

## Sensitive Ecosystems near Puerto del Rey Marina

The Cordillera Reef Nature Reserve is formed by a string of small islands, keys and coral reefs off the eastern-northeastern coast of Puerto Rico, covering nearly 18 nautical miles and an area of 120 square kilometers. Dominant formations are: *Las Cucarachas, los Farrallones, Cayo Icacos, Cayo Ratones, La Blanquilla, Cayo Diablo, Hermanos y Barriles, and Palominos*. *The island of Palominos and Cayo Lobos are private. Warm and clear waters in La Cordillera allow the presence of a great variety of fish species in the area. Many of these fishes are of commercial importance. Nearly 60 fishermen from Fajardo, Ceiba and Naguabo fish near the Reserve.*

*Among the marine ecosystems, the sea grass beds with abundant turtle grass and manatee grass are outstanding. Sea grass beds are of vital importance for their ecological services as nursing and feeding grounds for many marine organisms such as the Queen Conch, sea cucumbers, starfish and many juvenile fish.*

*The coral reefs at La Cordillera, are considered among the highest quality for the diversity of species present, the extension and the level of live coral found. There are three types of coral reefs a La Cordillera:*

- 1) rocky reef, also known as a coral community,*
- 2) fringing reefs, to the west of Palominos and south of Lobos*
- 3) patch reefs growing as spurs perpendicular to the shores. The Elkhorn coral (*Acropora palamata*) is an endangered species, commonly found in La Cordillera.*

*Other endangered species found in La Cordillera are manatees and sea turtles. Navigation through this water must be cautious to avoid contact with the reefs and the protected species.*