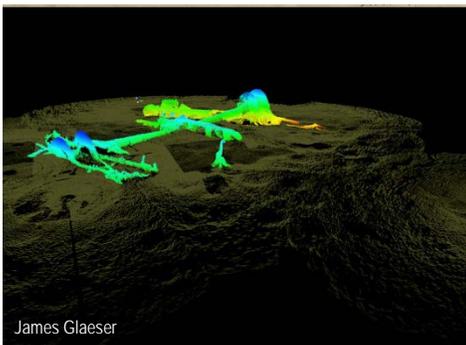


2012 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



20 YEARS OF EXPLORATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Celebrations lasted throughout 2012 as Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary reflected on 20 years of progress in exploring, conserving and sharing our passion for this special place. Celebrations began by sharing *20 Things to Love* and *20 Things We've Learned* about the sanctuary on our website and through Facebook. Celebrations continued with the launch of the first annual *Seaside Chats*, a wildly successful lecture series about the sanctuary hosted by Galveston Fishing Pier. Enjoyed by both residents and tourists, every presentation had standing room only. At *Ocean Discovery Day* 1,400 visitors were invited to share what they love about the sanctuary and what they will do to help protect it. Festivities culminated with the installation of the *Treasures of NOAA's Ark* traveling exhibit at the Texas Seaport Museum.



SANCTUARY EXPLORES CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The sanctuary partnered with ten organizations from government, non-profit and the private sector in a mission to document the wreck of the USS *Hatteras*, the only Union warship sunk in combat in the Gulf of Mexico during the Civil War. The use of 3D scanning technology provided an unparalleled view of the wreck, while also allowing scientists to document previously unexplored elements of the site. The sanctuary team provided significant ship and shore-side support for both the pre-expedition survey and the mapping expedition. The team also coordinated partners in providing displays and activities about the expedition for the annual Battle of Galveston commemoration, which attracts tourists from around the region.



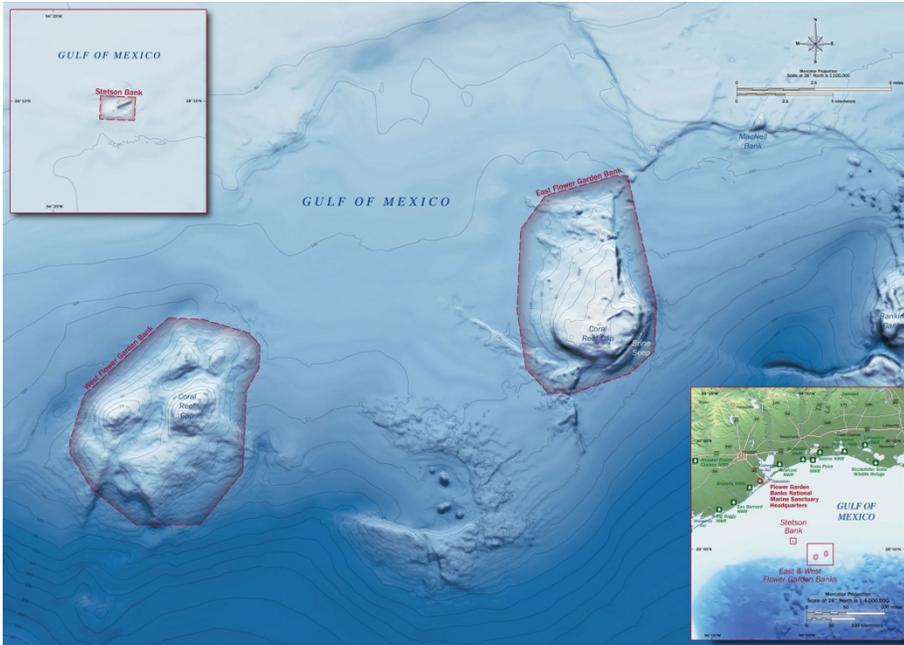
MANAGEMENT PLAN RELEASE

In April, the sanctuary released the Flower Garden Banks Final Management Plan, which serves as a framework for addressing issues facing the sanctuary over the next five to ten years. The plan lays the foundation for protecting, conserving and enhancing the sanctuary and its regional environment in the Gulf of Mexico for the present and future generations. The 2012 Management Plan includes two proposals of particular public interest: 1) a recommendation to expand sanctuary boundaries to include additional reefs and banks in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico; and 2) a study to determine the need for a scientific research area within the sanctuary to better understand the impacts of hook and line fishing and scuba diving. These proposals will be considered for action prior to the next management plan review and will require further analysis through an Environmental Impact Statement.



MAPPING RESOURCES AT RISK

Sanctuary staff partnered with Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to complete the first three of seven planned expeditions to document biological communities found on low-profile (less than 3 meters), hard-bottom features associated with selected reefs and banks in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico. The areas of interest lie outside the current "no-activity zones" designated by BOEM, but are potentially sensitive to activities related to oil and gas development. Characterization of these features will aid in the management of offshore energy resources. Resources were leveraged during the expeditions by collecting samples for another study to explore the diversity and distribution of black corals in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico.



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.

LOOKING AHEAD

- In 2012, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary published a new management plan. It was the result of more than five years of effort that included significant involvement from the public. This plan identifies the priority issues that NOAA will address over the next five to ten years, and provides strategic guidance for research, education and resource protection programs in the sanctuary.
- The coming year will see a continued focus on analyzing areas that may benefit from being included in the sanctuary. Years of exploration, research and discussions with interested citizens have provided excellent information from which to further this analysis.

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is committed to supporting lives and livelihoods across the nation and in sanctuary communities through socioeconomic research and monitoring to understand the economic and social drivers of sanctuary resources and improve management practices.

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a system of 14 marine protected areas encompassing more than 150,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The system includes 13 national marine sanctuaries and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuary System, visit: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>