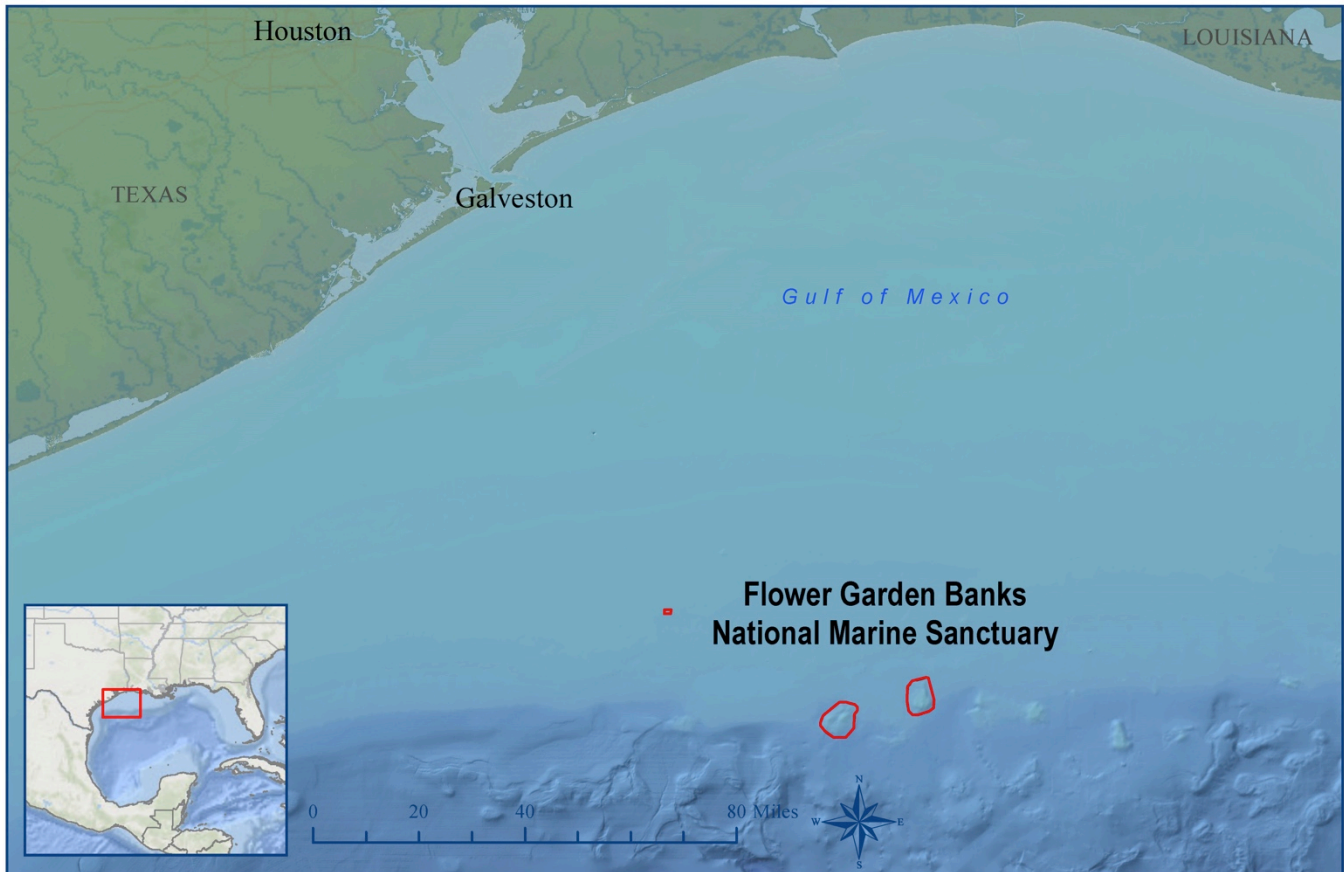


FY16 Accomplishments



BACKGROUND

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1992 to protect and preserve small underwater mountains created by salt domes. These salt domes rise from the depths of the Gulf of Mexico and are separated from each other by miles of open ocean. The tops of the banks are covered by gardens of coral, sponges and algae that provide habitat for a variety of tropical wildlife.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is part of the National Marine Sanctuary System, which is a network of underwater parks

encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. National marine sanctuaries are managed for the conservation of their natural and cultural resources, while supporting sustainable recreation, tourism and compatible commercial activities. The network includes a system of 13 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.



NOAA proposes sanctuary expansion

Today, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary protects three among dozens of reefs and banks scattered along the edge of the continental shelf of the north central Gulf of Mexico. Building on more than 30 years of studies and numerous reports released in the last decade calling for additional protections, NOAA proposed to expand the network of protected areas within the sanctuary by incorporating additional nationally significant reefs and banks. The proposed expansion alternatives would provide for more comprehensive management and protection of important habitat sites and cultural resources, along with opportunities for research and recovery of resources from observed impacts.



Photo: FGBNMS, NOAA

Conventional hook and line fishing is allowed in the sanctuary.

Scientists monitor, respond to coral bleaching and mortality events

Coral reef monitoring is an essential part of the science efforts at Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. On the heels of a mass mortality event in July 2016, the corals suffered a major bleaching event in the fall, with nearly 50 percent of the coral colonies in a study site at East Flower Garden Bank bleached or paling (in the process of bleaching). In response, the sanctuary worked with experts from Texas A&M University, Rice University, University of North Carolina, Baylor University, University of Texas at Dallas and the University of South Florida to explore a broad spectrum of possible causes for the events, including warmer water temperatures and freshwater intrusion.



Photo: G.P. Schmahl, NOAA

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary offers superb diving opportunities.

Sanctuary partners with Sea Center Texas

The National Marine Sanctuary System engages more than 400 partners across the country to enhance ocean literacy. Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary partnered with Sea Center Texas, which hosted the sanctuary's traveling exhibit, "Reef on the Road." Combining a video display and interactive elements, "Reef on the Road" delivers messages of underwater beauty and diversity, as well as reasons to conserve the ocean. The exhibit reached nearly 50,000 people during its stay. Sea Center also hosted the sanctuary's "Get Into Your Sanctuary Day" event where visitors were treated to a fish scavenger hunt, scuba gear demonstrations, and ocean conservation messages.



Photo: Shelley DuPuy, NOAA

A volunteer prepares a young explorer for his dive during the *Get Into Your Sanctuary* day event.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Did you know?

- Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary contributes to the health and sustainability of regional fisheries by protecting essential habitat for a variety of fish species of commercial and recreational importance.
- Approximately 150 oil and gas platforms are located within 25 miles of the existing boundaries of the sanctuary. One production platform is within the sanctuary boundary at East Flower Garden Bank.
- Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is a destination site for divers, with an estimated 1,500 - 2,000 divers visiting annually.
- Sanctuary research staff will work with the Bureau of Ocean Energy to collect data on carbonate chemistry related to ocean acidification within the sanctuary.