

Preface

Since the age of seven, when my father threw me overboard, I have been observing coral reefs through a dive mask. I have marveled at the beauty, biological diversity, and productivity of coral reefs and have seen how important they are to the local people who depend on them for food, income, recreation, and spiritual enrichment. I have also seen how human activity has undermined the health and vitality of reefs. The coral reefs I observed in the 1940s are totally different today. Sadly, none has changed for the better.

When I think of coral reef ecology, the concepts of *connection and interdependence* come to mind. Corals have their symbiotic algal partners, while “cleaner fish” have their clients. Landscape management relates directly to sediment and nutrient delivery and to reef health, while energy use and carbon dioxide emissions link to global warming and coral bleaching. The historical over-harvesting of large animals has impaired reef vitality. Public awareness is essential for sustainable reef management. These are just some of the examples that underscore the vital connections in time and space that affect coral reefs. The tragic decline in reef health is due to human insult, and their restoration likewise depends on human action.



I am pleased to see that *Reefs at Risk in the Caribbean* addresses these connections and calls attention to the importance of people in the equation of reef health and restoration. The involvement of multiple partner organizations ensures that this report reflects the many facets of reef assessment and management, and will be widely used. Predictably, I totally concur with the need for greater public awareness. It is my view that without public support, rational and sustainable management will not occur. I am often told that our television shows were instrumental in inspiring many of our present ocean experts to pursue a career in ocean sciences. Of course, awareness is not action. *Reefs at Risk in the Caribbean* clearly outlines the critical steps required for building capacity and improving management. The focus on socioeconomic issues is crucial to ensuring that future generations will continue to benefit from coral reefs.

Ultimately, our challenge is not to manage reefs: it is to manage ourselves. I applaud the World Resources Institute for its admirable work to protect coral reefs, a priceless natural treasure.

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