



Communications Contacts at a Glance

AZA

Beth Firchau

bfirchau@aza.org

Disney

Nadia Vanderhoof

Nadia.Vanderhoof@disney.com

SeaWorld Orlando

Jeannette Conrado

JEANNETTE.CONRADO@seaworld.com

Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida

Michelle Ashton

mashton@wildlifeflorida.org

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Carol Lyn Parrish

Carollyn.parrish@MyFWC.com

NOAA Fisheries

Allison Garrett

allison.garrett@noaa.gov

From Rescue Response to Restoration Leadership

A diverse team of wildlife experts continues to make a strong impact on the conservation of Florida corals in a unique public / private partnership, led by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums with involvement from Disney Conservation, the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, NOAA Fisheries, and SeaWorld.



Rescued from various sites along Florida's Coral Reef, as part of the State of Florida's response to stony coral tissue loss disease, hundreds of corals now reside in one of the world's largest coral care facilities located in Orlando, Florida.

The Florida Coral Rescue Center (**FCRC**) is a state-of-the-art facility established for gene banking and care of Florida corals rescued from reefs head of **stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD)** progress which has now swept the entirety of Florida's Coral Reef. [The center is supported by](#) a diverse group of coral reef management and conservation leaders including the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the Florida Fish and

Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), NOAA Fisheries. Its daily operations are managed by an expert team of SeaWorld coral biologists, and funding is provided through the generosity of funding organizations including the Disney Conservation Fund and Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, since opening and receiving its first corals in April 2020, the FCRC has been part of a national network of coral holding or gene banking facilities coordinated by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The facility provides a safe, stable environment for coral colonies to receive world class care from a team of coral experts. The FCRC was built to play a significant role in the future restoration of Florida's Coral Reef, and it is doing just that and more.

"AZA is proud of the incredible collaboration between our accredited zoo and aquarium members, like Disney and SeaWorld, their financial commitment, and their investment of time and talent to help save this natural treasure," said Dan Ashe, President and CEO of AZA. "Being able to share our global network of animal care and welfare teams and our coral management expertise is inspiring. A monumental undertaking like this is another demonstration of why zoos and aquariums are so vital to conservation. The coordinated, multi-facility AZA-Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project and the Florida Coral Rescue Center show that, together, we can make a difference for Florida's reefs for future generations to share. We are excited to move into the future."



"This unified effort between public aquariums, government agencies, researchers and universities, is incredible," reflects Jim Kinsler, SeaWorld curator and FCRC facility manager. "Experts from around the United States are collaborating together to save the corals on Florida's Coral Reef to support their survival in the future. The Florida Coral Rescue Center is a product of these vital partnerships, and we could not do the work we are doing without our combined resources and expertise."

FCRC Coral Spawning Firsts and Leadership

Providing Hope for Hot Corals

The summer of 2023 will go down in history as one of the hottest summers on record for the waters of the Florida Keys. As Florida corals and other marine life struggled to endure hot tub conditions, FWC and NOAA Fisheries reached out to AZA requesting assistance. Within days of the request, an AZA response was created, and husbandry staff were mobilized into Heat Response Teams (HeaRT). Two HeaRTs representing six AZA member facilities and the Perry Institute in the Bahamas, were organized to support local coral reef restoration practitioners in the Keys.

The first HeaRT to respond was led by Justin Zimmerman, manager of the FCRC. His team assisted practitioners in the critical care response for over 5,000 corals. During their tenure, the teams taught a crash coral husbandry course to practitioners and developed strategies to continue critical care after the teams returned home. The teams also assisted with hurricane preparation and response when Hurricane Idalia threatened the Florida coast. 100% of the financial investment to bring teams like Justin's to Florida was provided by the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, another FCRC partner.

The HeaRT collaboration, including the expertise of professionals like those from the FCRC, provided a blueprint for future emergency marine responses in Florida and possibly around the world.

Growing Capacity

The AZA launched its Coral Aquarist Program (CAP) in 2023. The goal of CAP is to provide a professional development course that transforms aquarists into strong coral aquarists that are well versed in modern day zoological processes and focused on Florida's Coral Reef species. The program consists of guided online coursework, onsite training, and mentorship. Members of the FCRC coral team were enlisted with aquarists from all over the country to develop the training curriculum for the year-long course. Additionally, the FCRC was selected as one of four nationwide public aquariums to host and train US and international CAP participants for the onsite hands-on phase of the program. AZA CAP and FCRC are fortifying today's coral care efforts and building a workforce to meet the restoration challenges of tomorrow.

Increasing Scope and Scale of Rescue

As they would in the wild, the corals continue to grow under the care of the coral biologists at FCRC. The largest coral, a boulder brain coral (*Colpophyllia natans*) is now over 46 cm in length. When it arrived, it had a length of 27 cm, an increase in surface area of over 290%! Many corals have needed new larger tile bases or have been moved into our expanded SeaWorld Coral Rescue facility.

On June 9, 2023, SeaWorld opened a second coral rescue center on park grounds to compliment FCRC - The SeaWorld Coral Rescue Center. Open to the public, it is a scaled version of the operation at the FCRC. Coral biologists care for over 300 rescued corals in this 3,419 sqft facility. Thousands of park visitors have passed through the center and come face to polyp with corals that are the foundation of the future of Florida's Coral Reef.

A First for a Coral Species in Human Care

In April of 2022, the first reported spawning of rough cactus coral (*Mycetophyllia ferox*) in human care took place at FCRC. This event was particularly significant because the coral is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The corals at the FCRC will play a significant part in the future restoration plans for Florida's Coral Reef as part of a breeding program focused on ensuring genetic diversity of offspring and providing the tens of thousands of baby corals required to restore the reef.

With the mentorship of other AZA facilities leading the development of coral propagation science, like The Florida Aquarium, the coral team at FCRC is scaling their operation to create a major coral spawning or reproduction hub. "We

are very proud because of our past successes and believe they are the foundation of the future for Florida's Coral Reef," reported Jim Kinsler.

The Personal FCRC Experience

Bringing hope to Florida's Coral Reef and the corals that build the reef tract takes a community. The story of rescuing corals and the Florida Coral Rescue Center is a personal one for everyone involved.

It Takes a Colony

"Saving an ecosystem like Florida's Coral Reef is not something that one person, one team or one organization can do alone. Collaboration, working without silos, exchanging ideas, and combining resources for the future of our reefs is what coral rescue and the FCRC is all about. Corals have been getting it right for millions of years. Working as a colony, working together, we can do great things." – Beth Firchau - AZA, Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project Coordinator

Honored to Work for Corals

"The effort to reverse the collapse of an entire ecosystem is not something that can be done without the herculean efforts of many people with a diversity of talents and resources. I consider it a privilege to play even a small part in this huge effort." – Dr. Andy Stamper – Disney, Conservation Science Manager

A Model for Other Conservation Challenges

"The Foundation was thrilled to help get the 'lights turned on' at the FCRC (or off, as the corals prefer)! We are honored to be a part of a team that's working to preserve a treasured Florida ecosystem for generations to come. And it takes all of us, from the coral biologists to the accountants who pay the bills. We are hopeful this partnership of state agencies, companies and nonprofit organizations can serve as a model to tackle other significant environmental challenges as they arise." -Andrew Walker - Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, President & CEO

Hope for the Future

"FCRC represents hope for the future of Florida's Coral Reef. To be able to save thousands of corals from disease so that restoration practitioners can produce and re-populate the reef tract with new generations of genetically diverse corals is every conservation manager's dream. Florida owes a great debt to AZA, the FCRC, and all of the gene banking facilities nationwide for taking on this significant challenge and knocking it out of the park." -Lisa Gregg – FWC, Florida Coral Rescue Team Co-Lead

Thriving Corals: A Good Problem to Have

"One of the most rewarding parts about working on this project at the FCRC is being able to see the incredible amount of growth these corals have had since first coming to the center. When collected, each coral is mounted on a terracotta tile that serves as a stable base or anchor for the coral in the aquarium. The corals brought here in March 2020 are doing so well they need to be given larger tile bases." -Sara Spalding - SeaWorld, FCRC Aquarist

Honored to be Saving a Fragile Ecosystem

I am honored to be working at the Florida Coral Rescue Center. To be a part of something that brings together researchers and aquarists from all over the country to save a fragile ecosystem is a rewarding experience. Here, at the FCRC we care for hundreds of corals, giving us unique insight into the characteristics of not only individual colonies but the entire species. This opportunity is rare given the limited knowledge about Caribbean corals. Everything we learn is especially valuable and significant to the survival of our Florida coral reef ecosystems worldwide. Having a role in this effort is extremely humbling and gives me hope that we can make a difference in the years to come." -Midori Mendoza - SeaWorld, FCRC Aquarist

Dedication to Saving Vulnerable Wildlife

The opportunity to care for corals at the Florida Coral Rescue Center is an absolute honor. It is incredible to be a part of unprecedented collaboration on research to save Florida's corals at our state-of-the-art facility. The dedication of our care team is reflected in the diverse species that are growing and thriving at the FCRC. I look forward to our future and the difference our research will make to save vulnerable wildlife." – Shelby Allen, The Seas with Nemo & Friends Pavilion at Epcot Aquarist

FLORIDA CORAL RESCUE CENTER

CORALS OF THE FCRC

<u>Code</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
ALAM	<i>Agaricia lamarcki</i>	Plate/Saucer Coral
CNAT	<i>Colpophyllia natans</i>	Boulder Brain Coral
DSTO	<i>Dichocoenia stokesii</i>	Elliptical Star Coral
DLAB	<i>Diploria labyrinthiformis</i>	Grooved Brain Coral
EFAS	<i>Eusmilia fastigiata</i>	Smooth Flower Coral
MAUR	<i>Madracis auretenra</i>	Yellow Finger/Pencil Coral
MMEA	<i>Meandrina meandrites</i>	Maze Coral
MCAV	<i>Montastraea cavernosa</i>	Great Star Coral
MANG	<i>Mussa angulosa</i>	Large Flower Coral
MALI	<i>Mycetophyllia aliciae</i>	Knobby Cactus Coral
MFER	<i>Mycetophyllia ferox</i>	Rough Cactus Coral
MLAM	<i>Mycetophyllia lamarckiana</i>	Ridged Cactus Coral
OANN	<i>Orbicella annularis</i>	Boulder Star Coral
OFAV	<i>Orbicella faveolata</i>	Mountainous Star Coral
OFRA	<i>Orbicella franksi</i>	Boulder Star Coral
PCLI	<i>Pseudodiploria clivosa</i>	Knobby Brain Coral
PSTR	<i>Pseudodiploria strigose</i>	Symmetrical Brain Coral
SBOU	<i>Solenastrea bournoni</i>	Smooth Star Coral

Florida Coral Rescue Center Square Footage – 2058 sq ft

Number of Corals to be Housed at the Center

511 corals

Holding System Surface Area – area devoted specifically to coral holding

Total – 620 sq ft

Number of Coral Aquariums

18 aquariums

Staffing

2 Full Time (40 hours/ week)

2 Part Time (28 hours/ week)

Total - 136 hours per week

Total Number of Gallons Devoted to Coral Care

6500 gallons

About the Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and 11 other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit www.aza.org.

About Disney Conservation

Disney Conservation is committed to saving wildlife and building a global community inspired to protect the magic of nature together. Since 1995, the Disney Conservation Fund has directed \$125 million to support nonprofit organizations working with communities to save wildlife, inspire action and protect the planet. The Disney Conservation Team leads best-in-class scientific programs to conserve wildlife in Disney's backyard and beyond, connects people to build a network for nature, and cares for the planet through everyday actions. To learn more, visit www.disney.com/conservation or follow @DisneyConservation.

About the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida

The Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and other public and private partners to conserve Florida's native animals and plants and the lands and waters they need to survive. Since its founding in 1994, the Foundation has raised and donated nearly \$71 million to conservation and outdoor recreation and education. To learn more, visit wildlifeflorida.org.

About the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

FWC's mission is managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. To learn more, visit www.MyFWC.com.

About NOAA

To understand and predict changes in climate, weather, ocean, and coasts, to share that knowledge and information with others, and to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources. To learn more, visit www.noaa.gov

About SeaWorld

SeaWorld is a leading marine life theme park and accredited zoo and aquarium that provides experiences that matter while educating and inspiring guests of all ages to care about marine life. Welcoming millions of guests every year, the parks offer fun and enriching experiences from up-close animal encounters and year-round educational programs to award-winning marine-life-themed rides and attractions, special events, and exciting entertainment. For more than 60 years SeaWorld has advanced the conservation of marine life in and outside its parks through science, education, and exceptional animal care that is Humane Certified by American Humane and accredited by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. SeaWorld is one of the largest marine animal rescue organizations in the world, helping more than 41,000 animals to date. The SeaWorld Conservation Fund, a non-profit foundation established in 2003, has provided more than \$20 million to nearly 1,400 organizations to advance critical research on every continent. A portion of park proceeds goes toward supporting these longstanding conservation commitments. SeaWorld parks are in Orlando, San Antonio, San Diego, and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). SeaWorld is part of the United Parks & Resorts Inc. (NYSE:PRKS) portfolio of theme park brands. For more information, visit us at SeaWorld.com.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Join the FCRC partners posting about this extraordinary facility and the partners that have made it possible. Everyone is invited to use the video and image assets provided in this toolkit and the social media post-copy suggestions listed below.

Relevant social tags: [#AZACoralRescue](#)

AZA

Facebook: [@ZoosAquariums](#) Instagram: [@Zoos Aquariums](#) X: [@Zoos Aquariums](#)

Disney Conservation

Facebook: [@DisneyConservation](#) [@DisneyASE](#) [@Disney Cruise Line](#)

Instagram: [@DisneyConservation](#) [@DrMarkatDisney](#) [@DisneyCruiseLine](#)

X: [@DisneyConserves](#) [@DisneyCruise](#)

Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida

Facebook: [@wildlifeflorida](#) Instagram: [@wildlife.florida](#) X: [@wildlife_fl](#)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Facebook: [@myFWC](#) Instagram: [@myFWC](#) X: [@myFWC](#)

SeaWorld

Facebook: [@SeaWorld](#) Instagram: [@SeaWorldRescue](#) X: [@SeaWorld](#)

TikTok: [@seaworld](#)

SeaWorld Orlando

Facebook: [@SeaWorldOrlando](#) Instagram: [@SeaWorldOrlando](#)

TikTok: [@SeaWorldOrlando](#)

NOAA:

X: [@NOAAFish_SERO](#) [@NOAAFisheries](#) [@NOAACoral](#)

Instagram: [@NOAAFisheries](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The AZA-Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project

AZA

www.aza.org/coral-reef-rescue

<https://www.aza.org/connect-june-2019>

<https://www.aza.org/connect-stories/stories/all-hands-on-deck>

<https://www.aza.org/connect-stories/stories/saving-corals-together>

<https://www.aza.org/connect-stories/stories/collaborating-to-save-the-florida-reef-tract>

Coral Reefs Overview

NOAA

https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/kits/corals/coral07_importance.html

CARMABI Research Station

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kb0bz-3lWc>

Coral Reefs as Coastal Protection

NOAA

https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral_protect.html