



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

CITATION

PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION AWARD

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS LONG-TERM MONITORING

In recognition of the dedicated partnership between the Minerals Management Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, involving the private sector and academic scientists, to protect the Flower Garden Banks coral reef communities in the Gulf of Mexico through persistent monitoring of this unique resource.

The Flower Garden Banks in the Gulf of Mexico are the northernmost coral reefs on the continental shelf of North America and are among the healthiest reefs in the Western Hemisphere. The Banks are approximately 100 miles south of the Texas/Louisiana border, near the continental shelf in the Gulf of Mexico. They rise from a water depth of about 300 feet to within 60 feet of the sea's surface, which makes them relatively deep reefs compared with typical Caribbean fringing reefs. The reefs are populated by stony corals that are referred to as "massive" or "boulder" corals. The appearance of the reefs is like a field of huge boulders, six feet and greater in diameter, starting 60 feet below the water surface. The oil industry started working this area in the early 1970's. The Minerals Management Service has studied and protected the Banks from potential impacts that could occur as a result of oil and gas activities, enacting restrictions and requiring monitoring in the early years. In 1988, the Service instituted its own monitoring program at the Banks, and it is one of the longest, continuous, coral reef monitoring programs in the world. This program has been a cooperative effort between the Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration since 1996. Each year, researchers from both agencies oversee data collection to assess the health of the reef. Since 2002, PBS&J Ecological Sciences has worked with the agencies in collecting data, advancing the science, and improving methods. Under their management, photographic methods are being converted to digital format, new stations have been established at deeper sites, and extra work has been accomplished to assess hurricane damages. This partnership highlights Interior's oceans role and is an excellent example of cross-jurisdictional resource management. For their collaboration in protecting the Flower Garden Banks in their pristine condition for the enjoyment of future generations, the Minerals Management Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and their partners are granted the Department of the Interior's Partners in Conservation Award.