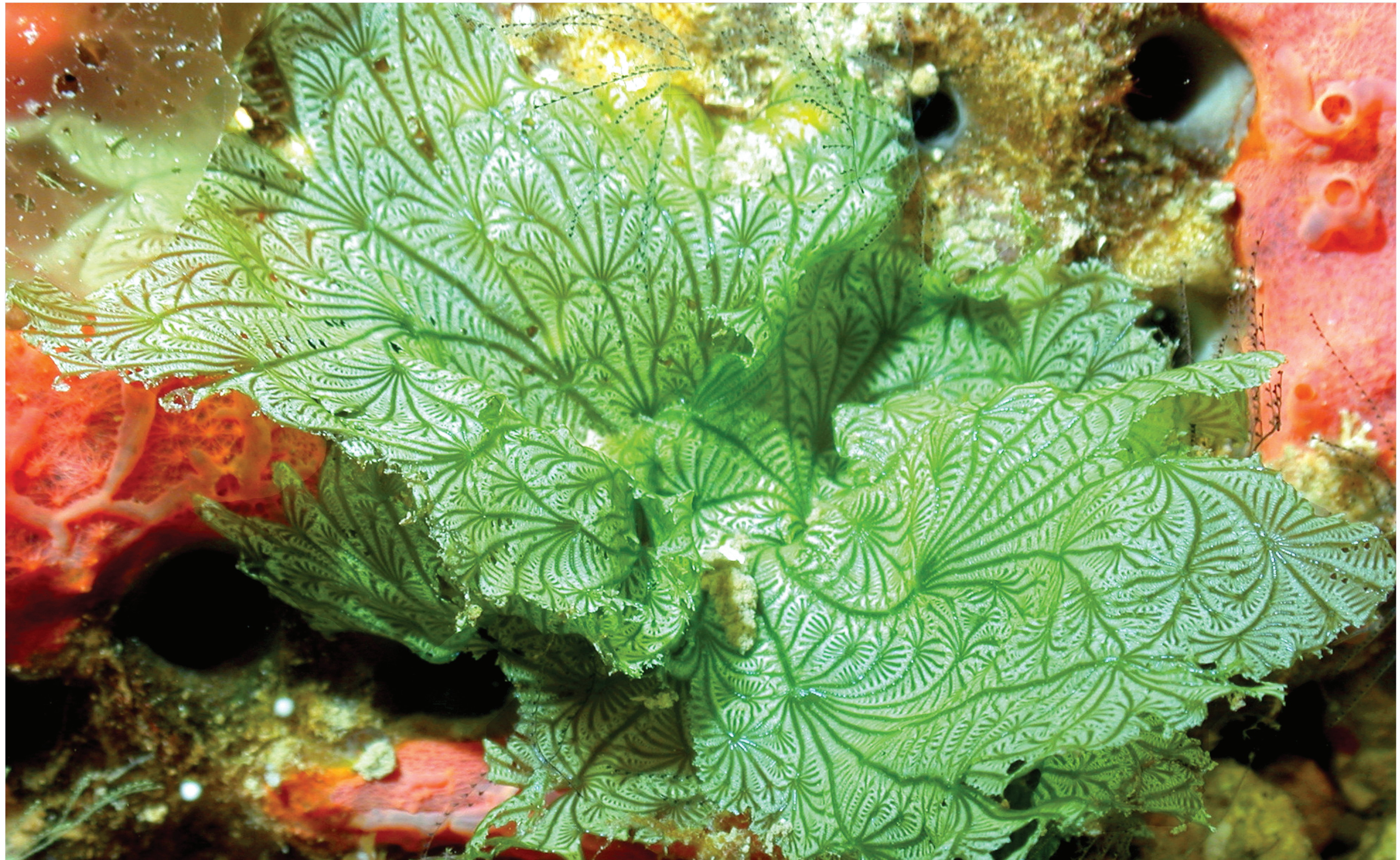


# GULF OF MEXICO



## FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, located roughly 115 miles south of the Texas/Louisiana coast, is part of a connected ecosystem of banks, patch reefs, and valleys along the continental shelf of the northwestern Gulf of Mexico. While stony corals dominate the shallow reef crests of the sanctuary, beautiful mesophotic reefs, supporting a variety of fishes, invertebrates, sea fans, and whips, extend throughout the 'twilight zone' (~130-500 feet) around these banks. These mesophotic coral ecosystems provide valuable habitat for many different species, and are considered an important component of the habitat highways connecting the banks of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico. Remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) are important tools used to explore the 'twilight zone' and were used to capture these images.

The intricate lace-like appearance of this leafy green algae, *Anodyomene lacerata*, flanked by a pink-orange encrusting sponge, captures our attention as we survey the seascape. The presence of algae like this indicates that enough light is reaching these depths to allow photosynthesis to occur.

West Flower Garden Bank, 170ft – Photograph by FGBNMS/NURC-UNCW

