



**Factsheet**

# The Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean (SPAW):

## Dry Tortugas National Park

- A SPAW listed site -



### Identification

**Country:** USA  
**Name of the area:** Dry Tortugas National park  
**Administrative region:** Southeast United States  
**Date of establishment:** 10/26/1992  
**Geographic location:**  
 Longitude X: -82.872813  
 Latitude Y: 24.627874  
**Date of listing under SPAW:** 23 October 2012

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 Contact address: P.O. Box 6208 Key West, FL 33041  
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### Introduction

The Dry Tortugas National Park (DTNP) protects a 265 sq. km. area of coral reefs, sandy shoals, seagrass beds and seven small islands or keys. The marine area includes reefs with high densities of live coral cover and massive coral heads that are unique to the Tortugas region and rare in the Florida Keys. Rare migratory seabirds utilize the keys for rookeries and sea turtles nest on the sand beaches. DTNP was established by the U.S. Congress: “to preserve and protect for the education, inspiration, and enjoyment of present and future generations nationally significant natural, historic, scenic, marine, and scientific values in South Florida.” U.S. law also directs that DTNP be managed “to protect and interpret a pristine subtropical marine ecosystem, including an intact coral reef community,” and among other purposes, “to protect populations of fish and wildlife, including (but not limited to) loggerhead

and green sea turtles, sooty terns, frigate birds, and numerous migratory bird species.” The Park has four management zones to achieve desired resource conditions and provide a range of compatible visitor uses, including a Research Natural Area where fishing and anchoring are prohibited to protect and restore coral and fish species and to scientifically evaluate their condition.

### SPAW criteria met

- Ecological criteria**
- Representativeness
  - Conservation value
  - Rarity
  - Naturalness
  - Critical habitats
  - Diversity
  - Connectivity/coherence
  - Resilience

- Cultural and socio-economic criteria**
- Productivity
  - Cultural and traditional use
  - Socio-economic benefits

## Site description

### General features of the site

**Size:** 42 sq. km

**Terrestrial surface under sovereignty, excluding wetlands:**

42 sq. km

**Wetland surface:** 0 ha

**Marine surface:** 265 sq. Km

**National status of your protected area:** National Park

**Marine ecoregion:** 70. Floridian

### Management structure, authority

DTNP is co-managed with Everglades National Park. The Superintendent of DTNP and Everglades NP reports to the National Park Service Regional Director, Southeast Region.

### Management plan

General Management Plan Amendment (GMPa) adopted in 2001 establishes desired conditions for natural and cultural resources and an appropriate range of visitor experiences. The GMPa guides decision-making and direction of park management for 10-15 years. Four management zones are established to achieve these goals.

### International status and Date of designation

Biosphere reserve: No

World heritage site: No

Others: World Heritage Site in Danger 1/1/10

SPAW Site : 2012

### Main fauna populations and/or those of particular importance present (resident or migratory) in the area:

**Coral Reefs:** The coral reef formations of DTNP include bank reefs, high relief and low relief spur and groove, patch reefs, pinnacles, and other morphologies, which taken together provide an ecological suite of highly complex and productive habitats for fish and invertebrates. Various reefs within DTNP contain high densities of live coral cover and massive star coral heads (*Montastrea spp.*) that are unique to the Dry Tortugas region. Other common coral species include starlet coral (*Siderastrea spp.*), brain coral (*Copophylia natans*, *Diploria spp.*) fire coral (*Millepora alcicornis*), finger coral (*Porites spp.*), and lettuce coral (*Agaricia agaracites*). Additional species occurring

in DTNP are listed in the Appendix (Annex II species list to be added).

**Seagrass and Algal Communities:** Shallow seagrass and algal communities are important components of DTNP and the wider coral reef ecosystem of the Tortugas. *Thalassia testudinum* and *Syringodium filiforme* typically abound in shallower waters <10 m (33 ft). Algal communities in the Dry Tortugas tend to be ephemeral and occur on a variety of bottom types. Conspicuous genera include *Laurencia*, *Dictyota*, *Sargassum*, *Cladophora*, and *Padina*. Seagrass beds provide habitat and food for important coral reef fishery species, threatened and endangered species, and many other organisms.

**Sea Turtles:** The shores of the DTNP islands are important nesting habitat and the coral reefs and seagrass beds forage areas for sea turtles. Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) are the most common species known to nest and forage in DTNP. Hawksbill sea turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) are less common. Sightings of Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) are very rare, with three nests observed in 2004. (Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) sea turtles are seldom observed in the Tortugas region.) All species are protected under Florida statutes and the United States Endangered Species Act (ESA), and have had their conservation status elevated by inclusion on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Species ([www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)).

**The DTNP islands provide critical nesting habitats for five rare seabird species:** the Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*), Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*), Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), and Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*). DTNP contains the only known rookeries for Brown Noddies, Magnificent Frigate Birds, and Masked Boobies in the continental U.S. Sooty Tern sightings at DRTN have been recorded since 1903 and over 500,000 individuals have been banded there since the early 1950s. The Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) and Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*) also nest in DTNP. The National Audubon Society lists DTNP as one of the Important Birding Areas in Florida.

### Inhabitants inside the area or in the zone of potential direct impact on the protected area:

Not given



## Links

PA LISTING : [www.spaw-palisting.org](http://www.spaw-palisting.org)

CaMPAM : <http://campam.gcfi.org/campam.php>

UNEP-CEP : [www.cep.unep.org/](http://www.cep.unep.org/)

SPAW-RAC : [www.car-spaw-rac.org](http://www.car-spaw-rac.org)