



Elkhorn, staghorn coral get new protection

Published: Oct. 29, 2008 at 2:39 PM

WASHINGTON, Oct. 29 (UPI) -- The U.S. Fisheries Service says it will increase its protection of elkhorn and staghorn corals in Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The service, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, says new regulations prohibiting activities that result in death or harm to either of the threatened species become effective Nov. 21.

"These corals were once the major reef builders in Florida and the Caribbean, but now more than 90 percent of their populations are lost," said Roy Crabtree, NOAA's Fisheries Service's southeast regional administrator. "That not only threatens their survival -- it affects the entire ecosystem. This rule will strengthen our efforts to recover these corals by allowing us to address human-induced threats affecting their status."

The rule, among other things, prohibits the import, export, taking and all commercial activities involving the corals, including damaging the species' habitat or discharging pollutants or contaminants that harms the species.

"Our coral reefs are disappearing faster than you can say 'global warming,'" said Miyoko Sakashita of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Today's protective regulations are an important step forward in a race to prevent the extinction of our coral reefs."