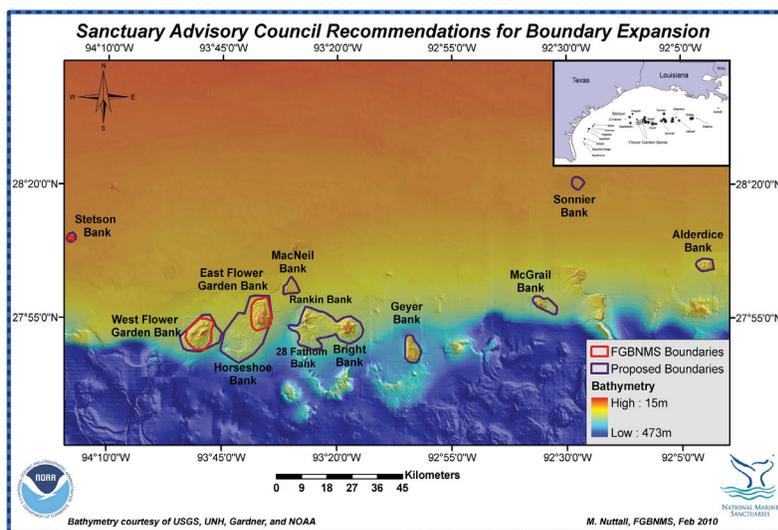


FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY Sanctuary Expansion

In 2007, participants in the public scoping process, members of the sanctuary advisory council, and sanctuary staff all identified 'Sanctuary Expansion' as one of six priority issues.

In response, the Sanctuary Advisory Council formed a working group to address this issue. Through a series of public meetings and workshops, the working group developed their final recommendations on management activities and strategies to be considered by the full council and the sanctuary superintendent.

The Issue: Since the sanctuary was designated in 1992, the collection of high-resolution multibeam bathymetry has revealed potentially vulnerable geological and biological features outside of current sanctuary boundaries. In addition, many banks and associated topographic features in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, like the Flower Garden Banks, have unique or unusual structural features, and may be ecologically linked to each other. These features may be highly vulnerable to certain human impacts that alter the physical, chemical, biological, or acoustic environment.



The Solution:

It is proposed that some of these features be evaluated for inclusion under the management and protection of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.



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The Strategies:

1. Develop a list of nominated sites to consider for further protection:
 - Consider expanding sanctuary boundaries around Stetson Bank to include vulnerable habitat known as the Stetson Bank Ring. This semi-continuous ring of features is structurally and biologically part of the Stetson Bank ecosystem.
 - Consider expanding sanctuary boundaries to include vulnerable habitats between and adjacent to the Flower Garden Banks that are structurally and biologically linked to the Flower Garden Banks ecosystem, including an area now called Horseshoe Bank.
 - Numerous banks and associated topographic features in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico are populated by potentially vulnerable hard bank assemblages, and may be ecologically linked to each other. These should be assessed for effectiveness of current protection, and evaluated for inclusion under the management and protection of FGB-NMS.
2. Develop criteria for assessment of nominated sites for sanctuary status.
3. Make recommendations for further science needed to make management decisions, including interpretive materials.
4. Make recommendations for further educational products needed to address issue.

How can you get involved?

- Subscribe to the Sanctuary Update email list by sending an email to requests@willamette.nos.noaa.gov with “Subscribe FGBNMSupdates” on the subject line.
- Participate in the public review and comment process for the Draft Sanctuary Management Plan. Information regarding the public comment period and public meetings will be available through the email list and the web site.

<http://flowergarden.noaa.gov>

Contact Information:

Emma Hickerson, Research Coordinator
Flower Garden Banks NMS
4700 Avenue U, Building 216
Galveston, TX 77551
p) 409-621-5151
f) 409-621-1316
Emma.Hickerson@noaa.gov

Clint Moore, working group chair
FGBNMS Advisory Council
Clint@clintmoore.com

