



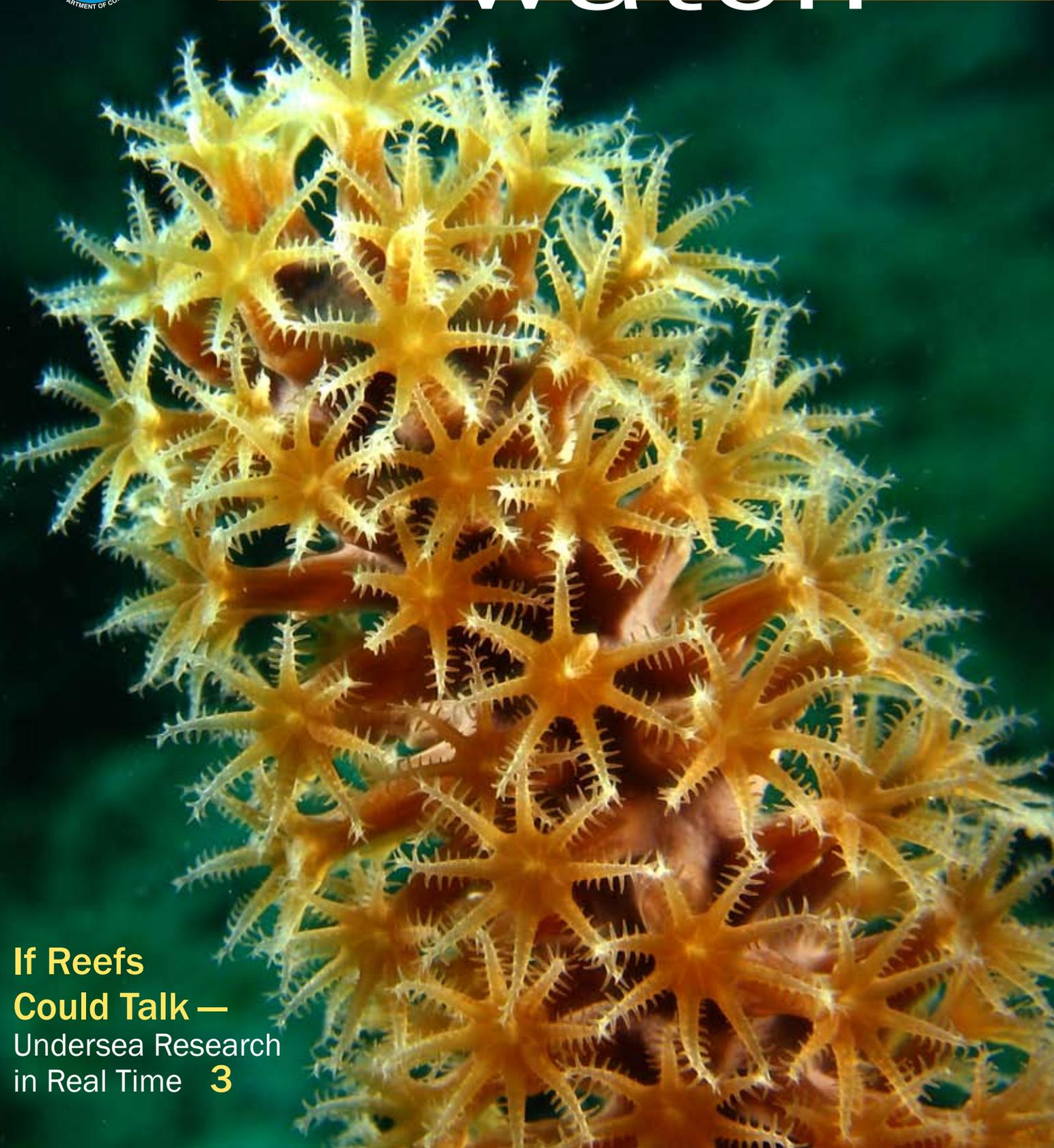
NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARIES



Sanctuary watch

Winter 2008

**If Reefs
Could Talk —**
Undersea Research
in Real Time **3**



Letter from the Director



Photo: Lou Cafiero

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Well, we have a lot to celebrate as we kick off 2008. In fact, we were all so busy with sanctuary duties we almost forgot about an important milestone last October - the 35th Anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, established by Congress in 1972.

October 23, 1972 was an important date in the history of marine conservation. It began a movement in the U.S. and abroad recognizing that "special places" are critical to sustaining the marine ecosystems of the planet; that all places in the ocean were not equally important, and most of all, people cared more deeply about places they can relate to and understand. The foresight of National Marine Sanctuary Act creators is now becoming more appreciated as the changing world focuses its attention on the oceans.

A great deal has been accomplished, but so much more remains to be done. From our first sanctuary, the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary, we now have 13 national marine sanctuaries and one national monument covering more than 150,000 square miles.

The community based growth of the national marine sanctuary system, since 1972, provides a measure of the critical role of special marine places. In this issue of Sanctuary Watch you can get a glimpse of the variety of exciting and innovative projects we are working on every day to help preserve and protect our ocean environment.

- The year 2008 also marks the start of the International Year of the Reef which is a year long campaign to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of coral reefs to our planet. NOAA and the sanctuary program are key players in this initiative. Almost 90% of coral reefs under U.S. jurisdiction are managed within the marine sanctuary system.
- Since the ocean is connected to all countries of the world, we are honored that many countries are seeking our help and knowledge to find better ways to manage their own marine protected areas through our international management capacity building project.
- We are always seeking innovative ways to educate the public about marine conservation and have recently introduced Sanctuary Sam, our new, NOAA spokes-sea lion, who will appear on television public service announcements, the Internet and on a variety of education materials for school children.

Throughout the coming year, you will be seeing and hearing more from the sanctuary program as we find new ways to touch all 303 million Americans with moving images and messages that illuminate the wonder, and importance of these special marine places that affect their lives every day.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Basta, Director
NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program

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Learn more about your national marine sanctuaries at
sanctuaries.noaa.gov



Photo: Ken Nedimyer

Coral Nurseries Established in Florida Keys

Nursery-raised corals may prove to be key building blocks in restoring coral reefs in the Florida Keys. These nurseries are important not only in re-establishing corals where they once existed, but also in preserving the genetic material of the many species of coral found in the Keys. In a first coral restoration transplant effort, sanctuary scientists and volunteers recently relocated staghorn coral colonies to

Researchers plant new corals in the Florida Keys.

a reef where the corals had once existed. Through careful monitoring, researchers will identify the corals that survive best under known environmental conditions and use this information in managing coral reefs in the future. Sanctuary biologists also maintain a coral nursery nearshore in Key West that provides corals for research purposes and for restoration projects.

Great Lakes Center Receives Energy Award

In 2007, the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center in Alpena, Mich., won the Department of Energy's Federal Energy Saver Award. The purpose of the award is to promote wise energy and water use throughout the Federal government by recognizing agencies that showcase cost-effective, energy efficient, water-conserving, and renewable energy technologies in their facilities. The center is on track to becoming a Gold Certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building. This is only the 5th time NOAA has received the award since 1995. The center, which serves as headquarters for Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, also won a Department of Energy You Have the Power award for energy conservation in 2006.

NOAA Receives Preserve America Award

On November 7, 2007 NOAA received the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's (ACHP) Award for Federal Preserve America Accomplishment for its exemplary organizational efforts among government agencies in implementing the Administration's Preserve America initiative. Council chairman John L. Nau III presented the award to Daniel J. Basta, director, National Marine Sanctuary Program, and Cheryl A. Oliver, senior program advisor, NOAA Preserve America Initiative, at the ACHP's fall meeting in Washington, D.C. NOAA was recognized for the outstanding job the agency has done in capturing the spirit and purpose of the Preserve America initiative.

Hearings Underway to Reauthorize National Marine Sanctuaries Act

A Congressional subcommittee held their first hearing to reauthorize the National Marine Sanctuaries Act at the University of California Santa Barbara in November. More hearings are expected throughout the nation before a final bill is introduced. In testifying before the Committee, William Douros, West Coast Regional Director for the National Marine Sanctuary Program, stressed the need for clarifying the Act's primary purpose for resource protection, streamlining the process for designating new sanctuaries, providing marine national monuments the same legal tools as sanctuaries under the law, and making a number of technical updates to the Act's various elements such as enforcement and permitting.

Unmanned Aircraft Planned to Locate Marine Debris

Staff from Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center began a project to develop an unmanned aircraft system to aid vessels in locating derelict fishing gear and marine debris in monument waters. The concept of locating and removing derelict fishing gear at sea in a cost-effective manner has been on the table for many years. Until recently, this has not been feasible due to the high costs associated with locating the debris in the open ocean. The unmanned aircraft would be hand-launched from a support vessel or small boat and controlled by a shipboard operator. The location of marine debris sites would be identified during the flight in real time using customized detection software. Successful test flights were conducted last fall and Monument staff is planning future flights and sea trials from NOAA vessels in spring 2008.



Photo: Claire Fackler

Innovative Vessel Launched

The prototype catamaran vessel Proteus, developed by Marine Advanced Research, made its New York City debut last September to help announce plans for a one ocean cruise through the national marine sanctuaries. The vessel also sailed up the Potomac in October for a Washington, D.C. visit and first-hand inspection by sanctuary, NOAA and U.S. Navy staff.

'If Reefs *Could* Talk'

Undersea Research in Real Time

Coral reefs in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary were the subject of a high profile education and scientific mission in September. Billed as "If Reefs Could Talk", scientists and educators hunkered down for nine days in NOAA's Aquarius Undersea Laboratory off Key Largo, Fla.

While living and working in the world's only undersea research facility, the team brought their research to students with classroom sessions that were broadcast live to schools and to a worldwide public via www.OceansLive.org.

During the mission, scientists looked at changes in corals

NOAA's Aquarius Undersea Laboratory, the world's only undersea research facility, lies in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Photo: NOAA



Photo: Bob Care

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen visits with Aquarius mission aquanauts Chris Martens (inside) and Niels Lundquist (outside).

and other marine life in the sanctuary, gathered data at monitoring stations originally established in 1994, and measured the effects of sponge metabolism on reef water quality. Preliminary findings suggest that sponges play an important role in filtering and converting particulate matter, and releasing dissolved inorganic nitrogen that could fertilize the reef and enhance algae growth.

Scientists also looked at changes on the reef tract that may have occurred due to human activities, climate change and other variables. They noticed substantial changes in the cover of animals and plants on the reef, with algae and sponges now occupying the bottom in places where corals once dominated. Scientists also recorded low numbers of brittle stars and sea urchins, both of which used to be abundant on the reefs. This raises concern among scientists about the loss of biodiversity in the Florida Keys. Losing species reduces the stability of an ecosystem, and makes it more difficult for it to recover when disturbed.

“Species that we typically don’t monitor may be disappearing from the coral reefs of the Florida Keys,” according to Steve Gittings, science coordinator for the program. “This compromises the integrity of the reefs, and we need to do everything we can to make sure it doesn’t continue to happen.”

The Aquarius mission, like many program expeditions and education outreach efforts, was built on past research and enhances understanding of the marine world. The ocean is in peril, and NOAA’s efforts to study and monitor marine ecosystems in and beyond marine sanctuaries is at the core of the program’s efforts to protect marine resources.

The mission was a partnership with NOAA’s National Undersea Research Center at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Over 175 national and international radio, TV, and online outlets covered the event as well as a visit from National Geographic Wild Chronicles, and a Fox News Channel broadcast. Total audience reached was more than 22 million. 

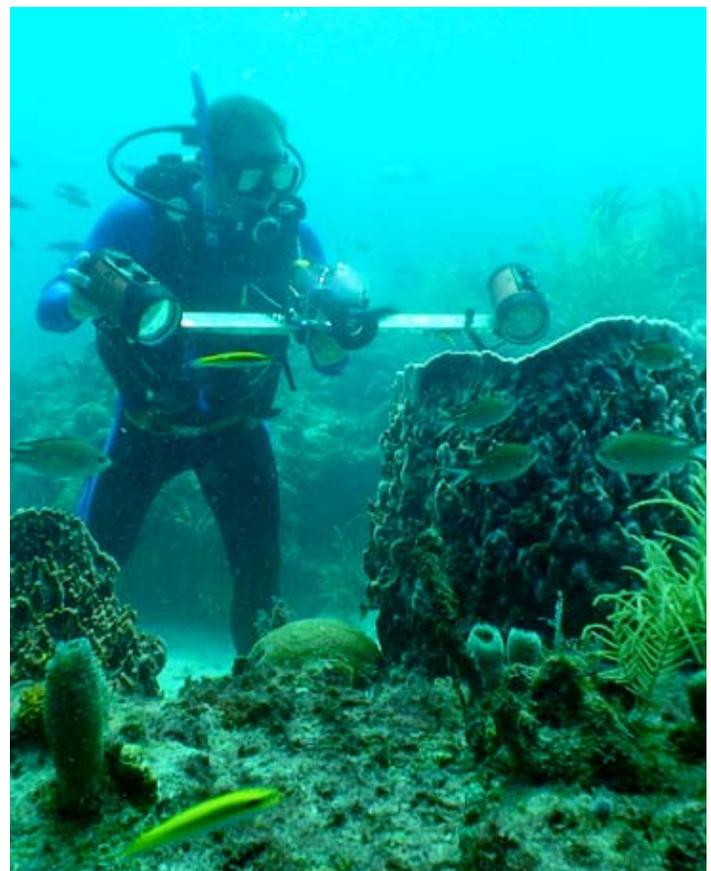


Photo: NOAA

Top: Sanctuary’s national research coordinator Steve Gittings surveys sponge and coral during Aquarius mission.



Photo: NOAA

Left: Kate Thompson, mission education coordinator, enters air filling station near Aquarius reef base.

Sanctuary Sam Makes a Splash for Ocean Conservation

Ocean conservation has a new advocate, and it's not a human. It's a sea lion and his name is Sanctuary Sam. The program made the announcement at SeaWorld, Orlando in November as part of a NOAA public awareness campaign that will feature Sam, a California sea lion, as the program's "spokes-sea lion."

"What Smokey Bear did for our nation's forests, Sanctuary Sam has the potential to do for marine conservation, making ocean issues real for all Americans," said Daniel J. Basta, director of the sanctuary program. "The future health of our oceans depends on all of us caring and taking action. Sam's charge is to help bring that message to the nation."

The goal of the campaign is to generate public awareness about marine conservation among the American people, particularly younger audiences, and create a buzz about Sanctuary Sam, thus shedding more light on the program's role in helping protect America's underwater treasures.



Planned for release are two public service announcements for television and Internet featuring the messages "don't trash where you splash" and "be wildlife wise." For the television spots, Sanctuary Sam offers tips on ways humans can be better ocean stewards by not throwing trash in the ocean and not disturbing marine life, such as marine mammals, in the wild.

Sam's likeness and messages will also appear on educational vehicles produced by program staff, such as the OceansLive Internet Web site, school materials, posters, bookmarks, and videos. For more information about Sanctuary Sam, visit oceanslive.org. 

Sanctuary Program Joins International Year of the Reef Campaign

Recognizing an urgent need to increase awareness and understanding of coral reefs, and to further conserve and manage valuable reef ecosystems, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) designated 2008 as the International Year of the Reef.

The worldwide campaign will address the value and importance of coral reefs and threats to their sustainability - nearly 10 percent of the Earth's coral reefs have been seriously degraded. The Initiative is a partnership among governments, international organizations, and non-government organizations dedicated to preserving coral reefs and related ecosystems.

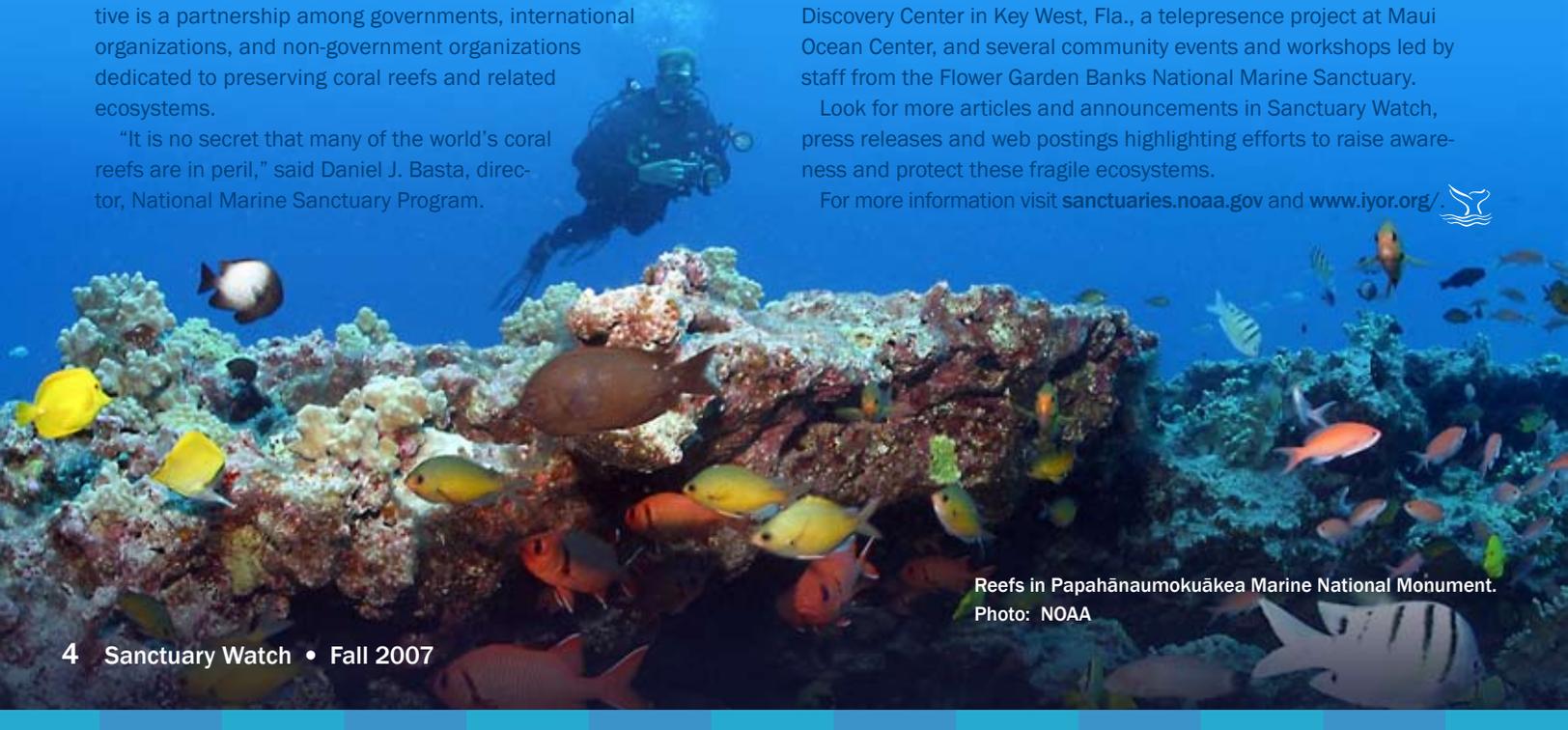
"It is no secret that many of the world's coral reefs are in peril," said Daniel J. Basta, director, National Marine Sanctuary Program.

"Climate change, natural events like hurricanes, coastal development and other human and environmental stresses have ganged up on the corals of the world. NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuary Program are key players in coral reef initiatives designed to protect these fragile ecosystems."

Throughout the year, the program plans several events and outreach efforts including a coral reef lecture series at Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center in Key West, Fla., a telepresence project at Maui Ocean Center, and several community events and workshops led by staff from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

Look for more articles and announcements in Sanctuary Watch, press releases and web postings highlighting efforts to raise awareness and protect these fragile ecosystems.

For more information visit sanctuaries.noaa.gov and www.iyor.org/. 



Reefs in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.
Photo: NOAA

Whale Shark

The World's Largest Fish is Still a Mystery



So, which is it, a whale or a shark? Don't let the whale shark's confusing name and leviathan size fool you — this big shark is actually the largest fish on the planet.

Adults can grow to more than 60 feet in length (although individuals over 40 feet are rare), and the heaviest specimen on record weighed a whopping 75,000 pounds!

Swimmers have nothing to fear from these gentle giants. Whale sharks are docile creatures that swim at a top speed of just over 3 miles per hour, making them a popular sight for tourists and scuba divers.

Whale sharks can be found throughout the tropical and warm temperate oceans of the world to a depth of about 2,300 feet. They are frequent summer visitors to Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico, where nutrient-rich waters provide abundant sources of food.

The whale shark uses its gaping mouth, which can measure up to five feet wide, to feed on high concentrations of tiny krill, plankton, small fish and crustaceans. Unlike the other known species of filter-feeding sharks, the whale shark actively “gulps” down food by pumping water over its gills, which can filter nearly 1,600 gallons of water an hour!

Tagging and DNA studies have indicated that male whale sharks tend to travel long distances, while females only make short-distance migrations and always return to their place of birth.

Much about whale sharks is still shrouded in mystery, but through research like the ongoing tagging efforts at the Flower Garden Banks sanctuary, the National Marine Sanctuary Program hopes to reveal more about these majestic creatures in the years to come.

Common Name: Whale shark
Scientific Name: *Rhincodon typus*
Distribution: Tropical and warm temperate oceans worldwide
Max. Length: 66 feet
Max. Weight: 37.5 tons
Diet: Plankton, krill, small fish, squid and crustaceans
Status: Vulnerable

Photo: ©iStockphoto.com/Klaas Lingbeek-van Kranen



The Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) of the United States is a busy place, with overlapping ecosystems and commercial uses. Fishing, transportation, telecommunications, and tourism are among the many economic interests that successfully co-exist with recreational and scientific endeavors in the waters off our coasts. The National Ocean Industries Association (NOIA), based in Washington, DC, is working together with these groups to seek sensible solutions to meeting our energy needs using the potential resources of the OCS.

The United States already finds a lot of its domestic energy under the OCS. Safe extraction of oil and natural gas from beneath the seabed in the Gulf of Mexico and parts of Alaska accounts for nearly a third of all the energy produced in the country overall. The offshore oil and gas industry has a strong track record of safety and environmental consciousness. In addition, the industry doesn't believe that every area is appropriate for drilling. Some important ecological areas are better served as marine sanctuaries, for example. The issue before us is how do we sensibly identify and share these important resources.

The OCS may also soon be the source of a range of new and innovative renewable energies, from wind power to wave energy to tidal

conversion. NOIA is committed to supporting the development and deployment of any and all ocean energy projects to help meet our growing energy demand.

Along the way, the energy industry will continue to act as a partner to the environmental and academic communities and as a friend to the marine sanctuaries. We are proud, for example, that the presence of offshore energy facilities in the neighborhood of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico has allowed the sanctuary staff to compile more data about its ecosystem than almost any other sanctuary around the country.

It is possible for energy development and ocean conservation to occur hand in hand. Indeed, they already do. NOIA looks forward to continued cooperation with the conservation community to meet the nation's energy needs and finding the common ground that benefits all Americans now and in the future. 

Tom Fry is President of the National Ocean Industries Association, a trade association representing all aspects of the exploration for and production of energy on the nation's Outer Continental Shelf. Mr. Fry is also a member of the Board of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

The opinions expressed in Sanctuary Voices do not imply endorsement by NOAA of any particular product, service, organization, company or policy.

Beach Watch Volunteers Help in Bay Area Oil Spill



Photos: Jamie Hall

Beach Watch volunteers examine dead seabirds (left) and collect oil samples from the beach.

Beach Watch volunteers have long set the standard for San Francisco's ocean conservation ethic. Established by Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary in 1993, Beach Watch volunteers regularly survey beaches within the Gulf of the Farallones and Monterey Bay national marine sanctuaries and provide sanctuary management with information collected from their surveys. Volunteers collect data on live and dead birds, marine mammals, report violations, and collect oil samples.

Their dedication reached new heights by their quick response to the November 7 oil spill in San Francisco Bay where the freighter

Cosco Busan spilled 58,000 gallons of fuel into the bay after striking the San Francisco Bay Bridge. Beach Watch volunteers mobilized at dawn the next day to survey the beaches hardest hit north and south of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Trained to work with hazardous materials, assist with wildlife rescue, and collect dead seabirds and tar balls, the volunteers reported on how the spill affected the area's marine and bird life. They monitored the flow of the fuel and provided critical data to management and the incident command unit.

"The volunteers' response to the oil spill exemplifies how dedicated they are to protecting our marine environment," said Maria Brown, sanctuary superintendent. "You can't put a price on the work they do."

During a two-week span after the spill, 81 volunteers invested over 1,200 hours monitoring 510 kilometers of beach, completing over 200 surveys. Their continued shoreline monitoring will help sanctuary managers and local officials determine the ongoing impact of the spill on wildlife and habitats.

The Beach Watch program was later singled out in testimony, at the November 19 Congressional Subcommittee hearing on the *Cosco Busan* spill, for their preparedness and swift action in getting trained volunteers into the field. 



Sanctuary Program Goes International to Help World's Oceans

Coastal development is expanding worldwide and contributing to the loss of critical habitat and threats to fragile marine resources. In order to achieve a healthy ocean ecosystem nationally, it is also important to engage our partners worldwide so that all benefit. To that end, the National Marine Sanctuary Program, in partnership with Conservation International, the World Conservation Union, UNESCO and other international partners have been working with marine resource managers in the South China Sea (China, Vietnam and Cambodia) and the Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascape (Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador) to look at ways to manage marine protected areas (MPAs). This exchange of knowledge and information between countries on how to effectively manage protected areas and create a balance between biodiversity protection and multiple use, helps build expertise within these developing countries.

In Vietnam, a network of 15 MPAs are being established by the Vietnamese Ministries of Fisheries. Through training courses, the program is helping build a foundation of how to plan for sustainable tourism and fisheries building off the experiences of developed countries who have decades of experience to share with the international community.

In 2007, the multi-disciplinary program has organized eight training

sessions for country participants throughout Southeast Asia and Latin America to learn how to effectively manage MPAs. Participants included key decision makers, MPA managers and staff, and community members. The training program focused on such topical areas as sustainable tourism, sustainable fisheries, zonal management, enforcement, as well as education and awareness building.

“Training MPA staff in other countries and helping them build capacity will provide the necessary mechanism to enable resource managers to directly experience and learn from one another, while setting new standards for the management of MPAs globally,” said Daniel J. Basta, director of the National Marine Sanctuary Program.

In 2008, program staff are looking to share their expertise with Mexico and Raja Ampat.

For more information about this program and other international efforts within the National Marine Sanctuary Program, visit <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/management/international/mpa.html>. 

Vietnamese squid light boat in Ha Long Bay world heritage site.

Photo: Claire Fackler

Star of the Sea

Capt. Frank Mirarchi



Frank Mirarchi knew at a young age that he would become a fisherman. As a young boy growing up in Scituate, Mass., he had loved the ocean. Then, while in college pursuing a degree in geology, he interned for a summer on a fishing boat. Though the work was messy – gutting fish, swabbing decks, hoisting lines – he felt he would be back. Mirarchi eventually got his degree in geology, but switched gears and became a commercial fisherman, which is what he still does today – 45 years later.

“I suppose if I had become a geologist I would have worked for an oil company somewhere in the middle of nowhere,” he said lightheartedly. “That wasn’t for me. I needed to be at sea, fishing.”

With a lifetime of experience fishing in the Gulf of Maine, Mirarchi has long been an advocate for sound stewardship in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. His passionate voice has been heard throughout the region to help fishermen sustain their livelihood while finding the best ways to sustain an ecosystem in peril. Along the way, he has sat on local councils that address ecosystem-based management in the sanctuary. Recently, he and a fellow fisherman have joined with staff from Stellwagen Bank in a year-long

effort, funded by NOAA’s Marine Debris Program, to clean up derelict fishing gear, and other marine debris in the sanctuary, and bring it to shore.

“One of the many steps we need to take in sustaining a healthy marine ecosystem system is to clean up debris, and there is a lot of it,” Mirarchi said. “It is a big problem in the Gulf of Maine, something all fishermen have to deal with. Typically in a given year, we can haul in as much as 5,000 pounds of debris, which in addition to derelict fishing gear, can also include balloons, plastics, tires, and such oddities as toilet seats and slot machines.”

The derelict fishing gear also poses a threat of entanglement to marine mammals, including endangered whales like the North Atlantic right whales that feed in sanctuary waters.

“Frank is an ideal person to work with on this marine debris project because of his vast experience, his open-mindedness and innovation, and eagerness to find solutions,” said Ben Haskell, assistant superintendent for Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. “Working with Frank is like working with a venerable professor except that Frank’s knowledge comes from 45 years experience at sea.”

Mirarchi’s ocean stewardship serves as an example of how fishermen and communities can join together to do something beneficial for their marine environment which can ultimately benefit their local fishing industry. 

Marine Debris Fast Facts

- The majority of marine debris comes from people’s mishandling of waste materials while on land.
- A glass bottle takes one million years to break down in the environment.
- Every day, the average American discards 4.5 pounds of trash.
- It is estimated that more than one million birds and 100,000 marine mammals die each year due to ingestion of, and entanglement in marine debris.
- An aluminum can takes 80 to 200 years to break down in the environment.
- Marine debris entanglement and ingestion has been reported in six of seven sea turtle species worldwide.
- Debris can be blown into the water or carried by creeks, rivers, storm drains and sewers into the ocean.
- A plastic bag takes 10 to 20 years to degrade in the environment.
- It is illegal to dispose of any plastics in all U.S. waters and anywhere at sea.



Photo: NOAA

Researchers remove marine debris from sanctuary waters

- In 2005, collisions with floating and submerged objects caused 269 boating accidents, resulting in 15 deaths, 116 injuries and \$2.9 million in property damage.

Information provided by NOAA’s Marine Debris Program. To learn more about what you can do, visit <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/>.



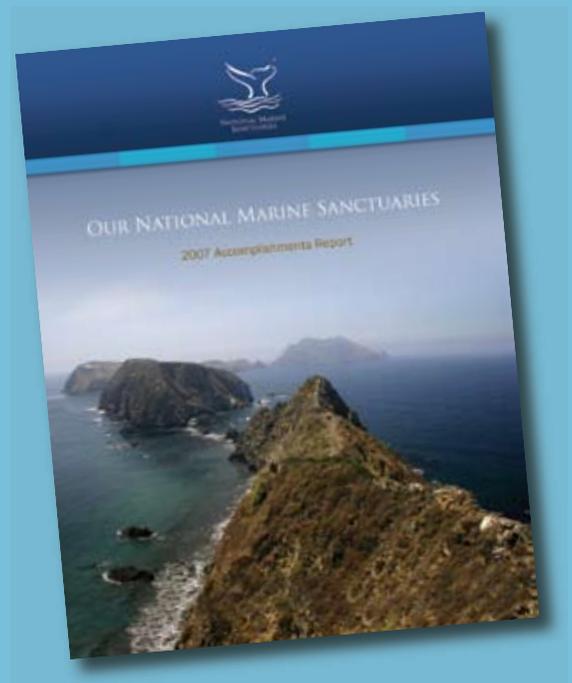
Sanctuary Staff and Partners Respond to Blue Whale Ship Strikes

During a three-week period in September, three blue whales were found dead in southern California – an unusually high mortality event – raising concern amongst program staff. Two of the whales were struck by ships in the Santa Barbara Channel and a third whale, found floating in Long Beach Harbor, was likely dragged there on the bow of a ship. With recent observations of blue whales feeding on a shallow layer of krill in and around the shipping lanes, sanctuary and NOAA Fisheries staff requested that the U.S. Coast Guard issue a cautionary notice to mariners, encouraging ships in the channel to watch for whales. The notice also recommended ship speeds not exceed 10 knots. Sanctuary staff coordinated flyovers with the Coast Guard to provide real-time locations of blue whales in the shipping lanes. 

A container ship comes dangerously close to a blue whale in the Santa Barbara Channel.

Photo: Julie Helmers

The new, 2007 Accomplishments Report highlights numerous achievements throughout the national marine sanctuary system in education,



resource protection, science and exploration, community involvement, and maritime heritage.

The report is available online at:

sanctuaries.noaa.gov



NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARIES

The National Marine Sanctuary
Program is part of the NOAA
National Ocean Service

Our Vision

People value marine
sanctuaries as treasured places
protected for future generations.

Our Mission

To serve as the trustee
for the nation's system of
marine protected areas to
conserve, protect and
enhance their biodiversity,
ecological integrity, and
cultural legacy.

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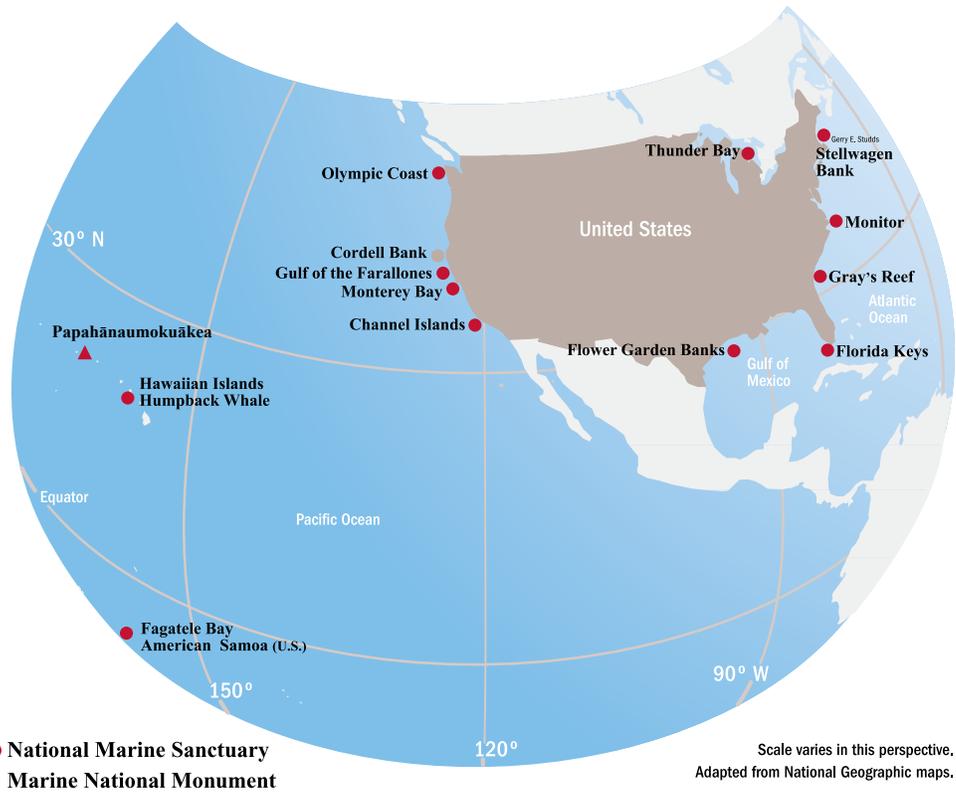
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National Marine Sanctuary System



The National Marine Sanctuary Program serves as the trustee for a system of 14 marine protected areas, encompassing more than 150,000 square miles of ocean and Great Lakes waters. The system includes 13 national marine sanctuaries and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The sanctuary program is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which manages sanctuaries by working cooperatively with the public to protect sanctuaries while maintaining compatible recreational and commercial activities. The program works to enhance public awareness of our nation's marine resources and maritime heritage through scientific research, monitoring, exploration, educational programs and outreach.



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