

GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

2008 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

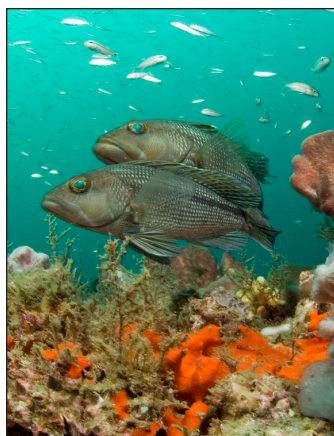


Photo: Greg McFall



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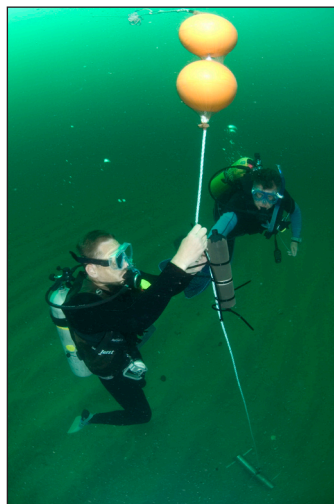


Photo: Greg McFall

Gray's Reef Sanctuary Proposes Spearfishing Ban

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary proposed a complete ban on all spearfishing gear in the sanctuary in 2008 after NOAA gathered additional socioeconomic information on the practice. Spearfishing using explosive "powerheads" was prohibited with the sanctuary's designation in 1981, but the sanctuary's revised management plan in 2006 called for consideration of additional regulations when it became apparent that the practice was continuing, in part because the powerhead ban is difficult to enforce if other kinds of spearfishing are allowed. The 2006 management plan proposed that NOAA revisit the issue after more information on the impacts of a ban could be gathered, and, following a 2007 study indicating that a spearfishing ban would have little socioeconomic impact, the sanctuary proposed a prohibition on all spearfishing at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Spearfishing targets larger fish more efficiently than other fishing methods and can cause significant declines in fish size and abundance; eliminating it would provide important protection to key fish species in the Gray's Reef ecosystem. A decision on this regulation is not expected until spring 2009.

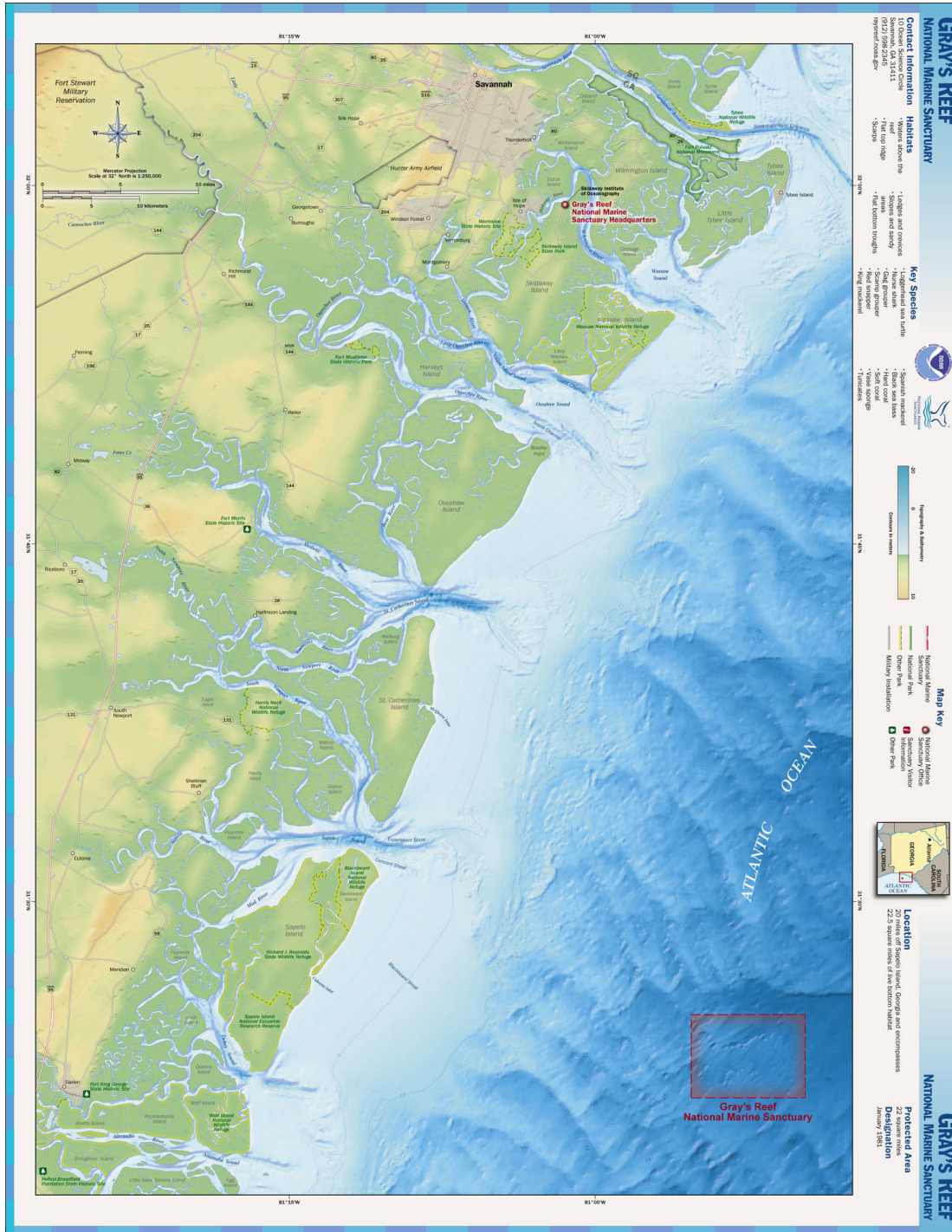
Sanctuary Staff Investigate Potential Establishment of Research Area

Significant research questions exist at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary that can only be addressed by establishing a research area with restrictions on human activities like fishing and diving. The concept of a research area at Gray's Reef was first raised in 1999 during the early stages of the sanctuary's management plan review, when public comment included discussion of the need for increased opportunities to distinguish natural changes in the sanctuary's ecosystem from human-induced changes. The Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council designed a consensus-driven, constituent-based process to explore the issue, and the public scoping process began in 2008. Participants in the process also used a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tool developed by NOAA's Biogeography Team to investigate potential boundary options that would minimize the impacts on users while including enough of four different habitat types that reflect habitat distribution in the sanctuary and that are of interest to researchers. The research area could then be used by investigators who can address management questions through research that cannot be conducted anywhere else in the region. An environmental analysis of a proposed research area may be released by summer 2009 for public comment.

Sanctuary Scientists Launch New Fish Tracking Project

Researchers at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary tagged eight reef fish in May 2008, kicking off a new project to track the movement of fish around the sanctuary environment. The tagged fish — six scamp, one gag and one red snapper — were caught during a mission aboard the NOAA ship *Nancy Foster*, surgically implanted with acoustic tags, and released back into the sea. As the fish move through the water, the signals emitted by the tags are recorded by

acoustic receivers positioned throughout the sanctuary. The tagging project is designed to help Gray's Reef sanctuary staff identify the home ranges of reef fish within the sanctuary and track how the fish use the different habitats. Ultimately, information from the project will assist with management decisions as the sanctuary gains a greater understanding of fish behavior and distribution in relation to protection boundaries. Plans are being developed to partner with NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and Savannah State University to continue tagging efforts in FY 2009. More information is available at http://graysreef.noaa.gov/foster_tag_news.html.



Sanctuary maps available at sanctuaries.noaa.gov

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