

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary



Photo: G.P. Schmahl/NOAA

The Flower Garden Banks were named after the brightly colored sponges, plants and other marine life on the colorful reefs.



Photo: NOAA

Black corals, such as this *Plumapathes pennacea*, are found in deep reef areas across the sanctuary.



Photo: NOAA

Manta rays are frequent visitors to the sanctuary and the highlight of many dives at the Flower Garden Banks.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) encompasses

17 reefs and banks located approximately 80-125 miles off the coasts of Texas and Louisiana. These banks are a combination of small underwater mountains, ridges, troughs, and hard-bottom patches. The habitats associated with these banks range from thriving shallow water coral reefs and algal-sponge communities, to deeper mesophotic reefs alive with black corals, algal nodules, and octocorals. These varied habitats provide havens for tropical reef fish and invertebrates, as well as manta rays, sea turtles, and sharks.

When first designated in 1992, the sanctuary consisted of only East and West Flower Garden Banks, home to some of the healthiest coral reefs in the world. In 1996, Stetson Bank also became part of the sanctuary, adding a different type of reef community teeming with marine life. In 2021, the sanctuary was expanded to its present size of 160 square miles to protect important shallow and deep reef habitats across an additional 14 banks. Although each bank is marked with its own separate boundaries, together these banks create a chain of protected habitats for ecologically and economically important species across the northern Gulf of Mexico.

Research and Monitoring

Science activities at FGBNMS include general exploration and habitat characterization, investigations of specific research questions, and long-term monitoring of resource health. All of these play a vital role in helping to effectively allocate limited resources toward the most important management and protection issues. Invasive species assessment and removal, climate change and ocean acidification investigations, and maintenance of a mooring buoy system are annual priorities as we expand our science and resource protection activities across more reef areas.

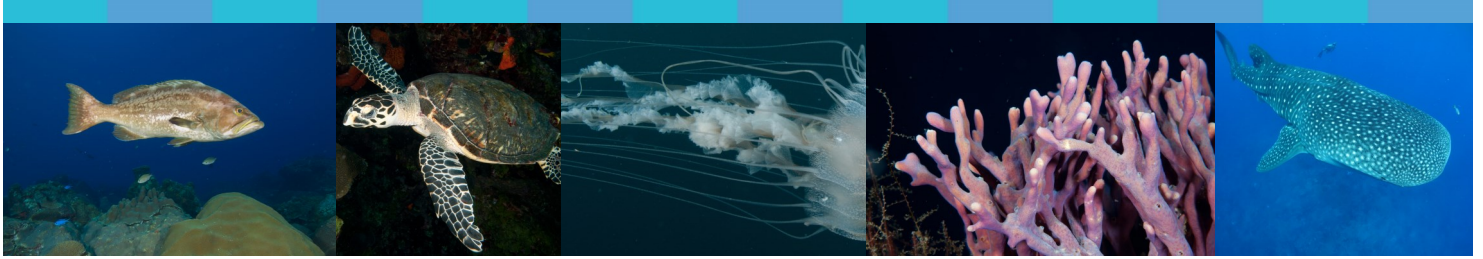
Education and Outreach

Education at FGBNMS comes in many shapes and sizes, just like the sanctuary's unique habitats. From students and teachers, to recreational divers, to industry representatives and community members, the sanctuary delivers a message of conservation, appreciation, and action to audiences young and old. The sanctuary website and social media serve as important tools to communicate our message to all audiences, along with general presentations to groups and clubs, educational presentations to students, participation in community events, and the annual Seaside Chat speaker series.



Photo: Greg McFall, NOAA

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary contains the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States.



Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Location

80-125 miles off the Texas and Louisiana coasts.

Protected Area

160 square miles

Designation

January 1992
East & West Flower Garden Banks
October 1996
Stetson Bank
January 2021
28 Fathom, Alderdice, Bouma, Bright, Elvers, Geyer, Horseshoe, MacNeil, McGrail, Parker, Rankin, Rezak, Sidner, and Sonnier banks

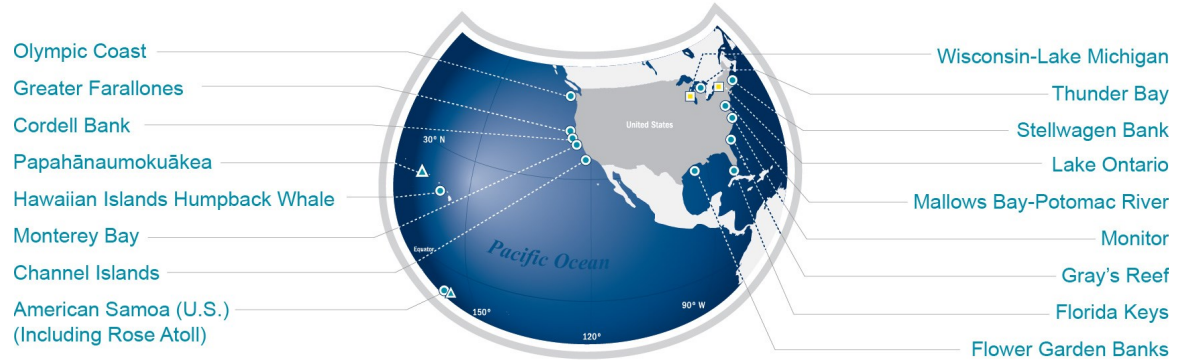
Habitats

Coral reefs
Algal-sponge communities
Mesophotic reefs
Algal nodule zones
Sand flats
Brine seep
Mud volcanoes
Open ocean

Key Species

Brain and star coral
Black coral
Octocoral
Manta ray
Sea turtle
Hammerhead shark

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.

- National Marine Sanctuary
- Marine National Monument
- Proposed National Marine Sanctuary

Find Us

4700 Avenue U, Building 216
Galveston, TX 77551
409-621-5151

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

Network of marine protected areas
Encompasses more than 600,000 square miles
Established October 1972

On the Web

Email: flowergarden@noaa.gov
www.facebook.com/FGBNMS
Twitter: @FGBNMS

On the Web

sanctuaries.noaa.gov
www.facebook.com/NOAAOfficeofNationalMarineSanctuaries
Instagram: @noaasanctuaries
Twitter: @sanctuaries
Tumblr: @noaasanctuaries



Photo: G.P. Schmah/NOAA

The sanctuary's reef building corals put on one of the most abundant spawning displays in the entire Caribbean.



Photo: NOAA

The giant Caribbean sea anemone, *Condylactis gigantea*, can be found in deeper regions of the sanctuary.

<https://flowergarden.noaa.gov/>