

A Boon for Nature, Tourism

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TEAM Effort: David Gilliam, left, research scientist at Nova Southeastern University National Coral Reef Institute, inspects loose coral at the coral nursery off Dania Beach. Jamie Vernacchio, a research assistant, helps collect the coral for the nursery.

Mention scuba diving or snorkeling in South Florida, and it conjures the Florida Keys, often called home to the only living coral-reef system in the continental United States. But the Southeast coast boasts other distinctive reef systems, too. Aficionados cite the drift dives off Palm Beach County, the three-reef system at varying depths off Broward's beaches and the wreck dives and coral sites in Biscayne Bay.

Recreation may not be the main reason for Nova Southeastern University's budding reef-nursery project, but certainly sport diving will benefit from it. NSU's scientists have stretched a \$25,000 grant from the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration and \$50,000 in resources from Broward County to create a nursery where they

re-attach fallen pieces of coral. Coral reefs, which shelter fish, suffer from many threats -- including boat groundings and a disease called bleaching.

Still, they are big tourist draws. Many hotels along South Florida's coast -- well beyond the Keys -- get hundreds of bookings yearly from diving tourists. So both nature and commerce will benefit from NSU's undersea nursery, worth remembering when more funding is needed to keep the project going.
