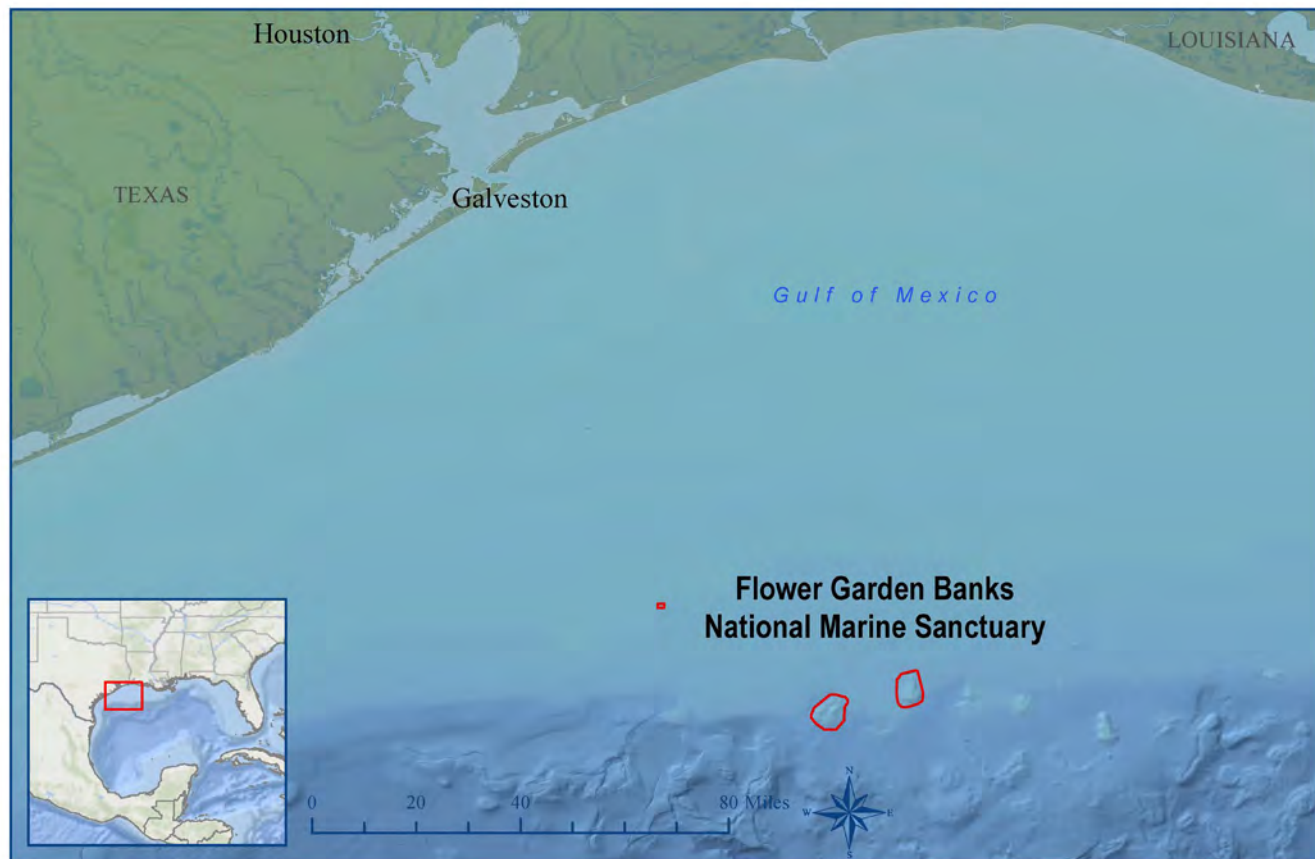


## FY19 Accomplishments



### BACKGROUND

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1992 to protect and preserve healthy coral reefs and related algal and sponge communities perched on top of small underwater mountains in the northern Gulf of Mexico. These living communities provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, including sea turtles, grouper, colorful reef fish, and invertebrates. Deeper areas feature long-lived black corals and gorgonians. Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is part of the National Marine Sanctuary

System, a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of Great Lakes waters from Washington State to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. National marine sanctuaries are managed for the conservation of their natural and cultural resources, while supporting sustainable recreation, tourism and compatible commercial activities. The network includes a system of 14 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments.



## Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary



Photo: Global Foundation for Ocean Exploration

Black corals such as this one were noted during the third leg of the sanctuary telepresence cruise.



Photo: G.P. Schmahl/NOAA

A new buoy now transmits valuable data related to ocean acidification and other parameters in the sanctuary.



Photo: Sepp Hakebo

A "Vet Into Your Sanctuary" participant casts a line into the sanctuary.

### Live telepresence expedition

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary partnered with Global Foundation for Ocean Exploration to provide the first live, ship to shore interaction via telepresence from the sanctuary's R/V *Manta*. Researchers used the remotely operated vehicle *Yogi* to address three distinct projects: coral reef biodiversity and connectivity, coral reproduction, and genetics of black corals. All exploration took place in low-light reef communities too deep to scuba dive. Scientists on-board connected with education partners to interact with audiences at specific times, while viewing of the entire mission was available to the public through an online live stream.

### Ocean acidification buoy installed at East Flower Garden Bank

In July 2019, sanctuary staff and partners installed an oceanographic buoy dedicated to measuring conditions related to ocean acidification at East Flower Garden Bank. The buoy system provides real time oceanographic and meteorological data from the sanctuary, supporting studies on ocean acidification, oceanographic processes, watershed issues, coral reef health, and long-term monitoring. The information is served online by Texas A&M University Department of Oceanography. Other partners include Geochemical and Environmental Research Group, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and Shell Oil Company.

### "Vet" Into Your Sanctuary fishing trip

As part of the annual "Get Into Your Sanctuary" weekend, the sanctuary hosted a fishing charter for veterans to help them experience the sanctuary firsthand. While the 12 veterans caught a variety of species, they also exercised mindful use of the resources by employing a descending device to return some fish to their habitat unharmed. Office of National Marine Sanctuary Director John Armor joined the adventure, made possible by sanctuary partners Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Environmental Defense Fund, and Galveston Professional Boatman's Association.

### Looking Ahead to FY20

- The proposed rule for expanding the sanctuary will be released. NOAA will request specific public input on issues related to fishing regulations and boundary configurations.
- A restoration program will be established to enhance recovery of a reef at East Flower Garden Bank where a localized coral mortality event occurred in 2016.
- The sanctuary, partnering with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, will collaborate on field work, sanctuary interpretation, and citizen stewardship with four zoological facilities through the newly established Aquarium-Sanctuary Partnerships for America's Keystone Wildlife.