



Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2022

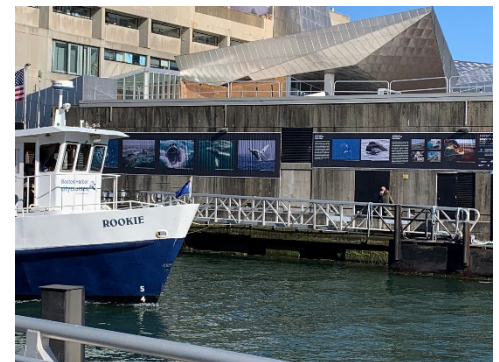
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1992 to protect and preserve one of the more biologically diverse ecosystems in the Gulf of Maine. Historically important as a fishing ground, the sanctuary region continues to attract commercial and recreational fishing activity. The presence 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 for more information.



Public Photo Exhibit Raises Sanctuary Visibility

In recognition of the sanctuary's biodiversity, its 30th anniversary, and the sanctuary system's 50th anniversary, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary partnered with renowned underwater photographer Keith Ellenbogen, the New England Aquarium, MIT Sea Grant, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to offer a free, outdoor exhibit showcasing images of sanctuary species. The photographs provided many larger than life looks at well-known animals and other more obscure species that live in our ocean backyard. Approximately a half million aquarium visitors and Boston Harborwalk users will have seen the exhibit during its June-November installation.



The outdoor exhibit of the New England Aquarium in Boston. Photo: NOAA

Whale Watches Provide New Learning Experiences

Students from Lawrence and Boston, many of whom had never been out on the ocean, traveled into the sanctuary and viewed marine life via a new program entitled "Secret Connections – The Wonders of Sanctuary Waters and Whales." The whale watches and pre-trip classroom sessions on whale biology, wildlife identification, and marine careers were made possible by an Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Diversity and Inclusion grant. A total of 250 teachers and young people from the Lawrence Boys and Girls Club, the Menino Community Center, and the Codman Academy Charter School participated in this pilot project.



A student looks for whales during a trip. Photo: NOAA

Interconnectedness of Ecosystem Studied

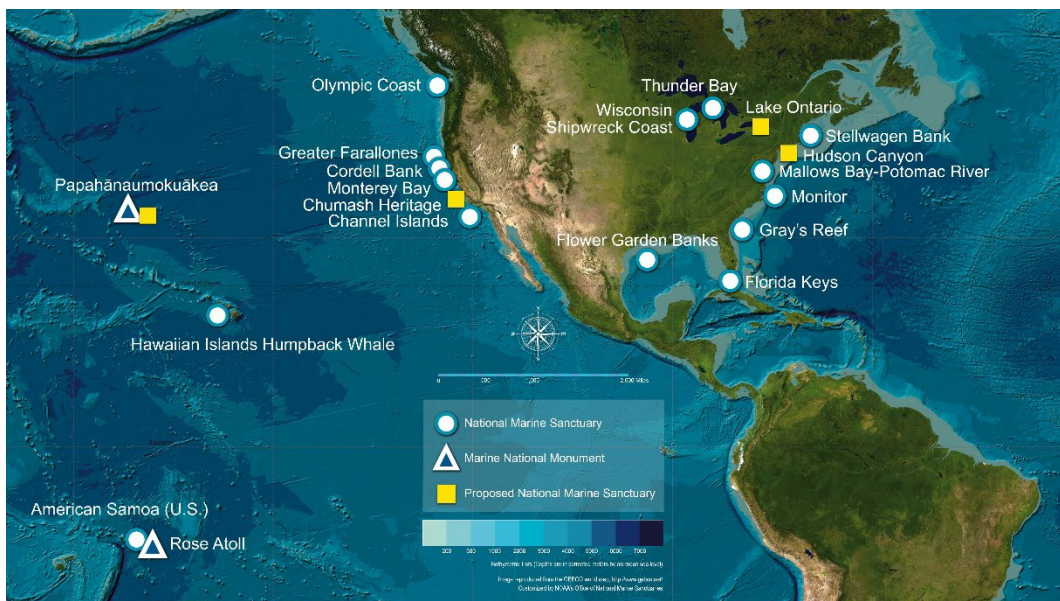
Research programs which demonstrate species interrelatedness and the necessity to look at ecosystem dynamics in marine life studies continued. A study on great shearwater seabirds used satellite tags to show their feeding behaviors, a study on humpback whales used data tags applied manually and with drones, and year-round sampling of sites for sand lance, a regionally important forage fish, continued. Partnerships with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S. Geological Survey, NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and funding from public and private sources helped these projects flourish, leading to important published research and insights for sanctuary management.



A drone is flown over a sei whale during a tagging project. Photo: NOAA

Looking Ahead

- The sanctuary's 30th anniversary is being commemorated with a special event at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Program highlights include the premier of a new musical composition dedicated to the sanctuary and the release of an innovative online game examining animal interactions and human impacts.
- A new emphasis on permitting and interagency engagement will address issues as diverse as possible discharges of radioactive spent fuel pool water from a decommissioned nuclear power plant, timing of the scallop season to minimize impacts on sand lance, the sanctuary's role in the offshore wind energy siting process, and compliance with new vessel speed zones for right whale conservation.
- A maritime heritage conference exploring technical and personal stories of the sinking of the steamship Portland, the sanctuary's most iconic shipwreck, is being planned for 2023, to mark the 125th anniversary of its sinking in 1898.



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.