Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

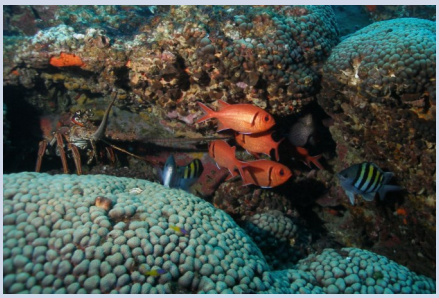


Photo: Emma Hickerson, NOAA

The coral reef communities of Flower Garden Banks developed on salt domes rising above the sea floor.

Photo: G.P. Schmahl, NOAA

Flower Garden Banks were named after the brightly colored sponges, plants and other marine life on the colorful reefs.

Photo: Marissa Nuttall, NOAA

Whale sharks, the largest sharks in the world, often cruise through FGBNMS in the summer.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) lies 70 to 115 miles off the coasts of Texas and Louisiana where three underwater gardens, East Flower Garden Bank, West Flower Garden Bank and Stetson Bank, emerge from the depths of the Gulf of Mexico. They are small underwater mountains created by salt domes and rise 200-500 feet from the seafloor, separated from each other by miles of open ocean. The tops of the banks are covered by gardens of coral, sponges and algae that provide habitat for a variety of tropical wildlife. The remote location of East and West Flower Garden Banks helps to maintain some of the world's healthiest remaining coral reefs. These premier diving destinations harbor the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States and serve as regional reservoirs for hundreds of shallow water Caribbean reef fish and invertebrates, manta rays, whale sharks, and coral heads bigger than cars.

Research and Monitoring

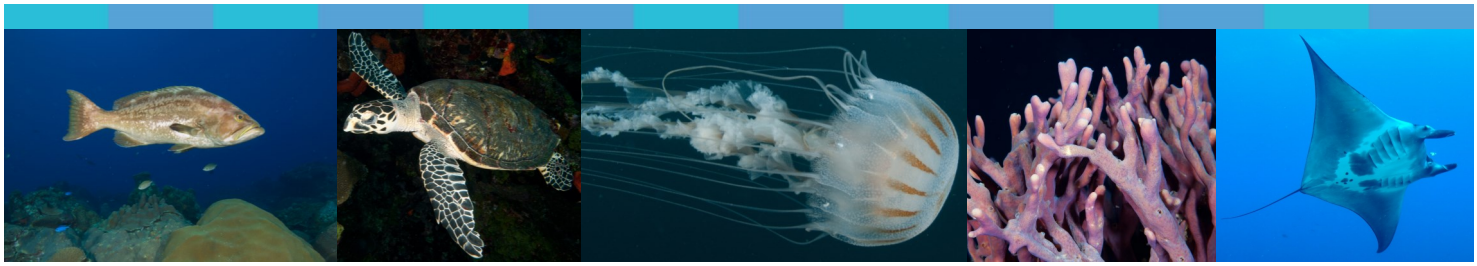
From general exploration and habitat characterization to investigations of specific research questions to the routine monitoring of resource health, science in Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary plays a vital role in making informed resource management decisions. Information gathered by the sanctuary science team and partners provides the foundation necessary to expand upon existing baseline data, compare current habitat conditions with past conditions, and allocate limited resources to effectively target the most important management issues. For instance, lionfish assessment and removal and climate change and ocean acidification investigations are new annual efforts. Additional research changes as sanctuary needs dictate.

Education and Outreach

Education at FGBNMS comes in many shapes and sizes, just like the sanctuary's unique habitats. No one is too young or too old to learn about the sanctuary. From students and teachers to recreational divers, to industry representatives, the sanctuary delivers a message of conservation, appreciation and action. Website and social media are important tools to communicate our message to all audiences. General presentations to civic groups, educational presentations to students and an annual teacher workshop are key components of the education program. An annual Ocean Discovery Day relays information to the general public in person.

Photo: Greg McFall, NOAA

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary contains the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States.



Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Location
Gulf of Mexico, 70 to 115 miles south of Texas-Louisiana border

Protected Area
56 square miles

Designation
January 1992
Stetson Bank, October 1996

Habitats
Algal-sponge communities
Brine seep
Coral reefs
Pelagic, open ocean
Sand flats

Key Species
Brain and Star coral
Grouper
Hammerhead shark
Hawksbill and Loggerhead sea turtles
Manta ray

National Marine Sanctuary System

Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

Find Us
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On the Web
Email: flowergarden@noaa.gov
www.facebook.com/fgbnms
Twitter: @fgbnms

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
Network of marine protected areas
Encompasses more than 170,000 square miles
Established October 1972

On the Web
sanctuaries.noaa.gov
www.facebook.com/NOAAOfficeofNationalMarineSanctuaries
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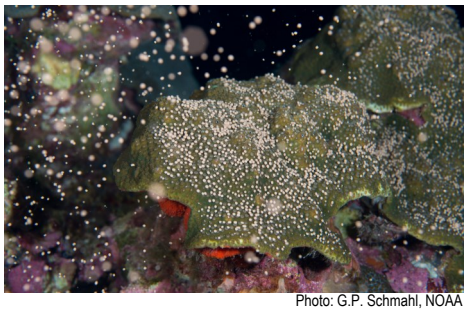

Photo: G.P. Schmahl, NOAA

The sanctuary's reef building corals put on one of the most abundant spawning displays in the entire Caribbean.

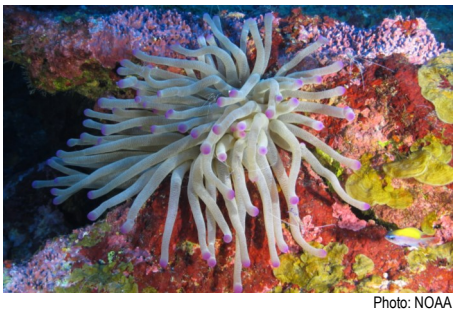

Photo: NOAA

The giant Caribbean sea anemone, *Condylactis gigantean*, can be found in the deeper regions of Flower Garden Banks.

Photo: NOAA

Black coral, such as *Plumapathes pennacea,* is only found in the deeper parts of the sanctuary.

http://flowergarden.noaa.gov/