

## NOAA

### Habitat Blueprint



*A storm rolling in on Flamenco Beach, Culebra Island.*

## NOAA Selects Puerto Rico's Northeast Reserves and Culebra Island as New Habitat Focus Area

The Northeast Reserves and Culebra Island, located on northeastern Puerto Rico, has been selected a new Habitat Focus Area under NOAA's Habitat Blueprint. This site encompasses the watersheds of the Northeast Ecological Corridor and its related marine areas, as well as Culebra Island and its surrounding coral reefs.

### Almost Paradise

The Northeast Reserves and Culebra habitats are home to coastal forests, wetlands, a bioluminescent lagoon, seagrass beds, shallow and deep coral reefs, and miles of pristine beaches. Leatherback sea turtles nest on the beaches, while manatees, green and hawksbill turtles, and bottlenose dolphins are frequently sighted. A variety of coral species—including those protected under the Endangered Species Act—can be found along with diverse fish species that depend on these valuable habitats.

This area is also of great economic value, thanks to thriving tourism, seven marinas, and recreational and commercial fisheries.

*Culebra turtle in seagrass.*



*Outplanting of Culebra coral.*



### A Habitat in Need

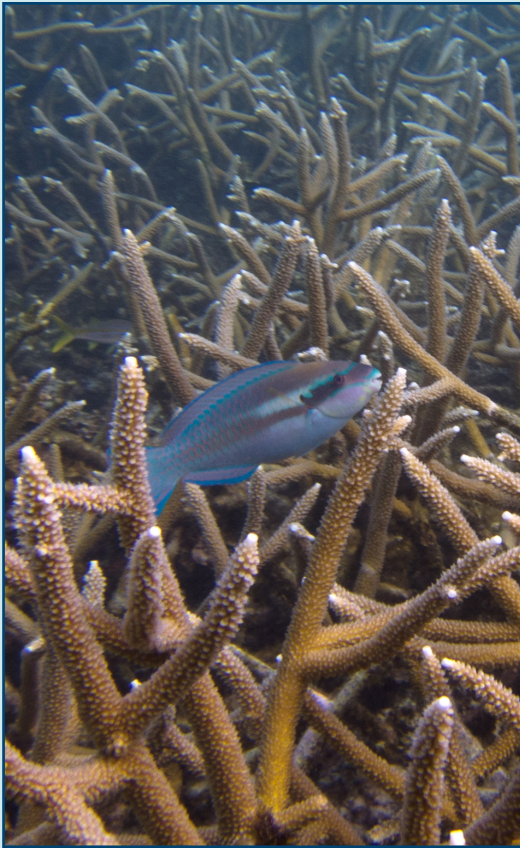
The Northeast Reserves and Culebra Island encompass a combination of urban and protected lands. This lush region has experienced significant decline in coastal and marine habitats, such as mangrove, coral, and seagrass. This is due largely to unsustainable coastal development and recreational and commercial uses, land-based sources of pollution, and climate change impacts such as rising sea surface temperatures.

NOAA will protect and restore coastal habitats and resources within the Northeast Reserves and Culebra Island through conservation projects, management based monitoring and research, and training and education programs.

## Partners

NOAA, partners, and local communities are already engaged in multiple projects in this new Habitat Focus Area. Our partners include:

- Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources
- Puerto Rico Sea Grant
- Caribbean Fishery Management Council
- Caribbean Coastal Ocean Observing System



*Fish in a Culebrita thicket.*

### *Focus Area Objectives At a Glance*

#### *3-5 years*

- Protect and enhance coral reef ecosystems and near-shore habitats
- Protect biodiversity through maintenance or restoration of habitat connectivity, and avoid further habitat, ecosystem and landscape fragmentation
- Improve quality of surface waters, wetlands, and coastal waters by reducing pollution
- Strengthen local and federal agency collaboration and partnerships
- Increase sustainable tourism and economy of the area
- Actively involve community in habitat conservation

#### *Long-term*

- Resilient coastal communities
- Sustainable and abundant fish populations
- Recovered threatened and endangered species
- Protected coastal and marine areas and habitats at risk
- Increased coastal/marine tourism, access, and recreation