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Punta Cana bets on its coral reefs

This summer, the Punta Cana Group envisions the start of the most comprehensive private sector effort in the Caribbean to restore the area's coral reefs with the aim of turning them into a major attraction. The Punta Cana reef is a stretch of 16 million square meters of coral formations. The Punta Cana Ecological Foundation will be funding the first two-year program starting July that extends from Juanillo to Cabeza de Toro along the east coast. At the start, works would seek to identify the causes, in order to correct them gradually. "You cannot mop the floor, if you do not turn off the water," Professor John W. McManus, director of the University of Miami's National Center for Caribbean Coral Reef Research, and project director, stated to press the point for the need to stop the causes of the problems while instating a coastal management program.

During his visit to Punta Cana last week, McManus spoke enthusiastically about how this effort could turn Punta Cana's coral reefs into a major competitive selling advantage in the Caribbean. McManus was in the Dominican Republic to take part in the New York Times/Center for Environmental Research and Conservation of Columbia University workshop on environment issues for journalists and took time off to inspect sections of the coral reef.

McManus called the project "the best prospect of its kind in the Caribbean." He highlighted that it would be "a cutting edge project."

"This is a beautiful reef if we can get it back to life," said McManus. He stressed that it would become a major natural beauty attraction for tourists headed to Punta Cana.

While many sites are building artificial reefs to protect the coastline and harbor marine life, the cost of replicating the sheer size of a natural reef is prohibitive. Thus, for those with a vision for sustainable tourism, recovering reefs makes economic sense.

This major Punta Cana Group investment in the environment would come at a time when corals are rapidly disappearing from reefs in the Caribbean, making it crucial for conservation actions to be taken.

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/07/0722_030722_coral.html

For more on the coral reefs and environmental issues, see <http://dr1.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=35>