

Conservation Association Answers the Call

By Jack Salisbury, Chairman
Ocean Reef Conservation
Association

The Ocean Reef Conservation Association is now in its 16th year of supporting conservation and education in the Florida Keys. The generosity of the Ocean Reef community through the All-Charities Auction has enabled the organization to provide \$225,000 in scholarships and over \$1.6 million in grants over the last five years. One hundred percent of the funds are used to support students from Keys High Schools and organizations off The Reef.

Recent grants have included: support for the History and Discovery Center in Islamorada, the Wild Bird Center in Tavernier, John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, the History of Diving Museum, Mote Marine Coral Nursery, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, Ocean Studies Charter School, The Everglades Foundation, Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, National Parks Conservation Association, Audubon Florida, Everglades Outpost Wildlife Rescue, Florida Keys Marine Sanctuary, Biscayne and Everglades

National Parks, Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge and many more.

We were recently contacted by the Lower Keys Guides Association regarding an urgent need for help. An as yet unidentified source is affecting fish, primarily in the lower keys. The affected fish are swimming erratically and spinning around. There have been 49 sightings of sick sawfish with 16 deaths confirmed. Affected species include tarpon, snook, permit, grouper, snapper and baitfish. The Board of the Conservation Association quickly approved the request for funding. It is being used to send biologists out with guides to the affected areas for sampling and research. We had the funding and could react quickly to a very serious problem.

The Conservation Association has worked to develop strong relationships with the numerous State and Federal Parks, preserves and sanctuaries that surround Ocean Reef. We have a stake in working to preserve and protect these environmentally sensitive areas.

The continued support of the Ocean Reef community has enabled the Conservation Association to fulfill its mission of preserving and improving the environment and offering scholarships in the areas of marine science and environmental studies. Thank you for helping preserve this "Unique Way of Life".