

## FY16 Accomplishments

### BACKGROUND

Gray's Reef was designated on January 16, 1981, and is the only protected natural reef area on the continental shelf off the Georgia coast. The natural live-bottom reef is teeming with marine life and is part of the endangered North Atlantic right whale's calving ground. Loggerhead turtles rest at the reef, where scientists have identified more than 200 fish species.

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary is part of the National Marine Sanctuary System, which is a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. National marine sanctuaries are managed for the conservation of their natural and cultural resources, while supporting sustainable recreation, tourism and compatible commercial activities. The network includes a system of 13 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.





Photo: NOAA

Informational signs were installed at public boat ramps and marinas.



Photo: Greg McFall, NOAA

Black sea bass are one of the many large predatory fish found on Gray's Reef.



Photo: Judi Duffy

At the film festival, the audience watched some screenings while wearing 3D glasses.

### New informational signs installed at Georgia boat ramps

Gray's Reef is a popular spot off the Georgia coast for recreational fishing and diving. But until recently, very little information existed at marinas and boat ramps connecting this recreational spot to Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Working with coastal communities, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and marina owners, sanctuary staff installed 20 informational signs at high-traffic public boat ramps and marinas in all six counties along coastal Georgia. These signs feature marine life at the sanctuary, user information and regulations, and highlight activities such as fishing and diving.

### Scientists study predator-prey relationship

To learn more about the ecology of reef communities, sanctuary scientists and partners conducted research operations aboard the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* and NOAA's SRVX *Sand Tiger* in July 2016. Scientists examined relationships between large predatory fish -- black sea bass, gag and scamp grouper, and Spanish mackerel -- and their smaller prey, canvassed for invasive lionfish and conducted benthic habitat and fish community surveys at numerous sites within and outside the sanctuary's research area. For the first time, research dives took place off the *Sand Tiger* in the dark at dusk. Non-diving scientists used the *Nancy Foster's* acoustic instruments to scan for fish at different times during the day and night.

### Inspiring stewardship and tourism through the power of film

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary partnered with the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to host an ocean-themed film series, the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Gray's Reef Film Festival. Eight hundred twenty people attended the nearly sold-out opening night, which featured screenings of *Jean-Michel Cousteau's Secret Ocean 3D* and *Humpback Whales 3D*, directed by two-time Academy Award nominee Greg MacGillivray. Not only does this annual event inspire ocean stewardship and conservation, but also it draws tourists from across the country who are visiting Savannah's famed Historic District.

### Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Looking Ahead to FY17

- Following creation of a new citizen-based recreational fishing working group in 2016, the sanctuary and its advisory council plan to continue efforts to enhance relations and communication with the sport fishing community, an important sanctuary user group.
- The sanctuary's first traveling exhibit, "Gray's Reef on the Road," will be displayed in various branches of Savannah's public library system and in the Savannah History Museum. A sanctuary educational kiosk in Georgia's new I-95 Visitors Center opens in March, located along the busiest north-south highway on the east coast.
- Sanctuary scientists plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the eight-square-mile research area that was created in 2011 to study the impact of human activities on the sanctuary's marine resources.