AMERICA'S UNDERWATER TREASURES

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Expansion Update

GMFMC Coral SSC/AP and Shrimp AP Meeting
September 16, 2019

National Marine Sanctuaries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Sanctuary System

Image reproduced from the GEBCO world map, http://www.gebco.net/

Customized by Matt McIntosh, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

LOUISIANA
New Orleans
Houston
TEXAS
N
0 40 80 120 Miles
Flower Garden Banks
National Marine Sanctuary
Stetson Bank
East Flower Garden Bank
West Flower Garden Bank
0 3 6 9 Miles

Remarkable Reefs of the Flower Garden Banks

Stetson Bank – Flower Garden Banks NMS

Reefs and Banks of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico

1968-1974
Dr. Tom Bright and Dr. Richard Rezak
TAMU, Flower Gardens Ocean Research Center (FGORC), UTMBI

1974-1981 Drs. Bright, Rezak, and David McGrail
TAMU, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Biologically Sensitive Areas (<300m)

December 2012

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) – 2006

Oil and Gas Infrastructure of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico, 2016

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA

M. Nuttall, FGBNMS, July 2016

Fishing / Anchor Impacts – FGBNMS Expansion Areas

Large Vessel Anchoring

Dry Tortugas, Florida

Vessel Anchoring – Geyer Bank - July 16, 2011

Photos courtesy John Stout, *M/V Possession Limit*

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

SANCTUARY EXPANSION

DATE OF RELEASE:
June 10, 2016

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:
June 10 – August 19, 2016

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Mission: "Identify, protect conserve and enhance the natural and cultural resources, values and qualities of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary and its regional environment for this and future generations."
FGBNMS Management Plan, April 2012

1. Stetson Bank; 2. West Flower Garden Bank; 3. East Flower Garden Bank

1. Stetson Bank; 2. West Flower Garden Bank; 3. East Flower Garden Bank and Horseshoe Bank; 4. MacNeil Bank; 5. Rankin Bank, 28 Fathom Bank, and Bright Bank; 6. Geyer Bank; 7. McGrail Bank; 8. Sonnier Bank; 9. Alderdice Bank

ALTERNATIVE 3

2015 Staff Recommendation
PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

- 15 additional banks in 8 additional polygons
- Including current sanctuary locations, a total of 18 banks, in 11 polygons (3 multi-bank complexes).

Current sanctuary area: 56.21 sq. miles
Net Increase Over Current Sanctuary: 326.98 sq. miles
Alternative 3 Area: 383.19 sq. miles

1. Stetson Bank; 2. West Flower Garden Bank; 3. East Flower Garden Bank and Horseshoe Bank; 4. MacNeil Bank; 5. Rankin Bank, 28 Fathom Bank, and Bright Bank; 6. Geyer Bank; 7. McGrail Bank; 8. Sonnier Bank; 9. Alderdice Bank

1. Stetson Bank; 2. West Flower Garden Bank, East Flower Garden Bank and Horseshoe Bank; 3. MacNeil Bank; 4. Rankin Bank, 28 Fathom Bank and Bright Bank; 5. Geyer Bank; 6. McGrail Bank; 7. Sonnier Bank; 8. Alderdice Bank; 9. Elvers Bank; 10. Bouma Bank, Bryant Bank, Rezak Bank and Sidner Bank; 11. Parker Bank; 12. Hidalgo Basin Rim; 13. Assumption Dome; 14. St. Tammany Basin Rim; 15. Henderson Ridge North ; 16. Henderson Ridge South; 17. Biloxi Dome; 18. Mountain Top; 19. Viosca Knolls West; 20. Gloria Dome; 21. Alabama Alps, 36 Fathom Ridge; 22. West Addition Pinnacles; 23. Dauphin Dome; 24. Shark Reef, Double Top, Triple Top; 25. Viosca Knolls East; 26. Ludwick-Walton and West Delta Mounds; 27. Yellowtail, Cat's Paw, Roughtongue, Corkscrew; 28. Far Tortuga; 29. Desoto Canyon/West Florida Escarpment

1. Stetson Bank; 2. West Flower Garden Bank, East Flower Garden Bank, Horseshoe Bank, MacNeil Bank, Rankin Bank, 28 Fathom Bank and Bright Bank; 3. Geyer Bank; 4. McGrail Bank; 5. Sonnier Bank; 6. Alderdice Bank; 7. Elvers Bank; 8. Bouma Bank, Bryant Bank, Rezak Bank, Sidner Bank, Tresslar Bank and Antoine Bank; 9. Parker Bank; 10. Hidalgo Basin Rim; 11. Assumption Dome; 12. St. Tammany Basin Rim; 13. Henderson Ridge North ; 14. Henderson Ridge South; 15. Biloxi Dome, R. E. Lee* and U166*; 16. Mountain Top; 17. Viosca Knolls West; 18. Gloria Dome and Deepwater Horizon*; 19. Alabama Alps, 36 Fathom Ridge; 20. West Addition Pinnacles; 21. Dauphin Dome; 22. Shark Reef, Double Top, Triple Top; 23. Viosca Knolls East; 24. Ludwick-Walton and West Delta Mounds; 25. Yellowtail, Cat's Paw, Roughtongue, Corkscrew; 26. Far Tortuga; 27. Desoto Canyon/West Florida Escarpment; 28. USS Hatteras*; 29. Claypile Bank; 30. Galvez/Frye Basins Ridge; 31. 29 Fathom Bank; 32. Monterrey Wrecks*; 33. Tunica Mound; 34. Jeanerette Dome; 35. Jakkula Bank; 36. Penchant Basin Rim; 37. Ewing Bank; 38. Henderson Ridge Mid-South; 39. GulfOil*; 40. Henderson Ridge Mid-North; 41. GulfPenn*; 42. Whiting Dome; 43. Mardi Gras*; 44. Horn Dome; 45. Anona*

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Expansion: Alternative 3

2016 DEIS
NOAA Preferred Alternative

15 Reefs and Banks
383 square miles

FGBNMS PROHIBITIONS

- Vessel Anchoring
- Fishing with or possession of fishing gear other than conventional hook and line gear
- Possession of fish or invertebrates (except those taken by hook and line)
- Alteration of seabed
- Injuring or removing coral, plants or bottom formations
- Oil & gas exploration within “no activity zones” (NAZ)

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Seafloor Mapping – “Multibeam Bathymetry”

Mohawk ROV at East Flower Garden Bank, November 2013

Mapping

Habitat Characterization

Alderdice Bank

Bright Bank

Elvers Bank

Parker Bank

Coral Colony Count Summary

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

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November 08, 2016

George Schmahl, Superintendent
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
4700 Ave. U, Bldg 216
Galveston, Texas 77551

006578 NOV 2016

Re: Comments on the Proposed Regulations for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS): Sanctuary Expansion

Dear Mr. Schmahl:

Thank you for your attendance at the past three Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) meetings and providing information to the Council. This letter is accompanied by a white paper entitled "Evaluation of Regulations for the Expansion of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary" that includes the Council's recommendations and comments on the proposed regulations for the proposed Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) expansion. Additionally, the Council's recommendations on the regulations strictly pertain to the FGBNMS's Preferred Alternative 3. The Council does not support the expansion proposed in the DEIS for Alternative 4 nor Alternative 5 as the Council agrees with the FGBNMS assertion that Alternative 4 and Alternative 5 are outside the current operational capacity of the FGBNMS.

The Council urges the FGBNMS to consider a tiered approach to management of the FGBNMS as outlined in the attached white paper. The Council proposes that the first tier coincide with existing BOEM no activity zones and to make these areas into "no bottom tending gear" zones. Traditional hook-and-line fishing (including bandit rigs) would be allowable in these zones. The second tier would be the area outside the BOEM no activity zones but inside the boundaries of the proposed FGBNMS expansion. This tier would allow bottom tending gear and anchoring but would exclude bottom trawling, traps, and dredges. The third tier would be outside the boundaries of the proposed expansion and would not have any FGBNMS imposed regulations. The Council also recommends related endorsements, anchor restrictions, and mooring buoys.

The Council also requests that the FGBNMS include Council staff on any working groups regarding future regulatory or spatial analyses and welcomes further discussion of the regulations with the FGBNMS staff as noted, by you, at the October 2016 Council meeting.

Sincerely,

Leann Bosarge
Council Chairman
cc: Gulf Council
Billy Causey
Cindy Meyer
Council staff

11/8/2016

Evaluation of Regulations for the Expansion of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

White Paper

November 2016

This is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA15NMF4410011.

Recommendations from GMFMC on Fishing Regulations

- Maintain current fishing regulations in the existing HAPCs with regulations

- Continue to allow historical fishing practices in the areas that are outside designated “No anchor / No bottom tending gear zones”

- Establish a certificate program or endorsement program that would allow for education of fishermen within the FGBNMS on the environmental importance of the area(s), fishing restricted areas and appropriate gear types (i.e. anchor type). This program could be a requirement for anyone that fishes in the FGBNMS proposed boundaries.

- Provide an adequate number of mooring buoys on any of the expanded “no bottom tending gear zones” to allow access for the public.

Boundary Expansion Working Group – May 2018

FGBNMS Advisory Council
Recommendation 05/18
160 square miles
Alt. 3
SAC
TX
LA
MS
AL
FL
Houston
New Orleans
0 25 50 100 150
Miles
93°0'0"W
92°15'0"W
30°0'0"N
28°0'0"N
28°30'0"N
92°30'0"W
89°0'0"W
27°45'0"N
93°45'0"W
Sonnier Bank
Stetson Bank
Alderdice Bank
Bouma Bank
McGrail Bank
Bryant Bank
Rezak Bank
Sidner Bank
Parker Bank
East Flower Garden Bank
MacNeil Bank
West Flower Garden Bank
Rankin Bank
Bright Bank
Geyer Bank
Elvers Bank
28 Fathom Bank
Horseshoe Bank
Gulf of Mexico
0 5 10 20 30 40
Miles

FGBNMS Advisory Council Recommendation 05/18
Alt. 3
SAC
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LA
MS
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FL
Houston
New Orleans
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92°15'0"W
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28°0'0"N
28°30'0"N
92°30'0"W
89°0'0"W
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93°45'0"W
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Bouma Bank
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Bryant Bank
Rezak Bank
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East Flower Garden Bank
MacNeil Bank
West Flower Garden Bank
Rankin Bank
Bright Bank
Geyer Bank
Elvers Bank
28 Fathom Bank
Horseshoe Bank
Gulf of Mexico
0 5 10 20 30 40 Miles

2018 FGBNMS Advisory Council Recommendation
Bright Bank Complex

July 2018

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA

2018 FGBNMS Advisory Council Recommendation
Bright Bank

GMFMC Recommendation

- Apply existing FGBNMS fishing regulations (i.e. hook and line only) within "No Activity Zones" (NAZ)
- Allow historical fishing practices (i.e. bottom longline) and anchoring by fishing vessels outside NAZ
- Require education program and FGBNMS "endorsement" to fish or anchor outside NAZ

July 2018

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA

2018 FGBNMS Advisory Council Recommendation
Bouma Bank Complex

July 2018

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA

2018 FGBNMS Advisory Council Recommendation
McGrail Bank

July 2018

Bathymetry courtesy of USGS, UNH, Gardner and NOAA

FGBNMS Advisory Council Recommendation 05/18
Alt. 3
SAC
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Houston
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0 25 50 100 150 Miles
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November 7, 2018

006730NOV2019

George Schmahl, Superintendent
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
4700 Ave. U, Bldg 216
Galveston, Texas 77551

Re: Revised Comments on the Proposed Regulations for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS): Sanctuary Expansion

Dear Mr. Schmahl:

Thank you for your presentation on the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) Advisory Council's (SAC) recommendation for sanctuary expansion at the August 2018 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting. The Council requested that its staff provide a summary of the fishing activity in the areas recommended by the SAC, as these boundaries were markedly different from the boundaries in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on which the Council had previously provided recommendations. The Council supports the new SAC boundaries for the FGBNMS expansion and would also recommend an alternative set of fishing regulations to go along with these modifications. The Council's original fishing regulations recommendations for the proposed area used a tiered approach for the DEIS preferred alternative 3. These recommendations no longer seem sensible when applied to the new SAC recommended areas. Thus, this letter provides the Council's recommendations on fishing regulations for the areas outlined by the SAC.

The Council recommends that the current fishing regulations of the FGBNMS extend into the expanded area; however, with one major exception, that is spearfishing in the expanded area be allowed. This recommendation is consistent with the SAC recommendations. The Council still recommends related endorsements for fishing in the sanctuary, anchor restrictions, and placement of mooring buoys. Lastly, the Council discussed the use of bandit rig gear in the FGBNMS and some members advise that the FGBNMS investigate the potential impact that the weights used in bandit-rig fishing could have on coral.

The Council appreciates the opportunity to provide the FGBNMS with comment and your participation in the Council process. Should the FGBNMS move forward with preferred alternative 3 outlined in the DEIS, the Council maintains its recommendations in the letter dated November 8, 2016 for that alternative.

Sincerely,

Tom Frazer, Ph.D.
Council Chairman

cc: Gulf Council
Council staff
Sanctuary leadership

"The Council recommends that the current fishing regulations of the FGBNMS extend into the expanded area; however, with one major exception, that is spearfishing in the expanded area be allowed. This recommendation is consistent with the SAC recommendations. The Council still recommends related endorsements for fishing in the sanctuary, anchor restrictions, and placement of mooring buoys. Lastly, the Council discussed the use of bandit rig gear in the FGBNMS and some members advise that the FGBNMS investigate the potential impact that the weights used in bandit-rig fishing could have on coral."

GMFMC Letter – November 7, 2018

FGBNMS Expansion

- Publish “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking” – Fall 2019
- 60 day Public Comment period with two Public meetings (Houston TX / New Orleans LA)
- Review / analysis of public comment and any new information.
- Publish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – Spring 2020
- Publish Final Rule (boundaries/regulations)

Proposed Expansion Rule

- No changes to regulations as proposed in 2016
- Requesting specific public input on following issues:
  - Exemption for use of spearfishing gear (GMFMC)
  - Exemption for use of spearfishing gear for pelagic species by breath-hold diving only (SAC)
  - Exemption for use of pelagic longline gear (NOAA/Highly Migratory Species)
  - Possession of spearfishing gear in E&W Flower Garden and Stetson Banks (SAC)
  - Boundary configurations (NOAA/OLE)

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS

http://flowergarden.noaa.gov