



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NOAA Seeks Greater Protections for Threatened Elkhorn and Staghorn Corals

NOAA is proposing to extend most of the prohibitions of the Endangered Species Act - normally applied only to endangered species - to the threatened elkhorn and staghorn corals.

NOAA biologists estimate more than 90 percent of elkhorn and staghorn corals have been lost because of coral bleaching due to rising sea temperatures, disease, and tropical storm damage. Both species were listed as threatened in May 2006.

"These were the most dominant and important coral species on Florida and Caribbean reefs," said Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries Southeast regional administrator. "Since their decline, they no longer fulfill their important ecosystem role - which includes protecting coasts from storms and supporting healthy fisheries."

Species listed as endangered under the ESA are automatically covered by a suite of protective measures and prohibitions in the law. However, for species listed as threatened, such as elkhorn and staghorn corals, these same measures and prohibitions do not automatically apply. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries Service developed a separate proposed rule, called a 4(d) rule after section 4(d) of the ESA, detailing the prohibitions necessary to provide for the conservation of elkhorn and staghorn corals.

The proposed rule would prohibit the take, trade and all commercial activities involving elkhorn and staghorn corals. For corals, collection or any activity that will result in mortality and harm is considered a "take" of the species. Other prohibited activities include anchoring or grounding a vessel on the coral, dragging a fishing gear on the species, removing or altering the corals' habitat; or discharging any pollutant or contaminant that will harm the species.

Allowable activities are limited to qualified scientific research and enhancement and restoration activities carried out by an authorized agency.

NOAA's Fisheries Service developed these prohibitions and exceptions from suggestions by federal, state and territorial resource managers, fishermen, environmental organizations, universities, and coral research institutions during a series of workshops in Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The public has 90 days to comment on the proposed rule, which is available at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>, by contacting NOAA's Jennifer Moore at jennifer.moore@noaa.gov, or by fax request sent to 727-824-5309.

Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods and should reference **(RIN) 0648-AU92** in the subject line:

- E-mail via the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>
- Fax to 727-824-5309, Attention: Jennifer Moore
- Mail to Assistant Regional Administrator, Protected Resources Division, NMFS, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

Elkhorn & Staghorn Coral Information <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/esa/acropora.htm>

Elkhorn Coral Image: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/docs/07.jpg>

Staghorn Coral Image <http://sero.nmfs.noa.gov/pr/docs/o5.jpg>