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ICPS receives grant from Coral Reef Conservation Program

February 18, 2015

James H. Oliver, Jr. Institute for Coastal Plain Science Director, Dr. Daniel Gleason has received 3 years of funding at \$315,381 from the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program for the project entitled: "Investigating how coral recruitment and juvenile survivorship varies along the Florida Reef Tract."

This is a collaboration between Rob Ruzicka (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), Nicole Fogarty (NOVA Southeastern University) and Daniel Gleason (Georgia Southern University). Rob Ruzicka is also a Georgia Southern University Alum, receiving his M.S. in Biology in 2005.

The principal objective of this project is to determine how coral recruitment varies across years, regions, and habitat types in Florida. Establishing a geographic index of recruitment across the Florida Reef Tract will enhance understanding of a process that has long been considered a bottleneck to coral reef recovery. Having access to such information will allow management actions to be targeted to species and regions more precisely. For example, regions or reef types in the Florida Keys exhibiting poor coral recruitment are least likely to be sustained or recover naturally after disturbances and thus may be candidates for coral reef restoration programs. On the other hand, areas identified as "recruitment hotspots" may be considered for more specialized conservation or protection strategies because of their ultimate potential as larval sources. Along similar lines, species specific patterns of recruitment will aid managers in understanding which coral species can recover naturally as opposed to those requiring active propagation. Other biological and physical parameters will be evaluated at the proposed research sites (e.g., condition of adult populations, water temperatures, etc.). These parameters influence recruitment success and juvenile survivorship and will provide biological inference for current marine spatial planning and reef restoration efforts in Florida.



Danny Gleason, Director, ICPS, uses a pneumatic drill connected to a scuba tank to create a small hole in the reef. A drywall anchor and stainless steel bolt will be installed in this hole.



Lauren Stefaniak, Postdoctoral Associate, ICPS, installs a stainless steel bolt in the reef that will secure a terra cotta tile used as settlement substrate.

In addition to the scientific information gained through this research, the funding provided will support the masters theses of at least two Georgia Southern graduate students.

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