

## Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2020

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1992 to protect and preserve one of the more biologically diverse ecosystems in the Gulf of Maine. Historically important as a fishing ground, the sanctuary region continues to attract commercial and recreational fishing activity. The presence of several whale and dolphin species sparked the start of east coast whale watching in the mid-1970s and now makes the sanctuary one of the world's premier whale watching destinations. The sanctuary's shipwrecks, the unfortunate yet inevitable result of centuries of ship traffic, serve as time capsules of our nation's important maritime history.

Visit [stellwagen.noaa.gov](https://stellwagen.noaa.gov) for more information.



### Assessing sanctuary conditions

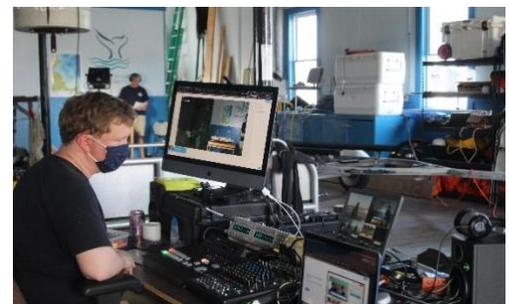
The sanctuary released a new condition report on the status of resources, developed from data collected between 2007-2018. The analyses suggest that water quality in the sanctuary is fairly good, but habitat, living resources, and maritime heritage resources continue to be impacted by human activities, such as shipping traffic and both commercial and recreational fishing. Ecosystem services in the sanctuary are generally improving and are in either good or fair condition. The release of the condition report denotes the start of the process to update the sanctuary's management plan.

### Live broadcasts from the depths

Year two of the telepresence project with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and Marine Imaging Technologies brought viewers back through time as scientists explored the wrecks of the steamship *Portland* and a mystery coal schooner. The flexibility of the system allowed the team to work from socially distanced locations while leading eight broadcasts. The programs were shown at 35 different venues, reached 800 students directly, and were viewed in real-time by more than 27,000 individuals around the world through web platforms and social media.



Humpback whales are a living resource impacted by human activities. Photo: NOAA



The boathouse became a broadcast studio during telepresence project. Photo: NOAA

## Going virtual – online meetings and education programs

Sanctuary staff acquired new software and developed new protocols to meet the needs of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The scoping session to open the management plan review process and the spring sanctuary advisory council meeting were held remotely. A “Seabird 101” webinar attracted more than 400 attendees, the marine art contest drew almost 200 online entries, and recorded webinars on seabird photography and the *Portland* shipwreck discovery were part of the annual “Get Into Your Sanctuary” event, hosted virtually through Facebook.

## Sounds in the sanctuary

The sanctuary’s acoustic program was able to collect underwater sound information continuously at four long-term listening sites. The sanctuary and NOAA-Northeast Fisheries Science Center scientists use the data to evaluate whether changes in human activities during spring-summer 2020, such as shifting levels of international commercial shipping, local whale watching, fishing, and ferry service, resulted in changes to the sanctuary’s sound environment. Samples of humpback whale stress hormones taken by the Center for Coastal Studies and sanctuary acoustic data are part of a study correlating changing sound levels with changes in physiology.



A whale’s tail can be seen as it dives near a large commercial vessel.  
Photo: Anne Smrcina/NOAA



A great shearwater undertakes a running start to initiate flight. Photo: Peter Flood

## Looking Ahead

- The sanctuary is working with Provincetown, the outermost town on Cape Cod and the community closest to the sanctuary, the Center for Coastal Studies, and other partners to develop a new NOAA visitor center. Planning in 2021 will focus on building design and selection of content for exhibits.
- Field work for long-running science projects will resume as guided by health and safety protocols. Projects include tagging humpback whales with suction cup-equipped packs to record video, sound, and movement, and affixing satellite tags to great shearwaters to study feeding behaviors and migration.
- Sanctuary staff will work with the advisory council and subject area specialists to develop the next management plan, which follows the previous plan issued in 2010. The management plan review process will involve a series of public reviews and comment periods throughout the year.

## NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



- National Marine Sanctuary
- ▲ Marine National Monument
- Proposed National Marine Sanctuary

Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

The National Marine Sanctuary System is a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. The network includes a system of 14 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.