

Dry Tortugas

Managing Agencies:

1. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Division of Marine Fisheries Management, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
2. National Park Service

Dry Tortugas National Park was established for the following purposes:

- to protect and interpret a pristine subtropical marine ecosystem, including an intact coral reef community;
- to proactively manage populations of fish and wildlife, including loggerhead and green sea turtles, sooty terns, frigate birds, numerous migratory bird species, and other sensitive species;
- to safeguard the pristine natural environment of the Dry Tortugas group of islands; to protect, stabilize, restore, and interpret Fort Jefferson, an outstanding example of 19th century masonry fortification;
- to preserve and protect submerged cultural resources;
- to provide opportunities for public enjoyment and scientific research in ways consistent with the park purpose.

Dry Tortugas National Park Chronology:

- 1990 – Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) established
- 1992 – Designated as Dry Tortugas National Park (DTNP)
- 1997 – Governor/Cabinet approved FKNMS Management Plan
 - Tortugas Ecological Reserve not included
- 1998-2001 – Collaborative planning process between NPS and Sanctuary
- 2001 - Tortugas Ecological Reserve established (151 square nautical miles)
 - FWC approved regulations for state waters (March 2001)
- 2001 – DTNP New General Management Plan approved by Secretary Gale Norton (DOI) on July 27
 - Includes 46-square mile Research Natural Area (RNA)
- 2001 to present – DTNP Plan not fully implemented due to dispute over submerged lands
- 2005 – Governor/Cabinet approved management agreement
 - (August 9th Cabinet Meeting)

Management History:

Established as Fort Jefferson National Monument in 1935, Congress designated the Dry Tortugas as a national park in 1992. DTNP is managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The 2,800-square mile FKNMS that surrounds DTNP was established in 1990 and is jointly managed by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the State of Florida. The FKNMS Management Plan was approved in 1997 by the Florida Governor and Cabinet. The Tortugas Ecological Reserve (TER) was originally included in the Plan, but it was removed in response to concerns expressed by the public that it did not encompass the most significant reef structures and other important fish habitat, and to consider impacts to the commercial fishing industry. A collaborative planning process was initiated in 1998 between NPS and FKNMS to coordinate implementation of management plans. Included in the planning effort was the establishment of a system of complementary reserves based on scientific research and public participation. In 2001, the 151-square mile TER was established within the Sanctuary, expanding the FKNMS boundary by 96 square miles and included Sherwood Forest and Riley's Hump. The FWC approved fishing regulations in the state waters of the TER in March of 2001.

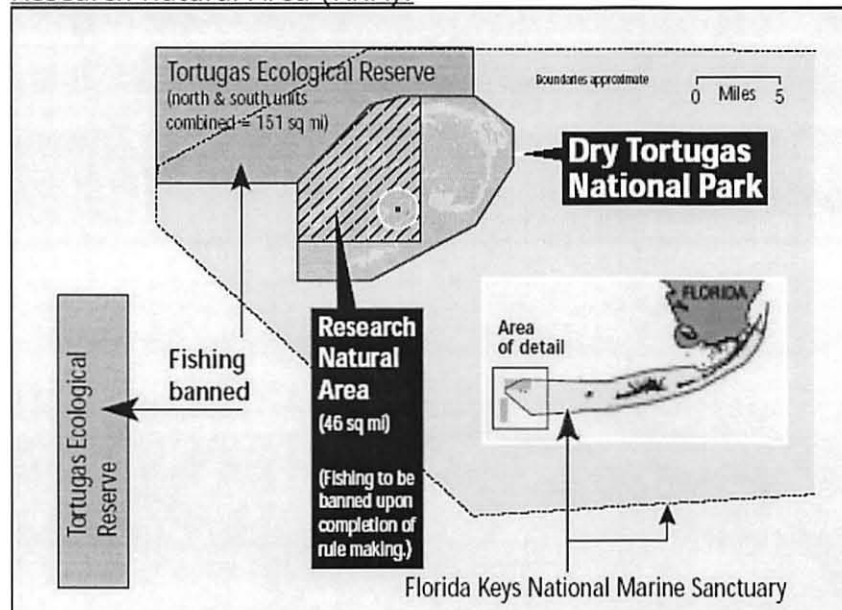
In conjunction with the FKNMS's Management Plan, the DTNP's New General Management Plan (Plan) was approved after public comment and review and signed by Secretary of the

Department of Interior Gale Norton on July 27, 2001. The Plan included a 46-square mile Research Natural Area (RNA), which was intended to complement the adjacent TER in the FKNMS. Within the RNA, access would be restricted and fishing would be prohibited. However, the DTNP's Plan was not fully implemented because both the State and Federal governments claimed ownership over the submerged lands. These submerged lands lie entirely within state waters. On August 9, 2005, the Governor and Cabinet, acting as the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, and NPS entered into an agreement that would allow NPS to manage all submerged lands within DTNP without relinquishing Florida's claim of ownership.

Submerged Lands Management Agreement (Florida/NPS)

- Management Agreement – Allows NPS to manage submerged Park lands consistent with NPS laws, policies and approved management plan
- **Florida and DOI reserve all claims either may have title to the submerged lands**
- **FWC's authority to regulate marine fish (including fish, lobster and stone crabs) is not affected by agreement**
- Requires NPS to submit to Commission any proposed fisheries regulations for review

Research Natural Area (RNA):



The RNA of the DTNP is approximately 46 percent of the Park's 100- square miles. Establishing and implementing the RNA would complete the NPS Management Plan for DTNP, which was originally approved in 2001. The RNA was designed to complement the TER of the FKNMS and both management plans were originally coordinated to serve as an ecosystem management approach to managing waters within several jurisdictions. The RNA is considered an important component of this system of reserves because it adds shallow-water habitat to the deeper waters of the TER and provides both spawning and nursery habitat for a multitude of marine species including economically important fisheries. Included in the NPS management plan for the RNA is a research monitoring component to inventory the marine life, monitor the ecology and study the efficacy of the reserve.

Approximately 54-square miles will remain open to recreational fishing, snorkeling and diving under the NPS proposed special fishing rules. This open area includes five of the seven islands within DTNP. An extensive public participation process that included numerous public hearings and workshops resulted in more than 6,000 comments, of which