



**NEWS RELEASE :**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Reef Environmental Education Foundation**  
**An Active Organization of Divers Committed to the Preservation of the Marine Environment**

The Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) was founded in 1990, out of growing concern about the health of the marine environment, and the desire to provide the SCUBA diving community a way to contribute to the understanding and protection of marine populations. REEF achieves this goal primarily through its volunteer fish monitoring program, the REEF Fish Survey Project. REEF maintains a no-fee membership, and by the end of 2000 the organization had over 18,000 members. REEF members include divers and non-divers alike, all with an interest in the marine environment.

The Fish Survey Project allows volunteer SCUBA divers and snorkelers to collect and report information on marine fish populations. The data are collected using a fun and easy standardized method, called the Roving Diver Technique. The only materials needed are an underwater slate and pencil, a scantron form available at no charge from REEF, and a good reference book. Data are returned to REEF and are housed in a publicly-accessible database on REEF's Website. These data are used by a variety of resource agencies and researchers.

The Fish Survey Project is now in place along both coasts of North and Central America, the Bahamas and Caribbean, the Galapagos Islands, and Hawaii. The database is quickly growing and currently contains over 30,000 surveys. While the basis of the program is marine fish, two new components were recently added. Sea turtle sightings are now included in all regions and a Pacific Northwest Invertebrate program was created as a companion to the region's fish program. The invertebrate program monitors 44 indicator species in coastal waters of Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, and was developed in partnership with British Columbia-based Living Oceans Society.

Through partnerships with federal and state agencies, scientists, conservation organizations, and private institutions, the Fish Survey Project has been incorporated into existing monitoring programs. These collaborations have included those with management agencies such as NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System and the State of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and other non-profit organizations. As the Project has grown, several scientific papers and products have been produced using the roving diver survey method and the REEF database. In addition, REEF's data and educational materials have been used in a variety of outreach programs and educational curricula.

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The Great Annual Fish Count (GAFC) is an annual REEF event that serves to focus fish survey effort and provide an introduction to volunteer fish surveying to divers and snorkelers. Leading up to the event, which takes place each July, local partners organize free fish ID seminars. The NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program provides support for the GAFC, and eight of the Nation's Sanctuaries host GAFC activities.

In addition to providing valuable information to scientists and marine park staff, participation in REEF's survey program enhances a diver's ability to discern details about the marine environment. By learning identification techniques and recording observations, REEF surveyors become keen observers and naturalists. In addition, the sense of stewardship that arises from involvement in citizen science programs such as REEF raises the public's awareness of and involvement in marine resource issues. Ultimately, REEF's efforts empower volunteers to take an active role in support of effective marine resource management.

REEF is a non-profit organization with 501 (c)(3) status.

For more information or to view data, visit [www.reef.org](http://www.reef.org).

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## **What People Say About REEF and the Great Annual Fish Count**

“Volunteer divers and snorkelers participating in the Great Annual Fish Count provide National Marine Sanctuary managers with valuable data on fish populations, which can help lead to more effective protection. Here in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, volunteers play an integral role in the Sanctuary’s monitoring program by collecting data on fish populations in no-take areas and fished sites.” - Billy Causey, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent

“Participation in REEF’s survey program enhances a diver’s ability to discern details about the marine environment. For divers that have no training as naturalists, areas begin to blend together and the attitude that “it’s just another coral reef” or “one more kelp forest” prevails. The excitement of finding a rare fish can only be appreciated if one knows it’s rare. By learning identification techniques and recording their fish observations, REEF surveyors become keen observers, true naturalists”- Dr. Christy Pattengill-Semmens, REEF Scientific Coordinator

“While the July count is the marquee event of REEF’s mission, most people do not realize that the count continues year-round. People say they have heard about it but don’t know a lot about it. A lot of times they’re not sure how to get involved. They think it lasts a week or two and then it’s over.” - Julie Dutcher, 2001 GAFC Coordinator

“Fishwatching is a passionate hobby within a hobby; it gives purpose to a dive, anyone can take it up and have a good time.” – Paul Humann, Marine Life Photographer and Co-Founder of REEF

“We realize that we do not have the resources to conduct all the monitoring needed in the Sanctuary program, and we rely on REEF volunteers to fill in some of the gaps.” - Dr. Steve Gittings, NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program Science Coordinator

"In the development of the methods and techniques used for REEF fish surveys, REEF and its founders have exhibited enormous vision by pioneering in the ocean the kind of conservation ethic that terrestrial naturalists have demonstrated for over a century." Billy Causey, Superintendent Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

## REEF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION

### *Our Mission*

To educate, enlist and enable divers and non-divers alike to become active stewards in the conservation of coral reefs and other marine habitats.

### *Our Vision*

The oceans have always inspired a sense of awe and wonder. Of even greater importance, the very health and well-being of our water planet depend on the continued health and well-being of the oceans. And yet, the oceans remain one of the last natural histories to be extensively explored. We do know that marine habitats provide some of the world's most diverse ecosystems. Coral reefs support communities comprising many tens of thousands of species; they are unique, valuable, and irreplaceable places of great aesthetic, environmental and commercial value. They are also under increasing threats from human impacts that permanently destroy habitat and deplete resources.

Recreational divers and snorkelers are in a unique position to observe, record and publicize the effects of these threats. Armed with knowledge and the opportunity to become involved, these divers can make significant and ongoing contributions to the conservation of marine habitats.

### *Our Goals*

- To educate and enlist a growing corps of volunteer divers and snorkelers to conduct surveys of marine life.
- To provide the marine science, resource management, and conservation communities with a reliable, geographically broad, and continuing source of marine biodiversity data for practical application in habitat conservation and resource management.
- To encourage the support and implementation of effective marine conservation strategies developed through government, private or public frameworks.
- To educate divers and the general public about threats confronting the marine environment and to encourage them to become active stewards in ocean conservation.
- To promote the diving community as an active partner in the long-term conservation of coral reefs and other marine habitats.
- To work cooperatively with other like-minded people and organizations to effectively and efficiently achieve these goals.

## REEF Board, Staff and Advisors

### REEF Board of Trustees

**Paul Humann**, President - Paul is a world renowned underwater photographer, author and naturalist. His three volume marine life identification series has introduced thousands of divers and snorkelers to the underwater world. Paul is a co-founder of REEF.

**Ned DeLoach**, Vice President -Ned is a co-founder of REEF. His photography and writing are known to divers and snorkelers everywhere. His recent book *Reef Fish Behavior* is a landmark compilation of the ecology and behavior of Caribbean fish.

**Jim Dalle Pазze**, Treasurer - Jim is a tax attorney practicing in Delaware with his own firm. He has worked *pro bono* for REEF since its inception, incorporating the organization in 1990 and gaining its non-profit 501 c (3) status. His diving passions have lead him around the world over the last 20 years.

**Dr. Gina Green** - Gina is the Director of the Caribbean and Latin American division of The Nature Conservancy. She joined the REEF board in January of 1998. Her work has focused on specific sites of interest, both terrestrial and marine, in key conservation regions throughout the Caribbean.

**David Taylor** – David is the Editor of Rodale’s Scuba Diving Magazine and joined the REEF Board in 2000. His viewpoints, environmental concerns and actions led to his being honored as recipient of the dive industry’s Environmental Award in 2000.

**Dr. Carol Lorenz** – Carol is principal of the consulting firm Carol Lorenz and Associates and served on REEF’s Advisory Board from 1999-2001. She acts as the primary liaison between the Advisory Board, the REEF Staff and the Board of Trustees. Carol is an active surveying member of REEF and member of the Advanced Assessment Team.

**Dennis Liberson** – Dennis is the Senior Vice President of Human Resources of Capitol One Financial Corporation. As an avid diver and underwater photographer, he has sought out ways to make a meaningful contribution to the conservation of the marine environment.

### Liaison to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

**Dr. Jim Bohnsack** - Jim is a senior fisheries biologist with the National Marine Fisheries Service, based in Miami, Florida. He is recognized around the world for his work in advocating the benefits of marine protected areas. Jim served on REEF’s Board of Trustees since its inception and in 2002 was assigned to serve as REEF’s Liaison to NOAA. His scientific assistance and advice has been essential in developing REEF’s monitoring protocols and data application.

## REEF Staff

**Laddie Akins, Executive Director** - Laddie's background is in the dive industry as a Scuba instructor and Coast Guard licensed Captain. Laddie started working as a volunteer with REEF during its formative stages and became REEF's first Executive Director in 1993.

**Dr. Christy Pattengill Semmens, Scientific Coordinator** - Christy began her work with REEF as an intern with The Nature Conservancy in 1993. She helped develop the fish survey program during her internship then implemented the program in the Gulf of Mexico during her graduate work at Texas A&M. Christy received her Ph.D. in Reef Fish Ecology in 1998 and joined REEF as our Scientific Coordinator later that year. She has published numerous papers using REEF data and continues to work with new ideas to utilize the survey information. She lives in Seattle with her husband Brice who is also a REEF Volunteer and is conducting his graduate work at the University of Washington.

**Leslie Whaylen, Field Operations Coordinator** - Leslie began working with REEF as a volunteer in 1995 during fish assessments in the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. She graduated from Texas A&M in 1992 with a degree in Marine Biology and worked for the Texas Natural Resource and Conservation Commission for 6 years before joining REEF. Leslie's responsibilities include data management, field surveys, assessment contracts and the REEFNotes newsletter.

**Alex Score, Education and Outreach Coordinator** - Alex joined the REEF staff in July of 2001 after relocating to Key Largo from Savannah, Georgia, where she worked for NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Alex has a B.S. degree in Marine Biology from Florida Institute of Technology and a M.S. degree in Biology from Georgia Southern University. Her duties at REEF include coordinating the GAFC, developing education materials and school programs, managing REEF's Field Station program, working with new partners, and leading the monitoring of several artificial reefs in the Florida Keys.

**Leda Cunningham, Office Manager** - Leda started her career with REEF as an intern in the Summer of 2000 and joined the staff in August of 2001. Leda earned a B.A. in Biology from Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota and hopes to one day pursue a Masters degree in international non-profit management. Leda's duties includes bookkeeping, oversee membership, orders, and inventory; and to coordinate the Marine Conservation Internship program.

## REEF Advisory Board

The members of the REEF Advisory Board are all distinguished members in their fields and contribute their expertise to the REEF board and staff.

Billy Causey, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary  
Dr. Ken Deaver, Ethnoscience  
Kalli De Meyer, Coral Reefs Park Program, Coral Reef Alliance  
Stephen Frink, Rodale's Scuba Diving/ Stephen Frink Photography  
Professor Robert Ginsburg, Univ. of Miami's Rosenstil School  
Dr. Steve Gittings, Marine Sanctuaries Division, NOAA  
Wolcott Henry, The Henry Foundation and Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation  
William Horn, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Peter Hughes, Peter Hughes Diving  
Dr. Tom Isgar, Seluera, Inc.  
Jennifer Lash, Living Oceans Society  
Ken Marks, Bytes and Pieces Computer Consulting  
Chris Ostrom, Marine Sanctuaries Division, NOAA  
Dr Emily Schmitt-Lavin, The Nature Conservancy  
Dr Edwin Steiner, Chemist, Dow Chemical, retired  
Dr Kathleen Sullivan Sealy, The University of Miami  
Anne Walton, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary  
Deena Wells, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission