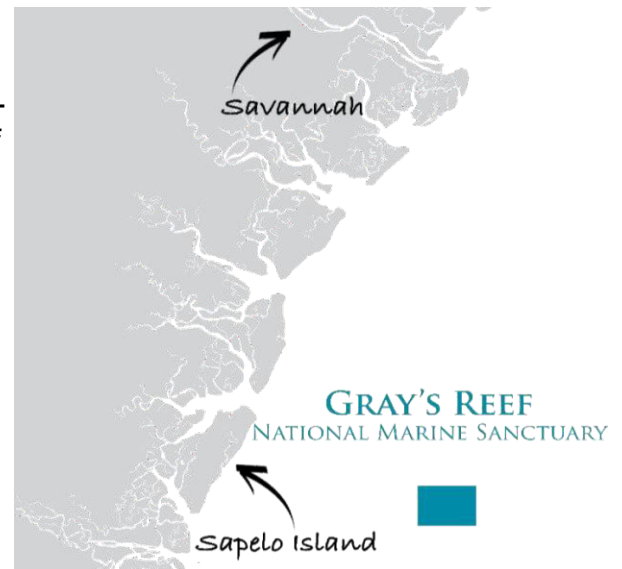


Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2022

Designated in 1981, Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of Georgia is one of the largest near-shore "live-bottom" reefs of the southeastern United States. Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary is currently the only protected natural reef area on the continental shelf off the Georgia coast. The approximately 22-square-mile sanctuary (about 14,000 acres) 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.

Visit graysreef.noaa.gov for more information.



Establishing the Gray's Reef Ocean Discovery Center

Establishing the Gray's Reef Ocean Discovery Center, a public, free visitor center in downtown Savannah, was the main focus of the sanctuary's education and outreach efforts. Sanctuary staff completed a site interpretive plan, center bubble plan, and designed promotional giveaway items for the October open house. During the first year of a 10-year lease in partnership with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, walls were painted, floors stained and finished, lighting installed, and sanctuary exhibits repurposed. The Gray's Reef Ocean Discovery Center will significantly change how the public explores and connects with their offshore sanctuary providing space and programs to understand, appreciate, and conserve the country's ocean resources.



The Ocean Discovery Center in Savannah, Georgia. Photo: NOAA

Awarding the contract for a new Class III research vessel

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries awarded a contract for a new Class III research vessel to support Gray's Reef. The contract was awarded to All American Marine to build an aluminum hull catamaran approximately 52' in length. The capabilities of the new vessel will transform coastal and ocean monitoring in the South Atlantic bight by providing mapping and benthic characterization capabilities, a versatile scuba dive platform, an A-frame and winch for lifting and towing scientific equipment, and on-board bunks for overnight expeditions. The research vessel will join the existing vessel fleet at Gray's Reef that includes the R/V Sam Gray and replace the R/V Joe Ferguson.



The R/V Storm Petrel in Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary is similar to the new vessel for Gray's Reef. Photo: NOAA

Completing the 2022 NOAA Ship Nancy Foster Expedition

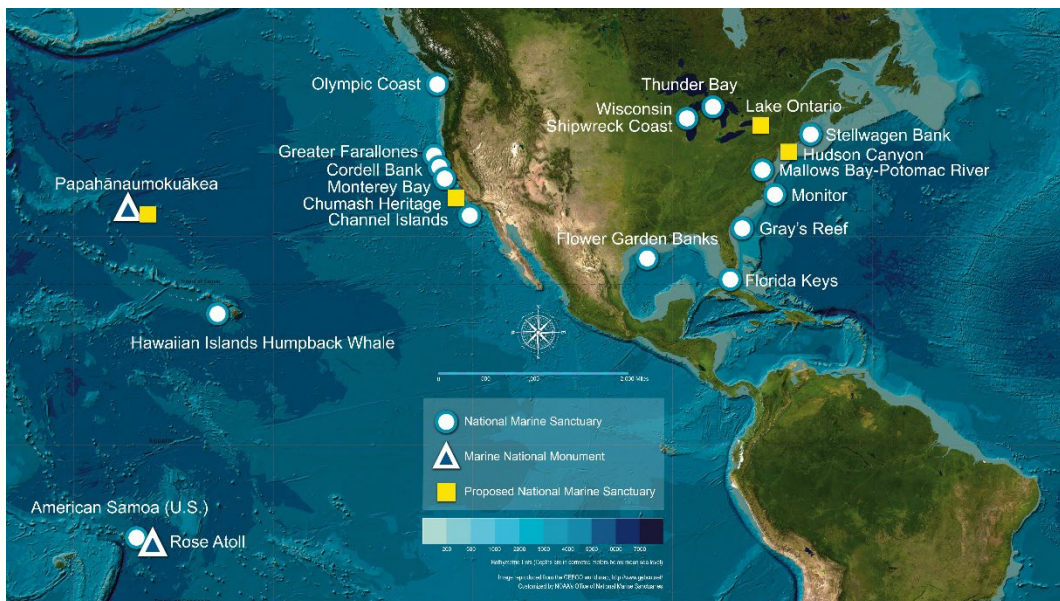
Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary continues to be a catalyst for scientific research in the coastal southeast through the annual NOAA Ship Nancy Foster expedition in July 2022. Partnering researchers joined sanctuary staff for dive missions including algal diversity and collections, benthic invertebrate diversity, sediment and microplastic collection, ciguatera-associated dinoflagellate collection, benthic habitat characteristics with fish diversity and abundance, and sea turtle sightings. Bathymetry mapping continued at night on the continental shelf encompassing 34 km² of seafloor off the Georgia and South Carolina coasts. Notable findings and accomplishments included zero lionfish sightings in 200 cumulative dive hours and continued long-term monitoring of sanctuary research sites.



Divers exploring the seafloor of the sanctuary. Photo: NOAA

Looking Ahead

- The sanctuary will complete a condition report working with researchers and other stakeholders to compile health indicators including water quality, habitat, and living resources.
- The Gray's Reef Ocean Discovery Center in downtown Savannah, Georgia will be fully operational and staffed mainly by volunteers.
- Gray's Reef staff will facilitate meetings of a 30x30 working group of the Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council as they identify and recommend initiatives across the South Atlantic bight that support the Administration's goal of conserving at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.



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.