



Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary 2017 Lionfish Invitational



Diving for Research

Aug 27th–31st, 2017



Project Description

The invasion of the lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico is a crisis of rapidly increasing magnitude. The invasive species, known for its voracious appetite, venomous spines and rapid reproduction, are depleting native coral reef fish and invertebrate populations at alarming rates throughout the Southeast United States, Gulf and Caribbean region. Complete lionfish eradication is not an option with current technology, given the species' broad depth distribution (surface to 1000 feet) and rapidly growing populations. However, control at the local scale has been proven to be successful. Building on these successes, the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) will be partnering with NOAA's Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS), with support from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF), Ripley's Aquarium, Oregon State University, and Fling Charters, to use trained divers to help conduct research and remove invasive lionfish within the FGBNMS. Collection permits will be issued for a four day lionfish research cruise on board the recreational dive charter M/V Fling.

The goals and objectives of the project are to:

- I. Conduct research to increase the knowledge of invasive lionfish distribution and predator/prey relationships in coral communities at the FGBNMS.
- II. Reduce the impact of lionfish on reef habitats and native fish populations by removing lionfish from the upper-100 feet of the FGBNMS.
- III. Assess effectiveness of diver removal effort on lionfish populations and native fish communities.
- IV. Increase public awareness of invasive lionfish impacts and provide the knowledge and skills for individuals to be part of the solution by training volunteer divers from the local community in safe and effective collection and handling techniques.

About the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Located in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary includes three separate areas, known as East Flower Garden, West Flower Garden and Stetson Bank. The banks are perched atop underwater hills formed by rising domes of ancient salt, and these northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States are a diver's paradise. Since the introduction of lionfish into the Western Atlantic in the late 1980's, they entered the Gulf of Mexico by means of larval transport in 2009. In the fall of 2010, lionfish were observed at Sonnier Bank and nearby oil and gas platforms. Finally, in July of 2011, lionfish were observed on all three banks of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. For more information, go to: <http://flowergarden.noaa.gov>

Eligibility Requirements

To apply, each diver must:

- be at least 18 years of age;
- be able to swim;
- be a certified advanced open water scuba diver, or higher certification (must present a valid Diver Certification Card);
- be a Nitrox certified diver;
- have conducted a minimum of 25 dives in the past 12 months; or provide the total number of dives logged since becoming a diver
- have DAN or other dive-specific insurance;
- be able to identify reef fish at the Flower Garden Banks and conduct in-water fish surveys; and
- have experience collecting lionfish (preferable).

Participant Benefits

Participants will:

- participate in a 4-day research cruise at the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary on board the MV Fling;
- learn about invasive lionfish, research, and field techniques through a REEF lionfish collecting and handling course;
- build relationships with peers, Flower Garden Banks, REEF, partners, and divers from the local community;
- be immersed in classroom, lab, and field activities that raise awareness of invasive lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico and ocean conservation; and
- gain hands on experience that can be utilized in future lionfish control efforts throughout the region
- assist with marine sanctuary resource protection efforts.

Provided to Divers

All divers will receive:

- four days of diving including Nitrox;
- meals and dorm-style liveaboard accommodations;
- workshop training in lionfish collecting and handling;
- use of lionfish collecting/handling and fish survey equipment and materials;
- on-board hands-on training in data gathering and lionfish dissection; and
- educational resources and materials from REEF and FGBNMS.

Requirements of Participation

Divers will be required to:

- travel to and from Freeport, TX for all aboard Aug. 27th through 31st
- attend the REEF lionfish handling course to be held at 5PM in Freeport on Sunday, Aug. 27th before leaving the dock.
- room with other divers in bunk style accommodations;
- scuba dive at the FGBNMS;
- conduct themselves in a responsible manner as volunteers representing REEF and the FGBNMS;
- practice safe diving techniques;
- remove only lionfish with approved pole spears;
- assist with fish surveys, lionfish processing and dissections;
- complete and sign all applications, liability waivers and releases;
- pay the \$625.00 fee to cover vessel and fuel costs of the MV Fling.

How to Apply

1. Complete all sections of the application (see below).
2. Email a copy of the complete application and copy of C-Card and DAN insurance card to Michelle.A.Johnston@noaa.gov by May 1st, 2017.
3. Applicants will be selected and notified no later than May 31st, 2017

Entry Fee: \$625.00, upon selection, checks must be post marked by June 30th, 2017

Checks payable to: Fling Charters

Mail Checks to:

Fling Charters
1203 North Ave J
Freeport, TX 77541
Phone: 979.233.4445

Additional Questions? Please contact:

Michelle A. Johnston, Ph.D.
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
4700 Avenue U, Bldg. 216
Galveston, TX 77551
Tel: (409) 621-5151 ext. 127
Michelle.A.Johnston@noaa.gov

APPLICATION

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary 2017 Lionfish Invitational

SECTION I — CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

SECTION II — EXPERIENCE

Dive Certification (Level and Year certified): _____

NITROX Certification (Year certified): _____

DAN Insurance Expiration Date: _____

CPR and First Aid certified? Yes _____ No _____

O2 Certified? Yes _____ No _____

Number of total ocean dives: _____ in the past 12 months: _____

Number of liveaboard dive trips: _____

Describe your experience collecting lionfish: _____

Can you identify reef fish at the FGB and perform an in-water survey. If so, include REEF # and # of surveys and experience level? _____

SECTION III - PERSONAL INFORMATION

Date of Birth: _____

Gender: Male Female

Dietary Restriction(s): _____

Medical Consideration(s): _____

Have you ever been stung by a lionfish (include reaction, treatment)?

Emergency Contact Name: _____
Relationship: _____
Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____
Email: _____

Hobbies
Tell us about yourself. What are your interests and hobbies? _____

SECTION IV — SIGNATURES

Statement of Intent, Waiver, and Release

I have read the program description and to the best of my understanding I am able to participate. I acknowledge that if I am selected to participate in the Lionfish Invitational, I will be expected to attend the entire 4-day cruise; be willing to dive to achieve project goals; am responsible for using safe diving and lionfish handling techniques; and am responsible for conducting myself in a manner that supports the goals and mission of REEF and NOAA’s Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary mission. I recognize that participation in this event may involve certain hazards. I understand that I should not participate unless medically able. I assume the risks associated with involvement but not limited to SCUBA diving, vessel operations, inclement weather, seasickness, and handling venomous lionfish, these risks being unknown and appreciated by me. Having read this release and considering the acceptance of my application, I for myself and anyone entitled to act on my behalf, waive and release NOAA, REEF, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and Fling Charters, all partners, sponsors, and hosts and their representatives and successors from any claim of liability arising from my involvement in this project. I do hereby consent to the use of my name and/or photograph in connection with publicity about the project.

Applicant Signature: _____ Date: _____