

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

A SPAW listed protected area



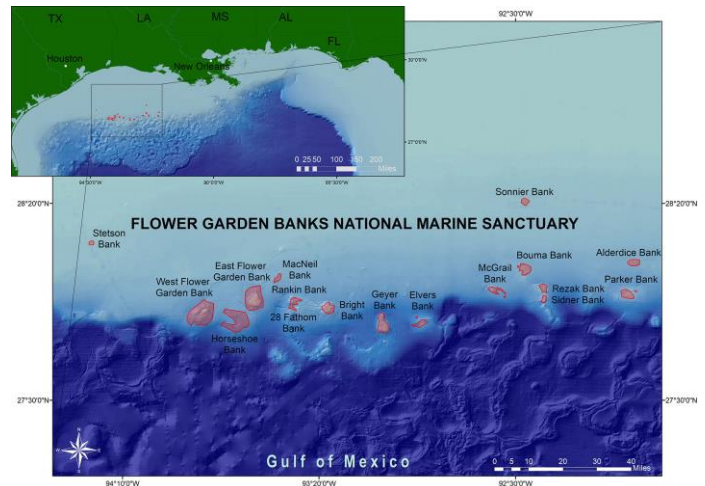
Country: USA

Management structure / authority: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

Date of establishment: 17 January 1992

Date of listing under SPAW: 23 October 2012

Size: 414 sq. km (160 sq. miles)



Context:

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary provides natural resource protection to some of the most intact coral reef ecosystems, healthy coral communities, and mesophotic reefs in the tropical Western Atlantic. The sanctuary was created by public interest to protect these habitats from expanding oil and gas development, anchoring, and fishing impacts in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico.

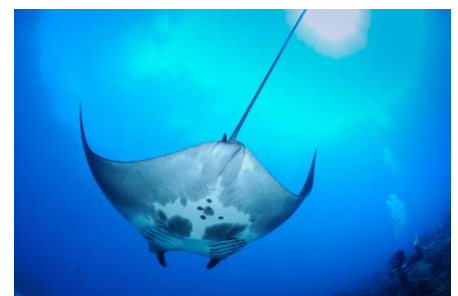
Recreational and commercial fishing is allowed in the sanctuary, with specific gear restrictions, and oil and gas production infrastructure is also present within sanctuary boundaries. As a result, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is an example of how marine resource use and conservation protections can compatibly coexist within the U.S. National Marine Sanctuary System.

Main fauna populations and/or those of particular importance present (resident or migratory) in the area:

Approximately 300 species of **fish** have been documented within the sanctuary, including parrotfish, wrasse, angelfish, boxfish, and squirrelfish. Commercially targeted species include snapper, grouper, jacks, and mackerel.

Loggerhead and hawksbill sea **turtles** reside within the sanctuary throughout the year.

Approximately 20 species of **sharks and rays** have been documented in the sanctuary, some seasonal, others year-round. During the winter months, schooling scalloped hammerhead sharks and spotted eagle rays are visitors in some areas. Manta rays are regular visitors to the sanctuary.



Main ecosystems in the area:

The habitats of the Flower Garden Banks have been classified into depth related zones: coral reef zone (shallowest zone); coral community zone (depths of 18 to 50 meters); coralline algae zone (depths between 45 to 90 meters); deep coral zone (below 90 meters); and soft bottom community zone (large expanses of mud, sand, and silt substrates).

Potential Threats:

A number of potential threats to the sanctuary were identified, there is: Shipping; Fishing activities; Diver interactions; Discharge of Pollutants; Oil Spills and other Hydrocarbons; Climate Change; and Invasive Species.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Sanctuary Expansion

- Sanctuary expansion was completed in January 2021, with the addition of 14 banks.

Education and Outreach

- Broaden public awareness of the sanctuary
- Improve understanding of the sanctuary and its resource protection issues
- increase public support and stewardship
- Enhance communication

Research and Monitoring

- Investigate ecosystem processes
- Access and characterize sanctuary resources
- Maintain and enhance monitoring programs
- Develop partnerships

Resource Protection

- Enhance enforcement efforts
- Increase protection of sanctuary resources from potential threats

Visitor Use

- Improve the quantity and quality of visitor information needed to make management decisions
- Reduce the potential for user conflict and promote compatible uses
- Protect and maintain NOAA property

Operation and Administration

- Strengthen sanctuary human resource and program support capabilities
- Maintain and enhance sanctuary facilities, vessels and other infrastructure

Contact:

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Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is part of the **SPAW protected areas managers network**.

For more information about it: <https://www.car-spaw-rac.org/?Protected-Areas>