

2014 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



COMBATting INVASIVE LIONFISH

Divers from Texas A&M University, Galveston assisted in the removal and dissection of invasive lionfish from Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS). Gut contents were analyzed to determine which species in the sanctuary may be affected by the invasion. A high school student assisted with one of the dissection sessions. She then designed an informational poster for distribution to dive shops to raise awareness about lionfish in the dive community. The poster was also featured at a sustainable seafood conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.



MARINE LIFE STATUS REPORT

FGBNMS partnered with NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and several other groups to study the marine life in both the shallow and deep areas of the sanctuary more extensively. Results published in *Fish & Benthic Communities of FGBNMS: Science to Support Sanctuary Management* show that the coral reef system overall is healthy. The presence of invasive lionfish, however, was noted in the deeper areas. Sanctuary management is using the information gained to establish appropriate response and monitoring actions.



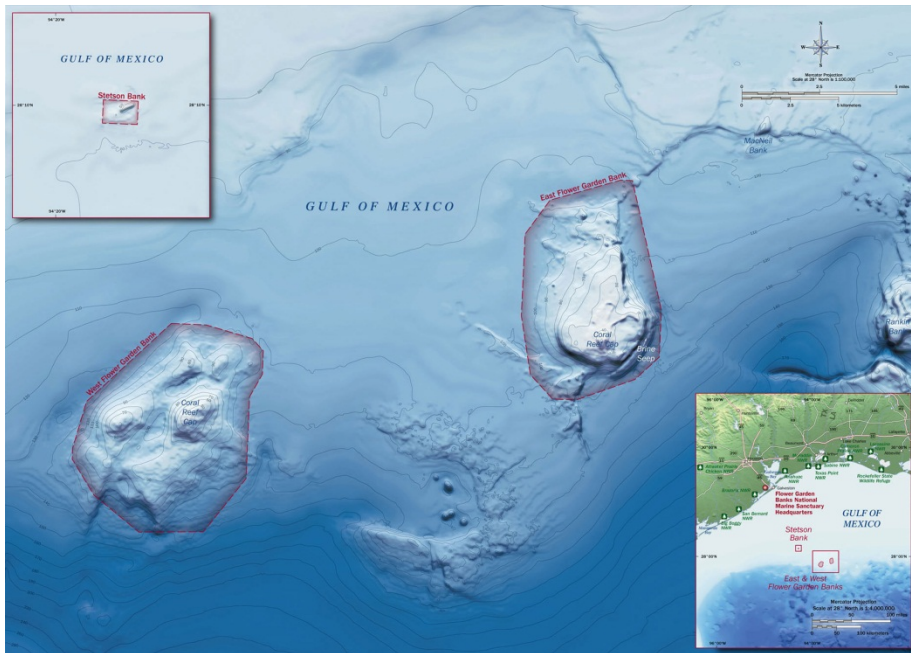
TRAVELING EXHIBIT WINS FIRST PLACE

The new FGBNMS traveling exhibit premiered and won first place at the Association of Zoos and Aquariums conference. The exhibit consists of three kiosks, highlights various aspects of the sanctuary and includes interactive components for all ages. The exhibit opened at Moody Gardens Aquarium and was the topic of the sanctuary's first Seaside Chat. The FGBNMS traveling exhibit is designed to promote marine and environmental education and foster an appreciation for America's maritime heritage.



NEW ROV HELPS ANSWER QUESTIONS

The new remotely operated vehicle (ROV) recently acquired by FGBNMS was instrumental in assessing corals in the deeper portions of the sanctuary for potential research into the symbiotic relationship between coral and algae living within coral tissue. The ROV has also been vital in the evaluation of reef communities in proposed expansion sites. The ROV has also been used in research and exploration projects in other sanctuaries, such as Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The vehicle is maintained and operated through a partnership between the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and the Undersea Vehicle Program at the University of North Carolina – Wilmington.



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. The sanctuary was established on January 17, 1992.

LOOKING AHEAD

- FGBNMS will focus on the possibility of expanding the sanctuary. In 2015, the proposed expansion will be published in the Federal Register and three public hearings held to help determine what the expansion will include.
- FGBNMS will establish an Ocean Acidification Sentinel Site in the sanctuary in partnership with Texas A&M University and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement.
- The monitoring program at the sanctuary will be expanded to include the HIA-389-A oil and gas platform and additional components at Stetson Bank. An interagency agreement was developed with Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement to include funding for the effort.

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>