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Scientists concerned about the accelerated deterioration of environmental quality and marine communities in La Parguera Nature Reserve [1]

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Cayo Caracoles in La Parguera Natural Reserve with hundreds of boats in a reduced area during a long weekend.

Scientists from the Department of Marine Sciences (DCM) of the University of Puerto Rico's Mayagüez Campus (RUM) are raising concerns about the accelerated deterioration of the quality of the environment and the state of the marine communities that make up the ecosystem of the La Parguera Nature Reserve (RNLP), the most developed in Puerto Rico.

"The coral reefs, seagrass meadows and mangroves of the RNLP show accelerated deterioration, a consequence of a lethal combination of global warming and uncontrolled human activities. The increase in the frequency and intensity of storms, reef diseases and sargassum arrivals in the area are natural problems that we cannot control, but we can reduce the impact of human activities". La Parguera has been a tourist attraction for many years due to its proximity to recreational areas protected by the most developed reef ecosystem in Puerto Rico. After Hurricane Maria, during and after the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the number of visitors, lodges, boats, nurseries, restaurants, and people visiting the town, the cays and other areas of the RNLP during the week and mainly every weekend," and the lack of vigilance of official agencies, said Dr. Ernesto Weil, professor and director of the DCM, and specialist of coral reefs.

He added that the number of boats anchoring on the seagrass meadows, trampling by people walking and the physical damage produced by the propellers of the engines, significantly exceeds the resistance (carrying capacity) to disturbance of these habitats, which currently show a progressive deterioration in their structure and biodiversity, losing the ecological benefits they provide to the reserve and to humans.



"The frequency with which these over-tourist events occur prevents the natural recovery of these important habitats," he said.

"We call on state agencies to take a more proactive role in protecting the coral reefs and other associated communities of La Parguera Nature Reserve. Specifically, we urge the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and the OGPE to be more cautious before granting permits for residential or commercial development in coastal areas, especially in critical areas bordering coral reefs such as the RNLP, without an environmental impact statement, or the participation of

the local and scientific community in this process," Roy Armstrong, professor and associate director of the DCM, added.

This is a summary, to read the full story please visit our website in spanish or click here [3].

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