



Mote Marine Laboratory / Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Coral Bleaching Early Warning Network

Current Conditions Report #20260922



Updated September 22, 2026

Summary: Based on climate predictions, current conditions, and field observations, the threat for mass coral bleaching within the FKNMS is currently **ALERT LEVEL 5**.

NOAA Coral Reef Watch Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Outlook September 20, 2026 (experimental)

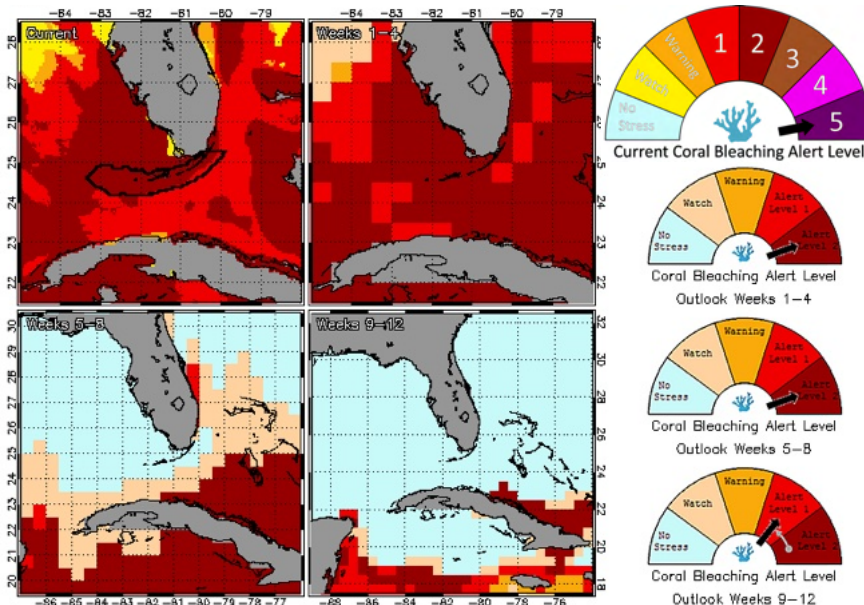


Figure 1. NOAA's 5 km Experimental Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Outlook Areas through December 2026. Updated September 20, 2026.

Weather and Sea Temperatures

According to the current NOAA Coral Reef Watch (CRW) experimental 5-kilometer (km) Satellite Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Area, all areas of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary are under a “**Bleaching Alert Level 5**”, which means there is a reef-wide risk of near complete coral mortality (Fig. 1).

Recent remote sensing analysis by NOAA's CRW program indicates that all areas of the Florida Keys region are currently experiencing significant thermal stress. NOAA's experimental 5 km Coral Bleaching HotSpot Map (Fig.2), which illustrates current sea surface temperatures compared to the average temperature for the warmest month, shows sea surface temperatures remain elevated above normal in the Florida Keys. Similarly, NOAA's experimental 5 km Degree Heating Weeks (DHW) map (Fig.3), which illustrates how much heat stress has built up over the past 12 weeks, indicates extreme temperature stress in the Florida Keys region with a DHW value of 21°C-weeks. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) Aqualink, which provides near real time in-situ wind data at Eastern Dry Rocks, as well as Aqualink in-situ temperature data confirm that temperatures remain above historical maximums, with all areas remaining above 30.5°C (Fig.4). Mote Marine Laboratory will continue to monitor the NOAA HotSpot maps, DHW maps, and Aqualink sea temperature data from FKNMS monitoring stations on a weekly basis for the remainder of the bleaching season.

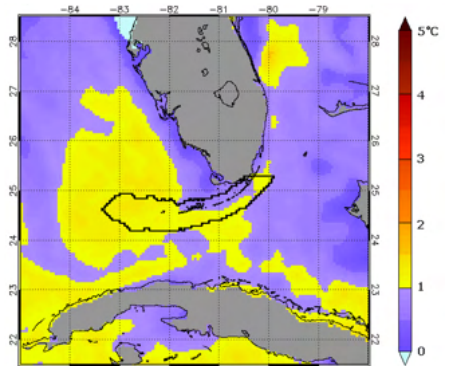


Figure 2. NOAA's Experimental 5km Coral Bleaching HotSpot Map for Florida, September 20, 2026.
[NOAA Coral Reef Watch Website](https://www.coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/)

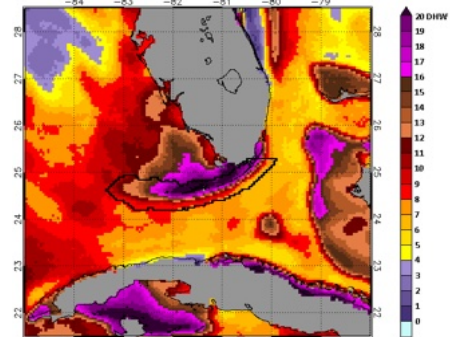


Figure 3. NOAA's Experimental 5km Degree Heating Weeks Map for Florida, September 20, 2026.
[NOAA Coral Reef Watch Website](https://www.coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/)

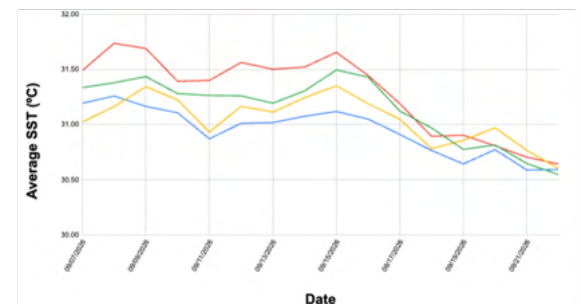


Figure 4. In-situ sea surface temperature from Aqualink monitoring stations (September 7-22, 2026).



Figure 5. Wind speed data from Aqualink's Eastern Dry Rocks monitoring station (September 7-22, 2026).



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Current Coral Conditions

A total of 11 BleachWatch observer reports have been received since September 9th, 2026, all of which reported some level of bleaching (Fig. 6). Most reports indicated an overall percentage of corals exhibiting signs of stress at 31-50%. Paling/partial bleaching observations were reported for all coral categories, including Knobby Brain Coral (*Pseudodiploria clivosa*) (Fig. 7) and Staghorn Coral (*Acropora cervicornis*) (Fig 8). Other observations included paling and bleaching of *gorgonians*, *fire coral*, and *palythoa*, and 9 reports of disease reported on brain, mound/bouldering species and branching species.



Figure 7. Bleached *Pseudodiploria clivosa* (PCLI), Molassas Reef

As we continue through this bleaching season, BleachWatch observers are encouraged to continue submitting your coral reef observations after every visit to the reef, **even if NO bleaching was observed**. Frequent coral condition observations from throughout the Florida Keys are needed for the remainder of the summer season.



Figure 8. Partially Bleached *Acropora cervicornis* (ACER), North Dry Rocks

If you know of anyone interested in becoming an observer, an online training is available year-round on www.mote.org/bleachwatch.

BleachWatch reports for September 7 – 22, 2026

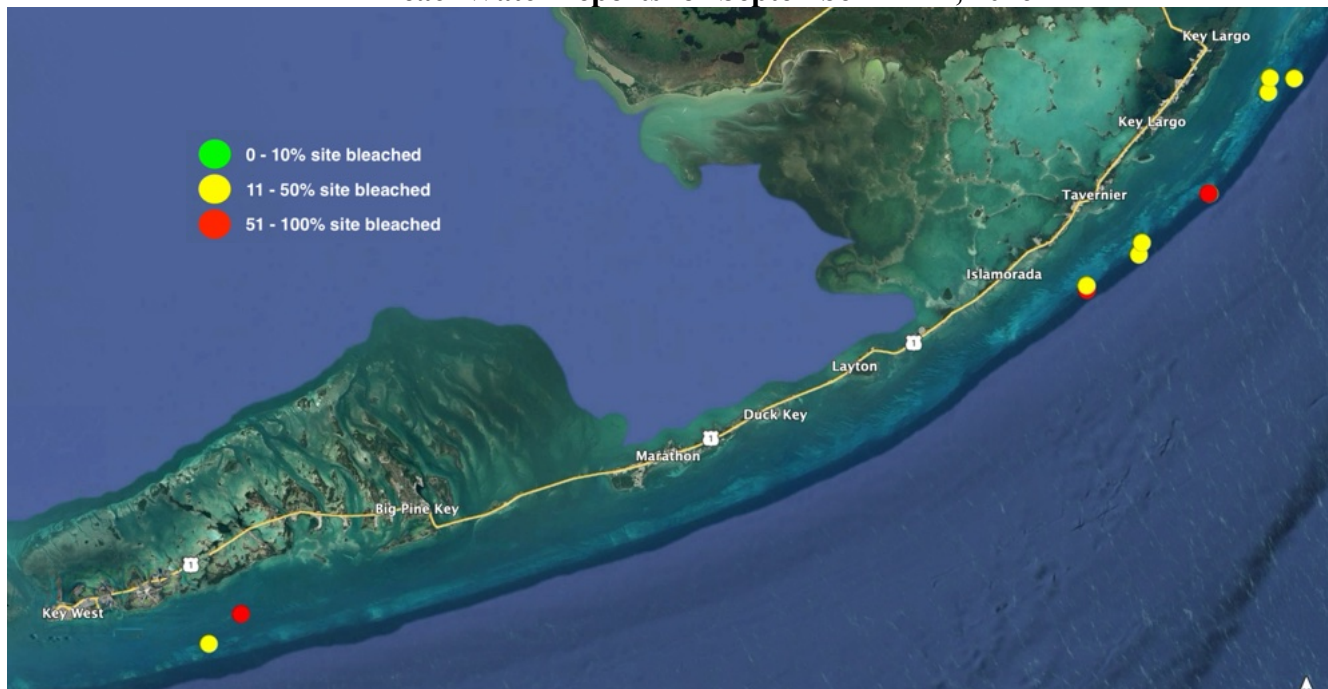


Figure 6. Overview of BleachWatch reports from September 7 – 22, 2026.

BleachWatch observations are submitted by a range of community reporters, and data quality may vary depending on the observer's level of training, experience, and assessment method. As a result, individual reports may contain discrepancies or inaccuracies in reported bleaching prevalence and should be interpreted with consideration of observer experience and other available observations.

**For more information about the BleachWatch program,
or to submit a bleaching observation, contact:**

Email: bleachwatch@mote.org
<http://www.mote.org/bleachwatch>

