SOUTHEAST REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Science Staff Provide Support for Southeast Region

The Southeast Region of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries provides direct support to the sanctuary sites through its regional science coordinators, who are active in a wide range of projects within NOAA as well as with other agencies and academia. In 2009, the region’s science coordinator worked to support the science program at Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, in addition to several national initiatives such as the Southeast Atlantic and Caribbean Regional Team. The region’s associate science coordinators helped Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary prepare an environmental impact statement that will support the site’s proposed sanctuary expansion; represented the sanctuary on NOAA’s Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration Team; served as the co-chief scientist for the Gray’s Reef Sanctuary cruise aboard the NOAA ship Nancy Foster that supported four separate research projects and involved 12 organizations and numerous volunteers; and helped lead an acoustic study of fish movement underway at Gray’s Reef.

Collaborative Efforts Help Protect U.S. Coral Reefs

The region has been an active part of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and has worked closely with NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program to help implement programs and steer the future direction of the United States’ coral reef protection efforts. The Southeast Region director chairs the land-based sources of pollution task force working group that has developed strategies for addressing water quality decline in coral reef areas of the U.S. These collaborations with the Coral Reef Task Force and with NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program are testament to the important role that our sanctuaries play in research, education and management of coral reefs and in demonstrating the success of coral reef conservation policies.

Regional Staff Focus on Climate Change, Fisheries Management Issues

The region has taken a leading role in helping to guide local, regional and international responses to climate change and its impacts. Staff have been invited to several conferences and participated in panel and roundtable discussions with state governments, academic institutions and conservation groups to help direct science and policies in response to climate change and its impact on coastal and marine environments. These efforts have helped to promote the value of the sanctuary system as sentinel sites, locations with particular importance in understanding and monitoring climate change impacts on marine ecosystems.

The region also represented the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries at meetings of South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regional fisheries management councils and commissions in 2009. These opportunities have ensured our participation in regional habitat monitoring, catch assessment and law enforcement programs established by these organizations. The meetings have also shown the national marine sanctuaries’ commitment to fisheries management and conservation strategies and to fully engaging resource users in sanctuary management plans. The Southeast Regional Team also worked closely with the Florida Institute of Oceanography, the Coral Reef Conservation Program and sanctuary headquarters to keep SeaKeys operating, and is continuing to work to integrate the system into the NOAA Integrated Ocean Observing System Network. SeaKeys is one of the longest-standing networks of oceanographic monitoring stations.

FGBNMS ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Officers

Research: Larry McKinney (Chair)
Recreational Diving: Frank Burek (Vice Chair)

Other Non-Governmental Members

Commercial Fishing: Joe Hendrix
Commercial Fishing: Michael Jennings
Conservation: Rafael Carbonell
Conservation: Page Williams
Diving Operators: Darrell Walker
Diving Operators: Frank Watson
Diving Operators: Dale Loughmiller
Diving Operators: Jacqueline Stanley
Oil & Gas Production: Clint Moore
Oil & Gas Production: Rebecca Nadel
Recreational Diving: Lori Traweek
Recreational Diving: Matt Bunn
Recreational Fishing: Irby W. Basco
Recreational Fishing: Matt Bunn
Research: Will Hoyt

Federal Government (all non-voting)

Environmental Protection Agency: vacant
Minerals Management Service: James Sinclair
NOAA Fisheries: Rusty Swafford
NOAA Office of Law Enforcement: Charles Tyer
U.S. Coast Guard: LCDR Carmen DeGroat

http://flowergarden.noaa.gov

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary lies 70 to 115 miles off the Texas-Louisiana coast, where underwater “gardens” emerge from the depths of the Gulf of Mexico. The sanctuary encompasses three submerged features called salt domes that harbor the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States. These premier diving destinations feature numerous Caribbean reef fish and invertebrate species and are frequented by majestic whale sharks and graceful manta rays. Established Jan. 17, 1992.
Flower Garden Banks Reefs Among Healthiest in Caribbean

Marine Life Tagging Reveals International Connectivity

A three-year partnership culminated in 2009 with a report titled "A Biogeographic Characterization of Fish Communities and Associated Benthic Habitats within Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary." The research team, working with the National Coastal Data Development Center to develop an interactive map tool that will inform resource managers and the public about the complexity of issues in the offshore areas of the northern Gulf of Mexico. The online database provides layers of geo-referenced information for the sanctuary, as well as the surrounding northwestern Gulf of Mexico region. Users can turn map layers on or off and zoom into areas of interest. The long-term project is a collaboration between NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the Department of the Interior. The data collected will help inform decision-making in the sanctuary’s management strategy.

Science at Sea Education Workshop Premiers

Monitoring Program Receives Partners in Conservation Award

Sanctuary Staff Meets Challenge of Hurricane Recovery

Web-Based Marine Spatial Planning Tool Developed

Marine Debris Removal at Stetson Bank

The surface of Stetson Bank is sprinkled with shrimp trawl nets, boat anchors, twisted metal, fishing line and various other items. All of these items pose potential threats to sanctuary habitats. One of the challenges of removing the debris is the depth at which it lies. In 2008, the sanctuary research team recruited expert technical divers to assist with the project. During a five-day expedition, they removed three large anchors, an engine block and a net from Stetson Bank. A Web page dedicated to the project provided updates and information for the sanctuary, as well as the surrounding northwestern Gulf of Mexico region. Users can turn map layers on or off and zoom into areas of interest. The interactive map tool is designed to inform resource managers and the public about the complexity of issues in the offshore areas of the northern Gulf of Mexico.

The program has been outsourced in recent years, with co-funding from the sanctuary and MMS. This year, sanctuary staff began conducting the program in-house. Two science divers are now responsible for monitoring the sanctuary, including water sampling, biological surveys, and equipment and infrastructure checks. The program is one of the largest and most comprehensive coral reef monitoring programs in the world. Monitoring and restrictions on nearby oil and gas exploration since the early 1970s, first by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) and later in partnership with the sanctuary, have helped protect the reef. Monitoring results have shown that the reef is well on its way to full recovery from Hurricane Ike’s impacts.

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