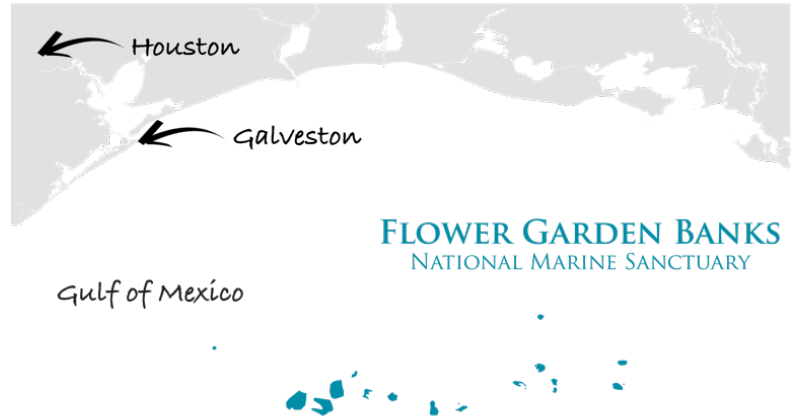




Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments Fiscal Year 2022

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary was first established in 1992, and expanded in 1996 and 2001, to protect and preserve healthy coral reefs, algal and sponge communities, and dense forests of black corals and octocorals perched on top of small underwater mountains in the northern Gulf of Mexico. These living communities, 80 to 125 miles off the coasts of Texas and Louisiana, provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, including sea turtles, manta rays, grouper, colorful reef fish, and invertebrates.

Visit flowergarden.noaa.gov for more information.



Sanctuary Celebrates 30th Anniversary

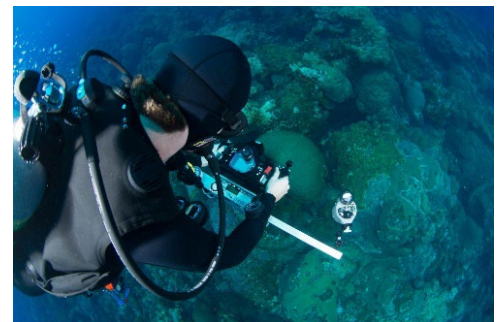
In January 2022, the sanctuary celebrated its 30th anniversary with a series of social media and stakeholder engagement posts which highlighted the diversity and unique ecosystems of the sanctuary. The celebration continued over the summer, with “Cheers to 30 Years” events, including a collaboration with a local brewery that produced an UnbeREEFable beer with a Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary theme. These events were designed to engage people in exploring sanctuary resources through fun activities like Reef Tac Toe and a sanctuary-themed cornhole game.



The sanctuary hosted two community events to celebrate the 30th anniversary and continue building sanctuary awareness. Photo: NOAA

Coral Reef Long-Term Monitoring Resumes

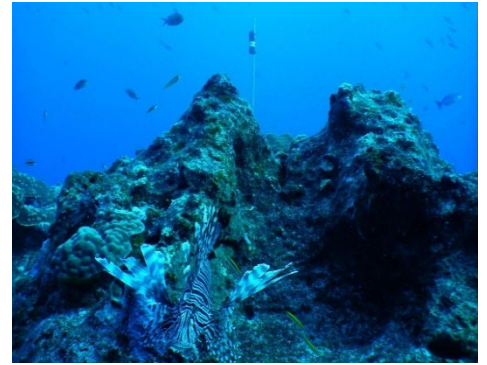
This year, sanctuary staff were able to resume long-term monitoring efforts, after two years of restricted access to the sanctuary due to the pandemic. These efforts included the capture of repetitive photo-station images, refurbishment of the stations, video transects, benthic transects, and fish surveys in designated study sites at East and West Flower Garden Banks, and across the reef cap at Stetson Bank. The National Coral Reef Monitoring Program also conducted fish and benthic surveys at various sites within the sanctuary.



Diver collects photographs of a repetitive monitoring station at East Flower Garden Bank. Photo: NOAA

Ecosystem Connectivity Project Kicks-off in Sanctuary

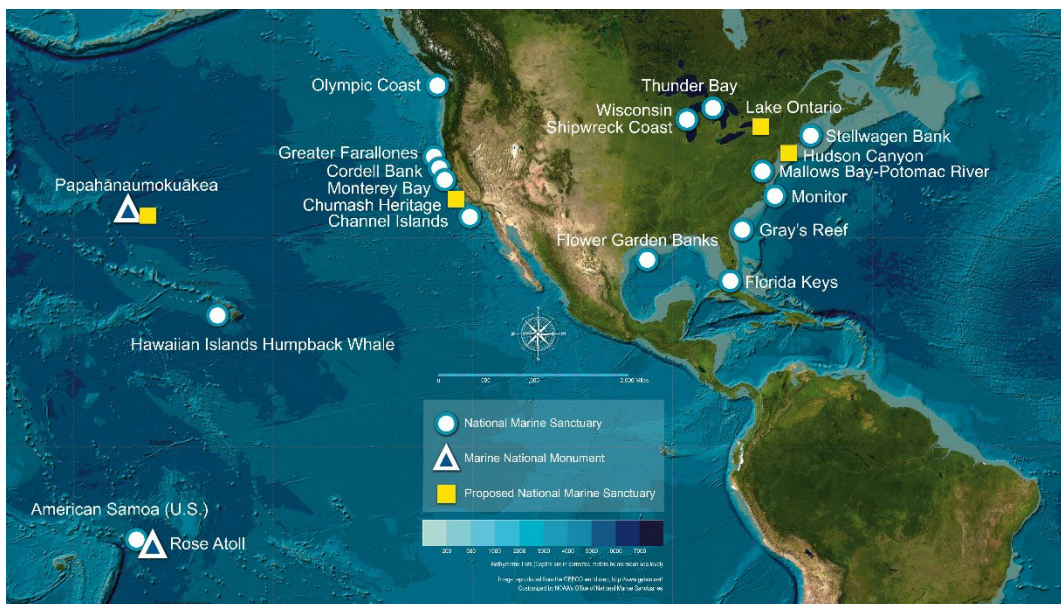
Following sanctuary expansion in 2021, researchers are working to examine habitat requirements and ecosystem connectivity of reef-associated fishes in the expanded sanctuary. This year, divers worked to install an array of acoustic receivers at East Flower Garden Bank that will allow researchers to track the movement of tagged fish across the coral reef in high resolution. Additional receivers were installed at deeper sites across the sanctuary to examine connectivity between the banks, and researchers began tagging grouper, snapper, and lionfish.



A lionfish swims in front of an acoustic receiver in the array at East Flower Garden Bank. Photo: NOAA

Looking Ahead

- Using workshop input from subject area experts in 2022 and data from the past 13 years, sanctuary staff will prepare the next Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report and Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- Upon completion of the Condition Report, sanctuary staff will initiate the Management Plan review process. The Management Plan serves as a framework for addressing issues facing the sanctuary over the next five to ten years.
- The Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities project, a collaboration between the sanctuary and several other branches of NOAA, will continue to collect deep coral samples and explore habitats to further our understanding of the mesophotic communities of the northwestern Gulf of Mexico.



The National Marine Sanctuary System is a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.