

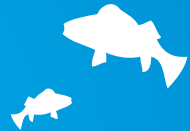


# BlueRider

OCEAN AWARENESS  
AND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

[www.PWIA.org/BlueRider/Default.aspx](http://www.PWIA.org/BlueRider/Default.aspx)

**Toolkit for Enhancing Visitors'  
Experiences in the Florida Keys  
Aboard Personal Watercraft**





## Important Links

- » Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary – <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>
- » Dolphin SMART (marine mammal viewing guidelines) – [www.dolphinSMART.org](http://www.dolphinSMART.org)
- » Personal Watercraft Industry Association – [www.pwia.org](http://www.pwia.org)
- » NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries – <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/>
- » National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) – <http://www.noaa.gov/>
- » Seagrass information – [www.flseagrass.org](http://www.flseagrass.org)

# Dear Friend:

Your personal watercraft rental business has an extraordinary impact on the vacations of thousands of visitors to the Florida Keys each year. As you know, the Florida Keys are an amazing American treasure, and visitors who have an opportunity to enjoy their time on the water while they are here are likely to return and hopefully bring friends and family.

We greatly appreciate your participation in the [Blue Rider Ocean Awareness and Stewardship Program](#). The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the Personal Watercraft Industry Association (PWIA) are continuing their partnership to ensure that people who rent PWCs in the Florida Keys understand, embrace, and practice good ocean environmental stewardship when riding in the National Marine Sanctuary.

As a [Blue Rider](#) participating livery, we have enclosed a set of “Best Practices” that we encourage you to incorporate into your customer orientation. These “Best Practices” can help ensure that your customers leave not only enthused about their PWC excursion, but also more appreciative of the sensitive marine habitat that they toured.

Additionally, [www.PWIA.org/BlueRider/default.aspx](http://www.PWIA.org/BlueRider/default.aspx) will continue to serve as an outlet for potential customers to identify your business and its participation in the [Blue Rider Program](#).

We hope the [Blue Rider](#) information will contribute to the overall PWC experience and tour for your customers, so that they will recommend the trip to their friends and will plan another tour for their next vacation.

Please do not hesitate to give us a call with any questions or suggestions, and once again, we appreciate your participation in the [Blue Rider Program](#).

Sincerely,



Sean Morton  
Superintendent,  
Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary



David Dickerson  
Executive Director,  
Personal Watercraft Industry Association

## Tips for PWC Use in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

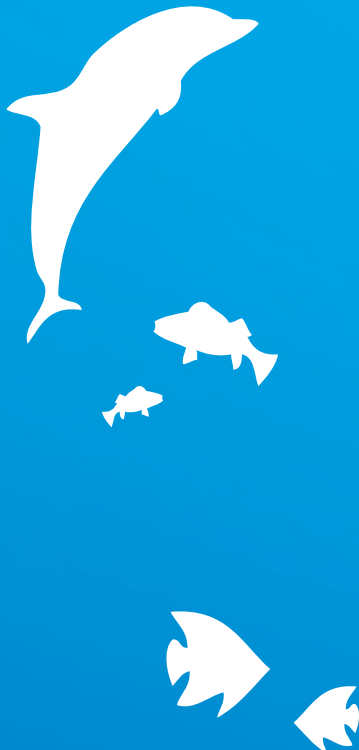


### **Minimize your fleet's environmental footprint whenever possible.**

- » Refuel PWC out of the water or on a dry dock.
- » Use a "Fueling Doughnut" when refueling on or near the water.
- » Recycle engine oil.
- » Maintain your PWC so that it operates as efficiently as possible.

### **Do NOT harass, pursue, touch, feed or disturb wild dolphins, manatees or sea turtles.**

- » Observe wild dolphins, manatees and sea turtles from safe distances of at least 50 yards. If approached by a marine mammal or sea turtle, put your watercraft's engine in neutral or cut the engine, and allow the animal to pass.
- » Use binoculars or telephoto lenses for a better view of the animals.
- » Limit overall viewing time to no more than 30 minutes.
- » Avoid circling or entrapping marine mammals between multiple watercraft, or watercraft and the shore.
- » Avoid abrupt movements or loud noises around dolphins and manatees.
- » Avoid separating dolphin pods, especially mother/calf pairs.
- » Move away cautiously if you observe behaviors that indicate the animal is stressed.
- » Avoid touching or swimming with wild marine mammals, even if they approach you.







**Careless and reckless boating behavior that endangers the safety of swimmers and boaters is not tolerated regardless of the vessel. Practice good seamanship and safe boating at all times.**

- » Before leaving shore, check weather conditions. Strong winds and rough seas can result in poor visibility and less-than-optimal boating conditions.
- » Avoid wildlife disturbance; stay 100 yards or more offshore; keep speed, noise and wakes to a minimum near mangroves.
- » Slow to idle speed within 100 yards of a residential shoreline. Also, slow down to idle speed within 100 yards of a dive flag (red flag with a white stripe). Maintain safe distances from fishermen.
- » Dumping trash at sea is illegal; plastic bags and other debris can injure or kill marine animals. Bring your trash back to shore and recycle it.
- » Do not touch the coral. Remember even the lightest touch with hands or equipment can damage sensitive coral polyps.
- » Shallow reef areas and seagrass beds will appear brown. Please avoid these areas. If you run aground, immediately turn off the engine. Do not try to motor off; wait until high tide to remove the vessel and call for assistance when necessary.
- » Use reef mooring buoys or anchor in sandy areas away from coral and seagrasses so that anchor, chain, and line do not contact or damage coral or seagrasses.





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## Information on the Sanctuary to Share with

Few marine environments compare to the Florida Keys in terms of natural beauty and resources. North America's only coral barrier reef and the third-longest barrier reef in the world lies about six miles seaward of the Florida Keys, a 220-mile-long string of islands extending south and west of the Florida mainland. These coral reefs are intimately linked to a marine ecosystem that supports one of the most unique and diverse assemblages of plants and animals in North America.

The 2,900 square nautical miles of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary includes the productive waters of Florida Bay, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean. The proximity of coral reefs to centuries-old shipping routes has resulted in a high concentration of shipwrecks and an abundance of historical artifacts.

### **Establishing the Sanctuary**

In response to a growing awareness of the intrinsic environmental and cultural value of our coastal waters, Congress created the National Marine Sanctuary Program in 1972. The National Marine Sanctuaries Act authorizes the secretary of commerce to designate specific areas as national marine sanctuaries to promote comprehensive management of their special ecological, historical, recreational, and aesthetic resources.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is responsible for management of the nation's 13 national marine sanctuaries and one marine national monument. In recognition of the significance of the coral reef ecosystem, the Florida Keys

National Marine Sanctuary was created in 1990 by Congress, extending 2,900 square nautical miles on both sides of the Florida Keys.

### **The Local Ecosystem**

North America's only living coral barrier reef and the third-longest barrier reef in the world (following Australia and Belize) lies about six miles seaward of the Florida Keys, making it a unique national treasure of international acclaim. Coral reefs contain a greater diversity of species than any other marine environment. They are part of a fragile interdependent ecosystem that includes mangroves and seagrasses that grow both on the ocean and bay side of the Florida Keys.

» **Coral Reefs** – Corals are delicate structures composed of hundreds of thousands of tiny slow-growing animals called polyps. Each one secretes a calcium carbonate skeleton for protection. Colonies of these coral polyps can form massive reef formations. It can take years for some corals to grow one inch. The reef is constantly growing new colonies on top of the skeletons of older corals.

Coral, for all its sturdy appearance, is fragile and vulnerable. The most important thing to know about coral reefs is that they are living creatures that require sunlight to grow and survive. When coral colonies along a reef are damaged by humans, usually from boating accidents, the entire reef can suffer and potentially die over time. The rule about coral reefs is simple—enjoy their beauty and the tropical fish that live in and around them, but don't touch or harm the reef in any way.

# your Customers

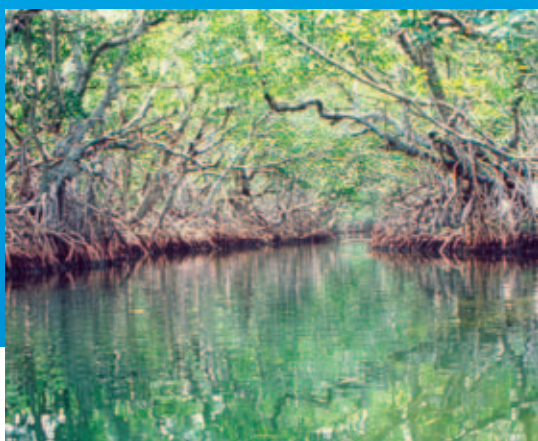
» **Seagrass Beds** – Seagrasses are flowering plants that live underwater. Florida's estimated 2.7 million acres of seagrass meadows are important natural resources that perform many significant functions, including:

- Maintaining water clarity by trapping fine sediments and other particles in their blades;
- Stabilizing the bottom with their roots in much the same way as land grasses retard soil erosion;
- Providing habitat for many fish and invertebrates;
- Providing food for manatees, sea turtles, and other marine creatures;
- Providing a nursery area for much of Florida's recreationally and commercially important marine life;
- Providing excellent protection for young marine animals from larger open-water predators.



» **Mangroves** – Mangroves are one of Florida's true natives. They thrive in salty environments because they are able to obtain fresh water from salt water. Florida's estimated 496,000 acres of mangrove forests contribute to the overall health of the state's southern coastal zone. Mangroves trap and cycle various organic materials, chemical elements, and important nutrients throughout the larger ecosystem. Mangrove roots act not only as physical traps for sediments and other matter, but provide attachment surfaces for various marine organisms. Many of these attached organisms filter water through their bodies and, in turn, trap and cycle nutrients.

The relationship between mangroves and their associated marine life cannot be overemphasized. Mangroves provide protected nursery areas for fishes and other marine life. They also provide food for a multitude of marine species such as snook, snapper, tarpon, jack, sheepshead, red drum, oyster, and shrimp. Florida's important recreational and commercial fisheries would decline without healthy mangrove forests to support them.





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# Florida Keys: PWC Access

## Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges

### Key West and Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuges

PWCs are prohibited in the Key West and Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). The state waters within Great White Heron NWR & Key West NWR are included in the PWC exclusion boundary.

**Map:** *The red line is the boundary for the PWC exclusion zone. However, the hatched line is the refuge boundary for Great White Heron.*

### National Key Deer Refuge

National Key Deer Refuge overlays Great White Heron NWR through much of its boundary. However, the waters of National Key Deer Refuge are not included, except where they match the PWC exclusion zone established by Great White Heron NWR.

### Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge

All lands and waters within Crocodile Lake NWR are closed to public uses, therefore the area within the boundary is a PWC exclusion area.

- » Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge – [www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/greatwhiteheron/](http://www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/greatwhiteheron/)
- » Key West National Wildlife Refuge – [www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/keywest/](http://www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/keywest/)
- » National Key Deer Refuge – [www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/](http://www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/)
- » Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge – [www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/crocodilelake/](http://www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/crocodilelake/)

## National Parks

**Everglades National Park**

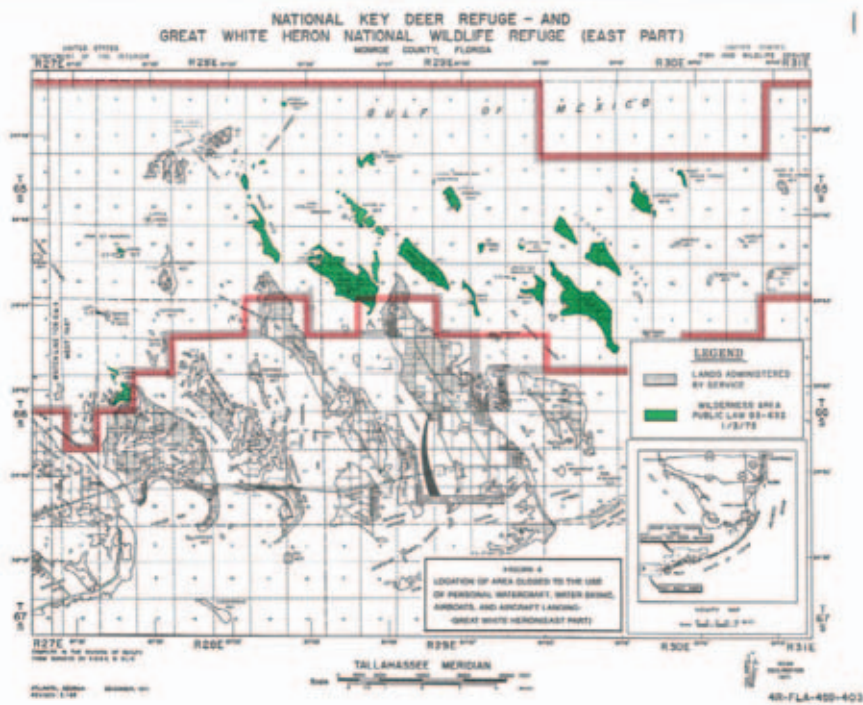
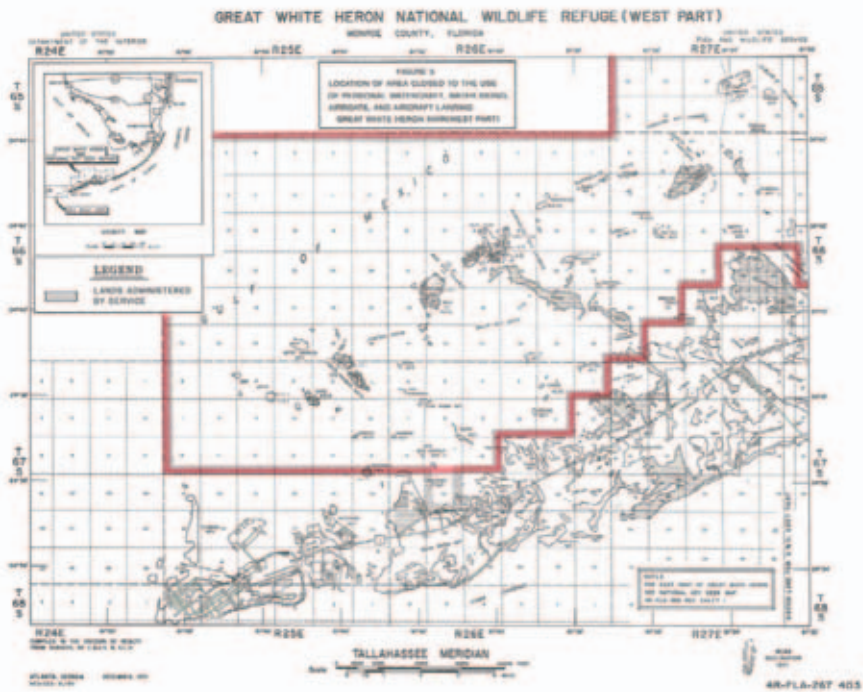
**Biscayne National Park**

**Dry Tortugas National Park**

The operation of “personal watercraft” also known as “wet bikes<sup>®</sup>”, “jet skis<sup>®</sup>”, and other trade names, is prohibited.

- » Everglades National Park – [www.nps.gov/ever](http://www.nps.gov/ever)
- » Biscayne National Park – [www.nps.gov/bisc](http://www.nps.gov/bisc)
- » Dry Tortugas National Park – [www.nps.gov/drto](http://www.nps.gov/drto)







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This project has been made possible with the support of the  
***National Marine Sanctuary Foundation***

## Sanctuary Resources

**Display Brochures and Maps** – If you would like to display brochures and other educational materials offered by the sanctuary and other marine resource management agencies, please contact a sanctuary office.

## Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

**Upper Keys:** 305-852-7717 ext. 39

**Lower Keys:** 305-292-0311 ext. 230

## Personal Watercraft Industry Association

202-737-9772 or [info@pwia.org](mailto:info@pwia.org)



Personal Watercraft Industry  
Association

[www.pwia.org](http://www.pwia.org)



NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES  
FLORIDA KEYS

[www.floridakeys.noaa.gov](http://www.floridakeys.noaa.gov)



[www.NMSFocean.org](http://www.NMSFocean.org)