



NEWS FROM NOAA

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New High-Tech Research Ship to Serve NOAA's Flower Garden Banks Sanctuary

Today, NOAA christened a new, state-of-the-art research vessel that will enhance the study and protection of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico. The 83-foot R/V *Manta* will operate out of Galveston, Texas, where the sanctuary is headquartered.

"This technologically advanced research vessel is a vital addition to our fleet," said Daniel J. Basta, director of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. "The *Manta* will open new windows onto the marine life and habitats of the Flower Garden Banks sanctuary while helping us protect this special place for future generations."

Built in Bellingham, Wash., by All American Marine, the twin-hulled *Manta* features a laboratory equipped with the latest scientific instruments, air compressors to allow divers to refill scuba tanks at sea, and a recompression chamber to enhance diver safety. The vessel accommodates 14 people, deploy robot subs and other ocean exploration tools, and cruise at speeds up to 35 knots.

In addition to being a platform for exploring the sanctuary and surrounding waters, the *Manta* will also serve both as a patrol vessel to enforce sanctuary regulations and a floating classroom. Teachers will be regular visitors aboard the *Manta* to watch and learn as scientists conduct research.

"With the *Manta*, we will be able to study the sanctuary more intensively, protect it more effectively, and share its wonders with more people than ever before," said G.P. Schmahl, the sanctuary's superintendent. "The vessel's capabilities are as diverse as the sanctuary itself."

Located 115 miles off the Texas/Louisiana coast, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is one of 14 marine protected areas managed by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. The sanctuary includes the two northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States, sponge communities, and other habitats.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Flower Gardens Bank National Marine Sanctuary: <http://flowergarden.noaa.gov>