



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
1305 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

OCT 02 2009

Larry McKinney
Advisory Council Chair
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
4700 Avenue U, building 216
Galveston, Texas 77551

Dear Larry,

In response to your letter of September 17, 2009, I want to begin by thanking you for your interest in the Flower Gardens National Marine Sanctuary and your efforts to support the program. Over the past several years we have made a concerted effort to increase our presence on the water, and the R/V *Manta* is the latest addition to our small boat fleet. These assets not only provide greater opportunities for researchers to work in our sanctuaries, but also provide a tremendous opportunity to advance our education and outreach efforts. Our boats have attracted many partners who also have been able to utilize our boats, and in many cases, provide funds to help offset the vessel operating costs. This is the good news. However, with the economy being what it is, partnership offsets of operating costs have been reduced, and our program budget, which has been essentially level funded since 2006, has not been able to keep up with the costs of operating our valued assets. Fiscal Year 2010 will be the third year that many sites have had to reduce operational sea days, and we are now at a point where we will have to seriously consider laying up boats. In 2009, we did not operate the Seattle-based experimental Small Research Vessel (SRV/X) because we did not have operating funds. The program cannot jeopardize safety; therefore, these hard decisions must be made.

I do agree that the National Marine Sanctuary System can make a significant contribution to addressing issues of climate change, ocean acidification and marine spatial planning, and can act as the nation's most visible ocean sentinel sites. Our budget limits us in some ways, but nonetheless it also gives us the incentive to be innovative and resourceful in doing "more with less." You have the charge to lead your council to do the same.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Basta
Director



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