



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VI.D

DATE: NOVEMBER 27, 2017

TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS

FROM: STAFF

SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST FLORIDA CORAL REEF TRACT - TCSF JOINT RESOLUTION # 17-01

The Florida Reef Tract (FRT) stretches from St. Lucie Inlet south to the Dry Tortugas (Exhibit A). Within the FRT there are a patchwork of managed areas that extend from Biscayne Bay south. The Southeast Florida Coral Reef Tract (SFCRT) extends from the northern boundary of Biscayne National Park in Miami-Dade County to St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County and comprises one-third of the 360-mile long FRT. While the Florida Keys portion of the FRT is recognized and protected by management plans of the National Marine Sanctuary, National Park, and National Wildlife Refuges; the SFCRT remains unprotected and without a state-adopted management plan addressing its future sustainability. Florida House Bill 53 / Senate Bill 232 are being proposed to recognize and demarcate the SFCRT as a conservation area. This is the first step in establishing appropriate management programs and accessing funding for the long-term protection of this resource.

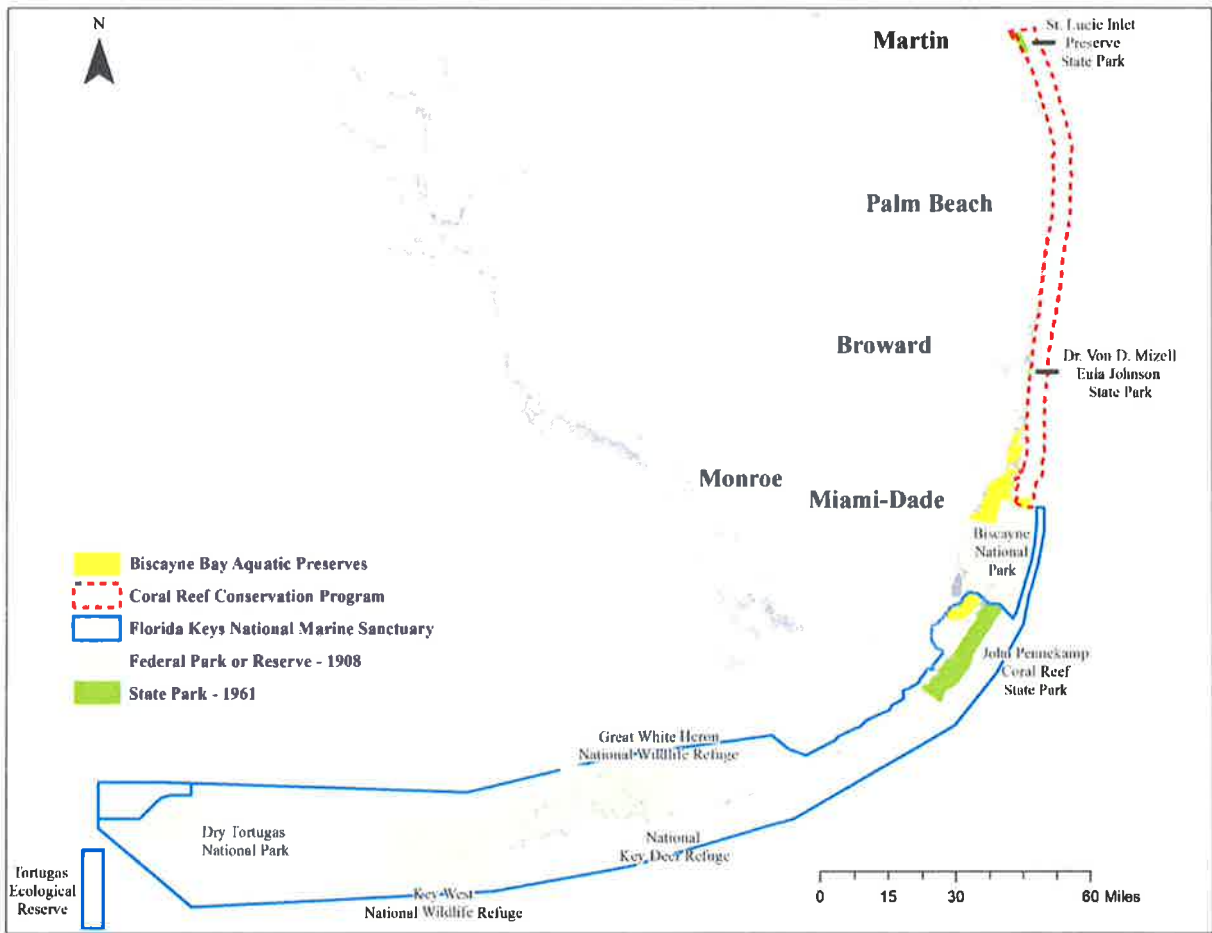
The SFCRT is suffering from known and unidentified blights. In 2014, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) confirmed that a significant coral disease outbreak began to spread into multiple sites in the Miami-Dade County portion of the unprotected portion of the SFCRT. Coral diseases continued to spread north to Martin County reefs and south to the upper Florida Keys during the summer of 2017. NOAA's Coral Disease and Health Consortium reports that diseases and diminishing health conditions among corals in the Florida Reef Tract have dramatically increased in frequency and severity during the past decade. The extent and number of species of corals that have been affected has been dramatic. Recent reef surveys suggest that 21 coral species are suffering from multiple diseases. Seven of those species are listed as "threatened" under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

At the October 20, 2017 Joint Meeting of the South Florida Regional Planning Council and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, TCSF Resolution # 17-01 was unanimously adopted. As of November 15, 2017, [SB 232](#) will next be considered by the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Environment and Natural Resources. [HB 53](#) was unanimously passed by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee and will now be considered by the House Government Accountability Committee.

Recommendation

Information only.

EXHIBIT A



RESOLUTION TCSF #17-01

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA AND TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS REPRESENTING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF MONROE, MIAMI-DADE, BROWARD, INDIAN RIVER, MARTIN, PALM BEACH, AND ST. LUCIE COUNTIES, FLORIDA, SUPPORTING HOUSE BILL 53 / SENATE BILL 232 ESTABLISHING THE SOUTHEAST FLORIDA CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION AREA; URGING THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO DEVELOP A MANAGEMENT PLAN; AND URGING THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND THE SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT TO IMPLEMENT ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES TO GREATLY REDUCE NUTRIENT LOADING FROM ALL HUMAN SOURCES AND PATHWAYS AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

WHEREAS, economically and ecologically valuable nearshore coral reef resources are found in Florida coastal waters from Martin County to the Dry Tortugas in Monroe County and comprise the Florida Reef Tract – the only coral reef tract in the continental United States (Exhibit A); and

WHEREAS, the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Tract stretches from Miami-Dade County (north of Biscayne National Park) to St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County and comprises one third of the 360-mile long Florida Reef Tract; and

WHEREAS, coral reefs are the literal first line of defense for our beaches and coastal communities, providing invaluable physical impact and flood reduction protection from increasingly severe and frequent tropical storm events; and

WHEREAS, coastal waters, coral reefs, and the aquatic life they support are essential in sustaining over 71,000 jobs and contributing over \$6 billion to Florida's economy while serving approximately 6 million residents and over 38 million visitors annually; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Keys portion of the Florida Reef Tract is recognized and protected by management plans of the National Marine Sanctuary, National Parks, and National Wildlife Refuges; however, the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Tract remains unprotected and without a state-adopted management plan addressing its future sustainability; and

WHEREAS, the highly-accessible Southeast Florida Coral Reef Tract has experienced impacts from extremely high usage year-round and from water quality degradation caused by numerous factors including: prolonged periods of exceptionally warm water temperatures, acidification; and from direct human inputs such as: excessive and prolonged stormwater discharge events and the continued operation of ocean outfalls and septic systems; and

WHEREAS, disease outbreaks are occurring along the entire Florida Reef Tract that have quickly spread and include multiple diseases which have impacted over 21 species of reef-building stony corals, including

several listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the State Imperiled Species Management Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Treasure Coast and South Florida Regional Planning Councils ("RPCs") recognize the value of the entire Florida Reef Tract and its important contribution to the region's economy and ecology; and

WHEREAS, the RPCs desire to support and advance the protection and restoration of the Florida Reef Tract.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED JOINTLY BY THE SOUTH FLORIDA AND TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS, THAT THEY:

- 1) Endorse and support House Bill 53 / Senate Bill 232, establishing the boundaries of the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area, and urge responsible agencies, including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection ("FDEP") Coral Reef Conservation Program to develop a Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Management Plan for the purpose of mitigating reef diseases, and water quality impacts, while maintaining a healthy and sustainable Southeast Florida Coral Reef Tract; and
- 2) Urge the FDEP and the South Florida Water Management District to develop and implement strategies to greatly reduce nutrient loading from all human sources and pathways as a matter of urgency, including surface water management initiatives of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and Central Everglades Planning Project; and
- 3) Encourage FDEP to establish, at a minimum, a recurring annual agency budget request of \$1 million for the purpose of water quality monitoring and coral disease response and mitigation for the Florida Reef Tract; and
- 4) That this Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption hereof.

DULY ADOPTED by the Treasure Coast and South Florida Regional Planning Councils this 20th day of October, 2017.



Doug Smith
Chairman, TCRPC



Tim Daubert
Chairman, SFRPC