

Welcome to the Florida Keys

Welcome to the Florida Keys, a 158-mile-long string of islands extending south and west of the Florida mainland from Key Largo to the Dry Tortugas. The Keys are home to North America's only coral barrier reef. This natural wonder, the third-longest coral barrier reef in the world, lies about six miles seaward of the Florida Keys and stretches over 200 miles from Biscayne Bay to the Dry Tortugas. Several hundred species of fish and coral can be found within this expansive reef, fish, lakes, mangroves, and beaches that compose this delicate and unique ecosystem.

Seagrasses
Seagrasses are flowering underwater plants found at shallow depths in protected bays and lagoons and in patches along the continental shelf of the Gulf of Mexico. As a nursery environment, seagrasses support many important species of fish and shellfish. They may also help stabilize shifting sands on the beach, the banks of the bay and improve water clarity by trapping fine sediments and particles. Seagrasses are an important part of the food web. They provide food for turtles, manatees, and a variety of fish and habitat for filter-feeding organisms and foraging sea life such as sea urchins and sea cucumbers. Seagrasses provide a nursery for pink shrimp, lobster, snapper, and other sea life. They filter the water by trapping sediments, releasing oxygen, and stabilizing the ocean bottom with their roots.

Native Habitats
Coral reefs are part of an interdependent ecosystem that includes mangroves and seagrasses. Bank reefs and patch reefs occur on the ocean side, whereas hard bottom coral communities are common on the bay side of the Florida Keys. Conditions that support coral reefs are more restricted than those that support mangroves and seagrasses. The coral reef ecosystem of the Florida Keys is alive with an abundance of fish, many seals, sea turtles, dolphins, sea birds, and other sea life. The reef is home to many of Florida's threatened and endangered species.

Resource Directory

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
FWC Law Enforcement Helpline
FWC Call Phone
To report a crime, marine violations, boating accidents, turtle or manatee sightings or stranding:

888-404-FWCC
305-369-5200
305-369-5200

727-896-8626
1-800-830-6011

FWC Channel 16
VHF Channel 16
1-800-271-8822
1-800-271-8822

1-800-338-8047
(888-2920)
162.400 MHz/VHF radio
162.475 MHz/VHF radio
162.500 MHz/VHF radio

888-404-1502
305-664-4815
305-395-5599

305-745-2729
305-395-8770

305-374-6465
305-872-1882

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
U.S. Coast Guard
State Police
National Park Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Navy
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S. Army
U.S. Air Force
U.S. Coast Guard
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Navy
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S. Army
U.S. Air Force

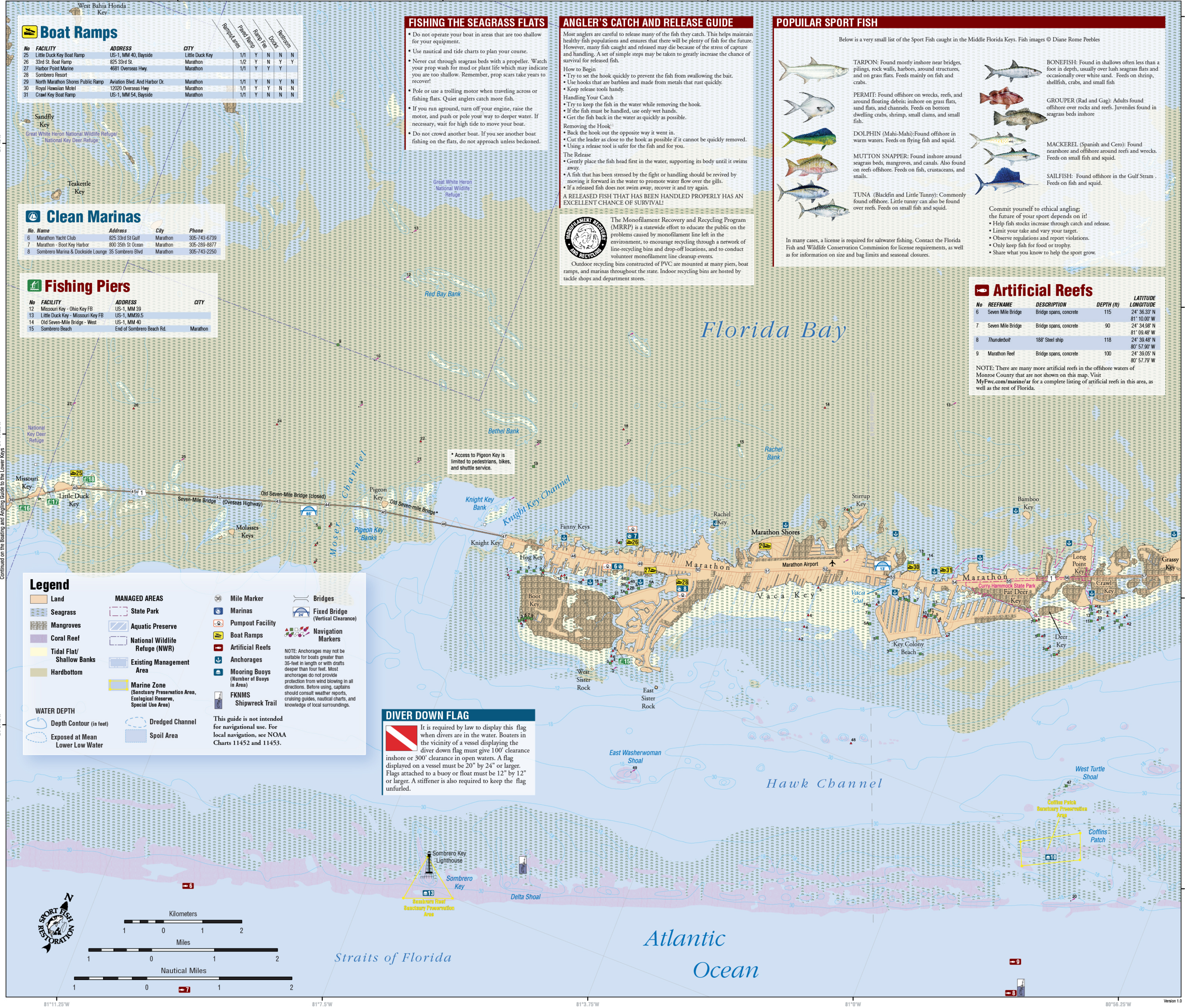
A Boating and Angling Guide to the Middle Florida Keys

This guide includes a map of the Middle Florida Keys that depicts seagrasses, artificial reefs, aquatic preserves, and boat ramps open to the public. Also featured is information on habitats and animals, popular sport fish, boating safety and protocol, and a resource directory.

The Boating and Angling Guide to the Lower Florida Keys was produced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. We welcome your comments and inquiries. Please address any comments to: Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, 100 Eighth Avenue S.E., St. Petersburg, FL 33701. <http://MyFWC.com/boating-guides>

Map designed and produced by Chris Anderson, Kathleen O'Connell, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. The Florida Key National Marine Sanctuary contributed to this guide. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration provided partial funding for this guide. The Sport Fish Restoration Program collects money from taxes on fishing equipment and boat fuel and then distributes those funds to projects that improve fishing and boating opportunities. This project was also funded in part by a grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Our Reef's speciality license plate. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is not responsible for omissions, misrepresentations, or factual errors.

NOT FOR RESALE 2011



Boat Ramps

No.	FACILITY	ADDRESS	CITY	Ramp/Lane	Boat Ramp	Decks	Restroom
25	Little Duck Key Boat Ramp	US-1, MM 40, Bayside	Little Duck Key	1/1	Y	N	N
26	33rd St. Boat Ramp	825 33rd St.	Marathon	1/2	Y	N	Y
27	Harbor Point Marine	4681 Overseas Hwy	Marathon	1/1	Y	Y	Y
28	Sombrero Resort						
29	North Marathon Shores Public Ramp	Aviation Blvd. And Harbor Dr.	Marathon	1/1	Y	N	Y
30	Royal Hawaiian Motel	12020 Overseas Hwy	Marathon	1/1	Y	N	N
31	Crawl Key Boat Ramp	US-1, MM 54, Bayside	Marathon	1/1	Y	N	N

Clean Marinas

No.	Name	Address	City	Phone
6	Marathon Yacht Club	825 33rd St Gulf	Marathon	305-743-6739
7	Marathon - Boat Key Harbor	800 35th St Ocean	Marathon	305-289-8877
8	Sombrero Marina & Dockside Lounge	35 Sombrero Blvd	Marathon	305-743-2250

Fishing Piers

No.	FACILITY	ADDRESS	CITY
12	Missouri Key - Ohio Key FB	US-1, MM 39	
13	Little Duck Key - Missouri Key FB	US-1, MM39.5	
14	Old Seven-Mile Bridge - West	US-1, MM 40	
15	Sombrero Beach	End of Sombrero Beach Rd.	Marathon

FISHING THE SEAGRASS FLATS

- Do not operate your boat in areas that are too shallow for your equipment.
- Use nautical and tide charts to plan your course.
- Never cut through seagrass beds with a propeller. Watch your prop wash for mud or plant life which may indicate you are too shallow. Remember, prop scars take years to recover!
- Pole or use a trolling motor when traveling across or fishing flats. Quiet anglers catch more fish.
- If you run aground, turn off your engine, raise the motor, and push or pole your way to deeper water. If necessary, wait for high tide to move your boat.
- Do not crowd another boat. If you see another boat fishing on the flats, do not approach unless beckoned.

ANGLER'S CATCH AND RELEASE GUIDE

Most anglers are careful to release many of the fish they catch. This helps maintain healthy fish populations and ensures that there will be plenty of fish for the future. However, many fish caught and released may die because of the stress of capture and handling. A set of simple steps may be taken to greatly increase the chance of survival for released fish.

How to Begin

- Try to set the hook quickly to prevent the fish from swallowing the bait.
- Use hooks that are barbless and made from metals that rust quickly.
- Keep release tools handy.

Handling Your Catch

- Try to keep the fish in the water while removing the hook.
- If the fish must be handled, use only wet hands.
- Get the fish back in the water as quickly as possible.

Removing the Hook

- Back the hook out the opposite way it went in.
- Cut the leader as close to the hook as possible if it cannot be quickly removed.
- Using a release tool is safer for the fish and for you.

The Release

- Gently place the fish head first in the water, supporting its body until it swims away.
- A fish that has been stressed by the fight or handling should be revived by moving it forward in the water to promote water flow over the gills.
- If a released fish does not swim away, recover it and try again.

A RELEASED FISH THAT HAS BEEN HANDLED PROPERLY HAS AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF SURVIVAL!

POPULAR SPORT FISH

Below is a very small list of the Sport Fish caught in the Middle Florida Keys. Fish images © Diane Rone Peebles

TARPON: Found mostly inshore near bridges, pilings, rock walls, harbors, around structures, and on grass flats. Feeds mainly on fish and crabs.

BONEFISH: Found in shallows often less than a foot in depth, usually over lush seagrass flats and occasionally over white sand. Feeds on shrimp, shellfish, crabs, and small fish.

GROUPER (Red and Gag): Adults found offshore over rocks and reefs. Juveniles found in seagrass beds inshore.

MACKEREL (Spanish and Cero): Found nearshore and offshore around reefs and wrecks. Feeds on small fish and squid.

SAILFISH: Found offshore in the Gulf Stream. Feeds on fish and squid.

TUNA (Blackfin and Little Tunny): Commonly found offshore. Little tunny can also be found over reefs. Feeds on small fish and squid.

In many cases, a license is required for saltwater fishing. Contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for license requirements, as well as for information on size and bag limits and seasonal closures.

Commit yourself to ethical angling: the future of your sport depends on it!

- Help fish stocks increase through catch and release.
- Limit your take and vary your target.
- Observe regulations and report violations.
- Only keep fish for food or trophy.
- Share what you know to help the sport grow.

Artificial Reefs

No.	REEFNAME	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH (ft)	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
6	Seven Mile Bridge	Bridge spans, concrete	115	24° 36.33' N	81° 10.00' W
7	Seven Mile Bridge	Bridge spans, concrete	90	24° 34.98' N	81° 09.48' W
8	Thunderbolt	188' Steel ship	118	24° 39.48' N	80° 57.90' W
9	Marathon Reef	Bridge spans, concrete	100	24° 39.05' N	80° 57.79' W

NOTE: There are many more artificial reefs in the offshore waters of Monroe County that are not shown on this map. Visit MyFWC.com maintained as for a complete listing of artificial reefs in this area, as well as the rest of Florida.

Legend

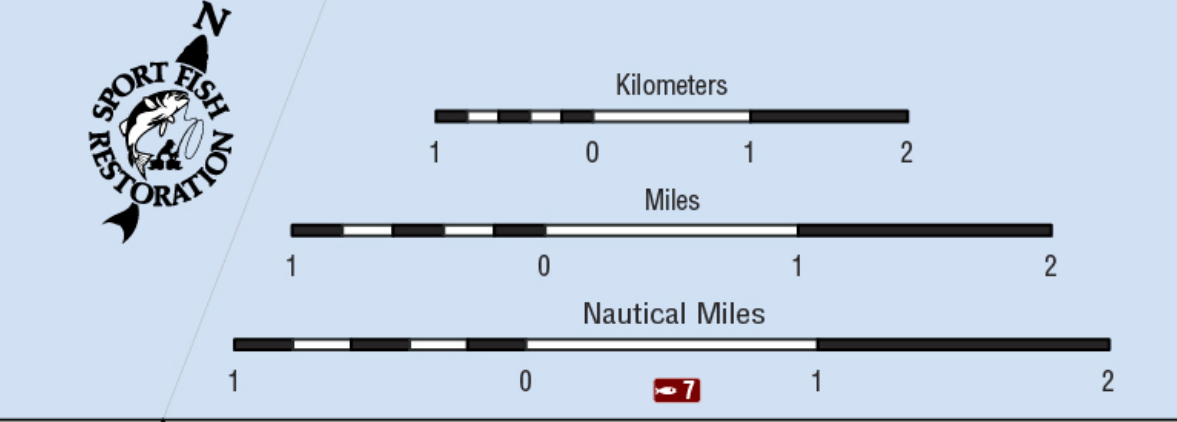
- Land
- Seagrass
- Mangroves
- Coral Reef
- Tidal Flat/Shallow Banks
- Hardbottom
- WATER DEPTH: Depth Contour (in feet), Exposed at Mean Lower Low Water
- MANAGED AREAS: State Park, Aquatic Preserve, National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Existing Management Area, Marine Zone (Secondary Preservation Area, Ecological Reserve, Special Use Area), Dredged Channel, Spoil Area
- Mile Marker
- Marinas
- Pumpout Facility
- Boat Ramps
- Artificial Reefs
- Anchorage
- Mooring Buoys (Number of Buoys in Area)
- FKNMS
- Shipwreck Trail
- Bridges: Fixed Bridge (Vertical Clearance), Navigation Markers

NOTE: Anchorage may not be suitable for boats greater than 35-foot in length or with drafts deeper than four feet. Most anchorages do not provide protection from wind blowing in all directions. Before using, captains should consult weather reports, cruising guides, nautical charts, and knowledge of local surroundings.

This guide is not intended for navigational use. For local navigation, see NOAA Charts 11452 and 11453.

DIVER DOWN FLAG

It is required by law to display this flag when divers are in the water. Boaters in the vicinity of a vessel displaying the diver down flag must give 100' clearance inshore or 300' clearance in open waters. A flag displayed on a vessel must be 20" by 24" or larger. Flags attached to a buoy or float must be 12" by 12" or larger. A stiffener is also required to keep the flag unfurled.



Map courtesy of NOAA, Photo courtesy of NOAA, Photo courtesy of NOAA, Photo courtesy of NOAA