



Blue Star Diving Program Framework:

Partnering with Charter Diving and Snorkeling Operators to Encourage Responsible Diving Practices in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

I. Program Mission

The mission of the Blue Star Diving program is to promote responsible diving and snorkeling practices and to enhance visitor appreciation and understanding of the marine ecosystems within Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

II. Program Goal and Objectives

The goal of the Blue Star Diving program (“Blue Star”) is to develop a voluntary education and recognition program and supporting materials for commercial dive and snorkel operators who are committed to coral reef conservation and education in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS).

Program objectives include:

- A. Increase the awareness and knowledge of the marine ecosystem and FKNMS among dive and snorkel operator staff;
- B. Connect dive and snorkel operators with the Florida Keys environmental community and conservation organizations;
- C. Reduce impacts of divers and snorkelers on the coral reef;
- D. Enhance visitor appreciation and understanding of the marine ecosystem and FKNMS.

III. Background

The Blue Star program is managed by FKNMS as a voluntary recognition program. Blue Star recognizes dive and snorkel operators in the Florida Keys who meet and adhere to established program criteria designed to educate business staff and patrons on topics including FKNMS, the

coral reef ecosystem, cultural resources, and how individuals can protect marine resources through responsible diving and snorkeling.

Recognition in the Blue Star program is voluntary and involves no regulatory component. Requirements are structured to avoid recognized organizations incurring costs beyond those of regular operations. The program is similar to the Clean Marina program administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Dolphin SMART program implemented by NOAA, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and the Dolphin Ecology Project.

The Blue Star Program Framework was developed with input from staff and owners of Florida Keys dive and snorkel businesses, REEF Environmental Education Foundation, and FKNMS.

Development of the Blue Star program fulfills strategy E.4, activity 6, under the Education and Outreach Action Plan of Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's Final Management Plan (2007) and goal 1, objective 1.3 of Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' Strategic Plan (2017).

IV. Eligibility for Program Recognition

Businesses or organizations licensed to conduct for-hire dive and/or snorkel charters originating and operating within the waters of FKNMS as either the primary or secondary purpose of their operation are eligible to be recognized as Blue Star Diving operators.

Note 1: Some charter businesses may combine dive or snorkel trips with other water-based activities (i.e. kayaking, fishing, wildlife viewing). Blue Star recognized operators agree to follow all program criteria, including providing key components of the Blue Star briefing (What is FKNMS?, Sanctuary Zones) to their customers, regardless of the type of charter they are running on a given day. The full Blue Star briefing should be provided on all dive and snorkel charters.

Note 2: Recognition by the Blue Star program does not create any right to renewal and does not represent a waiver by NOAA to seek penalties that are provided by law if violations are discovered.

Note 3: Recognition by the Blue Star program does not ensure that the vessel complies with U.S. Coast Guard safety inspection or other applicable safety and insurance requirements. Patrons are encouraged to ask businesses if they maintain current inspection, license, and insurance documentation.

V. Program Criteria

To be recognized in the Blue Star program, a dive or snorkel operator must meet the following criteria:

A. Train all staff to a standard of knowledge.

Staff training shall be accomplished using the online training website <http://www.sanctuarybluestar.org/training/> covering the following subjects:

1. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

2. Sanctuary Zones
3. Coral Reef Ecosystem
4. Coral Reef Etiquette
5. Maritime Heritage
6. Threats to FKNMS Ecosystems

Shops seeking recognition must designate a staff member to act as the Blue Star Liaison who will be responsible for record keeping and communication regarding staff training, continuing education, and conservation related activities. This role should be filled by a full-time staff member (or supervised by a full-time staff member) that has work time allocated to support tracking these program requirements (1-2 hours per month). The Blue Star Liaison should be able to produce the documentation upon request from Blue Star Program Coordinator or designee.

B. Conduct an on board briefing.

Prior to the completion of every tour, and preferably before any patrons enter the water, participating program staff (whether captain or mate) must conduct an educational briefing. Participants will be provided with a waterproof card to assist in the briefing. Briefing must cover the following:

1. Diving in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
2. Sanctuary Marine Zones
3. Coral Reef Ecosystem
4. Coral Reef Etiquette
 - a) Gloves prohibited on reef dives (See section P)
5. Maritime Heritage
 - a) Marine Debris vs. Artifacts
6. Threats
7. What is Blue Star and How to Learn More with Binder

C. Use mooring buoys when available. Anchor carefully in accordance with sanctuary regulations when mooring is not possible.

Anchoring on living coral in water less than 40 feet deep when the seabed is visible is prohibited (15 CFR 922.163(a)(5)(ii)). Anchoring within any Sanctuary Preservation Area (SPA) or Ecological Reserve (ER) when a mooring buoy is available is prohibited. Dive shops are encouraged to opt to move to a different dive site or live boat instead of anchoring whenever possible throughout the entire sanctuary (15 CFR 922.164(d)(1)(vi)). Participating dive shops are strongly encouraged to maintain an active line of communication with FKNMS regarding mooring buoys. If you notice a buoy that need to be maintained or replaced please contact Hank Becker at 305-434-9378 or email



David.Becker@noaa.gov. FKNMS welcomes suggestions for new locations for mooring buoys if operators find their vessels frequently using anchors in a particular location.

D. Comply with all laws, marine regulations, and best practices; ensure guest compliance to the best of your abilities.

Participants agree to abide by all resource protection laws and regulations enforced by, and not limited to, the following agencies: Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations, U.S. Coast Guard, State natural resources departments, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Should you witness guests violating any laws, regulations, or best practices, immediately correct the behavior in the water and discuss proper scuba diving and/or snorkeling etiquette in a post dive briefing.

E. Incorporate Blue Star Reef Etiquette Video into certification classes.

Program participants must ensure that all students taking diver certification classes watch the provided video. Upon request, FKNMS can provide additional copies on DVD or thumb drive. Shops are also encouraged to display the video on loop in retail locations and/or email the video to customers with their booking confirmation.

F. Participant must prominently display in its storefront, or vessel, brochures and other educational materials offered by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Including FKNMS brochure, Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center brochure, and/or Blue Star brochure. If no shore-side storefront is available for the operator, appropriate brochures and other educational materials must be offered to customers during the charter. Upon request, FKNMS can provide a plastic brochure rack for program participants.

G. Prominently display Blue Star sticker, plaque, and/or dive flag on vessel.

Sticker and/or plaque should be clearly visible to divers and other vessels.

H. Prominently display Blue Star sticker and/or plaque in participant's shop or storefront.

If no shore-side storefront is available, participants must place on vessel. Additional stickers may be made available upon request for new vessels or replacements.

I. Link to the Blue Star website.

Hyperlink the Blue Star logo provided by Blue Star Program Coordinator to the website: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/onthewater/bluestar.html>. This applies only if the operator maintains a website. Participants are not required to create a website in order to participate in Blue Star.

J. Program participants who are scuba dive operators offering certification must offer at least one conservation-related specialty course.

This criterion does not apply to snorkel-only participants. Examples include: buoyancy control, REEF fish identification, or underwater naturalist. Blue Star Program Coordinator will provide participants with a list of applicable courses, and instructors may submit courses to FKNMS for approval.

K. Offer at least one conservation-related special activity per calendar year.

Examples include: reef cleanups, mangrove cleanups, REEF field station, Project AWARE events, participation in coral restoration, etc. Activities not listed may be approved by the Blue Star Program Coordinator. Conservation-related activities may occur after the operator is recognized, but must be completed within the calendar year. Recognition will be awarded on an operator's commitment to offer a conservation-related activity by the end of the year.

L. Require all staff to attend a sanctuary resource conservation-related continuing education opportunity each calendar year.

In order to continuously stay informed of environmental issues in the Florida Keys and to impart additional stewardship information to customers, participating staff are required to attend any one of the marine conservation lectures or presentations offered every year by Florida Keys agencies and nonprofits, most of which are provided at no cost.

Examples include, but are not limited to: Mote's BleachWatch training, REEF's lionfish safe handling/collection training, REEF Fish n' Friends lectures, History of Diving Museum lectures, Coral Restoration Foundation training, Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage



Museum, and Florida Keys Community College’s sanctuary seminar series. Program coordinator will provide participants with notice of applicable presentations when possible. Presentations not on the list may be approved by the Blue Star Program Coordinator. Lectures or presentations must be marine/conservation related. The continuing education requirement may be fulfilled after the operator is recognized, but must be completed within the calendar year. Recognition will be awarded on the operator’s commitment that all staff will complete the continuing education requirement by the end of the year.

M. Recycling of engine oil is mandatory.

Operators should have a documented process for engine oil recycling.

N. Reducing waste on vessels.

Recycling of glass, plastic, cans, and paper is strongly encouraged throughout the business. Operators should work towards eliminating single-use plastics onboard vessels by January 1, 2021.

O. Educate customers on the harmful impacts of sunscreen on coral reefs.

Prior to departing for trips, educate customers on the impacts that sunscreens can have on coral reefs and suggest less harmful alternatives. If sunscreen is offered on a vessel, it must not contain chemicals that have been found harmful to corals. While no sunscreen has been proven to be completely ‘reef-friendly’, those with titanium oxide or zinc oxide, which are natural mineral ingredients, are more environmentally friendly alternatives. Blue Star and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary does not endorse any specific brands.

P. Require divers not to wear gloves on reef dives unless necessary for safety or health reasons.

Research has shown that divers who are wearing gloves are significantly more likely to impact the reef during a dive. This causes damage to delicate reef organisms, transmit diseases, create a false sense of security for divers encountering dangerous marine life, and generally threatens the health of the reef ecosystem. Blue Star Diving operators will require divers not to wear gloves on reef dives unless necessary for safety or health reasons.

Q. Maintain open and frequent communication with Blue Star Program Coordinator and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and respond to requests in a timely manner.

If a Blue Star operator has not responded to a request made via email from the Blue Star Coordinator, the Blue Star Coordinator will take the following steps:

1. Send two separate emails to the Blue Star operator requesting response and follow up.
2. Call the Blue Star operator and leave a message, requesting a response, if the owner or Blue Star liaison is not available.

If the Blue Star operator has not responded to requests within one month of the initial contact they will be notified that their Blue Star recognition will be temporarily suspended and their organization will be removed from the Blue Star website until contact is re-established.

Once contacted, the Blue Star Coordinator will work with the Blue Star operator to initiate the re-evaluation process (see page 10, [section VI F](#)). Once program requirements are complete the Blue Star operator will be reinstated and their information will be added to the Blue Star website again.

VI. Process for Program Participation

A. Definitions of Program Roles

1. **Blue Star Program Coordinator** - This role will be fulfilled by FKNMS staff member(s).
2. **Blue Star Representative** - Other FKNMS staff member or designated volunteer who may conduct annual ride along evaluation. This person will be trained in all required components of the Blue Star Program. *See section E.*
3. **Shop Owner/Manager** - Responsible party for Blue Star certification compliance. The owner and/or manager of a dive shop or organization may choose to designate a Blue Star Liaison to implement the program components at their site but is ultimately responsible for ensuring their organization meets these requirements.
4. **Blue Star Liaison** - Designated staff member at a shop or organization who is in charge of making sure the shop or organization is meeting Blue Star Program requirements. This liaison should be proactive in training staff, keeping a record of Blue Star activities (annual conservation activity, continuing education), responding to communications from the Blue Star Program Coordinator, participating in the annual ride-along evaluation and framework review, and should be a full-time staff member (or supervised by a full-time staff member)

that has work time allocated to support tracking these program requirements (1-2 hours per month).

B. Initial Evaluation for Program Recognition

1. Shop owner/manager schedules individual meeting with Blue Star Program Coordinator to discuss basic program requirements and business compatibility.
2. If both parties agree to move forward, the Blue Star Program Coordinator provides business owner/manager with a checklist of Blue Star program components and criteria, as well as materials to help the business prepare for an evaluation before participation and recognition are confirmed. Shop Owner, Blue Star Liaison if applicable, and Blue Star Coordinator sign the Blue Star Diving Operator Agreement.
3. The shop owner will hold an all staff meeting where a Blue Star Coordinator will give a short presentation to their staff about the general Blue Star program requirements, shop staff responsibilities, importance of dive briefing, and other topics. At this point the operator's Blue Star Liaison should be identified so they can be introduced to the Blue Star Coordinator and staff.
4. The designated Blue Star Liaison ensures that all staff are trained to the program standards outlined in the framework via the online training website, continuing education programs, and a presentation from the Blue Star Coordinator.
5. When prepared, business owner/manager contacts Blue Star Program Coordinator to request an evaluation to verify that the business is following the program criteria.
6. Evaluation occurs within four weeks of request.
 - a) Blue Star Program Coordinator (or Blue Star Representative) meets with participant at the business site on a mutually convenient date to review evaluation checklist.
 - b) Blue Star Liaison submits Blue Star Diving Requirement Tracker to Blue Star Coordinator for review.
 - c) Blue Star Program Coordinator (or Blue Star Representative) observes a complete dive or snorkel charter to ensure the briefing includes required educational information, and that the captain (and other staff when applicable) is following program criteria.
 - d) Evaluation results are provided within two weeks of site visit and review of information.
7. Following successful completion of the evaluation, the shop or organization becomes officially recognized as a Blue Star operator. The shop receives recognition materials (see Section VI.C) and is included on all Blue Star materials as appropriate and feasible.
8. If the owner/manager does not meet all program criteria following the evaluation, the Blue Star Program Coordinator provides a letter/email describing the manner in which the business is not meeting the program criteria and how best to revise its practices to conform. The Blue Star Program Coordinator

provides technical assistance, when possible. After reviewing the evaluation and making any suggested changes, the owner/manager contacts the Blue Star Program Coordinator to arrange for a re-evaluation. The re-evaluation will be scheduled no later than four weeks after the request is made.

Note: If the request for reevaluation is made within three months of the initial evaluation, only areas in which the criteria are not being met will be reevaluated. If the request is made more than three months after the initial evaluation, a full evaluation will be conducted.

C. Initial Orientation and Training

1. FKNMS will offer an orientation meeting for business owners or general managers to ensure operator management understands the framework and program requirements. The shop's designated Blue Star Liaison, if different from the owner or general manager, should also attend.
2. Outreach and educational materials necessary to engage and train employees are provided to prospective participants at no charge. These may include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a) Participation handbook
 - (1) Blue Star Diving Program framework
 - (2) Handouts of applicable laws
 - (3) List of pertinent websites
 - (4) Pertinent educational products
 - b) Interactive website for training
 - (1) Includes training modules that provide all employees with standardized program knowledge.
 - (2) Provides an explanation of all components of the framework and how to adhere to them.
 - (3) Provides a consistent means of training new operator employees.
 - (4) Allows for easily sharing updated information.
 - (5) Provides Blue Star coordinator and liaison with easy means for accountability.

D. Initial Recognition

Upon successful completion of training, evaluation, applicant is included on the list of program participants, receives all program materials, including vessel decal and shop plaque, and is recognized on the Blue Star website and media outlets available at the time.

E. Annual Evaluation

Annual evaluation of participants is essential to gauge the program's effectiveness and success, which relies on participants continuing to follow the program criteria after their initial evaluation and recognition as a Blue Star participant. The goal of annual

evaluation is to ensure that the Blue Star criteria are being followed, not to eliminate participants from the program. Therefore, the focus of the annual evaluation process is providing constructive comments to participants on their operations as related to Blue Star and working with them to meet program criteria.

1. All Blue Star participants, regardless of how many vessels and captains are associated with their business, are evaluated at least once per year.
2. A trained Blue Star representative conducts the annual evaluation. Evaluation techniques may include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Prearranged ride-along, which may include participating in scuba diving to assess underwater program components, by a Blue Star Program Coordinator or Blue Star Representative with feedback provided to the operator at the end of the trip.
 - b) Unscheduled ride-along with anonymous, trained representatives with feedback provided at a later date.
 - c) Customer evaluations in-person or online.
 - d) Coworker evaluations submitted to Blue Star Program Coordinator.
3. Representatives conducting Blue Star evaluations are trained and screened to ensure objectivity and accuracy.
 - a) The representative evaluates the charter for adherence to the Blue Star criteria using a standard reporting form.
 - b) At the conclusion of the charter, the representative identifies him- or herself to the operator as a Blue Star Representative and reviews the evaluation results, noting any areas of concern and offering recommendations on how to address them.
 - c) The operator has the opportunity on the form to note any areas of disagreement regarding the evaluation.
 - d) The representative notifies the operator that he/she will receive a copy of the evaluation results via mail, fax or email from the Blue Star Program Coordinator.
 - e) The representative explains how the operator can challenge the evaluation if he/she disagrees with any observations or conclusions contained in the report.
 - f) If a representative observes what he/she believes may be a violation of the law, the incident will be reported to the appropriate enforcement agency.
 - g) The representative provides the evaluation form to the Blue Star Program Coordinator, who forwards a copy to the participating business or organization.
4. If a Blue Star participant disagrees with the findings of an annual evaluation, the following process applies:
 - a) The program participant submits a written description of the discrepancy.
 - b) After reviewing both the evaluation and the participant's account, the program coordinator will decide whether the participant did not satisfy the criteria, triggering the process in Section VI.8 below.
 - c) If the program coordinator determines that the participant successfully met the program criteria, this will be noted on the evaluation form and

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- the participant will be provided recognition materials for the next calendar year.
5. If there are any areas of deviation from the program criteria noted in evaluation:
 - a) The participant will be made aware of the deviations to the program criteria and will be provided 30 days to revise its practices.
 - b) To the extent feasible, the Blue Star coordinator is available to provide assistance to the participant.
 - c) The participant is re-evaluated after the 30-day timeframe described above through an unannounced spot check, second representative evaluation, meeting with Blue Star Program Coordinator, or pre-arranged ride along by the Program Coordinator or representative.
 - d) The participant will not receive recognition materials for the next calendar year until the operator completes a successful evaluation, having revised its practices to meet the Blue Star criteria.
 6. Program Coordinator verifies continuing education and conservation-related activity record.
 7. Upon successful evaluation, the program participant receives recognition materials for the next calendar year.
 8. Participants are welcome to provide feedback on the evaluation process to the program coordinator at all times.
 9. Additional spot checks may be carried out on a random or unannounced basis to ensure that all participants continue to meet the program criteria.
 10. Complaints from members of the public or other program participants that a participant is not following program criteria will be handled according to the procedure described in Section VI, below.

F. Re-Evaluation

If a Blue Star operator is unable to meet the program requirements as outlined in this Framework within the timeline above their Blue Star recognition will be suspended, and they will be removed from the Blue Star website, pending re-evaluation.

The Blue Star Liaison is responsible for contacting the Blue Star Coordinator to schedule a meeting to discuss re-evaluation. During this meeting the operator will outline where they failed to comply with the Blue Star framework and what changes they have implemented to ensure future compliance. At this time the operator will schedule a date for a ride along and re-evaluation with the Blue Star Coordinator.

After a ride along evaluation has successfully been completed the Blue Star operator will be re-established and will receive the current year's recognition materials.

G. Refresher Training

Prior to annual renewal and by December 1st of each year, staff of participating operators must complete the online interactive training course as a refresher training. The course includes a question/answer section at the end of the training for participants

to complete. An email notification is automatically sent to the Blue Star program coordinator to indicate the participant successfully completed the refresher course.

H. Annual Review

Only a current-year decal and listing on the Blue Star website indicates active participation in the Blue Star program. Recognition for all Blue Star participants automatically expires at the end of each calendar year. New Stickers and plaques are distributed in January each year to participants who accomplish the following criteria:

1. Successfully complete the annual evaluation and address potential problem areas found, in accordance with Section VI.D.8.
2. Complete the required annual online refresher training or alternative for all staff, prior to January 1st.
3. Complete all continuing education and conservation-related activities during calendar year. Blue Star public awareness materials are updated as appropriate to reflect the current list of participants.

VII. Complaints Procedure

The following procedure establishes a process to address complaints received by the program coordinator about Blue Star participants not meeting the program criteria.

A. Telephone or Verbal Complaints

1. A record of the conversation is made and the complainant will be asked to put their concerns in writing. The complainant is advised that an anonymous copy of a written complaint will be provided to the program participant against whom the complaint is made. The written complaint procedure, Section VII.B below, then applies.
2. No further action will be taken unless a signed, written complaint is received.

B. Written Complaints

1. Complaints are date stamped and copied to the Blue Star program coordinator.
2. The program coordinator assesses whether the complaint relates to the Blue Star program criteria not being followed. If the complaint does not relate to the program criteria, no further action is taken.
3. If the program coordinator determines that the participant has deviated from the program criteria, the participant is given 30 days to address areas of concern. This may include a meeting with the participant to clarify any points.
4. The participant is then re-evaluated through an unannounced spot-check, a meeting with the Blue Star program coordinator or pre-arranged ride-along. The program coordinator will select the most appropriate evaluation method.

5. If, within any twelve-month period, two complaints are received and determined to be valid, the participant will be ineligible for the Blue Star program for one year. The participant will be removed from Blue Star program materials, will be required to return any Blue Star stickers, and will not receive an annual renewal decal.
6. The participant may request re-evaluation for renewed participation after one year of non-participation.

Note 1: Any complaint from the public that appears to describe a violation of the law will be forwarded to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, or U.S. Coast Guard for action, as appropriate.

Note 2: If any complaint that is investigated by a law enforcement agency results in a judgement against the participant, the participant will be dropped from the program. Future reinstatement is at the discretion of the Blue Star Program Coordinator and FKNMS.

VIII. Framework Review

An annual review of the framework will ensure that the Blue Star program is functioning as intended and provide the opportunity to address issues that were not foreseen when the framework was developed initially.

A. March

In March of each year, current Blue Star participants are notified via email or phone call that the annual framework review is commencing, which will include but is not limited to: interviews with and received suggestions from participants, the public, FKNMS Sanctuary Advisory Council members, or other appropriate parties. A webinar will be held, and all Blue Star operators will be encouraged to attend, during which operators can provide feedback on the Blue Star framework and suggestions for program modification.

B. April

The program coordinator reviews input from participants and others, along with any internal proposals, and completes a new draft of the framework if necessary by the end of April.

C. May

The new draft framework is circulated among current participants for comment, with 30 days to respond.

D. June

Comments are reviewed, and the revised final framework provided to current participants. Following distribution of the final framework to current participants, the

revised framework is circulated to other potential participants in local areas to advise them of program revisions.

E. July - January

Participants work to ensure they are meeting the Blue Star requirements as outlined in the new framework. The online refresher training will be based on the revised criteria. Participants agree to abide by all amendments to the Blue Star criteria. Blue Star operators are responsible for scheduling their annual ride along in order to receive their current year certification sticker. As of January 1st each year participants are recognized for their successful implementation of Blue Star requirements.

IX. Benefits of Blue Star Participation

A. Raising Public Awareness of the Blue Star Program

To ensure that the Blue Star program is effective in reaching divers and snorkelers and to create a further incentive for operators to participate in the program, FKNMS will pursue the following public awareness activities.

1. Maintain a Blue Star webpage as part of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries website, including a complete list of Blue Star operators.
2. Promote the Blue Star program on various social media outlets.
3. Work with dive, travel, and other relevant media to promote the Blue Star program.
4. When feasible, present information about the program at relevant consumer and trade shows. Examples may include Dive Equipment and Marketing Association annual show and other events and festivals.
5. Work with Monroe County Tourist Development Council to increase awareness of the program.
6. Distribute Blue Star rack cards and promotional materials at locations such as hotels and visitor centers.
7. Work to get information about Blue Star in tourist guides and other relevant tourism and dive websites.
8. Provide program participants with decals for vessels, a plaque for display in storefront, branded dive flag, and additional educational and promotional materials.

Participants should also plan to cross promote NOAA Sanctuaries branded events to the extent that they do not incur any financial burdens. If promotional products are delivered, participants are expected to share those via social media, marketing channels, and distribute physical media when possible and appropriate.

B. Blue Star Diving Conservation Programs

1. Eligibility for Lionfish Permit

Program participants who have completed the sanctuary-supported lionfish safe handling and collection workshops, organized by REEF Environmental Education Foundation or other sanctuary-approved training program, are eligible to receive a NOAA FKNMS permit to remove lionfish from Sanctuary Preservation Areas, Ecological Reserves, and Key Largo and Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary Existing Management Areas using pole spears with paralyzer tip or hand nets. The permit will contain specific conditions and will need to be countersigned and sent back to FKNMS to be valid. Contact Blue Star Program Coordinator for more information.

2. Eligibility for *Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys*

Marine debris is one of the most widespread and persistent forms of pollution affecting the world's ocean and coastal waters. In response to the significant amount of marine debris left in the wake of Hurricane Irma, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is working with local partners to identify and remove marine debris. You can play an integral role in helping the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary stay healthy and resilient. Blue Star operators are encouraged to participate in the *Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys* (<https://floridakeys.noaa.gov/CleanSeasFloridaKeys/>). Program participants who have completed their current year Blue Star requirements and secure appropriate permits may be eligible for funding to support marine debris removal activities through the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Contact Blue Star Program Coordinator for more information.

For questions about or feedback for the Blue Star Diving Program please contact the Blue Star Program Coordinator(s) at bluestar.diving@noaa.gov or by calling 305-809-4727 or 305-434-9385.