

Special Environmental Resource Concerns

Coral Reefs

Clean Air Act
Criteria Pollutants

Clean Air Act
Regional Visibility
Degradation

Clean Water Act

Coastal Zone
Management
Areas

Coral Reefs

Cultural
Resources

Endangered
and Threatened
Species

Environmental
Justice

Essential Fish
Habitat

Floodplain
Management

Invasive
Species

Migratory Birds

Prime and
Unique
Farmlands

Riparian Areas

Wetlands

Wild and Scenic
Rivers

Coral Reefs

The term “Coral reefs” is defined as the species, habitats, and other natural resources associated with coral reefs in all maritime areas and zones subject to the jurisdiction or control of the United States (e.g., Federal, State, territorial, or commonwealth waters), including reef systems in the South Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific Ocean. Coral reefs are also waters of the U.S. as defined in the Clean Water Act and are subject to Section 404 permit requirements.

What is it?

Coral reefs are among the most diverse and valuable ecosystems on Earth. They are extremely vulnerable to harmful environmental changes, particularly those resulting from human activities. One of the primary threats to U.S. coral reefs is pollution from land-based sources, including runoff of nutrients and sediments from watersheds adjacent to near-shore coral reef ecosystems. Present estimates are that 10 percent of all coral reefs are degraded beyond recovery; 30 percent are in critical condition and may die within 10 to 20 years, and if current conditions continue unabated another 30 percent may perish completely by 2050.

Why is it important?

Executive Order (E.O.) 13089, Coral Reef Protection, was issued in 1998 in recognition of the importance of conserving coral reef ecosystems. The E.O. created a Coral Reef Task Force whose membership is comprised of 11 Federal agencies, including the Secretary of Agriculture. The E.O. policy states that agencies will utilize their programs and authorities to protect and enhance the conditions of coral reef ecosystems and, to the extent permitted by law, ensure that any actions authorized, funded, or carried out by the agency will not degrade these ecosystems.

What can be done about it?

Maintaining current information regarding Local Action Strategies (LASs) that identify priority actions needed to reduce key threats to valuable coral reef resources is very helpful. Florida, Hawaii, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands created specific local action strategies for select locally relevant threats. NRCS should ensure that proposed actions consider impacts to coral reefs and, as appropriate, include conservation considerations that would enhance this valuable resource.

Coral Reefs at a Glance

Problems / Indicators - Nutrient and sediment runoff from near-shore watersheds	
Causes	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil Erosion (short and/or long term) • CAFO contaminants (or other point sources) • Improper nutrient and/or pesticide application • Improper livestock grazing management • Improper irrigation water management • Other point and non-point source pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residue management • Cover crops • Comprehensive nutrient management plan • NPDES permit • Irrigation water management • Prescribed grazing