

# 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 corals can be found within this unique ecosystem.

Stony corals are actually composed of millions of tiny slow-growing animals called polyps. Each one secretes a calcareous exoskeleton that forms a coral colony. Some boulder corals require years to grow one inch. These coral colonies, as well as other calcium-producing plants and animals, cement together to form the reef structure. The reef is constantly eroding and regrowing as new colonies settle on top of the skeletons of older ones.

### 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 small fish, shrimp, and crabs that hide among the blades 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.

Although they are once plentiful, seagrass beds now cover less than half of their original acreage, a loss triggered by dredge-and-fill activity and declines in water quality. Damage from motorboats is severe in areas. Boats that stray into shallow waters may dredge up the bottom, uproot seagrasses, and scatter nutrients that may kill or damage seagrass beds. The primary culprit is the prop wash that can disturb nesting birds, erode the eggs or seedlings to predators and the intense sun. In addition, disturbance of shallow feeding grounds can lead to the starvation of birds. To help preserve seagrasses, stay within marked channels and avoid shallow grass beds. If you run aground or enter grass flats to fish, stop your motor, tilt it up, and pole or push your boat through the bed.

### Native Habitats

#### Coral Reef and Hard Bottom

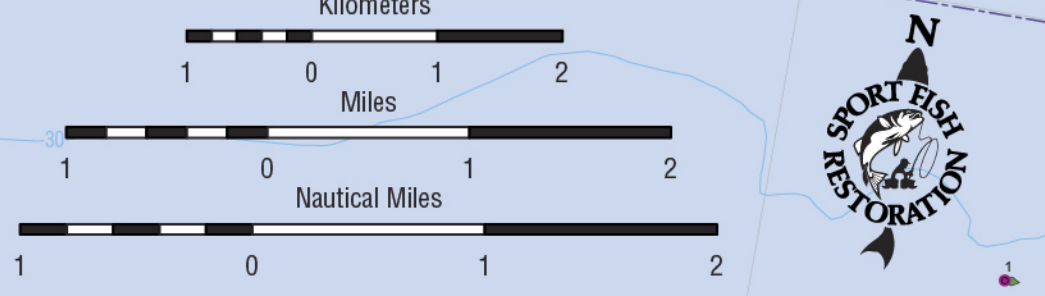
Coral reefs are part of an interdependent ecosystem that includes mangroves and seagrasses. Bank reefs and patch reefs occur on the ocean side, whereas hard bottom coral communities are common on the bay side of the Florida Keys. Coral reefs contain more varieties of life than any other marine environment, including a wide variety of fish, sponges, jellyfish, anemones, snails, crabs, lobsters, rays, stony corals, sea turtles, dolphins, sea birds, and other sea life. The reef is home to many of Florida's threatened and endangered species.

### Clean Marinas

No.	Name	Address	City	Phone
1	Key West Bright City Marina	201 William St.	Key West	305-899-3984
2	Key West City Marina at Garrison Blight	1801 N. Roosevelt Blvd.	Key West	305-809-3981
3	NAS Key West - Sigbee Marina (Military Only)	Dredger Key Road, Bldg. Bldg V-3000	Key West	305-293-4434
4	NAS Key West - Boca Chica (Military Only)	1132 Midway Ave.	Key West	305-293-2402

### CLEAN MARINA AND CLEAN BOATYARD

Clean Marina and Clean Boatyard designations are given by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to marinas and boatyards that meet federal and state environmental regulations as well as provide environmental education and services to boaters. For more information, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/cleanmarina](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/cleanmarina).



### Boat Ramps

No.	FACILITY	ADDRESS	CITY	Ramp/Lane	Power Ramp	Bump Up	Docks	Restroom
1	Simonon Beach Public Ramp	End of Simonon St.	Key West	1/1	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	Garrison Blight Key West City Marina	1801 N. Roosevelt Blvd.	Key West	1/2	Y	Y	Y	Y
3	11th Street Boat Ramp	End of 11th St.	Key West	1/1	Y	N	N	N
4	NAS Key West-Sigbee Marina Military Only	Dredger Key Rd. Bldg. V-3000	Key West	1/2	Y	N	Y	Y
5	Cow Key Marina	5031 5TH AVE	Stock Island	1/1	Y	Y	Y	Y
6	Murray Marine Sales and Service	5710 Overseas Hwy.	Stock Island	1/1	Y	Y	Y	Y
7	Oceanside Marina	5650 Peninsula Ave	Stock Island	1/1	Y	Y	Y	Y
8	Stock Island Public Ramp	MM 5, Oceanside	Stock Island	1/1	N	N	N	N
9	NAS Key West-Boca Chica Military Only	1132 Midway Ave.	Boca Chica	1/1	Y	N	Y	Y
10	Gulf View Park Boat Ramp	End of Barcelona St.	Big Coppitt Key	1/1	N	N	N	N
11	Shark Key Public Ramp	MM 11, Oceanside	Big Coppitt Key	1/1	N	N	N	N

### PRACTICE SAFE BOATING

- Observe and obey posted speed limits. Local regulations include an idle speed/ao wake zone in all residential man-made canals, and within 100 yards of residential shorelines. Channels and adjacent waters may also be regulated. When in doubt, slow down.
- Waste your wake. Remember, you are responsible for damage caused by your vessel's wake. Large wakes can overturn smaller vessels and damage boats which are moored at the dock.
- Use nautical charts in unfamiliar waters. Stay within marked channels.
- Know your navigational rules. Use the boating rules of the road to avoid accidents.
- Don't mix alcohol and boating. More than 50% of all boating accidents involve alcohol.
- Plan your route in advance. Use the appropriate nautical charts to reference depth, bridge clearance, and other natural and man-made features before you leave.
- Use VHF Channel 16 for bridge-to-bridge communication with commercial ships in case of emergency. Keep transmissions short and simple, and never tie up the frequency.
- Exercise caution when boating around ships or tugs involved in docking. Their prop-wash can easily capsize small vessels or send them into the path of oncoming traffic.
- Be sure that your boat is visible at night and in poor weather conditions.

### Fishing Piers

No.	FACILITY	ADDRESS	CITY
1	White Street Fishing Pier	S end of White St.	Key West
2	Shark Key Fishing Bridge	US -1, MM 12	Key West

### MARINE ZONING

Marine zoning is a management tool being implemented in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to protect sensitive marine resources from overuse and to separate conflicting visitor uses. There are five zone types in the Sanctuary: **Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPA), Existing Management Areas, Special-Use Areas (Research Only), Ecological Reserves, and Wildlife Management Areas.**

Please contact the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary headquarters listed in the Resource Directory of this guide for more information on the specific regulations for each zone.

### BIRDS OF THE KEYS

The Keys attract a remarkable variety of number of birds. Most spectacular are the great breeding colonies where thousands of birds of some 25 species-including pelicans, cormorants, herons, egrets, ibis, spoonbills, terns, and skimmers-come to rear their young. These large colonies are found on islands where nests are safe from predators and disturbance. Mud flats and seagrass meadows provide a beautiful fishing ground for resident, migrant, and wintering shorebirds. Open waters are habitat for loons, grebes, and ducks. Maintaining these bird populations in a growing metropolitan area is challenging. Many species are declining, and some have virtually disappeared due to loss and disruption of habitat.

### SEA TURTLES - YOU CAN HELP

Never approach sea turtles coming ashore or disturb nesting sea turtles or hatchlings. Turtles produce many eggs, but few hatchlings survive the difficult journey back to the sea.

- Preserve nesting beaches and nearshore habitats, such as seagrass beds and coral reefs.
- Beachfront property owners should turn off exterior lights in areas where nesting takes place. Bright lights discourage nesting sea turtles from coming ashore and may disorient hatchlings.
- Support public and private efforts to protect sea turtles and their habitats.

Observe posted signs that identify breeding colonies. Don't go ashore! And don't let dogs run loose in these areas.

Gulls, terns, and skimmers may nest at unmarked sites. If you discover a cloud of birds circling noisily above your picnic, you may be in a colony. Carefully pick up your belongings and leave, and then see where the birds settle. Choose a spot 100 yards away and enjoy the view.

If you are fishing and a bird becomes entangled in your gear, carefully remove the hook and monofilament line. Or if you're walking along the beach, pick up any stray fishing line and dispose of it properly. Birds and other animals that ingest or become entangled in fishing line may die.

Report injured seabirds that require assistance. Consult the Resource Directory for appropriate listings.

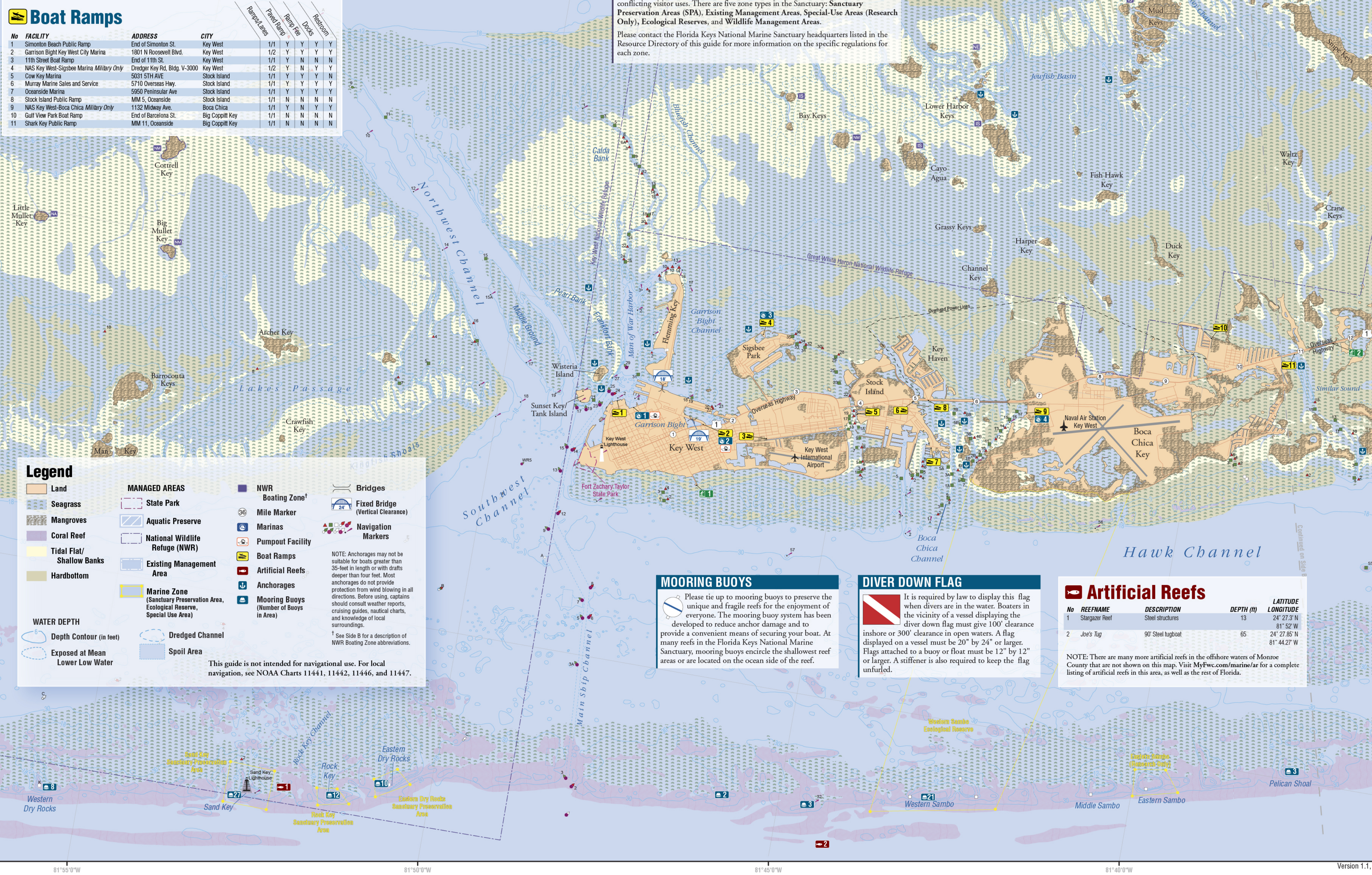
Stay clear of small islands that may harbor nesting colonies and of areas where flocks of feeding birds are visible. Operators of personal watercraft, wave-runners, and airboats should be aware that the noise and prop-wash from their vessels disturb wildlife and may disrupt nesting and feeding.

Remember: The best way to observe and enjoy these beautiful birds is by being quiet and moving slowly.

### MANGROVES

Mangroves are tropical trees that thrive in salty environments along the water's edge. Like seagrasses, they provide food and cover for a vast array of small fish and animals. The submerged roots are a nursery and breeding ground for most of the marine life that migrates to the reef. Mangroves trap and produce nutrients for food and habitat, stabilize the shoreline by trapping debris and silt, and filter land-based pollutants. Mangroves are the dominant shoreline plant community providing storm protection for the islands.

There are three species of mangroves. Red mangroves, typically located closer to the water, are easily distinguished by their tangled reddish roots that branch out over the water. Black mangroves feature numerous finger-like projections, called pneumatophores, that surround the base of the tree. White mangroves, which often occupy the highest elevations of the three species, have no visible aerial root system. The leaves of the white Mangrove are yellow-green.



### Legend

	<b>MANAGED AREAS</b>		

NOTE: Anchorage symbols 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.

† See Side B for a description of NWR Boating Zone abbreviations.

This guide is not intended for navigational use. For local navigation, see NOAA Charts 11441, 11442, 11446, and 11447.

### MOORING BUOYS

Please tie up to mooring buoys to preserve the unique and fragile reefs for the enjoyment of everyone. The mooring buoy system has been developed to reduce anchor damage and to provide a convenient means of securing your boat. At many reefs in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, mooring buoys encircle the shallowest reef areas or are located on the ocean side of the reef.

### 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.

### Artificial Reefs

No.	REEFNAME	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH (ft)	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
1	Starlazer Reef	Steel structures	13	24° 27.3' N	81° 52' W
2	Joe's Tug	90' Steel tugboat	65	24° 27.85' N	81° 44.27' W

NOTE: There are many more artificial reefs in the offshore waters of Monroe County that are not shown on this map. Visit [MyFW.com/marine/ar](http://MyFW.com/marine/ar) for a complete listing of artificial reefs in this area, as well as rest of Florida.

# About This Guide

This guide includes a map of the Lower 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 in partnership with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. We welcome your comments and inquiries. Please address any comments to: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, 100 Eighth Avenue S.E., Tallahassee, FL 32301. Fax: 904/438-6400. E-mail: [myfwc@myfwc.com](mailto:myfwc@myfwc.com)

Map designed and produced by Chris Anderson, Kathleen O'Kerfe, and Henry Norris, of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary also 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 those who buy fishing licenses and then distributes those funds to projects that improve fishing and hunting opportunities. This project was also funded in part by a grant awarded from Mote Marine Laboratory's Protect Our Reefs Grants Program, which is funded by proceeds from the sale of the Project Our Reefs specialty license plate. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is not responsible for omissions, misrepresentations, or factual errors.



NOT FOR RESALE 2011