



## NOAA's Habitat Focus Area in Puerto Rico

### Background

Habitat Focus Areas are targeted places where NOAA is collaborating with communities to measurably improve the environment through NOAA's mission of science, service, and stewardship.

### Ten Areas for Action

NOAA selected ten Habitat Focus Areas nationwide to help communities protect and restore valuable natural resources that support local economies. Experts in the HFAs design and implement solutions to address threats to coastal habitats, working with partners to achieve shared conservation goals within a 5-year period. Using habitat science and best practices, HFAs demonstrate a concrete application of NOAA's mission.

### NOAA Habitat Blueprint

Habitat Focus Areas are part of the Habitat Blueprint: a framework for NOAA to address the growing challenge of habitat loss. Visit the Habitat Blueprint website at <https://www.HabitatBlueprint.noaa.gov>.



***The Northeast Marine Corridor and Culebra Island is one of ten NOAA Habitat Focus Areas across the U.S.***

***Tour all ten online at  
[HabitatBlueprint.noaa.gov](https://www.HabitatBlueprint.noaa.gov)***

To an outsider, northeastern Puerto Rico and nearby Culebra Island are idyllic Caribbean getaways with some of the world's most beautiful beaches. For the local population, it is home, and this home and its surroundings are threatened. To address the challenges facing this region and its environment, NOAA and its partners are seeking solutions within Puerto Rico's Habitat Focus Area: the **Northeast Marine Corridor and Culebra Island**.

The riches of nature in this region remain largely intact, and protecting them now is a wise investment.

### Places ►

From the coast of Puerto Rico's northeastern corner, vibrant aquatic and coastal habitats abound in the approximately 20 miles that separate the main island from Culebra Island. These highly valuable natural resources include:

- coastal forests, wetlands and mangroves
- bioluminescent lagoons
- shallow and deep coral reefs
- grouper spawning grounds
- seagrass beds, supporting manatees and queen conch, and
- nesting beaches for leatherback and other sea turtles.

These natural riches are part of NOAA's only Habitat Focus Area in the Caribbean.







Threatened elkhorn coral lives throughout the Habitat Focus Area.



The Habitat Focus Area extends between the main island of Puerto Rico and Culebra Island (pin).



Culebra Island has a small residential population.

## Issues ▶

Endangered species and treasured animals can find refuge in coral reefs, which create habitat and support an abundance of species. Corals found here, currently listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, include pillar, staghorn, and elkhorn coral.

As a beautiful place to visit, this area is growing in popularity. With this added pressure, the region has experienced significant declines in the quality and extent of its ecosystems and species. These declines are mainly due to:

- unsustainable coastal development
- intensive recreation
- land-based sources of pollution
- excessive and illegal fishing, and
- effects of climate change, such as rising sea surface temperatures.

The HFA team faces these complex challenges.



Recreation here is growing.

## Priorities ▶

The Puerto Rico HFA team is tackling the following four objectives:

1. **Habitat Resilience:** Improved management to support resilience of coral reef resources, seagrass beds, and coastal habitat
2. **Coral Recovery:** Increased population size, abundance, and health of Endangered Species Act-listed corals
3. **Fisheries Management:** Sustainable management of living marine resources dependent on coral reef ecosystems
4. **Sustainable Recreation:** Promotion of recreational practices that preserve ecological integrity of marine habitats.

The project's focus is a place—the Northeast Marine Corridor and Culebra Island—but the real drivers of positive change are its people.

## Partners ▶

A central team and partners coordinate on-the-ground and in-the-water efforts in Puerto Rico, and those partners include:

- Department of Natural & Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Caribbean Fisheries Management Council
- Universities and nonprofit organizations.

The local community also participates as volunteers, students, and supporters of the HFA.

## Plans ▶

For more background and resources about this Habitat Focus Area, connect with our page on the Habitat Blueprint website: [HabitatBlueprint.noaa.gov](https://www.HabitatBlueprint.noaa.gov).

Visit the story map for a visual tour of the HFA. For details about its goals, download the Implementation Plan.



A diver reattaches a soft coral using cement.

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