

2013 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



LONG-TERM CORAL REEF MONITORING

East and West Flower Garden Banks are monitored on an annual basis as part of a long-term project jointly run by Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. The project monitors benthic community structure using coral cover, accretionary growth, water quality parameters and fish surveys as indicators of reef health. In more than 20 years of monitoring, these reefs have maintained more than 50 percent coral cover, suffered minimally from hurricanes and bleaching, and supported abundant fish populations. These observations make FGBNMS one of the healthiest reef systems in the world.



VOLUNTARY SCIENTIFIC DIVERS RECRUITED

The sanctuary's research team conducted the inaugural Specialty Class designed for Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG) scientific divers to learn fish and coral identification, and survey techniques. The course included several classroom sessions, a pool session at TAMUG, and fish identification/survey practice at Moody Gardens Aquarium. The goal of the course was to develop a group of knowledgeable divers that FGBNMS can draw from to assist in long-term monitoring and research activities. This course will be offered once a year to the TAMUG scientific divers on a voluntary basis.



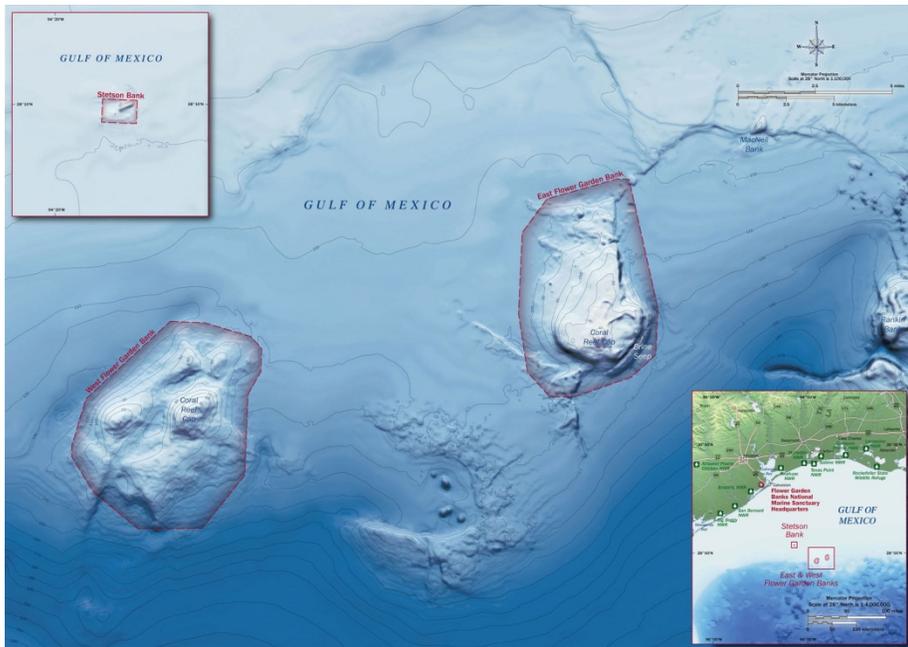
YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMIT

FGBNMS hosted the Youth Educational Summit of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers. The week was dedicated to helping youth learn about the history of African American people and their roots in nature. Youth participated in activities that introduced them to R/V *Manta*, drilling, kayaking, oyster bed restoration, surfing, coral reefs and diving. In addition, experiences with local citizens allowed them a first-hand view of life from the perspective of newly freed slaves. These experiences included an emancipation ceremony and a visit to Stringfellow Orchards to learn about former slaves.



NEW ROV ACQUIRED

FGBNMS received a world-class remotely operated vehicle (ROV)! The ROV will conduct habitat classification and characterization dives to quantify resources within the sanctuary. As the various major habitats are identified and quantified, they will be incorporated into the sanctuary map. The ROV will also be used to support studies in other parts of the Gulf of Mexico, including proposed expansion areas. The ROV was purchased by National Marine Sanctuary Foundation with funds contributed from a settlement designated for use in the sanctuary.



Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary lies 70 to 115 miles off the Texas-Louisiana coast, where underwater “gardens” emerge from the depths of the Gulf of Mexico. The sanctuary encompasses three submerged features called salt domes that harbor the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States. These premier diving destinations feature numerous Caribbean reef fish and invertebrate species and are frequented by majestic whale sharks and graceful manta rays. Established Jan. 17, 1992.

LOOKING AHEAD

- In September 2014, FGBNMS will be partnering with REEF, the Texas State Aquarium, Fling Charters and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to hold a lionfish derby in an effort to remove the invasive species from sanctuary waters in the Gulf of Mexico.
- A traveling exhibit about the Flower Garden Banks sanctuary will debut in 2014 as a way to introduce the sanctuary to wider audiences. The interactive exhibit is designed to fit into a variety of venues, such as museums, aquariums and other public facilities.
- All staff will move forward with goals to expand Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. In 2014, there will be a continued focus on analyzing areas that may benefit from being included in the sanctuary.

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is committed to supporting lives and livelihoods across the nation and in sanctuary communities through socioeconomic research and monitoring to understand the economic and social drivers of sanctuary resources and improve management practices.

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a system of 14 marine protected areas encompassing more than 150,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The system includes 13 national marine sanctuaries and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuary System, visit: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>