



FLOWER GARDEN BANKS

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY



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Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 17 reefs and banks located approximately 80–125 miles off the Texas and Louisiana coasts. These banks are a combination of small underwater mountains, ridges, troughs, and hard-bottom features formed as a result of dynamic salt domes beneath the seafloor. The habitats associated with these banks range from thriving coral reefs and coral communities, to deeper mesophotic reefs filled with black corals, octocorals, algal nodules, and sponges. These varied habitats provide havens for reef fish and invertebrates, as well as manta rays, sea turtles, and sharks.

LOCATION



ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The sanctuary is best known as a dive destination because of the beautiful coral reefs perched atop East and West Flower Garden Banks. However, these areas only account for a tiny fraction (2%) of the entire sanctuary. The majority of sanctuary habitats lie deeper beneath the waves in an area known as the mesophotic or "twilight" zone. Scuba and remotely operated vehicle technologies allow us to explore and learn about these areas.

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION

80–125 miles south of the Texas and Louisiana coasts in the Gulf of Mexico

PROTECTED AREA

160 square miles

DESIGNATION

January 1992
Expansion 1996, 2021

HABITATS (shallow to deep)

- Coral reefs and communities
- Sand flats
- Coralline algae zones
- Mesophotic reefs
- Mud volcanoes
- Open ocean

KEY SPECIES

- Boulder corals (brain and star)
- Black corals
- Groupers
- Hammerhead sharks
- Manta rays
- Octocorals
- Sea turtles



◀ CORAL REEF

The coral reefs here are among the healthiest in the world, and feature large star and brain corals.

GOLDEN SMOOTH TRUNKFISH (*Lactophrys triqueter*) The sanctuary is one of the only places in the world where you can find the golden morph of the smooth trunkfish.



◀ **BLACK CORAL** (*Distichopathes hickersonae*) During deep-sea explorations, new species are sometimes encountered. This black coral was first described in 2017.



MARBLED GROUPE (*Dermatolepis inermis*) ▶ The marbled grouper is a shy species that prefers deeper reefs, so it's a special treat to see one while diving in the sanctuary.



◀ **MANTA RAY** (*Mobula birostris*) Manta rays are a common sight in the sanctuary. Individuals are identified by their belly markings, which are unique like fingerprints.



WHALE SHARK (*Rhincodon typus*) ▶ Visitors are thrilled to see whale sharks when they occasionally cruise through the sanctuary during the summer months.



(Front) Illustration: (primary artist) Kathryn Robertson; (secondary artist and art direction) Matt McIntosh; (supporting artist) Melissa Cook. (Back) Photos: (fish in reef) G.P. Schmah/NOAA; (coral reef) G.P. Schmah/NOAA; (trunkfish) Emma Hickerson/NOAA; (black coral) NOAA/UNCW-LVP; (marbled grouper) G.P. Schmah/NOAA; (manta ray) G.P. Schmah/NOAA; (whale shark) Ryan Eckert/NOAA; (background photo) G.P. Schmah/NOAA

BELOW

Coral reef monitoring allows the sanctuary to regularly evaluate the health of the reefs. The coral reefs of East and West Flower Garden Banks have been annually monitored since 1989, resulting in one of the longest-term datasets of this kind in the region. Monitoring at Stetson Bank began several years later. The goal is to establish monitoring in all areas of the sanctuary.

AMERICA'S UNDERWATER TREASURES

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuary System, visit: sanctuaries.noaa.gov



● National Marine Sanctuary
▲ Marine National Monument
■ Proposed National Marine Sanctuary
Scale varies in this perspective. Adapted from National Geographic Maps.