Blue Star Recognition Program

Eric Raslich
Blue Star Overview

- Voluntary recognition program for charter boats participating in diving and snorkeling activities
- Began in Florida Keys
- Initially funded in part by a grant from Mote’s Protect Our Reef Grants Program
Context

- Began with 4 original shops
- 20 current Blue Star shops
  - Two or three at various stages in the process
- A few new shops show interest each year
  - 4 new shops on boarded in the last year
Mission

“The mission of the Blue Star program is to promote responsible diving and snorkeling practices within the Florida Keys and to enhance visitor appreciation and understanding of the marine ecosystem and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS).”
Program Goals

• Increase the awareness and knowledge of the marine ecosystem and FKNMS among dive and snorkel operator staff;
• Connect dive and snorkel operators with the Florida Keys environmental community and conservation organizations;
Program Goals (cont.)

• Reduce avoidable impacts of divers and snorkelers on the coral reef;
• Enhance visitor appreciation and understanding of the marine ecosystem and FKNMS.
Eligibility

• Any charter operation with a dive or snorkel component to their business
• Certified operators agree to perform Blue Star briefings for all customers regardless of the specific trip that day
• Participation does not guarantee eligibility in the future
PROGRAM CRITERIA
Big Picture

- Owner agreement
- Blue Star contact at shop
- Initial staff training
- Initial evaluation
- Continuing education
- Standardized briefing
- Certification classes
- Conservation courses
- Conservation activities
Standard Knowledge

- Staff take an online training course (~1 hr.)
- General FKNMS
- Sanctuary Zones
- Coral Reef Ecosystem
- Coral Reef Etiquette
- Maritime Heritage
- Invasive Lionfish
On Board Briefing

- Topics from previous slide/online training
- What is Blue Star?
- “Learn more…” binder
- Personal flair
Use Moorings (When Available)

- Proper use of moorings is important for the large vessels used by dive shops
- Anchoring allowed in accordance with Sanctuary regulations (15 CFR 922.163(a)(5)(ii))

Nancy Diersing, Florida Keys NMS
Comply with All Laws and Marine Regulations

- Keep trash on board
- No collecting or harvesting from SPAs
- Oily bilge discharge
- Fish feeding
- Wildlife harassment
- Dive flag
- And more!
Conservation Courses and Activities

• Incorporate Blue Star Reef Etiquette video into certification classes
• Provide the opportunity to earn at least one conservation related specialty certification
• Offer at least one conservation related special activity (reef cleanup, lionfish safari, CRF out planting, etc)
Blue Star Program Promotion

- FKNMS educational materials/brochures in store (or offer on vessel)
- Blue Star sticker or plaque on vessel
- Blue Star sticker or plaque in shop or storefront
- Blue Star logo and link on website
Blue Star Shop Promotion

- Press Releases
- Maintain a Blue Star website listing current recognized shops
- Promotional materials
- Website
- Radio spots
- Monroe County TDC
- Outreach events
- Related publications
Staff Continuing Education

• Complete an annual online refresher training
  – Updated Modules
  – New Material
• Attend at least one marine conservation lecture or presentation each year
  – Lionfish workshop
  – Pennekamp/FIU/FKNMS/FKCC lecture series
Environmental Regulations

- Recycle engine oil
  - Recycling everything else is encouraged
- Documented vessel pump out process
PROCESS FOR PARTICIPATION
Taking Ownership

- Completely voluntary program
- Needs shop buy in to succeed
- Owners must be interested and motivated
- Provided with checklist and operator agreement
- FKNMS invests time when initial requirements are met
Evaluation

- Blue Star coordinator evaluates each shop based on the published criteria in the Blue Star Framework found online
- Results provided quickly
- Corrections rectified and verified if necessary
Annual Evaluation

• Once a shop is participating, it must complete an annual evaluation consisting of
  – Refresher training
  – Continuing education
  – Prearranged ride along from a Blue Star representative
RECOGNITION
NAMASTE' ECO EXCURSIONS

(850) 525-9624

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

NAMASTE' ECO EXCURSIONS of Key West earns sanctuary Blue Star certification

October 17, 2015

NAMASTE' Eco-Excursions of Key West has received the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary’s Blue Star certification for its conservation efforts. The Blue Star program recognizes companies that contribute to the conservation and protection of the sanctuary’s marine environment.

The Blue Star program was established in 2011 to recognize companies that are committed to the conservation and protection of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The program aims to promote sustainable tourism practices and encourage businesses to adopt environmentally-friendly practices.

NAMASTE' Eco-Excursions has been a leading operator in the sanctuary for over a decade, offering unique and educational tours that allow guests to experience the beauty of the sanctuary’s marine life.

The sanctuary is home to a diverse array of marine life, including coral reefs, sea turtles, and numerous species of fish and marine mammals. The sanctuary’s protection is crucial to ensuring the health and survival of these species and their ecosystems.

NAMASTE' Eco-Excursions has been recognized for its commitment to sustainability and conservation efforts, and has taken steps to minimize its impact on the environment. The sanctuary is proud to acknowledge NAMASTE' Eco-Excursions’ dedication to the protection of the sanctuary and its natural resources.

For more information on the Blue Star program and a list of certified operators, visit the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary website at http://www.floridakeysnms.com. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @nmsf.
BLUE STAR OPERATOR

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary recognizes this operator as demonstrating care and concern for Florida's coral reefs through the promotion of responsible diving and snorkeling practices and coral reef conservation.

2009

Planning to Dive or Snorkel the Florida Keys?
Look before you book!

Ask if your operator is BLUE STAR recognized

Blue Star Operator
Committed to Coral Conservation

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