The Importance of Coral Reefs

- Healthy coral reefs contain thousands of fish and invertebrate species found nowhere else on Earth. They are some of the most diverse and valuable ecosystems.

- Coral reefs support more species per unit area than any other marine environment, including about 4,000 species of fish, 800 species of hard corals, and hundreds of other species. Scientists estimate that there may be another 1 to 8 million undiscovered species of organisms living in and around reefs (Reaka-Kudla, 1997).







The Importance of Coral Reefs



- This biodiversity is considered key to finding new medicines for the 21st century. Many drugs are now being developed from coral reef animals and plants as possible cures for cancer, arthritis, human bacterial infections, viruses, and other diseases.

- Storehouses of immense biological wealth, reefs also provide economic and environmental services to millions of people. Coral reefs may provide goods and services worth $375 billion each year. This is an amazing figure for an environment that covers less than 1 percent of the Earth's surface (Costanza et al., 1997).



- Healthy reefs contribute to local economies through tourism. Diving tours, fishing trips, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses based near reef systems provide millions of jobs and contribute billions of dollars all over the world. (Johns et al, 2001).

The Importance of Coral Reefs

- In developing countries, coral reefs contribute about one-quarter of the total fish catch, providing critical food resources for tens of millions of people (Jameson et al., 1995).

- Coral reefs buffer adjacent shorelines from wave action and prevent erosion, property damage and loss of life. Reefs also protect the highly productive wetlands along the coast, as well as ports and harbors and the economies they support.

- Globally, half a billion people are estimated to live within 100 kilometers of a coral reef and benefit from its production and protection.

