Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Expansion

G.P. Schmahl
Sanctuary Superintendent

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

April 1, 2015
Federal Register Vol. 80, No. 22 / February 3, 2015

“Notice of Intent” – Public Scoping / Draft EIS

• New Orleans, LA – March 3rd / Airport Hilton
• Houston, TX – March 5th / Bayland Community Center
• Galveston, TX – March 11th / FGBNMS Office

Public Comment period closes: April 6, 2015
West Flower Garden Bank
Stetson Bank
East Flower Garden Bank
West Flower Garden Bank

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
Remarkable Reefs of the Flower Garden Banks
Regulated Activities

- Anchoring - all anchoring prohibited
  - Mooring buoys provided on coral reef cap
  - Vessels over 100 ‘ cannot use mooring buoys

- Discharges - prohibited, with some exceptions

- Taking coral or invertebrates - prohibited

- Fishing - only hook and line fishing allowed
  - Spearfishing is prohibited
  - Possession of unauthorized gear prohibited
  - Vessels with unauthorized gear (shrimpboats, longliners) cannot stop or moor within the sanctuary
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Revised Management Plan April 2012

- Sanctuary Expansion
- Education and Outreach
- Research and Monitoring
- Resource Protection
- Visitor Use
- Operations and Administration
“Action Plan” Implementation

Sanctuary Expansion Action Plan

Strategy: SE.1 “Evaluate and expand, as appropriate, the network of protected areas within the sanctuary to include 5-12 additional reefs and banks, and to modify the existing boundary of East and West Flower Garden and Stetson Banks to include critical adjacent habitat.”

Activity: 1.1 “Develop a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) to evaluate alternatives for incorporating additional reefs and banks in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico into FGBNMS, and identify a preferred alternative.”

Regulatory: This activity implemented through a public rule-making process, and must follow NEPA guidelines.
Sanctuary Advisory Council

- Recreational Diving
- Dive Operators
- Oil and Gas Industry
- Recreational Fishing
- Commercial Fishing
- Education
- Research
- Conservation

AGENCY (NON-VOTING)
- NOAA Fisheries
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
- Bureau of Safety & Environmental Enforcement
- U.S. Coast Guard
- NOAA Law Enforcement
Reefs and Banks of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico

Their Geological, Biological, and Physical Dynamics

Richard Rezak, Thomas J. Bright, and David W. McGrail
Seafloor Mapping – “Multibeam Bathymetry”
Reefs and Banks of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico

High-resolution multibeam mapping, 2001-2007
Mapping

Habitat Characterization
Coral communities in the NW Gulf of Mexico

McGrail Bank - 10 species
Approx. 24% coverage in some areas

Sonnier Bank
8 species
20 - 52m

Bright Bank
6 species
34-43m
Deep / Mesophotic Coral Communities of the northwestern Gulf of Mexico
Boundary Expansion Ranking Criteria

- **Resource Significance**
  - Coral reef, deepwater coral, geological feature

- **Structural Connectivity**
  - Physical connectedness (ridges, scarps, faults)

- **Biological Connectivity**
  - Distance from nearest neighbor (larval dispersal)

- **Potential or Perceived Threat**
  - Anchoring, high use, historical resource recovery

- **Public and Scientific Priority**
  - Popular diving site, high research interest
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area or Bank</th>
<th>Zone Priority Index</th>
<th>Structural Connectivity Index</th>
<th>Biological Connectivity</th>
<th>Threat Index</th>
<th>Public and Sanctuary Priority</th>
<th>Overall ranking</th>
<th>Nearest Neighbor Distance (km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stetson Ring</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGrail</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geyer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonnier</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Horseshoe reef&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alderdice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rezak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rankin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Fathom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacNeil</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakkula</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida Middle Grounds</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama Pinnacles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison/Swanson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Boundary Expansion Criteria Matrix**
BOUNDARY SELECTION CRITERIA

- Seafloor Topography
- Biological communities
- Oil and gas infrastructure
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) regulations
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council “HAPC” designations
- Shipping Fairways
EXAMPLE
Sanctuary Expansion Recommendation - McGrail Bank

Legend
- Core Biological Zone
- 250 Boundary
- 500 Boundary
- 1000 Boundary
- FGBNMS Boundaries
- HAPC
- Platform
- No Activity Zone
- Pipeline
- Shipping Fairway
- Lease Blocks
- Contour (m)

Bathymetry
- High: 15m
- Low: 473m

Recommended Boundary

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA

M. Nuttall, FGBNMS, Feb 2015
Bright Bank – “Treasure” salvage activities
Large Vessel Anchoring

Dry Tortugas, Florida
Cargo Vessel, Astro Saturn, Anchoring at Geyer Bank, 7/16/2011

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA
M. Nuttall, FGBNMS, July 2011
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ACT (16 U.S.C. 1431)

SECTION 304 (a) (5):

FISHING REGULATIONS - “The Secretary shall provide the appropriate Regional Fishery Management Council with the opportunity to prepare draft regulations for fishing within the Exclusive Economic Zone as the Council may deem necessary to implement the proposed designation.”

In preparing the draft regulations, a Regional Fishery Management Council shall use as guidance the national standards of section 301(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1851) to the extent that the standards are consistent and compatible with the proposed designation.
Therefore, protecting and managing a network of ecologically significant offshore sites will be important to the Gulf’s overall biological productivity and resilience.” (p. 39)
For the first time in 20 years, NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries:

- Re-establishes the process by which the American public nominates special places as new National Marine Sanctuaries

  - Nominations should be based on criteria directly connected to the National Marine Sanctuaries Act
  - Nominated areas should include nationally-significant resources and habitats, as well as economic incentives and collaborative partnerships

www.nominate.noaa.gov
The Road to Nomination

For the first time in two decades, NOAA invites communities across the nation to nominate their most treasured places in our marine and Great Lakes waters for consideration as national marine sanctuaries. In response to ongoing widespread interest from the public, NOAA has launched a new, locally driven sanctuary nomination process developed with input from more than 18,000 public comments. Throughout the nomination process, NOAA will be available to answer questions and provide guidance to nominating communities and other interested parties. NOAA will also update nominators on the progress of the agency’s review of their nomination.

PLEASE NOTE: Nomination is not the same thing as sanctuary designation. Designation occurs as a separate process that by law is highly public and participatory and often takes several years to complete.

1. Community Builds a Nomination
2. Community submits a Nomination to NOAA
3. NOAA’s Initial Review
4. Taking a Closer Look
5. Nomination is Accepted
6. Nominated Area Added to Inventory

National Significance Review
Management Review

www.nominate.noaa.gov