

FY18 Accomplishments



BACKGROUND

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1992 to protect and preserve one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the Gulf of Maine. Renowned for its biological diversity and remarkable productivity, the sanctuary is a critical feeding and nursery ground for several whale and dolphin species and has become one of the world's premier whale watching destinations.

Stellwagen Bank 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: SBNMS/NOAA

These Certificates of Corporate Responsibility are proudly displayed by captains on board ships that comply with right whale speed limits in designated management areas.



Photo: Matt McIntosh/NMSF

Opportunities such as this one aboard the charter fishing vessel the "Polar Bear", provide fishermen with the opportunity to catch and release small game fish such as mackerel, pollock, halibut and cod, as well as large pelagics including swordfish, tuna and shark.



Photo: Melinda Foris/SBNMS

Researchers attach a satellite tag to the back of a greatshearwater to monitor its movements in summer feeding areas.

Rewarding Shippers for Conservation Actions

The sanctuary, in cooperation with the International Fund for Animal Welfare, rewards shipping companies and individual ships for compliance with North Atlantic right whale conservation measures. Sanctuary analysts map the track of every ship passing through the sanctuary's Seasonal Management Area. Ships demonstrating compliance with the required speed limit receive an A+ rating and a Certificate of Corporate Responsibility. Scores of 90-99 also qualify for certificates with an A grade. The program encourages shipping companies to increase vigilance and take action through slower speeds to avoid potential whale strikes.

Encouraging Stewardship Projects for Recreational Anglers

A new mini-grant program from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation challenged the public to develop stewardship and education projects related to recreational fishing in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. The first round of grants covered marine debris reduction, species identification, media outreach, and safe boating in the vicinity of whales. The pilot program brings together the sanctuary and user groups that have a strong interest in the health of the ecosystem. Other projects that may qualify in future funding rounds aim to promote better fishery practices.

Tagging Seabirds for Science and Education

Tracking devices attached to seabirds provide invaluable information on their movements, habitat use and foraging strategies. Such data provides an understanding of the health of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem, an area undergoing rapid increases in water temperature and an area where seabirds are unintentionally caught in commercial fishing nets. Since 2013, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary researchers and colleagues have satellite tracked more than 70 Great Shearwater seabirds and sampled feathers, blood, exhaled breath, and stomach contents to monitor animal health, life cycle, and ingested materials. This year, the project included an education component with full color charts and actual data sets provided to schools for tracking tagged birds. Participating schools on Cape Cod provided names for the ten birds tagged in 2018. The project will solicit 10 new schools to provide the names for tagged birds in 2019.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Looking Ahead to FY19

- Researchers will be analyzing data collected during the 2018 humpback whale tagging mission, and documenting results in scientific papers and other outreach products. Interesting findings of previously unknown feeding behaviors are expected.
- The sanctuary will work with professional photographer Keith Ellenbogen to bring his "Space to Sea" project documenting sanctuary species to the public.
- The sanctuary and Sanctuary Advisory Council will expand initiatives with the business/tourism sector, including opportunities for the whale watching community and projects with chambers of commerce.