

CORAL REEF CONSERVATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

BILL SUMMARY

- Reauthorize and amend the *Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000* (16 USC §6401 et seq.) to modernize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) coral reef program.
- Expand federal grant making for local coral reef projects, community-based coral reef conservation planning, and scientific research on coral reef biodiversity, genetics, propagation, and resiliency.
- Authorize the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, which includes relevant federal agencies, the states of Florida and Hawaii, and five U.S. territories with coral reefs (GU, CNMI, PR, AS, and USVI).
- Strengthen the federal response to coral reef emergencies and allowing NOAA to disburse grant funding on an expedited/emergency basis.
- Decrease damage to coral reefs from vessel groundings, anchors, boat moorings, ship strikes, and abandoned vessels by directing NOAA and other federal agencies to identify practicable steps to reduce vessel impacts and accidents that harm coral reefs.
- Protect at-risk coral reefs nationwide by directing NOAA to maintain an inventory of coral reefs most at risk from bleaching, disease/invasive species outbreaks, harmful algal blooms, and coastal pollution.
- Provide dedicated funding for coral reef conservation *at no cost to taxpayers* by requiring that all fines, penalties, and amounts recovered from damages to federally protected coral reefs to support conservation.
- Authorize the U.S. Department of the Interior to conserve coral reefs in near-shore federal waters and U.S. territories (Office of Insular Affairs), including the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Coral Reef Ecosystem Studies program.
- Promote coral reef conservation in national parks, national wildlife refuges, or marine national monuments.
- Authorizes the Coral Reef Management Fellowship to develop the next generation of leaders in coral reef stewardship.
- Authorizes National Academy studies on coral reefs.

SECTION-BY-SECTION SUMMARY

TITLE I – AMENDMENTS TO CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACT OF 2000

Section 101: Revisions to purposes of *Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000*

- Updates the purposes of the statute to include focus on healthy, resilient coral reefs.

Section 102: Revisions to National Coral Reef Action Strategy

- Ensures that U.S. Coral Reef Task Force has stronger consultation role in updates to national action strategy.
- Places emphasis on cooperative conservation, including with State and territorial fish and wildlife management agencies.
- Requires that national action strategy address conditions of coral reefs nationwide, emerging threats to corals, and adaptive management.
- Requires update of Action Strategy within two years of the bill's passage.

Section 103: Revisions to Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program

- Directs grant funds for projects that address priorities identified by NOAA and U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and emerging threats to corals.
- Authorizes NOAA to release grant funds early for qualified applicants responding to coral reef emergencies, imminent threats to reefs, or other time-sensitive projects
- Adds biodiversity; minimizing vessel impacts; emergency response; invasive species control; reef restoration; applied research on coral resiliency, diseases, genetics, propagation, and growth; water-quality monitoring; projects for ESA-listed corals; and community-based planning as new eligible categories for federal NOAA grants

Section 104: Coral Reef Public-Private Partnerships

- Reauthorizes public-private partnership between NOAA and the Congressionally chartered nonprofit National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to strengthen coral reef conservation grant opportunities, *at no additional cost to taxpayers*.
- Promotes additional public-private partnerships for coral reef conservation.

Section 105: Revisions to Emergency Assistance

- Authorizes NOAA to respond to coral event of national significance and provide emergency assistance to states, territories, or local governments, as needed.
- Directs NOAA to complete comprehensive damage/cost assessments for coral reef emergencies nationwide, to improve public accountability and inform restoration efforts.

Section 106: Revisions to National Program

- Expands NOAA's national program to include additional coral reef conservation activities.

- Directs NOAA to maintain public inventory of vessel groundings/strikes on coral reefs to improve public accountability and inform emergency response/restoration efforts.
- Authorizes NOAA to establish a nationwide inventory identifying coral reefs most at risk and provide concrete recommendations or federal actions to reduce redress those risks.
- Requires NOAA to make publicly available all science collected on coral reef ecosystems and provide for long-term stewardship and preservation of that data, possibly by incorporating into the Digital Coast initiative.

Section 107: Revisions to Effectiveness Reports

- Requires reports to Congress and the public every 5 years on implementation of the *Coral Reef Conservation Act*, this reauthorization bill, and other updates.

Section 108: Revisions to Authorization of Appropriations

- Increases authorization level for NOAA's coral reef program to \$38 million for FY 2021, with a \$2 million increase for every subsequent year.
- Increases authorization for NOAA's coral reef program for administrative costs from current \$1 million to \$2 million.
- Of the appropriated funds, requires a minimum of \$14 million for NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program and \$16 million for NOAA's National Program.

Section 109: Revisions to Definitions

- Updates statutory definitions for "conservation," "coral," "coral reef," "coral reef component," and "coral reef ecosystem."
- Adds new statutory definitions for "at-risk reef," "bona fide research," "damages," "resilience," "response costs," "restoration," "National Coral Reef Action Strategy" (Section 106), and "U.S. Coral Reef Task" (Section 108).

Section 110: Establishment of United States Coral Reef Task Force

- Provides Congressional authorization for the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.
- Maintains all current voting members on the Task Force, including state/territorial governors, and adds two additional federal agencies: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Homeland Security.
- Maintains current non-voting members on the Task Force (the 3 Freely Associated States).
- Codifies governance, duties, and federal responsibilities of the Task Force, as specified in 1998 Executive Order #13089.
- Authorizes the Task Force to establish working groups with NGOs and research institutions like marine laboratories and coral reef institutes.

Section 111: Agreements

- Authorizes NOAA to enter long-term, cooperative agreements to carry out the *Coral Reef Conservation Act* and related programs.

- Directs NOAA to establish cooperative institutes to advance coral reef conservation and research in partnership with universities, marine laboratories, and coral reef institutes in States/territories with coral reef ecosystems.
- Permits NOAA to formalize multi-year cooperative agreements to advance coral reef conservation and research, including with non-governmental organizations.

Section 112: Permits

- Authorizes NOAA to issue permits for coral reef research and conservation activities in federal waters or for federally protected corals and reefs.

Section 113: Regulations

- Authorizes NOAA to promulgate regulations necessary to carry out the *Coral Reef Conservation Act*.

Section 114: Use of Recovered Amounts

- Directs any fines, penalties, forfeitures, and restitution paid to NOAA for violations related to federally protected corals, coral reefs, or coral reef ecosystems to support coral reef conservation.

Section 115: Prize Competitions to Promote Innovation in Coral Reef Research and Conservation

- Authorizes any federal agency on the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force to individually or jointly use current funds or partner with other agencies, states, tribes, local governments or private entities to offer prize competitions to incentivize research on coral reefs.

Section 116: Conforming and Clerical Amendments

- Makes technical and clerical changes to reflect updates to the statute under this bill, including adding a table of contents.

TITLE II – DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR CORAL REEF AUTHORITIES

Section 201: Coral Reef Conservation and Assistance

- Authorizes the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to conserve coral reefs in national parks, national wildlife refuges, national monuments and any other areas under DOI's management.
- Authorizes the Interior Department to provide technical, scientific, and financial grant assistance for near-shore coral reef conservation in proximity to federal land units and in U.S. territories and tribal land.
- Provides Congressional authorization for the Office of Insular Affairs' Coral Reef Initiative to support conservation projects in U.S. territories and the Freely Associated States.
- Requires consistency with the National Coral Reef Action Strategy (Section 102).

Section 202: USGS Coral Reef Ecosystem Studies Program

- Provides Congressional authorization for the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Coral Reef Ecosystem Studies program to advance research, particularly watershed-based coral reef conservation science.

Section 203: Use of Recovered Amounts

- Directs any fines, penalties, forfeitures, and restitution paid to the DOI for violations related to federally protected corals, coral reefs, or coral reef ecosystems to support coral reef conservation.

Section 204: Authorization of Appropriations

- Authorizes \$12 million annually for the DOI's coral reef conservation work through FY 2025.
- Authorizes \$3 million for the Office of Insular Affairs' Coral Reef Initiative and \$4 million for the USGS Coral Reef Ecosystem Studies Program through FY 2025.

Section 205: Definitions

- Specifies that definitions used in this title have same meaning as *Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000*, to ensure consistency.
- Provides definitions for "Freely Associated State" and "Insular Area" for clarity.

TITLE III – NATIONAL CORAL REEF MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP

Section 301: Short Title

- This title may be cited as the "National Coral Reef Management Fellowship Act of 2019."

Section 302: Definitions

- Defines "Secretary," "fellow" and "fellowship" for clarity.

Section 303: Fellowship Program

- Establishes the National Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program within NOAA to develop future American leaders in the management and conservation of coral reefs.
- Provides state and territorial coral reef management agencies with fellows to enhance the capacity of those agencies while developing professional skills for the fellows.

Section 304: Fellowship Awards

- Sets qualifications for fellows, to include: an intent and potential to pursue a career in marine services, leadership potential or actual leadership experience, diverse life experience, and proficient writing and speaking skills.
- Limits fellowships to 24 months.
- Requires a non-federal 25% match by agencies hosting fellows.

TITLE IV—ASSESSING THE THREATS AND VALUES OF CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEMS

Section 401: Definitions

- Defines “Secretary,” “National Academy,” “appropriate committees of Congress,” “coral reef ecosystem” and “ultraviolet filters” for clarity.”

Section 402: Study Examining the Impact of Ultraviolet Filters on Coral Reef Ecosystems

- Requires NOAA to enter an agreement with the National Academies of Sciences to study and submit a report examining the impact of ultraviolet filters on coral reef ecosystems.
- The report will be submitted to Congress and published on a public website.

Section 403: Study to Determine the Economic, Societal, and Ecological Value of Coral Reef Ecosystems in the United States and Territories of the United States

- Requires NOAA to enter an agreement with the National Academies of Sciences to study and submit a report evaluating the economic, societal, and ecological value of coral reef ecosystems in states and territories.
- The report will be submitted to Congress and published on a public website.

TITLE V - MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Section 501: Stock Assessments under *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*

- Prioritizes stock assessments for economically important coral reef fisheries, as practicable.

Section 502: Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program

- Authorizes \$3 million annually through FY 2025 for the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program.
- Makes clerical amendments to the *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*