



CONTACT:

Don Stark
Turks & Caicos Reef Fund
(649) 347-8455
DonStark@TCReef.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

David Stone
Turks and Caicos Reef Fund
(649) 346-3111
DavidStone@TCReef.org

TURKS & CAICOS REEF FUND ESTABLISHED

15 February 2011, Providenciales, TCI – The Turks & Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF) has been established to help preserve and protect the marine environment of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Don Stark, one of the founders of the TCRF and the organization's chairman, said, "I have been coming to the Turks & Caicos since 1993 and I have been impressed by the conservation efforts already in place here with the National Marine Parks system, but rapid development on the islands is placing tremendous pressure on the marine environment. As one of the consistently highly rated dive destinations, snorkelers and scuba divers have a vested interest in seeing the reefs and related marine environments." The TCRF will raise funds from the voluntary contributions from island visitors. In exchange for a voluntary contribution, visitors will receive either a wristband (\$5) or a plastic dive tag (\$10) that can be attached to their scuba gear, bag or suitcase to demonstrate their support for the TCRF. We hope to involve all tourists whether they come here to fish, snorkel, dive, or just to enjoy our beautiful beaches.

"We have tried to model our program on the very successful Bonaire Marine Parks Fee program," said David Stone, the other founder and the Deputy Chairman of the TCRF. "We intend to facilitate marine environmental research efforts, educational programs, and conservation efforts with the funds we raise."

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Info@TCReef.org (E-mail)
www.TCReef.org

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The TCRF has begun to accept grant applications from individuals, groups and organizations for projects that will enhance the marine environment of the TCI.

The TCRF has selected as its first project, in cooperation with the Turks and Caicos Islands Department of Environmental and Coastal Resources, the refurbishing and replacement, as needed, of the snorkel trail markers on the reef in front of the Coral Gardens Resort. The snorkel trail is an attraction that is well known and heavily utilized by visitors to the islands, but hurricanes, storms & algae growth has taken its toll over the past several years. Our goal will be to replace the markers and reef ball support stands and to regularly visit the site to perform cleaning and maintenance of both the markers, reef ball stands and marker buoys for the benefit and enjoyment of all visitors.

Founded in 2010, the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund provides funding for education, research and conservation programs to individuals, organizations and agencies that help to preserve and protect the marine environment of the Turks & Caicos Islands. Over 85% of all funds raised through voluntary contributions from divers and snorkelers visiting the Turks & Caicos Islands are directed to the Fund's programs. For more information on the projects funded by the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund and funding opportunities, visit us at www.TCReef.tc or www.TCReef.org.

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