

2014 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



ESTABLISHMENT OF SANCTUARY FOUNDATION CHAPTER

In 2014, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation established a chapter dedicated to Gray's Reef. The foundation will support and strengthen Gray's Reef as a unique and vital landmark for the coastal Georgia community through charitable and educational activities. Executive Director Chris Hines, Chairperson Cathy Sakas and six founding members, form the current Board of Directors. Scientists, educators and other community members celebrated the public launch of the foundation at a gala event held during the Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival.



ENHANCEMENTS FOR RECREATIONAL USERS

As an important safety measure for recreational divers and an enhancement for recreational fishing, the use of weighted marker buoys is now permitted in the sanctuary. Marker buoys increase diver safety and help recreational anglers mark and relocate fishing spots after drifting. Weighted marker buoys up to 10 pounds with a maximum of a quarter-inch buoy line may be used for up to 12 hours at a time. They must be continuously tended by divers and anglers and may not be attached to a vessel or capable of holding a boat at anchor.



NEW SANCTUARY MANAGEMENT PLAN RELEASED

NOAA released a new management plan for Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) in 2014. The plan outlines a forward-looking strategy for site-specific planning and management of the sanctuary. An important element of the plan calls for the evaluation of Gray's Reef education and outreach programs. As part of this ongoing evaluation, the staff and members of the sanctuary advisory council worked together to document their vision for the future state of Gray's Reef. This work will serve as a baseline for evaluation and planning the future of education and outreach programs.



TRACKING POLLUTANTS

Staff from Gray's Reef, researchers from Georgia Southern University and a group of local teachers released 50 gallons of a non-toxic dye into the Altamaha River on the Georgia coast to analyze how the river may be conveying pollutants into the sea. Tracking the dye path provided information on the extent to which the river delivers dissolved contaminants, nutrients and fresh water to hard-bottom ocean habitats such as Gray's Reef. In addition, researchers deployed two GPS satellite-enabled current drifters to gather information on how larger materials, such as dead stalks of marsh grass, may disperse after being transported from the Altamaha River estuary.



LOOKING AHEAD

- The sanctuary advisory council established a connectivity working group to identify and assess areas outside of the sanctuary boundary with resources that may benefit from increased protection.
- As part of the new management plan, the sanctuary will conduct an evaluation of education and outreach programs starting in January 2015 followed by an evaluation of resource protection and research programs.
- GRNMS staff will partner with the Marine Advanced Technology Education Center, Georgia Aquarium, Skidaway Institute of Oceanography and others on education programs that will relate uses of marine technologies to issues and resources of Gray's Reef.

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary surrounds one of the largest live-bottom reefs in the southeastern United States, located just off the Georgia coast. The 22-square-mile sanctuary consists of rocky outcroppings separated by sandy troughs, resulting in a complex habitat of ledges covered by a living carpet of algae and invertebrates ranging from sponges to sea stars. Gray's Reef also supports loggerhead sea turtles, migrating right whales and a wealth of fish species, making the sanctuary a popular sport fishing destination and an occasional diving destination. The sanctuary was established on January 16, 1981.

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

Olympic Coast
Cordell Bank
Gulf of the Farallones
Papahānaumokuākea
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale
Monterey Bay
Channel Islands
American Samoa (U.S.)



Thunder Bay
Stellwagen Bank
Monitor
Gray's Reef
Florida Keys
Flower Garden Banks

○ National Marine Sanctuary
△ Marine National Monument
Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

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>