a half of development, a free mobile app is now helping sanctuary users explore the 3,800 square miles of water surrounding the Florida Keys. Marine Sanctuary Explorer was funded by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation with content created by the sanctuary team, describing the more than 50 marine zones located within the sanctuary with easy-to-read guidelines that communicate activities allowable in each managed area. Featuring GPS-enabled technology in both Apple and Android formats, the app alerts users when they are approaching managed zones.



Marine Sanctuary Explorer provides sanctuary visitors with useful information. Image: NOAA

## Looking Ahead

- Sanctuary staff will compile comments received during a 100-day public comment period as part of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the first major update of the sanctuary's regulations since 2007, which will culminate in the publishing of an updated management plan and regulations.
- In 2023, the new buoy maintenance vessel, the *R/V Hawksbill*, will be delivered to serve the upper Keys region just as her sister, the *R/V Leatherback*, is cruising the lower Keys.
- Iconic Reef Guardians, a program that allows Blue Star dive operators to engage citizen divers in the Mission: Iconic Reefs restoration program, will begin to allow passive visits to coral nurseries.



The National Marine Sanctuary System is a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.