

## **Genetically Modified Mosquitos Will Hurt Tourism**

Who will take their bucket list road trip to the iconic Florida Keys when they are driving through swarms of genetically modified mosquitos (GMMs)? How many travelers may fear getting bitten by a GMM? This largely untested technology and relatively unknown is a BIG risk to our recovery. So, if you are not already asking why to this technology at least start asking why now?

We all know hurricanes deeply affect us in the Keys and the memory and impacts of Irma in 2017 are still felt today. In 2019, Fodors placed the Florida Keys on its “No List,” advising not to visit the Keys because of our “sickly coral reefs,” a fragile ecosystem already in need of help. Before we could feel the impact of the “NO list” we immediately faced another challenge when the world entered a global pandemic in 2020 and shutdowns cut off our tourism. Many tourists didn’t travel and the Florida Keys remain economically vulnerable. Personally, I noticed numerous snowbirds opting out in my community this year.

Just as there is now a glimmer of hope for recovery, we face a new threat: genetically modified mosquitoes. Why release 500+ million genetically modified mosquitos into an already fragile ecosystem with an already fragile tourism economy and a fragile existence for our communities? Why release these largely untested, unnecessary and risky experiment when we are finally open and tourism may receive a relatively good year in 2021? Why release now when one bad story or event sourced from these mosquitos can go viral and can negatively alter the already fragile Florida Keys forever?

We’ve all been hit with enough in the last few years, let’s not self-inflict another potential disaster upon ourselves. So let’s ask the Mosquito Control Board and our local government assemblies to say NOT NOW to genetically modified mosquitoes. Even if you believe in the potential for the technology, surely you can agree to say NO to releasing them this spring when we may just be the place people want to visit and until we know more about them. Let’s all use commonsense and at least delay the release so we can climb out of this pandemic towards a thriving economy and a healthy community and environment.

So let’s not risk the future of the Florida Keys on an unneeded, unproven, and untested technology at this critical time. Let’s say NO to any genetically modified release this year. Let’s use common sense.

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