Guidance on Permit Applications for Activities that Impact Florida Stony Corals

Updated: March 2021

Background

Given the impacts of stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD) and other stressors on Florida corals, state and federal permitting authorities provide the following guidance to permit applicants proposing to undertake research or restoration activities with stony corals that may affect these resources. Such work may include, but is not limited to, removal of whole or partial colonies, tissue and skeletal sampling, and other *in situ* manipulations (excluding disease interventions).

Recommended Alternatives to Collecting Corals from Reefs or Similar Natural Habitats

Applicants interested in manipulating live corals should first fully attempt the following alternatives (in order of preference) to collection of attached, undamaged wild colonies from natural habitats and provide evidence or justification of such efforts:

1. Coordinate with researchers to use corals or samples of corals left from other projects
2. Use nursery reared corals
3. Utilize SCTLD-susceptible Coral Rescue project corals for coral propagation broodstock needs
4. Collect wild corals from within the footprint of a planned coastal construction project
5. Collect wild corals that have been previously dislodged or fragmented
6. Collect wild corals from man-made structures (e.g., seawalls)
7. Collect fragments from wild corals that represent discrete, unconnected tissue remnants on colonies with extensive partial mortality

Supporting Information

To the maximum extent possible, the applicant should include information to demonstrate that target species are sufficiently abundant to support the proposed impacts or collections. The information provided should include temporally and spatially relevant population data on the coral species of interest. For example, if a permit application proposes activities that impact SCTLD-susceptible species, the supporting information should be derived from data collected after the outbreak of SCTLD in the proposed location or vicinity. If these data do not exist, the applicant may be requested to conduct surveys to provide quantitative support for their permit request. Furthermore, any activities that propose collections from or work within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) are required to demonstrate that the activity cannot reasonably achieve its goals and objectives outside the sanctuary. Applicants that do not include sufficient supporting information in their initial permit application may receive a Request for Additional Information at the discretion of the relevant permitting authority.

Species Designations

For the purpose of assisting permit applicants select species appropriate for their proposed activities, scleractinian coral species have been assigned one of three designations: **green, yellow**, or **red**. To note, these are not legal designations; all Florida scleractinian coral species are prohibited for disturbance under Florida Administrative Code (68B-42.009 F.A.C.) and FKNMS regulations (15 CFR Subpart P), and seven species are additionally protected under the federal Endangered Species Act (79 FR 53852, September 10, 2014). Here, corals are being assigned a designation in consideration of their known abundance, population status, and/or conservation status. These designations may be updated as new data on these species are collected. A description of each designation as well as a list of the species assigned to each may be found below.

Green species are those whose populations have not seen major declines in recent years or that are historically common in Florida waters. It is recommended that permit applicants consider the seven alternatives identified above. However, designations as green species should not be construed as automatic approval for all proposed activities that might impact these species.

Yellow species are those whose populations have seen moderate declines in recent years or that are historically uncommon in Florida waters. It is strongly recommended that permit applicants consider the seven alternatives identified above before proposing collections of wild corals of these species.

Red species are corals whose populations have seen very significant declines in recent years or that are historically very rare in Florida waters. It is strongly recommended that permit applicants reconsider proposing activities that will impact red species. Only proposed projects with very strong justifications for impacting red species and that meet all agency review criteria will be considered. However, designations as red species should not be construed as automatic rejection for all proposed activities that might impact these species.

Green species

Agaricia agaricites (Lettuce coral)
Cladocora arbuscula (Tube coral)
Manicina areolata (Rose coral)
Oculina diffusa (Ivory bush coral)
Oculina robusta (Robust ivory tree coral)
Phyllangia americana (Hidden cup coral)
Porites astreoides (Mustard hill coral)
Porites divaricata (Thin finger coral)
Porites furcata (Branched finger coral)
Porites porites (Clubtip finger coral)
Siderastrea radians (Lesser starlet coral)
Siderastrea siderea (Massive starlet coral) [OS]
Solenastrea hyades (Knobby star coral) [OS]
Stephanocoenia intersepta (Blushing star coral) [OS]
Tubastraea coccinea (Orange cup coral) +

Yellow species

Agaricia fragilis (Fragile saucer coral)
Agaricia lamarcki (Lamarck's sheet coral)
Favia fragum (Golfball coral)
Helioseris cucullata (Sunray lettuce coral)
Madracis auretenra (Yellow finger coral)
Madracis decactis (Ten ray star coral)
Madracis senaria (Six ray star coral)
Montastraea cavernosa (Great star coral)
Porites branneri (Blue crust coral)
Pseudodiploria clivosa (Knobby brain coral)
Scolymia cubensis (Artichoke coral)
Scolymia lacera (Fleshy disc coral)
Siderastrea siderea (Massive starlet coral) [WS]
Solenastrea bournoni (Smooth star coral)
Solenastrea hyades (Knobby star coral) [WS]
Stephanocoenia intersepta (Blushing star coral) [WS]

Red species

Acropora cervicornis (Staghorn coral) *
Acropora palmata (Elkhorn coral) *
Acropora prolifera (Fused staghorn coral)
Colpophyllia natans (Boulder brain coral)
Dendrogyra cylindrus (Pillar coral) *
Dichocoenia stokesii (Elliptical star coral)
Diploria labyrinthiformis (Grooved brain coral)
Eusmilia fastigiata (Smooth flower coral)
Isophyllia rigida (Rough cactus coral)
Isophyllia sinuosa (Sinuous cactus coral)
Meandrina meandrites (Maze coral)
Meandrina jacksoni (Whitevalley maze coral)
Mussa angulosa (Spiny flower coral)
Mycetophyllia aliciae (Knobby cactus coral)
Mycetophyllia ferox (Rough cactus coral) *
Mycetophyllia lamarckiana (Ridged cactus coral)
Orbicella annularis (Lobed star coral) *
Orbicella faveolata (Mountainous star coral) *
Orbicella franksi (Boulder star coral) *
Pseudodiploria strigosa (Symmetrical brain coral)

Key

* Listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act

+ *T. coccinea* is a non-native coral species found in Florida. Any proposed activities or collections much be conducted in a manner that does not promote spread.

[WS] Designation for corals within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (i.e., **W**ithin **S**anctuary).

[OS] Designation for corals outside the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (i.e., **O**utside **S**anctuary).

Contact Information

For more information, please contact the following personnel:

NOAA Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary: Joanne Delaney (joanne.delaney@noaa.gov)
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Lisa Gregg (lisa.gregg@MyFWC.com)
NOAA Protected Resources Division: Jennifer Moore (jennifer.moore@noaa.gov)
NOAA Habitat Conservation Division: Jocelyn Karazsia (jocelyn.karazsia@noaa.gov) (for information related to planned coastal construction projects)