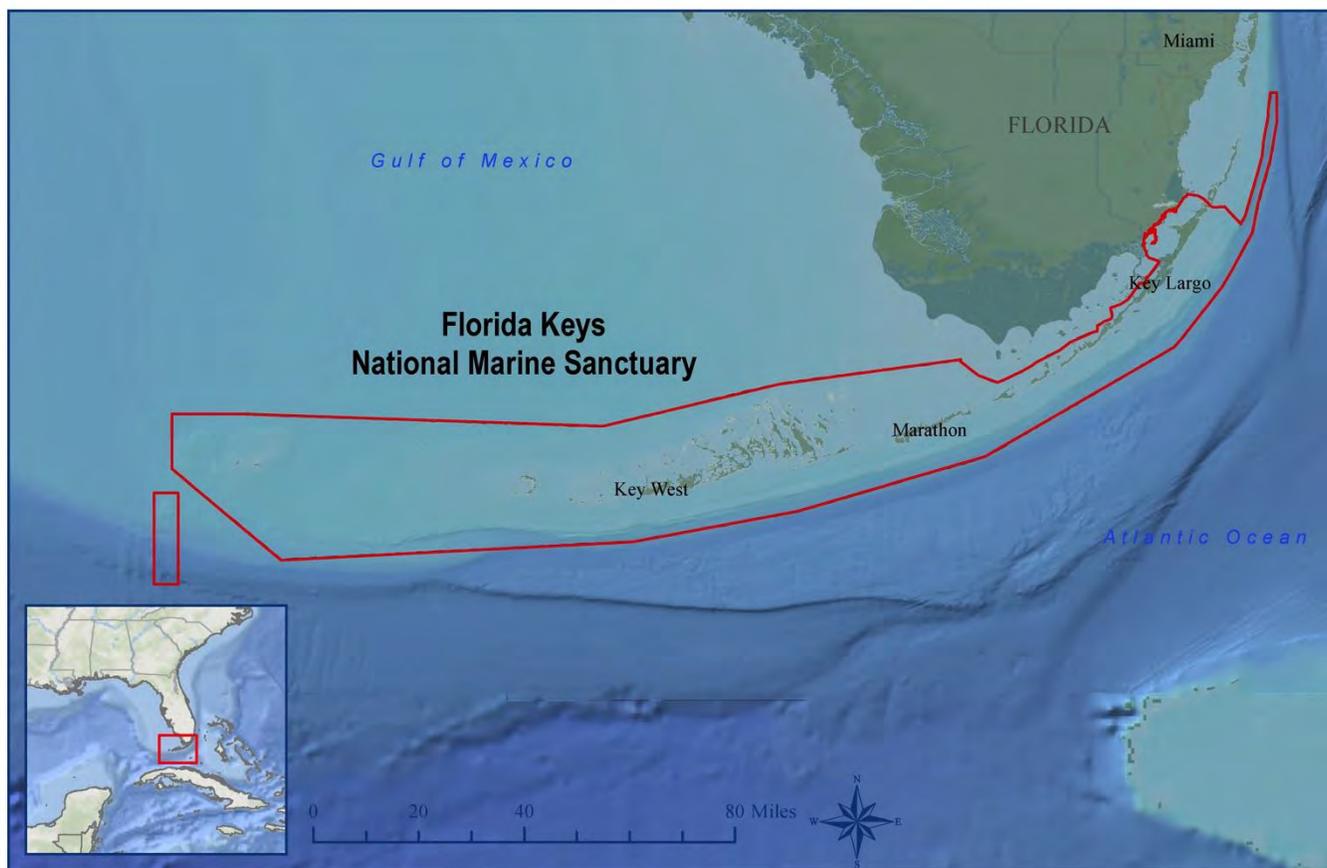


FY17 Accomplishments



BACKGROUND

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1990 to protect and preserve spectacular, unique, and nationally significant marine resources. Within the sanctuary are the **United States' only living** barrier coral reef, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands, and more than 6,000 species of marine life. **The sanctuary also protects pieces of our nation's** maritime history such as shipwrecks and other archeological treasures.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is part of the National Marine Sanctuary System, which is a

network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. National marine sanctuaries are managed for the conservation of their natural and cultural resources, while supporting sustainable recreation, tourism and compatible commercial activities. The network includes a system of 13 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.



Photo: Steve Gittings/NOAA

Science divers found the most severe **damage to the reef in Hurricane Irma's direct path.**



Photo: Brenda Altmeier/NOAA

Removing Cuban chugs from sensitive habitats takes careful collaboration.



Photo: Matt Lawrence/NOAA

Data collected by volunteer divers contributes to Florida Keys maritime history.

Hurricane Irma impact assessment

A NOAA-led coalition of federal and state agencies, academic institutions, and nonprofit organizations conducted **a rapid assessment of Hurricane Irma's impact on the Southeast Florida coral reef tract** and stabilized dislodged coral where appropriate. The data will also inform sanctuary management and the ongoing zoning and regulatory review process. Efforts immediately began to repair and replace marker and mooring buoys important to sanctuary protection efforts. Sanctuary staff also served as natural resource advisers to the Unified Command tasked with removing damaged and displaced vessels that posed environmental and navigational hazards.

Project removes Cuban chugs from islands in the Florida Straits

A logistically and environmentally challenging project removed 31 derelict migrant vessels that threatened public health and welfare, fish, wildlife, and sensitive ecosystems in the Marquesas Keys. The chugs were likely used by Cubans attempting to emigrate by landing on U.S. soil. The project was an unprecedented collaboration with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, United States Coast Guard, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and Monroe County Marine Resources. Sanctuary oversight ensured the sustainability and resilience of listed species and the ecosystems that support them.

Volunteers promote responsible stewardship on and offshore

To engender good environmental stewardship, 109 Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary volunteers, including seasonal residents and visitors, contributed 2,282 hours of service. Eco-Discovery Center guides steered visitors through interactive displays illustrating the Florida Keys sensitive ecosystem and its socioeconomic value. Team OCEAN volunteers delivered informational packets to recreational boaters at heavily-used reef sites. Volunteers, including alternative spring break students, participated in debris **cleanups along the sanctuary's shoreline that netted nearly two tons of trash.** Diving with a Purpose members collected and processed archaeological data from the historical shipwreck, *Acorn*, in 1885.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Looking Ahead to FY18

- Hurricane recovery efforts continue with NOAA and its partners stabilizing coral in high-value areas. The sanctuary will continue collaborating with partners on permitting manmade nurseries where more resilient coral types are grown primarily for research and mitigation of human impacts.
- A multi-year process will result in release of proposed changes to the **sanctuary's** management plan, zoning and regulations based on scientific data and input from federal, state and local partners including community and industry leaders on the Sanctuary Advisory Council.
- Efforts will increase to recruit volunteers to clear debris deposited by Hurricane Irma in and around sanctuary waters. Dive shop operators and volunteer divers may be enlisted to perform community service and environmental stewardship.