



Organizational Overview

The Reef Institute (TRI) was founded in 2016 as “Healthy Aquatics Marine Institute of Florida” with a goal of improving ocean health while teaching students to care about their environment. In 2018, with the reality of Florida’s coral reefs in severe decline, Healthy Aquatics changed its name and identity to

“The Reef Institute.” It was a natural change as the decision had already been made to move the organization towards **a mission of coral conservation through education, research and restoration. Our audacious vision is simple: We save the ocean.** To do this, we believe we must start with saving our coral.



While coral reefs take up a small space in the ocean, they protect the shoreline from erosion and storm surge, protect all coastlines from 97% of all wave energy, provide a habitat for 25% of marine life and help produce 70% of the world’s oxygen. Sometimes considered the third largest coral reef globally, Florida’s Coral Reefs are also a vital part of the state’s economy. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission states, "Coral reefs provide the foundation for 71,000 jobs and \$6.3 billion in sales and income in South Florida."

Unfortunately, Florida’s coral reefs are struggling to survive. Florida’s Coral Reef is currently experiencing a widespread and lethal coral disease outbreak of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, which has had a devastating effect. First observed near Virginia Key in late 2014, Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease or (SCTLD) has since spread across all of Florida’s coral reefs. Since that time SCTLD has been confirmed in the Caribbean across 20 different nations as it continues to spread. This disease effects more than 30 different species of stony corals especially brain, pillar, star and starlet corals. What makes it so devastating is it can take merely weeks for an ancient coral colony to be lost forever.

Prior to the discovery of SCTLD Florida’s Coral Reefs were already struggling due to rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and human impact. To date since the disease was discovered in 2014 it is estimated that **less than 2% of Florida’s reef building corals remain.**



Located in the Northwood District of West Palm Beach, the Reef Institute (TRI) believes they must take a multifaceted approach of treating education, research and restoration equally. Currently, TRI stands as the singular coral conservation non-profit with a focus on Palm Beach County first, and the Caribbean beyond.

A Few of Our Accomplishments:

Florida Coral Rescue & Propagation Project:

- One of only 26 land-based holding facilities in the Florida Coral Rescue & Propagation Project.
- One of first facilities to hold corals long term intentionally collected in the “endemic” or zone where SCTLTD is present.
- One of only a handful of organizations that is not an aquarium, museum, zoo or university in the program.
- Holding rarest corals in program: Golfball (*Favia fragum*) and Pillar (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*).
- Rearing juvenile corals spawned in the lab at the Reef Institute, Florida Aquarium and MOTE Marine Labs that will be used in restoration efforts.



Lake Worth Lagoon, Florida

- 3 years and counting monitoring coral and creating surveys of reef ecology at Peanut Island
- Watching coral reproduction at Peanut Island.
- Expanded citizen science project at Peanut Island
- Data showed that there are 19 different species of stony corals in lagoon area of Peanut Island.

Marine Living Structures Initiative:

Deployed first pilots of reef modules from the Marine Living Structures Initiative:

- Made of 70% recycled material.
- Designed for coral recruitment and out-planting as well as other animals living on a natural reef.
- Modular units allow for customized building to help with wave attenuation, and reef restoration.
- Single wave tile showed proof of coral larval recruitment as well as other invertebrates.
- Deployment of different sized units in Florida and the Bahamas.



Caribbean Work:

- Working with No Shoes Reef, and Paradise Cove in Freeport, Bahamas for education and deployment of wave tiles.
- Gene banking aquarium buildout with the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund in Providenciales, Turks and Caicos

Education Efforts Past and Present:

- 10,000 people reached annually through free education days at, outreach tables, interactive experiences, partner days, pop up education and Peanut Island!
- Partnered with Manatee Lagoon for the “Marine Science,” virtual series. This 10-part virtual series reached 100’s of 5th grade students all over the world. Including classes in the country of Myanmar. This continues online as a pre-recorded program.



- Taught over 1,500 students K-9th grade in weekly and monthly marine science classes. These classes supplement science classes helping to grow better stewards of the ocean, while reinforcing science standards.
- Held “Marine Ecology Intensives” alongside the Ritz Carlton in Amelia Island, and now at the Ritz Carlton in Naples.
- Growing community partnerships with Carve Coffee, Skunkworks Brewery, Candid Coffee, Coastal Karma Brewing, Sarah LaPierre Thick Paint, Happy Sea, and so many more to expand awareness of coral conservation.



- Taught small group coral reef camps, reef snorkeling, and one day beach ecology education to hundreds of students to teach coral and fish identification and coral reef ecology.
- Offer “Coral Reef Ecology” certifications to high school and college students.
- Official partnerships with Palm Beach Atlantic University, and Palm Beach State University to provide students with credited internships and research projects.
- Provide internships to local high school, undergraduate and graduate students year round from across the globe.
- Partner with the Cox Science Center and Aquarium in current and future aquarium projects focused on coral and coral education.
- Working in Freeport, Bahamas and Providenciales, Turks & Caicos. to assist with education of local stakeholders
- Provided interviews for the news and for an upcoming documentary on Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease and the state of coral in the Caribbean called, “With and Without.”

How Can You Help?

What Is Your Passion Point?

The Reef Institute has many programs, and efforts that seek to save the ocean. We do that through coral conservation through education, research and restoration. We know that each person brings a unique set of talents, experience and excitement to a relationship with the Reef Institute. Be creative! **How can our passions align to reach a larger goal? Alone we make a difference. Together we can make a change.**

Spread The Word!

We need Reef Institute Fans!



Get Involved!

Is there a program or project at the Reef Institute that stands out to you? We would love for you to back a specific initiative through time, effort or funding.

Our Top Programs Are:

- Education
- Peanut Island Reef Project
- Florida Coral Rescue & Propagation Project
- Marine Living Structures Initiative (Wave Tiles)
- Caribbean Efforts

Saving Coral Is Saving Your Coast!

Please reach out to learn what you can do to get involved!

Check out more: reefinstitute.org

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