

Mapping Southeast Florida's coral reefs

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Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative recently funded a coral reef mapping project through the State Wildlife Grants Program. Dr. Brian Walker from the National Coral Reef Institute at Nova Southeastern University, in partnership with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, will characterize and determine the extent of coral reefs in Southeast Florida.

Little data, and thus limited knowledge, exists about the reef resources of Martin County. To fully understand and manage these benthic resources, it is important to map the marine benthic habitats and to characterize and quantify the distribution of the coral and other benthic communities.

(Click on the images for a larger view)



Scenes from Martin County coral reefs. The turtle (lower right) survived a shark bite. (Photos courtesy of Laura Herren, Dept. of Environmental Protection)



In December, scientists began by conducting a high-resolution Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) bathymetric survey to image the sea floor. The next step, habitat mapping, will outline and define the features within the survey area. The final phase will map the densities of organisms within the features.

This project will create maps that will provide critical information scientists need to understand the extent of the coral reef habitat throughout Martin County and Southeast Florida. They will enable managers to enforce impact-avoidance and assist in developing strategies to conserve reef resources for future generations.