

NOAA Invasive Species Update for The Gulf & South Atlantic Regional Panel of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force

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Why is NOAA concerned with Invasive Species?

Directed by Executive Order, legislation or national and international cooperation, NOAA has key leadership positions in the:

- National Invasive Species Council (NISC)
- Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF)
- Ongoing national and/ or international strategic efforts
 - Ex. Commercial Vessel Ballast Water Management to Congress



Impacts of Nuisance and Invasive Species on NOAA's Mission and Managed Resources:

- Protected and Endangered species (Ex. coral reefs)
- Impacts to essential fish habitat and coastal fisheries
- National Marine Sanctuaries (Florida Keys, Flower Garden Banks, Gray's Reef)
- Impact to aquaculture operations



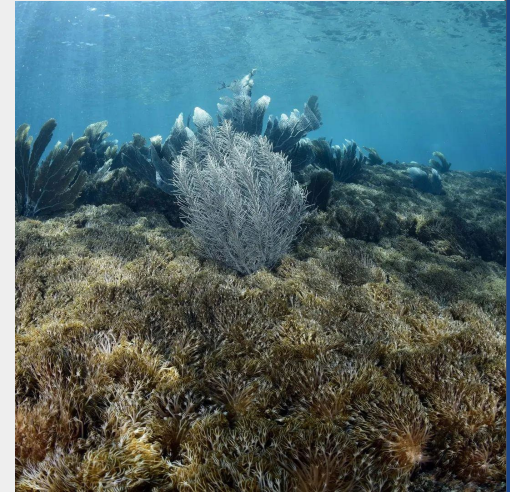
Invasive Soft Corals

- *Unomia stolonifera* & *Xenia umbellata*

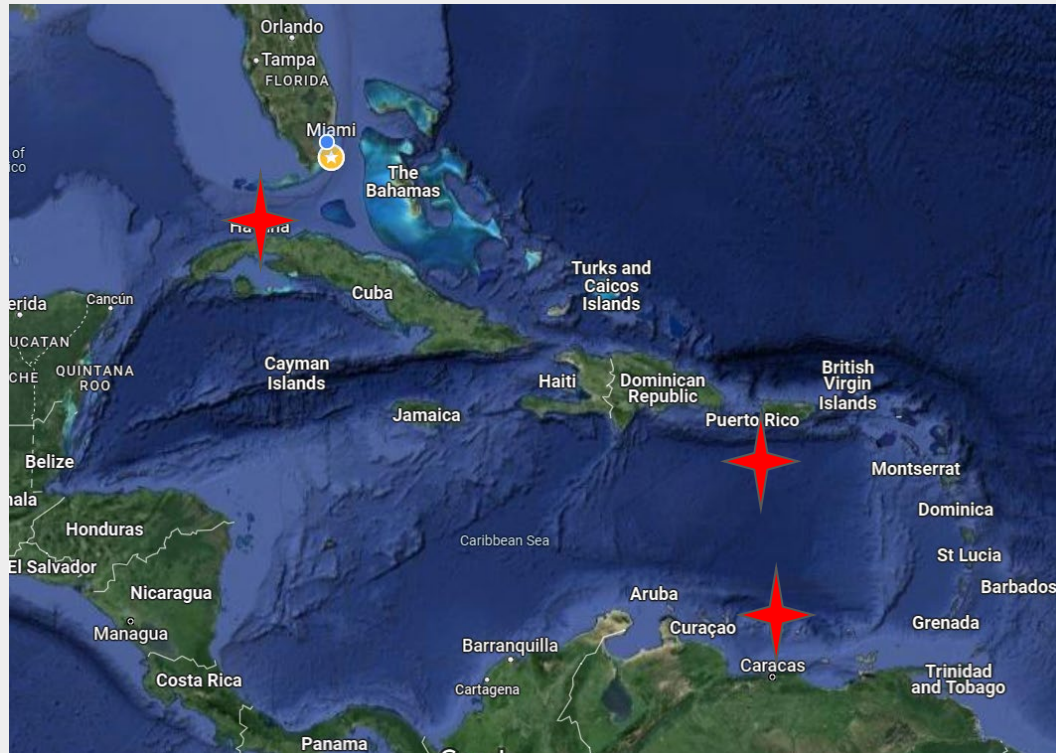
- Common aquarium species
 - Native to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Red Sea
- Asexual Reproduction (fragmentation, budding)
 - Spread by attaching to fishing gear, vessels
- Introductions in Puerto Rico and Hawaii
- Impacts stony/ hard coral reefs and eelgrass
- Rapid Recruitment



Credit: Raul Omar Ortiz



Invasive Soft Corals in the Caribbean



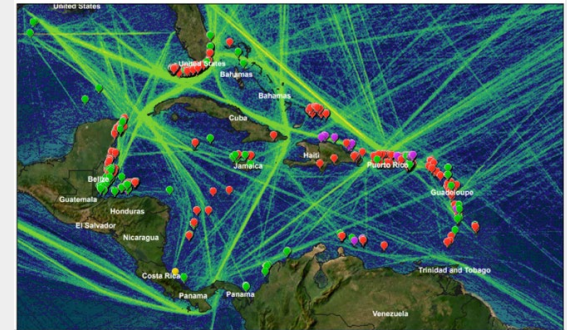
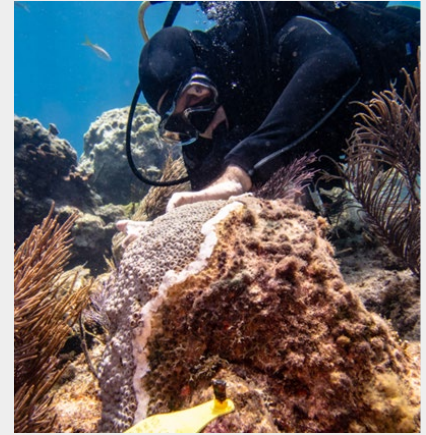
US Coral Reef Task Force/ Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force

- August 2024: Combined USCRTF/ANSTF work group is formed and led by NOAA.
- Members of the working group awarded \$2.4 million SERDP grant (DoD), additional funding opportunities are being pursued.
- Two-Pager Outreach Material (URL below)
- Comprehensive update at USCRTF meeting (last week in Saipan)
- Marine Biosecurity

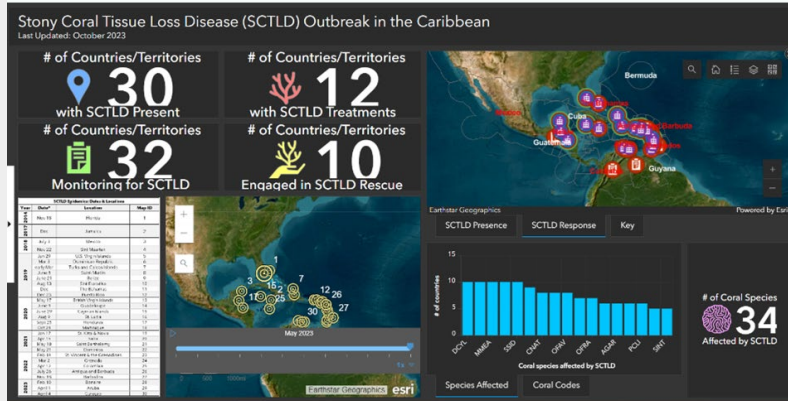
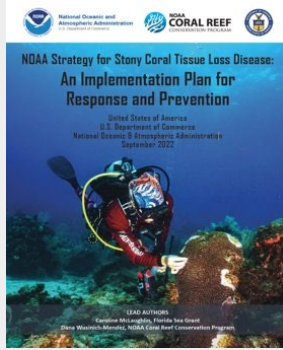


Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease

- Deadliest coral disease ever detected:
 - High prevalence
 - High transmissibility
 - High levels of mortality
 - High number of susceptible species
- Severe impacts on coral cover, diversity & ecological function
- Pathogen still unknown
- Likely transmitted by movement of
via ballast water or biofilms



NOAA's Efforts to Respond to SCTLD



Nuisance Species - Sargassum

Impacts:

- **Public health and social: Beach/shoreline closures**
- **Economic: hotel and business closures**
- **Infrastructure: USVI emergency declaration due to clogged intake at power and water generation facility**
- **Ecological: Shallow water coral smothering and anoxic layer fish kills, beach sand removal, disturbance from intervention**



Sargassum - What is NOAA doing?

- NOAA Policy Assessment on Sargassum
- NOAA Disaster Guide on Sargassum
- NOAA/EPA co -chair the IWG group on HABs
 - Sub-IWG group focused on Sargassum
- Cross-NOAA workshop in April to resolve gaps research, management, and disaster response
- Funding for USVI Sargassum Management Blueprint and study to understand societal impacts of Sargassum in the Caribbean
- \$963,000 FY25 for management and removal in USVI
- USF Optical Oceanography Lab: Satellite -based Sargassum Watch System (SaWS)



Other Aquatic Invasive and Nuisance Species that NOAA is currently tracking in the region:

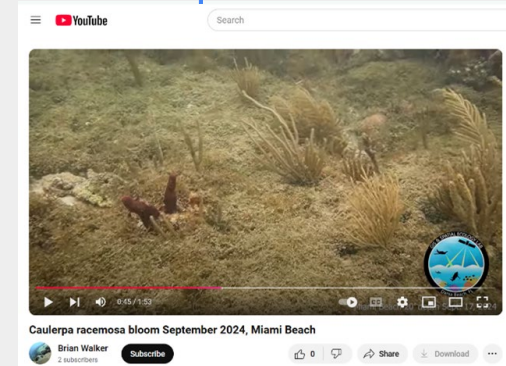
Halophila stipulacea



Ramicrusta textilis



Caulerpa racemosa



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