

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Resolution 47.3
Amendment to Resolution 28:1: Watershed Partnership Initiative
Amended October 26, 2023

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) continues its commitment to the Watershed Partnership Initiative (WPI) as detailed in Resolution 28.1 of August 23, 2012. This amendment allows the USCRTF to endorse future watershed sites to the WPI and will use lessons learned from previous WPI sites to guide these new watersheds toward achieving similar successful outcomes.

Background

The USCRTF created the Watershed Partnership Initiative in 2009 and codified it in Resolution 28.1 in 2012. The intent of the Initiative is to facilitate and enhance coordination, partnerships, and contributions of agency resources and expertise to implement geographically specific and integrated activities to reduce land-based sources of pollutant loads to coral reef ecosystems and associated nearshore habitats. The Initiative also promotes consistent and strengthened application and enforcement of laws and authorities intended to address land-based sources of pollution (LBSP) threatening the health of coral reefs. In addition to strengthening partnerships (through shared funding and technical capacity), this Initiative focuses on building tools and opportunities that can be used by other watershed efforts. The Initiative built out this approach by piloting three selected priority watersheds, with the intent for future application to other watershed locations with likelihood for success. The Watershed Partnership Initiative targets areas where watersheds are adjacent to or associated with coral reef ecosystems.

Individual federal, state, territory, commonwealth agencies, and non-governmental organizations contribute through direct application of resources, authorities, technical assistance, and/or program expertise. Support for work in these USCRTF priority watersheds has been provided mainly via competitive grants, technical assistance, and in-kind support from numerous sources including, but not limited to, the local jurisdictions in which the USCRTF priority watersheds exist, the Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coral Reef Conservation Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Watershed Partnership Initiative Objectives

The Watershed Partnership Initiative provides a framework for USCRTF member agencies to coordinate Federal agency actions with local management of reef resources, increase collaboration, and leverage multiple members' resources to advance action related to improving the condition of coral reef ecosystems. This Resolution reaffirms the following, targeted objectives for the Watershed Partnership Initiative:

- Develop and implement on-the-ground strategies and actions that address land-based sources of pollution that impact coral reef condition;
- Maximize effectiveness of resource management by promoting multi-agency partnerships and contributions in each USCRTF priority watershed partnership;
- Develop and implement clear, targeted, multi-year ecosystem, programmatic, and community goals, objectives, and activities specific to each site, that results in measurable positive increases

in coral reef ecologic metrics and have federal agency, local jurisdiction, and community support; Develop strategies to facilitate appropriate blending of traditional knowledge and science-based approaches for effective watershed management;

- Empower and increase the capacity of the local governments and communities to engage in watershed management practices that are protective of coral reefs for the long term;
- Use priority sites as pilot sites for building tools and a template for watershed success (e.g., empower communities to take on watershed management through partnerships) that can be shared and implemented in other watersheds and jurisdictions; and
- Implement actions that support the advancement of USCRTF priority watersheds to no longer depend on intensive USCRTF assistance in order to allow the selection of new USCRTF priority watersheds.

**U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
Pago Pago, American Samoa
Passed August 23, 2012**

Resolution 28:1: Watershed Partnership Initiative

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Issue Statement:

Within the United States and its jurisdictions, there are numerous locations where coral reef ecosystems are highly impacted by watershed alteration, land-based sources of pollution, and coastal development (Bellwood et al., 2004; Pandolfi et al., 2003; Richmond et al., 2007). Identifying the extent of and reducing these effects has now become crucial as land-based pollution and coastal development each, individually, threaten about 25% of coral reefs globally (Burke et al. 2011). The Watershed Partnership Initiative Resolution will promote coordination across USCRTF agencies to implement geographically specific and integrated activities to improve coral reef and watershed conditions that require or benefit from broad USCRTF engagement. This Partnership will also highlight community engagement and ensure that watershed management strategies facilitate the blending of cultural and traditional ecological knowledge and western science approaches.

Background:

Recognizing that the threat of land-based sources of pollution (LBSP) to coral reef ecosystems occurs in all U.S. coral reef jurisdictions, and both authority and responsibility to address LBSP involve a multitude of governmental and jurisdictional levels, the USCRTF initiated a Watershed Partnership Initiative in 2009. The intent of this initiative is to facilitate and enhance coordination, partnerships, and contribution of agency resources and expertise to implement geographically specific and integrated activities to reduce pollutant loads to coral reef ecosystems, while also promoting consistent and strengthened application and enforcement of laws and authorities intended to address LBSP. The USCRTF Watershed Partnership Initiative includes two distinct components:

1. individual federal and state/territory agency contributions through direct application of resources, authorities, technical assistance, and/or program expertise; and
2. a competitive funding opportunity that awards Federal funds to local organizations and individuals to implement projects in support of clean water. This fund is administered for the USCRTF through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Collaboration through this initiative is intended to increase Federal and local capacity for coral conservation, in particular, by implementing best management practices and solutions to reduce impacts of land-based sources of pollution on near-shore coral reefs from ridge to reef and across land uses (conservation, forested, agricultural, and urban areas).

The USCRTF is currently implementing this partnership approach in three watersheds: *Guánica Bay/Rio Loco* in southwest Puerto Rico (2009), *Ka'anapali* in west Maui, Hawaii (2010), and *Faga'alu* in American Samoa (2012). At present there is no plan or commitment to formally expand this partnership to other sites. However, there are activities underway in other jurisdiction watershed sites that can provide and benefit from lessons learned across sites. This partnership will work to enhance consistency of implementation activities and collaboration across all jurisdiction watershed sites.

Watershed Partnership Initiative Objective:

The Watershed Partnership Initiative provides a framework for USCRTF member agencies to coordinate Federal agency actions with local management of reef resources, increase collaboration, and leverage multiple members' resources to advance action related to improving the condition of coral reef ecosystems. Targeted objectives include:

- Promote multiple Federal agency partnership and contribution in each USCRTF Watershed Partnership site to holistically address land-based pollution and maximize effectiveness and efficiency of coral reef management.
- Develop and implement clear ecological and community goals and objectives specific to each site that have Federal agency and local jurisdiction and community support.
- Develop strategies to facilitate blending cultural and traditional ecological knowledge and western science approaches to effective watershed management.
- Empower and increase capacity of the local governments and community to engage in watershed management practices that are protective of coral reefs for the long term. Develop and implement on-the-ground strategies and actions that improve the health and resilience of coral reef resources and their watersheds.

Statement & Decisions:

The USCRTF commits to the Watershed Partnership Initiative to better coordinate across Federal and State/Territory agencies to implement geographically specific and integrated activities in support of direct land-based sources of pollution threat reduction. The USCRTF has committed to this partnership in three sites: *Guánica Bay/Rio Loco* in southwest Puerto Rico (2009), *Ka'anapali* in west Maui, Hawaii (2010), and *Faga'alu* in American Samoa (2012). In addition to these three sites, the USCRTF commits to enhance consistency of implementation activities and collaboration across all jurisdiction watershed sites. Success of the USCRTF Watershed Partnership Initiative is dependent upon strong commitment and engagement across individual federal and state/territory agencies to contribute resources, authorities, technical assistance, and/or program expertise.

In support of the USCRTF Watershed Partnership Initiative, the USCRTF commits to:

1. Promote multiple Federal agency partnership and contribution in each USCRTF Watershed Partnership site to holistically address land-based pollution and maximize effectiveness and efficiency of coral reef management.
 - a. Commitment of at least two partner Federal agencies (at headquarter and local levels) and a lead local jurisdiction agency for each partnership site with designated points of contact for each Federal agency engaged. Federal agencies will contribute financial, in kind, technical assistance, or other resources as available and applicable.
2. Develop and implement clear ecological and community goals and objectives specific to each site that have Federal agency and local jurisdiction and community support.

- a. Develop site specific implementation agreements based on local watershed plans to articulate specific goals and desired outcomes, commitment of participating USCRTF members, implementation plan, roles and responsibilities and time-line.
 - b. Commit to engage at each site for five to ten years.
 - c. Support State and Territory leadership engagement to ensure efforts implemented are complementary and are well integrated with existing State and Territory laws, regulations, and policies.
3. Evaluate the success of this partnership to ensure that the resources contributed are being applied effectively and are having the intended impact on watershed management, water quality issues impacting coral reef ecosystems, and building an informed and engaged community.
 - a. Evaluation will be conducted for the overarching partnership and specific to each watershed site in the following 3 categories: programmatic, ecological, and social/community engagement.
 - b. Site specific evaluation criteria will be outlined in each site-specific implementation agreement.
4. Support the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation administered competitive funding opportunity that awards Federal funds to local organizations and individuals to implement projects in support of clean water.
 - a. Commit to implement a partnership fund in each of the partnership sites. Specific implementation activities (funding watershed coordination, small grant program, etc) will be site dependent and will be clearly identified in the site-specific implementation agreement. This fund and associated activities is dependent on annual appropriation availability.