

ANNUAL

CORAL REEF ALLIANCE | 2018

REPORT



CORAL REEF
ALLIANCE



LETTER FROM BOARD CHAIR

As a passionate freediver and scuba diver, I am honored to assume the role of Chairman of the Board of the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL). Our mission is simple. We want to save coral reefs around the world.

As all long-time divers know, many formerly spectacular reefs are in serious decline- victims of the combined effects of overfishing, wastewater and sediment discharge and a warming ocean. Even more terrifying, the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a special report last year on the impacts of global warming. The findings were shocking: The report predicted a grim future for coral reefs in the coming decades, stating that if the earth's temperature continues to rise by another .5°C, we could see a mass die-off of coral reefs as soon as 2040. The IPCC report is one of several scientific papers that forecast devastating consequences to coral reefs if we don't act now. I don't like being such a pessimist, but there is virtually no chance now of avoiding global warming. If coral reefs are going to survive, they must somehow adapt to a warming planet.

We know that corals can adapt, and CORAL is at the forefront of efforts to understand how corals adapt to climate change. We now have a comprehensive, practical solution to save coral reefs around the globe. We call the solution Adaptive Reefscapes.

With your help and support, we are saving corals by:

1. Designing and implementing durable conservation programs that reduce local threats to reefs and promote adaptation
2. Forging powerful partnerships with other organizations to support the implementation of science-based Adaptive Reefscapes around the world
3. Advancing the science of coral adaptation and conservation, and providing the resources for others to create Adaptive Reefscapes.

These innovative strategies are the result of careful planning and organizational change that is allowing us to expand CORAL's global conservation efforts. I'm excited to help lead the organization during this important time in its history! It is literally now or never.

But we cannot do it without you. I hope we can count on your support.

Adaptively yours,

JOHN ANNER, PH.D.
BOARD CHAIR



Earlier this year, I traveled to Komodo National Park in Indonesia to see how coral reefs were doing in this isolated part of the world. Komodo's reefs were remarkably healthy, with clouds of darting fish surrounding our group of divers and plate corals overlapping until there was no more space on the reef. The remote, thriving reef was starkly different from others that I've seen in more populated areas, with living coral and other organisms occupying almost every surface available. If these were the only reefs you ever visited, I think you might ask: what's all this concern I hear about coral reefs?

Most reefs today don't look like the healthy, remote reefs of Komodo. Many coral reefs are close to intensive human activity like pollution and overfishing, which often leads to high levels of environmental stress. But the healthy coral reefs in Komodo show us that, when protected, coral reefs can thrive. They are also more likely to recover from coral bleaching, which is affecting reefs globally as the earth is heating up from climate change. Fortunately, direct conservation action can reduce human impacts on the reef, which is why we have developed our Healthy Fisheries for Reefs, Clean Water for Reefs and Intact Reef Ecosystems initiatives that address threats from overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction.

The healthy coral reefs of Komodo are an excellent example of what we're striving toward. By reducing environmental stressors through our Initiatives and creating networks of healthy reefs, or Adaptive Reefscapes, we can help coral reefs survive the larger global threat of climate change.

To reach this goal, we've spent the last year conducting scientific research, planning for our future and growing our staff and capacity to develop three organizational strategies that position coral adaptation as a global, scalable solution. We're listening, supporting

and collaborating to bring people together and promote Adaptive Reefscapes, and our three strategies are designed to build on our existing strengths as a trusted organization that has worked with local, scientific and conservation communities for nearly 25 years.

In this annual report, you'll read about our incredible year of growth and success, even during an anxious time of climate change reports. As I reflect on the past year and what the future holds, I know we're on the right path and I've never been more hopeful for corals or prouder of what CORAL has accomplished.

I'm excited to share this progress with you, our supporters who make this important work possible. While the urgency of climate change is unprecedented, with your support we can ensure a future for coral reefs. It's not too late, and I hope you'll join me as we implement our three strategies to save coral reefs from the effects of climate change.

Thank you for your continued support,

DR. MICHAEL WEBSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



CORAL's Innovative Strategies to Save Coral Reefs are:

- 1 Designing and implementing durable conservation programs that reduce local threats to reefs and promote adaptation
- 2 Forging powerful partnerships with other organizations to support the implementation of science-based Adaptive Reefscapes around the world
- 3 Advancing the science of coral adaptation and conservation, and providing the resources for others to create Adaptive Reefscapes.

CORAL'S CLEAN WATER FOR REEFS INITIATIVE

The landscape of West Maui has a terrain like no other. Rainwater maneuvers through the landscape near CORAL's watershed restoration sites, first traveling down thickly-forested mountains (*mauka*) to reach abandoned fields in the midslope region, then joining streams that flow toward the ocean (*makai*) and the reefs we are working to save.

The midslope region of West Maui was once home to a variety of traditional Hawaiian agricultural practices that protected the land from overuse. In the 20th century, land was cleared to make way for pineapple and sugar cane plantations, which transformed the landscape and altered the natural flow of rainwater from *mauka* to *makai*. As a result humans altering the landscape to redirect water flow, rainwater now collects soil from neglected fields and degraded dirt roads. The sediment then travels downstream to enter the ocean, where it settles on coral reefs and blocks out the sun. This prevents the symbiotic algae in corals from photosynthesizing and causes corals to slowly starve.

Sediment and soil aren't the only hitchhikers on the ride downstream. Harmful pollutants like fertilizers, pesticides and petroleum residue also reach the ocean and are toxic to corals and humans.

The runoff affects much more than just the coral reefs. In 2018, the Department of Health issued 167 "Brown Water Advisories" for West Maui, informing the public of unsafe swimming and fishing

FOOTAGE BY: JESS JOHNSTON

conditions. In other words, land-based runoff created unsafe ocean conditions across Maui almost every other day last year!

Researchers from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) have identified the Wahikuli and Honokōwai watersheds as the biggest polluters in West Maui. CORAL's Clean Water for Reefs initiative is restoring these watersheds by decommissioning old roads and planting a variety of plants to trap sediment and stabilize the soil. These innovative planting practices are addressing sedimentation problems, and CORAL is identifying best practices so that these techniques can be used across

Hawai'i and by international partners to provide clean water for coral reefs around the world.

Addressing land-based sources of pollution helps corals stay healthy, and it also helps corals adapt to the effects of climate change. Earlier this year, a study by scientists from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) found that coral reefs in West Hawai'i are stabilizing and poised to recover from the worst bleaching event in the state's history. The study showed that the most resilient reefs were those that had experienced fewer stressors, "including fishing pressure, land-based pollutants and runoff." That's why CORAL's signature initiatives



CORAL's Clean Water for Reefs initiative is restoring watersheds in West Maui to stabilize the soil and provide sediment-free water to save coral reefs downstream.

to reduce local stressors are so important to saving coral reefs, and we're thrilled to see positive results of our work in Hawai'i.



UNITING FOR ADAPTATION

The Nature Conservancy is the first partner using CORAL's initial findings to help them achieve their goal of restoring one million corals across the Caribbean.

The coral reefs of the Caribbean are no longer the lush underwater paradise that they once were. Overfishing, disease, invasive species and coral bleaching from climate change have decimated more than half of the Caribbean's coral reefs since 1970. And yet, the Caribbean is still one of the world's most biologically diverse marine regions; this unique ecosystem continues to support countless people, fisheries and ecosystems.

In order for coral reefs in the Caribbean to continue to support people and wildlife, they need to adapt to their biggest threat: deadly coral bleaching events caused by climate change. But the science of how organisms adapt to rapid change is still an emerging field, and adaptation hasn't traditionally been considered in conservation plans.

That's why CORAL is uniting top scientists around the world to improve the scientific understanding of how corals adapt. We're working with leading experts from Rutgers University, the University

of Washington, the University of Queensland, Stanford University and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to identify how we can help corals adapt. We call this scientific enterprise the Modeling Adaptation Potential (MAP) Project.

The MAP Project has developed scientific models that assess how certain management actions can help corals adapt to climate change. For example, we can use the models to compare how reefs in the future fare if only pristine areas are protected versus if a variety of reef types are targeted for management.

The initial findings of the MAP Project show that in regional-scale management networks that contain a diverse and connected group of reefs, corals can adapt to rising temperatures *if* other stressors are reduced and emissions are addressed. Never before have conservation managers had scientific guidance



to help corals adapt, so our models provide an insightful glimpse into the future of conservation.

CORAL has partnered with TNC's Caribbean Program to apply the findings from the MAP Project to help TNC design regional-scale conservation plans. [TNC's Caribbean Program](#) has over 40 years of conservation history in 17 countries, and their flagship coral restoration program uses techniques like microfragmentation to "bring reefs back to life on a large scale."

We're using models from the MAP Project to provide guidance on how coral restoration can make the best impact on Caribbean reefs, and our collaboration will help TNC achieve their goal of restoring one million corals across the Caribbean region. CORAL's partnership with TNC is the first to implement the findings from our models and by sharing our work

we're expanding our reach to influence new regions and strategies.

CORAL is excited to maximize our conservation efforts through similar partnerships. By working with organizations like TNC and academic partners, we can encourage conservation organizations all over the world to focus on plans that incorporate natural coral adaptation as the solution to save coral reefs.

The MAP Project's three key findings to promote coral adaptation around the world:

1. Evolution can help corals rapidly adapt to rising temperatures.
2. Management that effectively reduces local threats to reefs is critical to helping corals adapt.
3. Protecting networks of diverse and healthy reefs is the best way to help corals adapt to climate change.



Dr. Becky Twohey is CORAL's Associate Program Director of Science and is an expert on how corals can adapt to the effects of climate change. Becky joined CORAL last year and is currently coordinating the Modeling Adaptation Potential (MAP) Project, which is defining the conditions to maximize coral adaptation to climate change.

What does “save coral reefs” mean to CORAL? To us, saving coral reefs means ensuring that a healthy reef ecosystem will continue to provide benefits to people and wildlife. We envision a future where the world’s coral reefs have adapted to the rapidly changing conditions brought on by climate change – including warmer water, higher acidity, rising sea levels and increased frequency and severity of storms.

In particular, our planet is undergoing warming at an unprecedented rate. That means that coral reefs are going to change a lot, and most already have. Corals that are more sensitive to warmer temperatures have suffered coral bleaching, whereas corals that are more heat tolerant have fared better.

We’ll continue to see coral reefs change as our planet warms, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report. Saving coral reefs means helping them adapt to these warming temperatures so that we can still have coral reefs that provide benefits for people and wildlife for generations to come- even if they look different than the coral reefs of today.

How is CORAL helping coral reefs adapt to climate change? CORAL has developed an innovative, scalable, global solution to the climate crisis called Adaptive Reefscapes, which are networks of healthy reefs that are diverse, connected and large. Adaptive Reefscapes facilitate a process called evolutionary rescue, which is when adaptation saves a population that would otherwise die off due to a drastic environmental change.

By reducing local stressors like pollution, habitat destruction and overfishing, Adaptive Reefscapes make it easier for corals to cope with the larger issue of warming water. It’s like trying to fight off multiple

sicknesses at the same time; you’ll get better faster if you’re only fighting off one illness.

Not every coral is going to survive, but some will. With enough networks of these “hardier” corals, nature can regrow populations of coral reefs across the world.

So, we just have to reduce local environmental stressors to help corals adapt? Not quite. You also have to make sure that these better-adapted corals are able to repopulate reef ecosystems. Corals spawn approximately once a year, so when connected reefs are well-managed it improves the exchange of individual baby corals between populations via ocean currents. A large network of coral reefs ensures the highest diversity of coral species and habitats and helps corals recover from disturbances like disease outbreaks or storms (aka risk mitigation). And perhaps most importantly, a network of coral reefs that is diverse- meaning it has many different coral species, genes and habitats- helps increase the potential that corals can genetically adapt. That’s why our Adaptive Reefscapes must be diverse, connected and large- so that they can facilitate evolutionary rescue to repopulate degraded coral reefs around the world.

How can we use this knowledge/research to inspire people to action to save coral reefs? CORAL is leading adaptation research so that our partners and other conservation organizations have a real-world solution to save coral reefs. We’re currently producing an Adaptive Reefscapes toolkit that will guide the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an Adaptive Reefscape to promote coral adaptation and recovery. We also have several papers on coral adaptation in review and are continuing to push this science forward.

Our goal is to promote nature’s ability to adapt as a scalable, science-based solution to help coral reefs survive the collective effects of climate change. We’re mobilizing the scientific community to support Adaptive Reefscapes by partnering with other conservation organizations, presenting at international conferences on ocean health and climate change and advancing the science on what it will take to save coral reefs around the world.



DORY GANNES
Development Director

“What a pleasure it has been to get to know so many of you over the course of the year. Thank you for sharing your wild dive stories, your fears about declining reef health and your commitment to coral conservation. We recognize how many causes would love your support and are so grateful that you decided to choose CORAL.”



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- Jennifer Raymond
- The Swire Charitable Trusts
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- Jeanie and Murray Kilgour
- Kathryn Kirmayer



*A translucent goby sits on a whip coral in Komodo, Indonesia.
(Photo by Michael Webster)*

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(Gifts were made by the following in memory of those listed in copper)

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All of the coral who lost their lives
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A school of surgeonfish and chubs swim above critically-endangered elkhorn coral in Roatán, Honduras. (Photo by Michael Webster)

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** Indicates donors who have gifted \$1,000 or more

CORAL REEF ALLIANCE

Statement of activities for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2018

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Individual contributions | \$1,655,205 |
| Foundation & government grants | 2,758,612 |
| Other revenue | <u>9,382</u> |
| Total support and revenue | <u>4,423,199</u> |

EXPENSES

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Program services | 2,621,459 |
| Management & general | 329,268 |
| Fundraising | <u>573,567</u> |
| Total expenses | <u>3,524,294</u> |

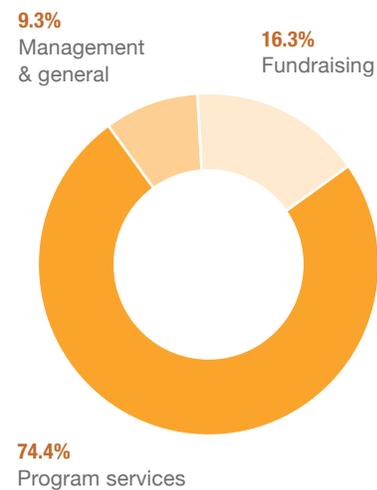
NET ASSETS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Change in net assets | 897,905 |
| Net assets, beginning of year | 2,090,323 |
| Net assets, end of year | <u>\$2,988,228</u> |

SUPPORT AND REVENUE



EXPENSES



"We are avid divers and have tremendous passion for coral reefs. For us, giving back is important and we want to give to fiscally-responsible organizations. We initially used Charity Navigator to find CORAL back in 2015. CORAL's five-star rating and mission to save coral reefs is what caught our attention and continues to do so today. We've been giving ever since."
-Gene Monnier





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