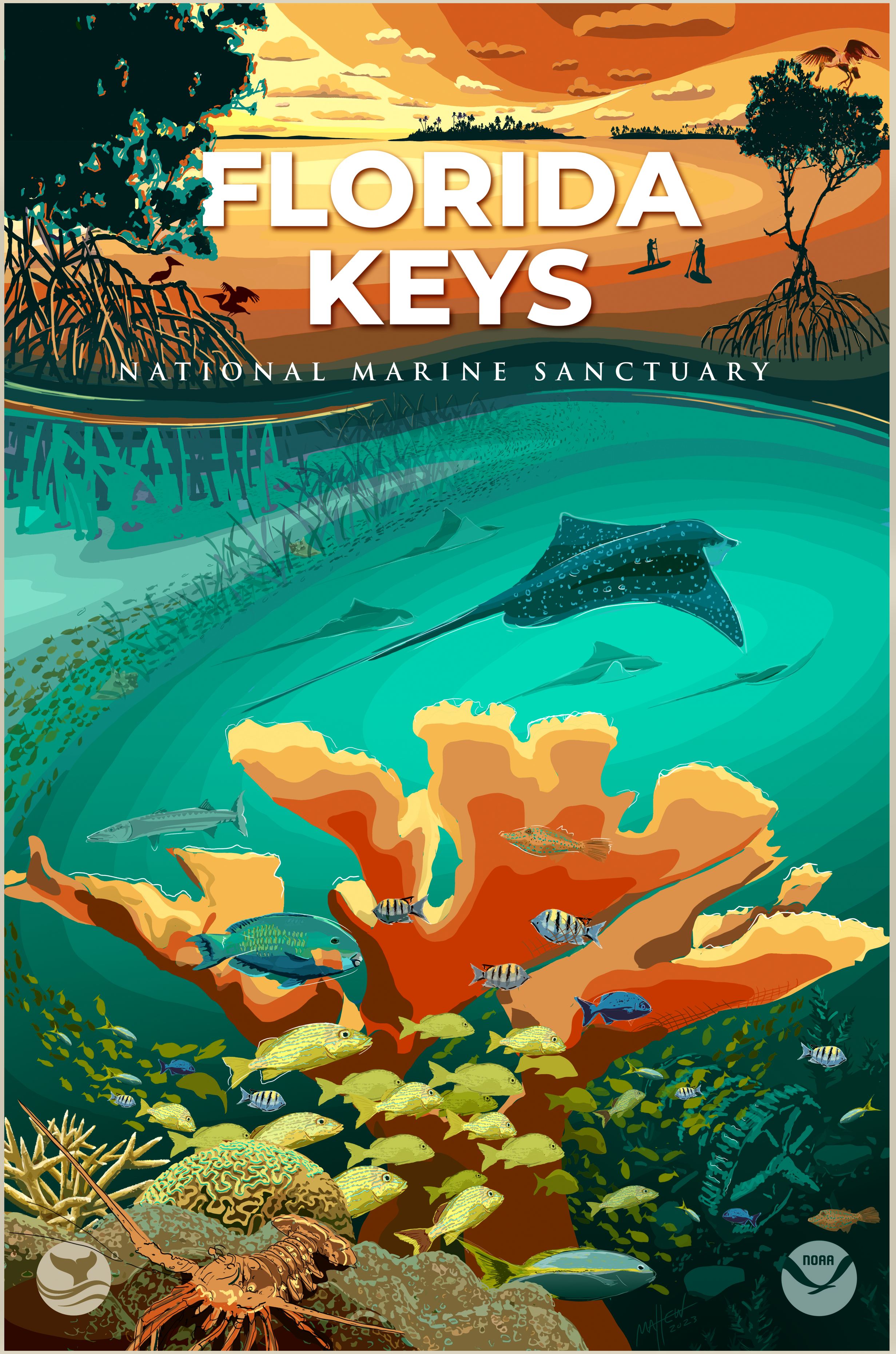
# FLORIDA KEYS

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY



# Florida Keys

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects a coral reef ecosystem that is home to one of North America's most diverse communities of underwater plants and animals. Nearly 6,000 marine species inhabit the coral reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, and other habitats of the Florida Keys. The sanctuary protects these resources that support the region's tourism and fishing based economy. The ecosystem attracts tourists who enjoy diving, boating, and other forms of ocean recreation, and sustains valuable commercial and recreational fisheries. The sanctuary also helps preserve the nation's maritime history by protecting shipwrecks and other irreplaceable heritage resources.

## About the Artwork

Coastal mangroves and seagrasses are nurseries for many species of fish, invertebrates, and birds that inhabit Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. These calm, shallow waters are ideal for paddle sports, snorkeling, and fishing. The offshore coral reef features stony and soft corals, sponges, and other invertebrates, which create habitat for spiny lobster, urchins, and many species of reef fish, including predatory fish like sharks, rays, barracuda, and snapper. Divers and snorkelers may encounter historic shipwrecks and artifacts that tell the story of our past.

**DIVING & SNORKELING**
Florida Keys is the dive capital of the world. Before you jump in, call a Blue Star dive operator to ensure a great adventure.

**CARIBBEAN SPINY LOBSTER** (*Panulirus argus*)
Spiny lobsters are closely related to crabs, shrimp, and other 10-legged crustaceans, with a tail that enables them to escape quickly by swimming backwards.

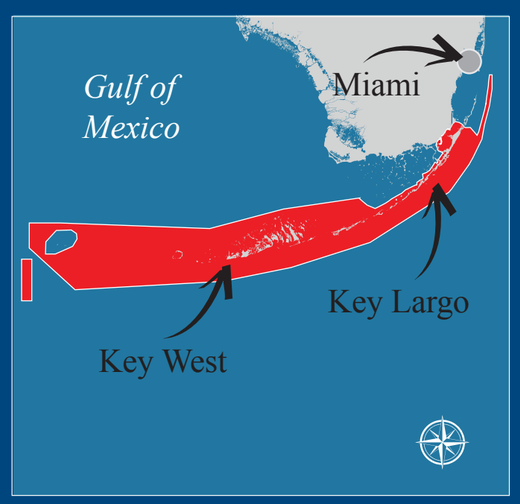
**SHIPWRECK TRAIL**
Interspersed within the natural environment, this trail of diveable historic shipwrecks represents three key periods of maritime history.

**TARPON** (*Megalops atlanticus*)
Every spring, thousands of tarpon migrate through our waters from both the Atlantic and Gulf sides, attracting anglers from around the world. Book with a Blue Star fishing guide to support operators dedicated to responsible fishing practices.

**ELKHORN CORAL** (*Acropora palmata*)
A key species of North America's only coral barrier reef, this coral is home to many commercially important fish families.

**GREAT WHITE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*)
A white-colored morph of the great blue heron, it is found almost exclusively, yet abundantly, in the Keys.

## Location




## Quick Facts

**LOCATION**
The water surrounding the archipelago formed by the Florida Keys

**PROTECTED AREA**
3,801 square miles

**DESIGNATION**
December 1975: Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary; January 1981: Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary; November 1990: Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

**HABITATS**
- Coral reefs
- Hardbottom
- Mangrove-fringed shorelines & islands
- Sand flats
- Seagrass meadows

**KEY SPECIES**
- Boulder corals (brain and star)
- Eagle ray
- Elkhorn and staghorn corals
- Green sea turtle
- Loggerhead sponge
- Nurse shark
- Spiny lobster
- Tarpon
- White heron
- Yellowtail snapper

Photos: (lighthouse) Jack Fishman; (snorkeling) Matt McIntosh/NOAA; (tarpon) Will Benson; (lobster) Julie Bedford/NOAA; (elkhorn coral) Nick Zachar/NOAA; (shipwreck trail) Tane Casserley/NOAA; (great white heron) Kristie Killam; (background photo of coral restoration): XL Catlin Seaview Survey

**BELOW**
Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary has been at the forefront of coral restoration, including the introduction of in-water nurseries where corals are grown on "trees" and then outplanted at key locations on the reef. An unprecedented project called *Mission: Iconic Reefs* features restoration partners who raise corals with genetic diversity, seeking to find resilient strains that withstand the increasing effects of ocean acidification and climate change.

## America's Underwater Treasures

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuary System, visit: sanctuaries.noaa.gov

Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

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