

FGBNMS Historic Detail

The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS or Sanctuary) boundary encompasses a total area of 160.4 square miles of offshore ocean waters, and submerged lands thereunder, along the continental shelf and shelf edge in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico. The sanctuary is composed of 17 individual banks and has one rigs-to-reef artificial reef within its boundaries. The artificial reef was donated by W&T Offshore Inc. and is managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The amazing biodiversity, concentration of marine life and beauty of the various banks in the Gulf of Mexico are the basis for the FGBNMS's establishment and its two expansions.

Prompted by researchers and recreational divers the FGBNMS was designated on January 17, 1992. That area contained both the East and West Banks and equaled 48.0 square miles in size and contains 350 acres of reef crest. Four years later in October 1996, Congress expanded the sanctuary by adding a small third bank - Stetson Bank.

On March 22, 2021- the Sanctuary was expanded for a second time with the addition of 14 banks. This expansion was supported by all the major state-holder groups including divers, fishermen, oil & gas producers, researchers, educators and conservationists.

The Sanctuary ranges from Stetson Bank, which is 82 miles south-southeast of Galveston, Texas to Parker Bank which is 194 miles southeast of Galveston, Texas. The sanctuary is now composed of 17 banks - Stetson, West Flower Garden, East Flower Garden, Horseshoe, MacNeil, Rankin, 28 Fathom, Bright, Geyer, Elvers, McGrail, Sonnier, Bouma, Rezak, Sidner, Alderdice and Parker Banks. They contain a series of underwater features, important geological features, biological habitats and other marine resources of national significance. They contain highly productive marine ecosystems that support a variety of fish and invertebrate communities of biological and economic importance. The reefs and banks of the northwestern Gulf of Mexico are structurally complex and contain a range of marine habitats, including coral reefs, coralline algal reefs, algal nodule beds, mesophotic and deep-water reefs, and softbottom communities.