



OUR OCEAN TREASURES

NOAA Restores Ancient And Vital Resource

(NAPSA)—When the M/V *Wellwood*, a 122-meter Cypriot-registered freighter ran aground in the Florida Keys in 1984, it crushed 5,805 square meters of living corals and over 75,000 square meters of reef habitat.

Fortunately, the serious damage caused by the crash is now being restored at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, which protects 2,896 square nautical miles of critical marine habitat, including coral reef.

The crash occurred at the Molasses Reef and Ecological Sanctuary Preservation Area, which contains some of the most aesthetically valuable and heavily visited reefs in the continental United States. It is part of the Florida Reef Tract, the third largest barrier reef system in the world. Coral reefs support over 25 percent of all known marine species, and are home to over 4,000 different species of fish, 700 species of coral and thousands of other plants and animals.

When the ship ran aground, it scraped a track 20 meters wide and six meters deep. Subsequent hurricanes following the grounding created even more wear on the reef, which can be compared to small craters.

The current project repairs the damage with the restoration of 14 separate craters. Twenty-two dome-shaped reef modules and surface dressing rocks were placed at the damaged sites.

Harold Hudson, a biologist for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, also known as “the reef doctor,” developed and built the



Harold Hudson, an NOAA biologist at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary has developed and built 22 modules to place in craters found in the sanctuary's coral reef.

modules to fill in craters caused by the ship grounding.

Made of cement and limestone, the reef modules can help restore a complex marine community dependent on limestone structures.

Coral reefs existing today began growing as early as 50 million years ago.

Built by a spineless animal known as the coral polyps, coral reefs can be described as bustling cities of marine organisms.

These underwater environments cover less than one percent of the ocean floor but support an estimated 25 percent of all marine life.

When coral reefs are damaged, the marine life that depends on them is endangered.

The sanctuary was congressionally designated in 1990 and is now managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the state of Florida.

For more information on the restoration of this reef, visit www.restorereef.nos.noaa.gov.