

"FISH OUT OF WATER"

REEF HOSTS INAUGURAL VIRTUAL 5K SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION



Fish teams have been hugely popular with registrants and are inspired by the species seen on REEF surveys. REEF/Contributed

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Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) is inviting everyone around the world to participate in its inaugural Fish Out of Water virtual 5K.

The event will be held from Sept. 28 to Oct. 4, and participants can choose their preferred exercise (run, walk, bike, hike, etc.) to complete 5K (3.1 miles). The race can be done at their own pace in one day or over the course of the week. The goal is to include people who don't like races or running and to support ocean conservation.

"We've been looking for more ways to get our members involved around the world virtually because we still can't do in-person programs right now," said Madalyn "Moose" Mussey, REEF education and outreach program director. "We came across virtual 5Ks and decided to theme it to fish from our different regions."

The special fish represent each of REEF's 11 Volunteer Fish Survey Project regions. Participants can sign up to be part of their favorite fish's team.

"Each fish is from a different survey region, and each fish has a different race personality," Mussey said. "So, people who don't scuba or snorkel can still pick a fish they would like and relate to. I picked the powdered blue sturgeon because it's my favorite."

The non-profit wanted the event to be a fundraiser, and created an "Oceans for All Fund," which will help to bring groups who normally cannot participate or repeat programs down



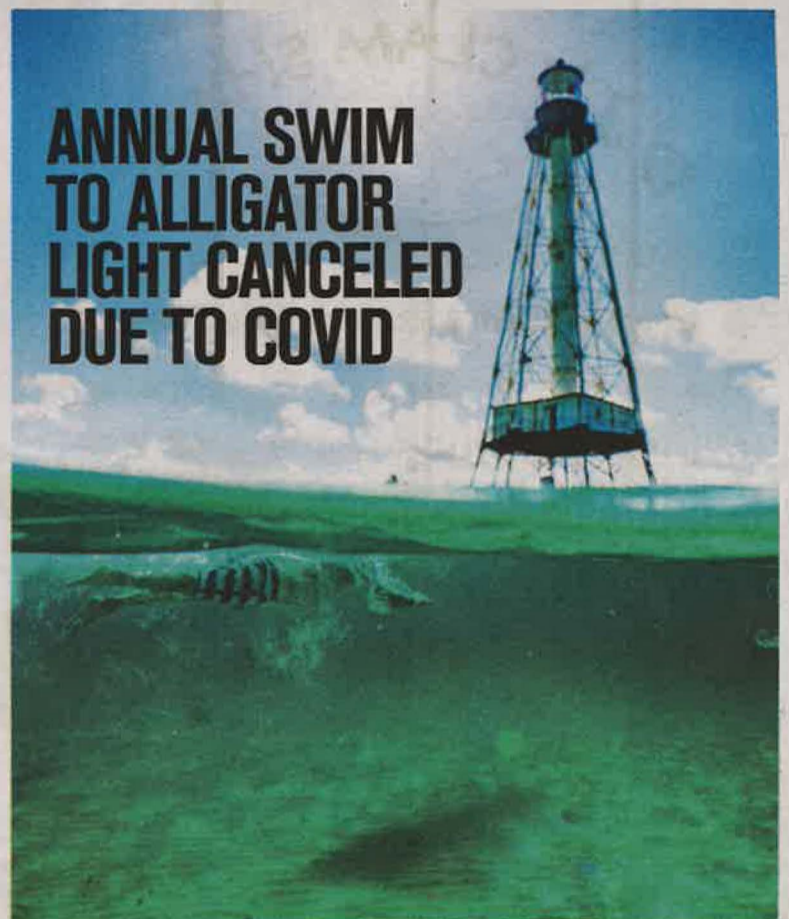
to take part in a REEF program. Registration fees will help fund the new endeavor to bring ocean accessibility to all.

"The idea is to engage members while maintaining COVID protocols, but also to help groups come out to do programs when we can do non-virtual programs again. Especially with the year we've had, not everyone can afford to come to the Keys," Mussey said.

Participants benefit themselves, others and the marine environment. Since registration began, the event has been hugely popular around the world.

"We were hoping for 100, and we already have 300 people signed up," Mussey said. "We didn't think it'd be as popular as it has been, and it's really cool to see people engaging. They're signing up for the race and then emailing us to get more involved. That's what we want."

Registration is \$35 per person and includes a limited-edition Fish Out of Water 5K shirt, race bib, finishers' medal, certificate of completion, social media kit, a Spotify playlist to run to and entry into a drawing to win a gift basket of REEF gear. Supplies are limited, and early registration is highly encouraged. More information is at www.REEF.org/5Krace.



A Swim for Alligator Lighthouse participant swims to the lighthouse. IAN WILSON/Keys Weekly

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A world-renowned race from the Islamorada shores to an iconic lighthouse won't go on as originally planned this year due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The eight-mile Swim for Alligator Lighthouse was set to take place in less than a month, Sept. 12, at Amara Cay, with hundreds of swimmers around the world participating. Guidelines from the state and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, however, limit gatherings to no more than 50 individuals; that was the deciding factor for the village to decline to issue a permit. As a result, the committee that puts on the annual swim announced its cancellation on Aug. 17.

"It crushes me," said Larry "Lighthouse" Herlth, the anchor behind the annual swim that began in 2013. "Swimmers all over the world were looking forward to it."

Herlth said safety is paramount for the annual swim out to Alligator that usually sees roughly 1,000 people, including 400 swimmers who sign up and hundreds of kayakers who support their swimmer's journey out to the lighthouse.

Rescheduling the race to a future date would have proved difficult, and Herlth said the race will resume Sept. 11, 2021.

"The way things are with bookings, it would be really hard to reschedule it with hotels and everything else," he said. "It's just better to bump it for next year."

Swimmers encounter some stunning scenes as they make their way out to the lighthouse during the swim. With sights of marine life also comes a sting or two from jellyfish. Year after year, participants return to conquer Alligator. And they'll have an extra year to prepare for the race that benefits the Friends of the Pool in Islamorada, which gives scholarships for high school students and raises awareness of the treasured, historic lighthouses on Florida's coastal waterways.

"As you can see by the response on social media, the swimmers are pretty darn understanding," he said. "They are already requesting and wanting to defer their entry fees for next year, and that assures them a spot too. It will all turn out, and I can't wait for the race in 2021."

More information is at swimalligatorlight.com.