CAN-199-Restoration working in Keys

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For a Diver Every day is Ocean Day

Coral-Restoration Project Shows Promise in Florida Keys

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Dead staghorn coral. (Arc Centre of Excellence Coral Reef Studies)

(CN) — Efforts to restore coral reefs in the Florida Keys show promise to help some endangered coral from going extinct, according to research revealed Wednesday.

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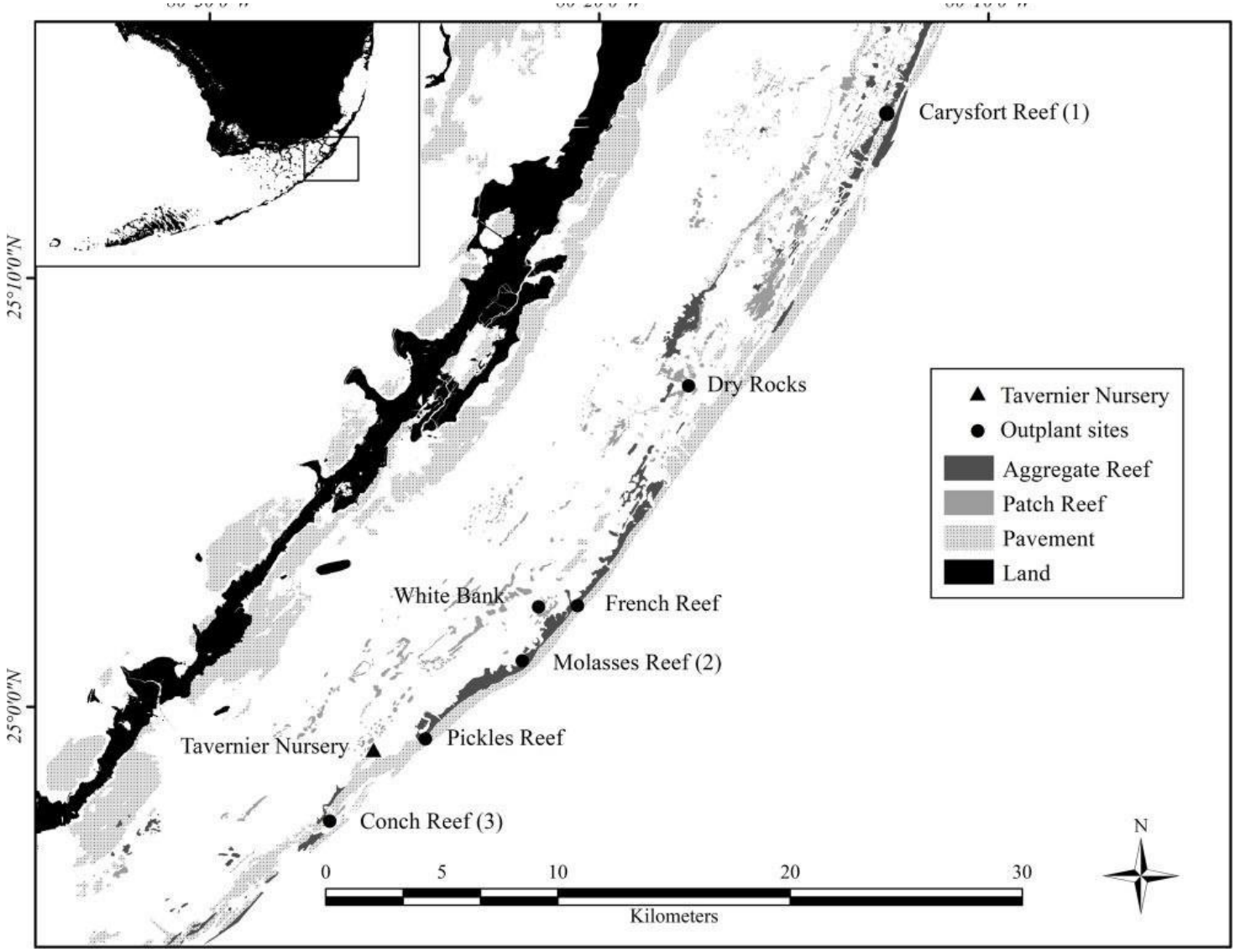
In a study published in the open-access journal PLOS ONE, scientists from Florida State University found that reef restoration projects could help endangered staghorn coral bounce back from its “Threatened” listing under the Endangered Species Act.

“Once widespread in Caribbean reefs, staghorn coral populations have declined by over 90% since the 1970s,” the researchers said in a statement.



In 2006, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration undertook recovery efforts to restore coral lost to the effects of the climate crisis. Key to this recovery is the process of out planting, where corals are grown in protected areas and then placed in restoration sites.

While out planting has been used for several years, researchers are just now beginning to see the long-term results of the recovery process.

This map marks the locations of coral restoration sites in the Florida Keys. (Courtesy of Matthew Ware)

Using photographic monitoring and in-person measuring, the research team analyzed the growth of over 2,400 staghorn coral colonies at 20 different out planting sites in the Florida Keys between 2007 and 2013.

While the initial survival rate of the corals was high, the long-term survival rate dropped precipitously, suggesting to scientists that larger colonies might fare better.

“The analysis revealed that survivorship — the percentage of colonies containing living tissue — was high for the first two years after out planting, but declined in subsequent years,” the statement said. “The researchers used statistical modeling to predict future survivorship, finding that 0 to 10% of the colonies would survive seven years post-out planting.

“This means that large numbers of colonies need to be out planted to start, so ecologically relevant numbers survive longer-term.”

While some success was found in replanting efforts, the scientists found the same stressors that killed corals in the first place were still affecting them, including bleaching and disease caused by global warming.

While the restoration projects show some signs of success, the research team suggests full, long-term recovery can only happen with combating greenhouse gas emissions and slowing the increase of the global temperature.

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The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing”….*Edmund Burke*

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