The Coral Triangle

Protecting the World's Epicenter of Coral and Fish Diversity

Deep in the heart of the Asia-Pacific region lies the epicenter of the planet's marine diversity, an area called the Coral Triangle. Home to an incredible 76 percent of the world's coral species and 40 percent of all reef fish species, the Coral Triangle provides livelihoods to 126 million people and feeds millions more.

A string of island nations curves between the southern tip of Asia and northern Australia. Around these islands, beneath the surface of the sea, lies a remarkable world of kaleidoscopic beauty and biological richness. The Coral Triangle stretches over thousands of miles and links six countries—Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

The nutrient-rich reefs of the Coral Triangle are nurseries and feeding grounds for an astounding diversity of fish and marine mammals, including whales, dolphins, sharks and manta rays. The reefs help buffer coastal communities from the onslaught of tropical storms. They lure tourism dollars and generate export income.

But the Coral Triangle is increasingly at risk of irrevocable ecological damage. Overfishing and highly destructive fishing techniques, such as dynamite fishing, are depleting stocks to dangerous levels. Rising water temperatures, sea levels and ocean acidity are devastating coral reef habitats here and around the world. At the current rate of destruction, scientists estimate that we could lose up to 70 percent of our planet's coral reefs over the next 50 years.

Coral reefs and waters in the area of the Solomon Islands. © Jeff Yonover

Yet the very richness of the Coral Triangle offers hope. These reefs have survived for millions of years and some species have demonstrated promising resilience to the effects of climate change.

Cutting-edge Science, Real World Solutions

For more than 15 years, The Nature Conservancy has worked closely with communities, governments, international funding agencies, businesses and regional organizations to protect marine sites in three Coral Triangle countries: Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and the Solomon Islands.

In each country, we work with partners to limit or restrict human access within marine areas of highest ecological importance. In addition to protecting coral reefs, these marine protected areas also benefit communities by replenishing depleted fish stocks. As islanders see the benefits to themselves and their families, they are inspired to support more conservation.

To ensure that existing and new protected areas can withstand the effects of global climate change, Conservancy experts agree that we must transform the way these reserves are designed, managed and financed. Our strategy is to establish marine protected areas that safeguard corals with natural

A diver conducts an underwater survey of the coral reefs in waters off the Solomon Islands during a Rapid Ecological Assessment. © David Wachenfeld/Triggerfish Images

resilience to coral bleaching, allowing them to withstand the effects of climate change.

Conservation that Lasts

Although only 2.6 percent of the region´s reefs are currently protected, the Conservancy aims to extend protection across at least 15 percent of the Coral Triangle over the next decade. In pursuit of this ambitious vision, Conservancy teams are tackling four key goals over the next three years—advance our science, shape additional protected areas, improve fishing techniques and generate dependable funding streams.

Conservancy-led scientific assessments have redefined knowledge of the richness and distribution of the region's coral communities, inspiring national pride and support for conservation. As the challenges that face the region intensify, our experts are on the ground and in the water, expanding our understanding of this complex place and sharing new discoveries with partners. We plan to establish a marine conservation training center in Bali and train at least 300 conservation practitioners from Coral Triangle countries.

Using science as our guide, we will work with governments and other partners to expand marine protected areas throughout the region. Our goal is to help decision-makers establish or strengthen 12 marine protected areas, preserving 12.4 million acres of the most biodiverse and sensitive marine habitat.

To address the effects of climate change, we will design marine protected areas that are connected by ocean currents, enabling coral larvae from resilient reefs to replenish damaged sites. We have already worked with partners in Kimbe Bay, Papua New Guinea, to successfully create such a network and we plan to replicate the project across the region.

We envision millions of acres in effectively managed marine protected areas that yield an annual return of $322 million in tourism, fisheries and coastal protection services to the people of the Coral Triangle.

Benefits for Nature and People

Because people rely on the resources the reefs provide, we will work with fishermen and public and private partners to develop alternatives to destructive fishing practices that damage coral reefs. We will offer counsel and information to help governments shift from focusing on conservation of individual fish species to a science-based approach that protects entire ecosystems.

Because effective conservation requires ongoing management, we expect to develop long-term financing, like a sustainable trust fund that will leverage $50 million in public and matching funding for marine protected area development and management.

A Vision for the Future

The best hope for the survival of the planet's coral reefs lies in the Coral Triangle. Our scientists are working hard to unlock the secrets of the region's resilient species, looking for clues that will help vulnerable species withstand the effects of climate change. What we are learning and demonstrating here will change the way that the Conservancy and other organizations approach tropical marine conservation, both within the Coral Triangle and throughout the world.

CAMPAIGN *for a* SUSTAINABLE PLANET

With strong partnerships, the very best available science and your support, we can ensure that the planet's coral reefs thrive for generations to come.

The Nature Conservancy

Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

Oceans and Coasts of the World
4245 N. Fairfax Dr., Ste. 100
Arlington, VA 22203
Phone: (703) 841-5300

09/08