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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agree to move corals and reduce damage in the PortMiami Deep Dredge Project

Corps struck an 11th hour deal to move threatened corals, and have agreed to reduce sedimentation and turbidity for the life of the project

Miami, FL (Oct. 24, 2014) – Just days before an emergency injunction hearing against the PortMiami Deep Dredge project, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agreed to pay for the rescue of more than 200 threatened corals that are currently being harmed by sedimentation in the Deep Dredge project. Miami-Dade Reef Guard Association was the moving party for the injunction, joined by fellow plaintiffs Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper, Captain Dan Kipnis, and Tropical Audubon Society. The complaint against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers alleges violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) related to excessive sedimentation produced by during dredging.



The tips of a staghorn coral living near the deep dredge, mostly choked in sediment. (Photo by A. Palacio, P. Kushlan, R. Winter)

“Our legal actions catalyzed the Army Corps to strike a last minute deal with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to rescue the corals and place them in nurseries,” said Rachel Silverstein, Executive Director and Waterkeeper for Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper. “Despite resistance to paying for the relocation of the corals and emergency recommendations issued by NMFS to relocate the corals immediately, the Army Corps finally agreed to pay over \$400,000 to mitigate the damage they have caused to our reefs.”

Dr. Mike Beach, President of Miami-Dade Reef Guard Association, stated, “This is a victory for my members who dive regularly on the reefs near the dredging. While it’s bitter-sweet because so much damage has already been done and we’re losing a beautiful staghorn reef right off of Miami Beach, I’m happy that the Army Corps had to show up before a federal judge and commit to do better for the rest of the life of this project.”

The complaint alleges that, since the project commenced in Nov. 2013, the Army Corps has failed to comply with a number of ESA requirements – to the detriment of valuable and threatened local marine species. According to the complaint, the Army Corps was

also well aware that a large number of staghorn coral colonies were living adjacent to the dredging area. Now, these corals have been irreparably damaged and the remaining living tissue must be salvaged in coral nurseries.

“The Army Corps has continually chosen not to be stewards of Miami’s natural resources while they conduct this project,” said Laura Reynolds, Executive Director of the Tropical Audubon Society. “Now we’re having to step in and stop this damage. Why should we continually have to worry that the federal government is not abiding by federal laws?”

Miami’s reefs— and the fish and marine life they support — are critical to the survival of Miami’s tourism, diving, fishing, and seafood industries, which are engines for the local economy.

“This action is not just about the Miami harbor expansion, but it’s also about having the public and the various state and federal agencies take note of the scale of this damage, before Port expansion permits are granted for projects up and down Florida’s precious coast,” noted Captain Dan Kipnis, a veteran of multiple actions against Army Corps projects, “It’s about stepping up and holding the Army Corps accountable.”

“With the Corps’ agreement to relocate the corals and reduce sedimentation we achieved the goal of the Emergency Motion; however, the rest of our suit is still very much active and we plan to proceed on the claims we have brought in the Complaint against the Corps,” Silverstein said.



A coral near the dredging activity with sediment brushed away, has died under the heavy sediment load.

About Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper

Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper (BBWK) is a non-profit organization located in Miami, Florida. Launched in January 2011, our goal is to advocate for the Biscayne Bay watershed and its inhabitants, and to empower citizens to defend their right to swimmable, drinkable, fishable water. Our role is to ensure that Biscayne Bay remains clean and vibrant to serve the needs of both humans and wildlife for generations to come. For more information, please visit www.bbwk.org.

About Tropical Audubon Society

The Tropical Audubon Society (TAS) is a non-profit organization located in Miami, Florida established in 1947, previous Audubon Chapters have been operating in Miami-Dade for the last 100 years and this conservation group is the longest running environmental organization in Miami-Dade County. Their mission is to conserve and restore South Florida's ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. As a founding member of the Everglades Coalition, Hold the Line Coalition and the Biscayne Bay Coalition, Audubon strives to activate grassroots action, educate the public on the environment and create action to achieve conservation objectives in South Florida. For more information and to get involved please visit www.tropicalaudubon.org or call us at 305-667-7337

About Miami-Dade Reef Guard

Miami-Dade Reef Guard Association ("Reefguard") is a Florida not-for-profit corporation. Its mission is the protection of natural reefs off the coast of Miami-Dade County and to provide collective assistance in the promotion, funding and organizing of resources for the installation and maintenance of mooring buoys on the reefs adjacent to Miami-Dade County. Reefguard promotes and supports both artificial reef deployment and natural reef conservation in the adjacent sea areas. As an advocate for protection and conservation of the County's reefs, Reefguard seeks to mitigate threats to the reefs. It encourages and inspires citizens to boat and scuba dive responsibly.

