

## FY19 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 14 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.



## Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary



Photo: NOAA

Hydrophones are used in Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary to monitor ocean noise.



Photo: Visit Savannah

Scenic River Street in Savannah, Georgia will host the Gray's Reef Expo on Memorial Day weekend 2020.



Photo: NOAA

Gray's Reef completed a 5-year Rapid Management Plan Review this year in accordance with NOAA regulations under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

### Two projects advance scientific understanding of Gray's Reef

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary actively monitored an array of 16 acoustic receivers and three hydrophone stations as part of the joint Department of Commerce (NOAA)/Department of Defense (Navy) sound project. Ocean noise can come from marine animals, wind and waves, and human activity. Sanctuary scientists and partners also conducted fine-scale habitat mapping that created a current seascape baseline. Coupled together, the two projects enable researchers to study changes in the sanctuary's habitat over time and better understand the effects of sound in Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary.

### Gray's Reef Expo offers new partnership opportunities

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary developed and cultivated new partnerships as it prepares to celebrate NOAA's 50th Anniversary in 2020. Commercial businesses including Hyatt Hotels and several locally-owned companies are supporting the upcoming Gray's Reef Expo with in-kind services. Savannah Technical College students are building a large outdoor exhibit for the Expo as a class project, and local tourism enterprises are gearing up to help attract thousands of visitors to the Expo.

### Rapid Management Plan Review completed

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary undertook a five-year review of the 2014 sanctuary management plan. Sanctuary staff streamlined the process by conducting a rapid review, in which it performed an internal assessment of natural and human environment changes, new opportunities, and new threats. The rapid review concluded that the 2014 management plan is still relevant, and no new revisions or regulations to the plan are needed at this time.

### Looking Ahead to FY20

- Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary's collaboration with The Nature Conservancy will continue engaging recreational fishers to increase awareness of opportunities at the sanctuary, while building knowledge and use of best practices for handling snapper and grouper fish species.
- The sanctuary will conduct research on loggerhead sea turtles to better understand how the threatened species uses the area in and around the sanctuary, and to observe connections from the Georgia coast to Gray's Reef and beyond.
- More than 5,000 tourists and visitors are expected to enjoy Memorial Day weekend 2020 at the "Gray's Reef Expo: Celebrating NOAA's 50th Anniversary" along the river in historic Savannah. The Expo will feature films, live animals, exhibits, virtual reality, and more!