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**White House Council on Environmental Quality and NOAA
Announce Actions to Conserve Coral Reefs**

President Bush will request \$2.7 million to support state and local coral conservation efforts to implement local action strategies developed by the states, territories and commonwealths that make up the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF). James L. Connaughton, Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator made the announcement today at the USCRTF meeting in Miami.

"Coral reefs are international treasures protected by local stewards. President Bush is requesting this funding to implement the local action strategies to facilitate lasting conservations results," said Connaughton in announcing the new funding at the December meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

"We're proud of the accomplishments to date of this federal, state, and territory partnership, and this money will help implement locally developed coral reef conservation measures," said Lautenbacher. "The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy highlighted the importance of ecosystem-based management and these local action strategies are an excellent example of how we can work across jurisdictions to achieve that goal."

"If we are going to succeed in protecting and restoring our coral reefs, we must work in close partnership with local communities," said Assistant Secretary of the Interior Craig Manson, who is co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. "The funding requested by President Bush will empower these communities to conserve these sensitive ecosystems. It will enable the Interior Department to develop more effective partnerships with states and local communities to deal with specific threats such as pollution, groundings and overharvest that vary from reef to reef."

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Local action strategies are three-year locally-driven road maps for collaborative and cooperative action among stakeholders which identify and implement priority actions needed to reduce key threats. The threats to coral reef resources vary from location to location and can range from overfishing to lack of public awareness. More information on local action strategies can be found at <http://www.coralreef.gov/lastrategy.cfm>

At the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting, the CEQ and NOAA also announced that:

§ NOAA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of State have agreed to re-establish an Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee. The Committee will focus on reducing marine debris from all sources, and will examine specific marine debris problems such as derelict fishing gear. Marine debris has a harmful effect on coral reefs and other valuable marine resources. Reconvening this Committee was a recommendation of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

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

CEQ: <http://www.ocean.ceq.gov>