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*Via Email*

December 29, 2020

Mr. Noah Valenstein  
Secretary, Florida Department of  
Environmental Protection  
2600 Blair Stone Road  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-2400

Mr. Eric Sutton  
Executive Director, Florida Fish and  
Wildlife Conservation Commission  
620 S. Meridian Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Director Sutton and Secretary Valenstein:

On behalf of the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils, thank you for your continuing efforts to safeguard Florida's fragile environmental and conservation resources. Over the last three years the SFRPC and TCRPC have worked in close partnership with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders to further public awareness, restoration, and protection of Florida's endangered coral reef spanning Miami-Dade through Martin counties, and Monroe County.

At its October 16, 2020 Joint Meeting, the Councils unanimously adopted Joint Resolution #20-01, related to Florida's Coral Reef ecosystem. A copy of the Resolution is included herewith for your review and information. The Councils have identified as a top priority the creation of a long-term coral reef conservation strategy for Florida's Coral Reef, including the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area, before adverse impacts to the reef cannot be reversed.

We respectfully request that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission elevate as a top priority the creation of this strategy during the upcoming year and beyond. As the lead environmental and conservation agencies

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in the State of Florida, your leadership in this area is critically needed. The Councils commit to lend our support and assistance to this important effort.

Thank you in advance for your consideration, time, and assistance.

Sincerely yours,



Steve Geller  
Broward County Mayor  
Chair, SFRPC



Michael Houston  
Chair, Treasure Coast RPC



Quentin "Beam" Furr  
Broward County Commissioner  
Co-Chair, SFRPC / TCRPC  
Florida's Coral Reef Working Group



Doug Smith  
Martin County Commissioner  
Co-Chair, SFRPC / TCRPC  
Florida's Coral Reef Working Group

Enclosure

cc Honorable Ron DeSantis, Governor  
Commissioner Rodney Barreto, Chair, FWC  
Thomas Reinert, Regional Director, FWC South Region  
Joanna C. Walczak, Administrator, DEP Coral Protection and Restoration Program  
Jason Andreotta, Director, DEP Southeast District  
Jamie Monty, Southeast Regional Administrator, DEP Office of Resilience  
and Coastal Protection  
Jessica McCawley, Director, FWC Division of Marine Fisheries  
Isabel Cosio Carballo, SFRPC Executive Director  
Thomas Lanahan, TCRPC Executive Director



## RESOLUTION TCSF #20-01

**A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA AND TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS REPRESENTING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF MONROE, MIAMI-DADE, BROWARD, PALM BEACH, MARTIN, ST. LUCIE, AND INDIAN RIVER COUNTIES, FLORIDA; EXPRESSING APPRECIATION TO THE GOVERNOR AND FLORIDA LEGISLATURE FOR LEADERSHIP AND FUNDING SUPPORT FOR FLORIDA'S CORAL REEF DURING THE 2020 LEGISLATIVE SESSION; URGING THE GOVERNOR AND FLORIDA LEGISLATURE TO ESTABLISH A LONG-TERM, RECURRING REVENUE SOURCE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING FOR CORAL REEF DISEASE INTERVENTION AND RESTORATION AND TO BETTER ADDRESS HARMFUL ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS ENABLING THE DISEASE EPIDEMIC CRITICALLY DAMAGING FLORIDA'S CORAL REEF; REQUESTING THAT THE SOUTHEAST FLORIDA CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION AREA ESTABLISHED IN 2018 (FS 253.90) BE RENAMED THE KRISTIN JACOBS SOUTHEAST FLORIDA CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION AREA IN HONOR OF LATE REPRESENTATIVE JACOBS' UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO THE CORAL REEF AND ENVIRONMENT; REQUESTING THAT THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION COLLABORATE TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A LONG-TERM CORAL REEF CONSERVATION STRATEGY; SUPPORTING FEDERAL LEGISLATION FOR INCREASED FUNDING OF RESPONSE ACTIVITIES AND CODIFICATION OF THE CORAL REEF TASK FORCE AS CALLED FOR IN SENATE BILL 2429 AND HOUSE RESOLUTION 4160; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

**WHEREAS**, the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils' seven county geographical area is comprised of Broward, Indian River, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, Palm Beach, and St. Lucie counties and 122 municipalities, with more than 6.8 million residents or nearly one-third of the State's population, responsible for generating over one-third of the State's gross domestic product; and

**WHEREAS**, Florida's Coral Reef runs parallel to our coastline from Monroe County north to Martin County, and is a valuable national resource that protects our shores and beaches by reducing wave energy from storms and hurricanes, providing flood protection valued at over \$675 million per year and over \$1 billion during extreme weather events; and

**WHEREAS**, Florida's Coral Reef ecosystem provides a vital marine habitat for over 6,000 species, including species found nowhere else on earth; and

**WHEREAS**, this habitat is essential to the state's commercial fishing and tourism industries, supports over 71,000 jobs within the region, and generates over \$6 billion in positive economic impact annually; and

**WHEREAS**, protection of Florida's Coral Reef is essential for ensuring the continued protection of our shorelines, coastal food sources, cultural practices, biomedical opportunities, and coastal economies that are a direct result of our coral reefs; and

**WHEREAS**, it has been determined that coastal ocean waters are under great user pressure and suffer from water quality degradation that has compromised the resiliency of the Florida Coral Reef and its habitat; and

**WHEREAS**, the global threat and impacts to coral reefs continue to grow which, coupled with local stressors, is evidenced by coral reefs declining at an alarming rate; and

**WHEREAS**, a coral disease outbreak of unknown origin originated offshore of Miami-Dade County in fall 2014 and has persisted and continued to spread and affect new reefs from the Marquesas west of Monroe County to the northernmost coral reefs in Martin County, harming roughly 50 percent of the coral species present in Florida's Coral Reef; and

**WHEREAS**, the coral disease epidemic is causing near total mortality of vulnerable species present on Florida's Coral Reef, including reef-building coral species and species listed under the Endangered Species Act, resulting in an increasing threat to fragile ecosystems that support Florida's fisheries and protect our coasts; and

**WHEREAS**, a collaborative, multi-organizational/multi-disciplinary emergency response has formed to address this grave threat; and

**WHEREAS**, inaction will ensure near extinction of these susceptible species throughout Florida's Coral Reef; and

**WHEREAS**, the coral disease has spread from Florida to nine locations throughout the Caribbean, with the potential threat of introduction into the Pacific Ocean; and

**WHEREAS**, U.S. Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Rick Scott (R-FL) and Representative Darren Soto (D-FL 9th) introduced the Restoring Resilient Reefs Act of 2020 designed to reauthorize and update the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 to support the conservation of U.S. reefs, including through five years of directed federal funding, technical assistance to jurisdictions for coral reef management and restoration, and the codification of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force; and

**WHEREAS**, the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils (Councils) wish to thank the Governor and Legislature for their leadership, support, and vital funding provided during the 2020 Legislative Session for the purposes specified below; and

**WHEREAS**, the Councils urge the Governor and Legislature to continue these efforts and establish a long-term, recurring revenue source to provide adequate and flexible funding that would provide dedicated resources to help find solutions necessary to protect Florida’s Coral Reef; and

**WHEREAS**, the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Conservation Area which encompasses sovereign submerged lands and state waters offshore of Broward, Martin, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties from the St. Lucie Inlet in the north to the northern boundary of Biscayne National Park in the south was established in 2018 pursuant to the multi-year, untiring efforts of State Representative Kristin Jacobs of Broward County and regional stakeholders; and

**WHEREAS**, the Councils urge the Governor and Legislature to honor the late Representative Kristin Jacobs (1959-2020) by commemorating her many contributions on behalf of the Coral Reef and environment by renaming this conservation area the “Kristin Jacobs Southeast Florida Coral Reef Conservation Area”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Councils support and urge the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to work collaboratively to develop and implement as soon as possible a long-term coral reef conservation strategy for Florida’s Coral Reef, including the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Conservation Area, before adverse impacts to the reef cannot be reversed.

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

The Councils request that Florida’s Governor and Legislature establish a long-term, recurring revenue source to provide adequate and flexible funding to support:

- 1) dedicated staff resources for coral reef disease response and restoration efforts;
- 2) infrastructure and capacity needed to maintain reproductive coral populations across the Florida Reef Tract;
- 3) infrastructure and capacity needed for assisted reproduction and propagation of corals and coral reef-associated species for future ecosystem restoration efforts;
- 4) in-water and land-based priority research focused on pathogen identification and disease response strategies;
- 5) restoration of coastal water quality through urban wastewater infrastructure upgrades; accelerated coastal septic to sewer conversions focused on local governments with matching fund programs; improved stormwater treatment;

expedited closure of ocean wastewater outfalls; and additional strategies to greatly reduce nutrient loading from all human sources and pathways; and

- 6) augmenting the new “Florida’s Coral Reef” awareness campaign, launched by the Governor in January 2020, and created by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and other partners to increase recognition and cultivate a sense of environmental stewardship for Florida’s Coral Reef. The website [www.FloridasCoralReef.org](http://www.FloridasCoralReef.org) provides information on the latest issues and restoration efforts affecting Florida’s Coral Reef and was a direct result of the recommendation from the 2018 local business leaders meeting co-hosted by the FDEP and convened by the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils.

The Councils support new Federal legislation which should include the following:

- 1) measures which ensure effective, science-based protection and management of coral reefs;
- 2) codification of the United States Coral Reef Task Force;
- 3) increased funding, including an increase in direct funding of Jurisdictional Coral Reef Management Agencies; and
- 4) support for adaptive restoration activities.

The Councils additionally urge:

- 1) the Governor and Legislature to honor the late Representative Kristin Jacobs and commemorate her many contributions on behalf of the Coral Reef and environment by renaming this conservation area the “Kristin Jacobs Southeast Florida Coral Reef Conservation Area”; and
- 2) the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to work collaboratively to develop and implement as soon as possible a long-term coral reef conservation strategy for the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Conservation Area before adverse impacts to the reef cannot be reversed.

**UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED** by the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils this 16<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2020.



Commissioner Steve Geller  
Broward County  
Acting Chair, South Florida RPC



Michael Houston  
Chair, Treasure Coast RPC