

Making the Ocean a Priority

World Oceans Day on June 8th gives us the chance to reflect on the importance of our ocean and what we must do to protect it. The ocean provides 95% of the living space here on Earth and holds 98% of the water on our planet. It is our planet's life support system. The ocean feeds billions of people around the world, drives our climate, absorbs heat and carbon dioxide and produces 70% of the oxygen we breathe. Every breath we take and every drop we drink depends on a healthy ocean. Every life here on Earth depends on the ocean and now, the ocean's life depends on every one of us.

We are causing global changes to the ocean in both ocean volume and pH level. Since 1970, ocean temperatures have increased by 1 degree causing bleaching of coral reefs. The ocean absorbs roughly 90% of the climate heating, increasing the ocean volume by thermal expansion, causing a rise in sea level. Since 1950 the sea level has risen 8 inches. However, since 2006, the ocean is rising at an accelerated rate of 1 inch every 3 years, with projections of another 8 inches in the next 20 years.

Carbon dioxide concentrations in our atmosphere have risen 46% since 1950 due to the burning of fossil fuels. Human-generated CO₂ emissions are currently 66 million tons per day and our ocean only absorbs 22 million tons per day. Carbon dioxide is saturating the ocean waters forming carbonic acid, a process called ocean acidification. The historical pH of the ocean was 8.16 and is now 8.05, that's a 25% increase in acidity. This dissolves the shells of plankton, corals, oysters, clams, shrimp, crabs and lobster.

We must take action now to protect and restore Florida's ocean and coastal environments. We must stop the land-based activities that are directly polluting our ocean and coastal waters. Over 85% of all the pollution in the ocean comes from human land-based activities. We should pick up the trash and debris that is currently in our waters and on our shorelines. We must stop discharges of polluted water into coastal bays, estuaries and lagoons. This water carries suspended solids, nitrogen, phosphorus, toxic algae and other pollutants harmful to aquatic plants, animals and humans. We must place a moratorium on any activity, such as offshore and below ground oil and gas exploration and production, which may cause harm to aquatic plants, animals and humans.

During the month of June, the ocean is celebrated around the world. We should do everything we can, individually and collectively, to stop the pollution and destruction of our ocean and coastal waters. Florida Oceanographic Society feels that together we must be the next wave for change to secure the future of our world's ocean. We must all work to increase awareness and inspire stewardship of our living coastal ecosystems. Visit our web site at www.FloridaOcean.org to learn more about how you can help.

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