

Fact Sheet: Impacts of the Indo-Pacific Lionfish Invasion
Prepared for the 2011 Senior Plenary Session of the Interagency Group on Insular Areas
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Who are lionfish and how did they get here?

Two species of Indo-Pacific lionfish the red lionfish, *Pterois volitans* and devil firefish *P. miles*, have invaded the Southeast U.S., Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico. Lionfish were first documented in South Florida waters in the 1980's and were likely introduced intentionally or unintentionally by pet owners. The lionfish is a venomous scorpionfish that inhabits temperate and tropical reefs. The lionfish propagates by releasing floating egg masses which hatch at the ocean surface. Lionfish larvae are then dispersed by surface and mid-water currents for approximately 30 days providing broad dispersal throughout the Southeast U.S., Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean.

Will lionfish have an impact?

Yes. Lionfish pose a serious threat to biodiversity and resilience of temperate and tropical reefs. The magnitude and geographical range of lionfish impacts is extreme and includes reduction of ecologically and economically important species, interactions with other reef stressors, cascading changes across the marine food web, impacts on stock rebuilding efforts for economically important fish stocks, and species and concern. Lionfish are capable of impacting commercial fishermen by reducing catch rates of commercial stocks and loss of working days when envenomation occurs. Additionally, lionfish may negatively impact the economically-important tourism sector, by reducing the demand for SCUBA diving trips, beach-going and thus hotel rooms.

What can we do about lionfish?

Lionfish densities can be controlled locally using initiatives such as harvesting lionfish for food, harvesting lionfish juveniles for the aquarium trade, sport tournaments, and adopt-a-reef and other citizen-based removal efforts. Lionfish cannot be eradicated throughout the invaded range given their expansive habitat and the high cost of removals. Managers of protected areas and small islands with coral reef based economies are developing lionfish control strategies, however, limited resources are available to assist with these efforts.

Funding Limitations

Although the USVI receives federal grant funding through both the Department of Commerce (NOAA) and the Department of Interior (USFWS), none of these existing sources may be used to fund either lionfish control or management programs and/or associated planning activities. Therefore a dedicated source of funding is needed for the lionfish management effort in the USVI. Dedicated sources might include funding from the local government or specific sources of funding from the federal government. Additionally, assistance could develop from the USVI forming partnerships with non-governmental organizations.

Is Congress taking action on lionfish?

Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen will be introducing a resolution helping to raise awareness and promote capacity building to strategically address the lionfish invasion in our oceans. As Ranking Member of the subcommittee on Fisheries, Oceans, Wildlife & Insular Affairs, Congresswoman Christensen will also work to ensure that a committee meeting is held on the issue.

How much would it cost to control lionfish in U.S. protected areas and territories?

\$150,000 to initiate a comprehensive removal strategy.

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