NOAA

Habitat Blueprint

NOAA Selects Florida's Biscayne Bay as New Habitat Focus Area

Biscayne Bay, located in south Florida, has been selected as the next Habitat Focus Area under NOAA's Habitat Blueprint.

An Urban Oasis

Biscayne Bay is a shallow water, subtropical ecosystem with extensive seagrass cover and a mangrove fringe along most of its shoreline. The bay contains nearly150,000 acres of essential fish habitat, which supports important species such as grouper and snapper. A wealth of living marine resources—including threatened and protected species—such as sea turtles, dolphins, and corals are also sustained by the bay and its reef.

This clear-water system provides important natural benefits and billions of dollars in economic output to the surrounding area. Recreational and commercial fishing, water sports, marine transportation, and tourism are just some of the activities popular in Biscayne Bay and its connecting reef.

The value of Biscayne Bay habitats has been widely recognized by federal and state entities, and many areas, such as Biscayne National Park, two state acquatic preserves, and Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, receive some protection.

Satellite view of South Florida's Biscayne Bay.

A Habitat in Need

Scientists and resource managers worry that Biscayne Bay may reach a "tipping point" toward conditions where nutrients that support these dense algae growths would be abundant and the decay of the algae will deplete the shallow waters of oxygen. The possible accompanying loss of seagrass cover may be impossible to halt or reverse.

We've only recently learned the extent of the threats posed by algal blooms. The recent appearance of expansive algal blooms in the southern, most pristine, part of the Bay is troubling. Water quality monitoring, always somewhat limited and patchy, has declined. Further investigations into the algal blooms and the water quality conditions that promote these blooms are needed and should be accompanied by efforts to reduce nutrient inputs wherever possible.

Bay fishery and protected species' nurseries, as well as recreational activities within the bay and on the adjacent reef, depend upon clean, clear waters. Tourism and recreational activities are major industries and sources of revenues, jobs, and income for the Biscayne Bay area, and both are directly and indirectly influenced by the ecological health of the bay.

Collaboration

NOAA has considerable involvement in Biscayne Bay research and conservation. We've partnered with other federal, state, and local agencies in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project: an effort to restore south Florida ecosystems, including coastal waters. NOAA also works with Biscayne National Park and Miami-Dade County to monitor water quality, physical, and biological parameters in Biscayne Bay.

Among our other partners:

- Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration and Coordination Team
- Biscayne National Park
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Tropical Audubon Society
- Clean Water Action
- National Parks Conservation Association
- University of Miami
- Florida International University

View of the Miami skyline from Boca Chita Key.

Ultimately, NOAA's efforts in Biscayne Bay are aimed at understanding algal blooms, promoting healthy nursery grounds for fisheries and protected species, resilient coastal communities, and strong partnerships focused on a healthy bay.

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