

GRAY'S REEF 2006 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



<http://graysreef.noaa.gov>

Gray's Reef Celebrates 25th Anniversary



Loggerhead sea turtles common to Gray's Reef and on view at the Georgia Aquarium.
Photo: Georgia Aquarium

Twenty-five years of sanctuary science, education, and conservation was the theme at a 25th anniversary celebration hosted by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Top accomplishments from a quarter century of ocean stewardship include the launch of Ocean Film Festival, creation of a comprehensive habitat profile and characterization maps necessary for critical management decisions, and two important education modules for regional teachers and students. The event, held at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta in September, brought citizens from around Georgia to commemorate the sanctuary's service to the American people. As part of its anniversary celebrations, Gray's Reef forged a partnership with students and teachers at Thunderbolt Elementary Marine Science Academy, Thunderbolt, Ga., to enrich marine science education for the academy's 650 children and for the community. Gray's Reef is noted for its diverse invertebrate communities and scientists continue to find new sponge and invertebrate species.

Clean the Reef, Clean the Beach

To celebrate World Oceans Day, sanctuary staff and volunteers from Savannah's Clean Coast group and local scuba clubs removed trash and debris from local beaches and sanctuary waters. The volunteers received special training on how to remove trash from the reef without damaging the soft corals and other invertebrates living there. The most common types of trash found within the sanctuary are fishing line, fishing gear and beverage cans. Program staff hope that the information on debris collected by the divers can feed into a long-term study of how marine debris impacts sanctuary waters and reef habitat.

Workshops Raise Ocean Awareness in Students

Two ROV (remotely operated vehicle) workshops brought students and teachers closer to the technology used to study the marine environment. These workshops help students understand ocean issues and increase their science aptitude. In Savannah, eight teams with a total of 25 students built their own ROVs and launched them in a local swimming pool. The students gained an appreciation for ocean science technology through this interactive, hands-on workshop.

Gray's Reef Has Possible New Sponge Species

Georgia Southern University scientists are developing a catalog of sponges found in the South Atlantic Bight including Gray's Reef. Within the sanctuary, they found 52 species of sponges from seven habitats, two of which are thought to be new species. Two years ago the same team found three tunicates in the sanctuary thought to be new species. Within the sanctuary, there are tropical sponges living at the northern most edge of their range and temperate sponges living at the southern most edge of their range indicating that Gray's Reef is a crossroads of the Atlantic.



Gray's Reef marine life. Photo: NOAA

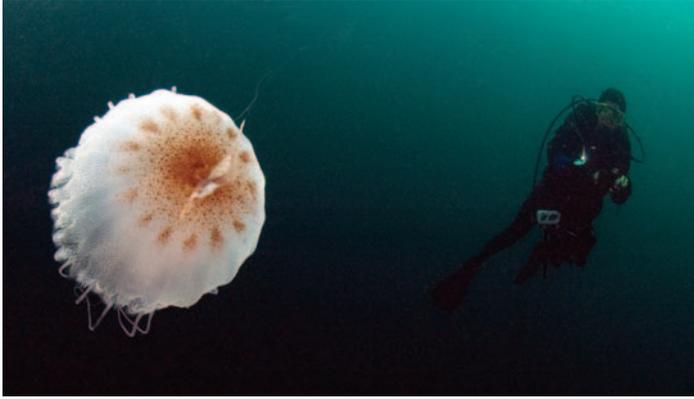
Ocean Film Festival Draws Many

More than 1,900 people learned about the ocean by attending the Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival in September. Nearly 50 films on ocean themes were shown during five days at three different venues. The festival brought together Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve staff and other partners to raise the level of ocean literacy in the community through films.

To learn more about these and other accomplishments, visit: sanctuaries.noaa.gov

New Analysis for Resource Management

In a valuable ongoing study, scientists are piecing together the “big picture” of the diverse marine life and habitat types found in Gray’s Reef. Using extensive surveys of the area’s fish, coral and other invertebrate species, staff are gaining new insight into ecologically important areas. Armed with this knowledge, resource managers will be able to better understand how factors like marine debris, recreational fishing and diving affect these habitats, and base future management decisions accordingly.

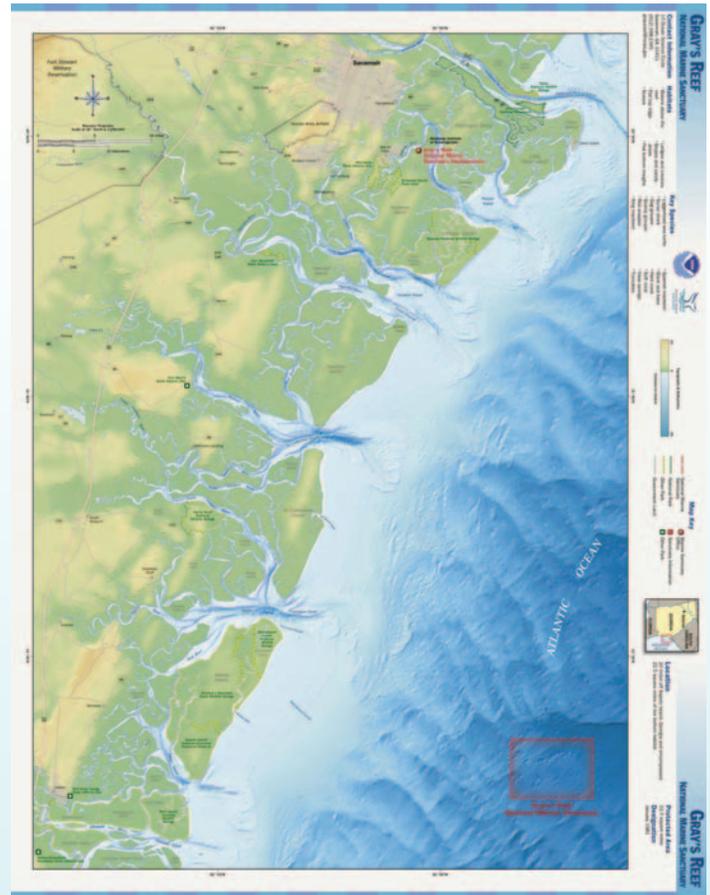


Diver and a jelly fish in Gray’s Reef sanctuary waters. Photo: Greg McFall

Plans for 2007

- Sanctuary staff will continue monitoring the reef and surrounding habitat to learn more about how it supports the living reef communities.
- A public awareness campaigns will be unveiled to make the public aware of new regulations designed to protect the sanctuary.
- A public process about a potential research area within the sanctuary will begin.
- A socioeconomic study on how people fish within the sanctuary will begin.

Sanctuary Maps Now Available



New sanctuary atlas maps depicting physical ocean and land features, other state and federal managed areas and parks, and other basic atlas features are now available on the sanctuary program Web site: sanctuaries.noaa.gov.

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