

## Site Selection for Florida's Coral Reef Restoration & Recovery (FCR3) Initiative

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Florida's Coral Reef forms the basis of our economy and way of life; and yet it faces human-induced and natural threats that have caused a significant decline in this critical ecosystem. Over the past two decades, scientists and practitioners have developed and refined coral reef restoration techniques as one tool to help reverse the decline. Florida's Coral Reef Restoration & Recovery (FCR3) initiative was established by Governor DeSantis to develop the resources and expertise needed to support the long-term recovery of Florida's Coral Reef. In an effort to better direct these resources, the state of Florida identified a need for comprehensive restoration planning. Florida's Tier 1 Strategy focuses on ecological goals to restore ecosystem structure and function and recommends places along Florida's Coral Reef where restoration is likely to have more impact based on long-term ecological data and larval connectivity modeling. Focal areas identified in Tier 1 were further refined to select priority areas to ground-truth by incorporating environmental data, including climate and water quality, and additional ecological data, such as bleaching history, disease risk and coral colony survival. A standard operating procedure was developed to guide data collection at priority ground-truthing sites so that metrics considered or known to influence coral outplant survival and restoration success can be statistically evaluated. Data collection includes capturing information on coral health, population size structure, coral diversity and habitat structure. These priority areas are currently being ground-trothed to determine recommended restoration sites for FCR3.