

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 28, 2008  
1:44 PM

**CONTACT: NRDC**

Kate Slusark, 212/727-4592

## **New Report: Preparing for Sea Changes in Florida**

**Environmental Groups Issue Coastal, Marine System Global Warming Survival Guide**

NEW YORK - May 28 - Florida should immediately take a series of key steps to address the already occurring, and looming, effects of global warming on its beaches and marine life, according to a report issued today by a group of nationally and internationally recognized environmental organizations. The full report, "Preparing for a Sea Change in Florida: A Strategy to Cope with the Impacts of Global Warming on the State's Coastal and Marine Systems," is available at: <http://www.flcoastalandocean.org/PreparingforaSeaChange>.

The report was issued by the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition, which is a group of scientists and experts active in global warming and ocean issues in Florida and around the globe. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is a member, along with the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, Environmental Defense Fund, Gulf Restoration Network, National Wildlife Federation, Ocean Conservancy, Reef Relief and The Surfrider Foundation.

"We want our children and our grandchildren to be able to enjoy what we love about the ocean – from fishing trips to beach vacations and seafood dinners," said Sarah Chasis, NRDC's Ocean Initiative Director. "This report is a blueprint for protecting our oceans from global warming. The longer we wait the more expensive and difficult it is going to be to fix later."

Florida is in a unique position to set an example for the rest of the nation and world by following the recommendations set forth in the report, which included specific steps state and federal agencies can take to protect Florida's coastal and marine ecosystems against stresses associated with global warming. The first and most important step, of course, is to curb emissions, but even if we do that we will need to address the impacts that are predicted to occur. We can do this by:

- **Restoring coastal and marine ecosystems** so they can better cope with the stress of climate change and ocean acidification.
- **Discouraging development in vulnerable areas to prepare for rising sea levels**, as well as restoring and protecting natural buffers.
- **Preparing for extreme weather events** by protecting and restoring shoreline vegetation and wetlands, upgrading stormwater management, and increasing water-use efficiency through conservation and recycling treated wastewater for irrigation and industrial use.

The future largely depends on how quickly and comprehensively state and federal officials move to protect Florida against the effects of global warming, and ensure the recovery of its beaches, ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Florida generates tens of billions of dollars each year from tourism and recreation.

Florida has heated up by about two degrees Fahrenheit since the 1960s. Average temperatures will keep rising in the coming decades, with lows in winter increasing three to 10 degrees, and highs in summer increasing three to seven degrees. But global warming does not just mean hotter weather, and the effects are already upon us.

"Warmer ocean waters kill coral and harm fish populations," said Patty Glick, the report's primary author and Senior Global Warming Specialist with the National Wildlife Federation. "Higher acidity

inhibits corals and other marine animals from forming their protective skeletons. Rising sea levels erode beaches, causing saltwater intrusion into fresh water supplies, and killing coastal marshes. Extreme weather events, including floods, droughts, and tropical storms, lead to more polluted runoff into estuaries, and damage to coastal habitats and property."

"Florida can and must be a leader not only in curbing the build up of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but also in implementing smart, common-sense coastal and ocean policies that will help preserve the state's natural coastal and ocean heritage," biologist Dr. Sylvia A. Earle, a former chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, observes in the preface to the report. "This guide, put together with careful thought by an impressive coalition of conservation organizations, lays out a roadmap for state policymakers to follow in preserving [the state's] heritage. The pathway is clear; what is needed now is action."

"We have a moral obligation to change our relationship with the planet," said David White, Regional Director of Ocean Conservancy. "Adaptation to climate change will require significant investments in research, education, industry and government, but is within our capacity as a global society."

"Protecting places like Florida's Nature Coast from sea level rise with creative adaptation techniques and strategic land acquisition offers us an opportunity to assure future generations that we had the grace and wisdom to respond to the crisis before us," said Gulf Restoration Network Florida Director Joe Murphy.

"The thin ribbon of sand that surrounds the Florida peninsula is the most important sea turtle nesting habitat in the United States," said Gary Appelson, Sea Turtle Survival League Advocacy Coordinator, at the Caribbean Conservation Corporation.

"During our lifetime, acidification and warming sea temperatures could eliminate coral reefs in Florida as we know them," said Paul G. Johnson, president of Reef Relief.

"We can turn the tide by implementing common sense solutions to reverse these effects and insure that Florida's future includes healthy coral reefs, sustainable beaches, and abundant fisheries," Surfrider Foundation Regional Manager Ericka D'Avanzo,

By assembling the nation's first comprehensive set of guidelines for dealing with the demonstrated effects of climate change on a coastal state, the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition has accomplished a first, Environmental Defense Fund Climate Director Gerald Karnas said. "This is a real prescription for surviving the onrushing years of global warming. The whole world is going to be watching what is done here. This is the frontline in the war on global warming," said Karnas.

*The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing.*

*The Coalition is a collaborative effort of conservation organizations which have joined forces to conserve, protect and restore Florida's coastal and marine environments, including restoring marine ecosystems and ensuring robust fisheries. Our steering committee organizations represent millions of citizens across the country and over 200,000 members, businesses and activists in Florida deeply concerned for the unique marine resources of the State.*

###