

# Ecosystem/Environmental Balance

Healthy Ecosystems & Living Resources



Long-Term Environmental Variability



Human Health & Safety



Coastal Hazards

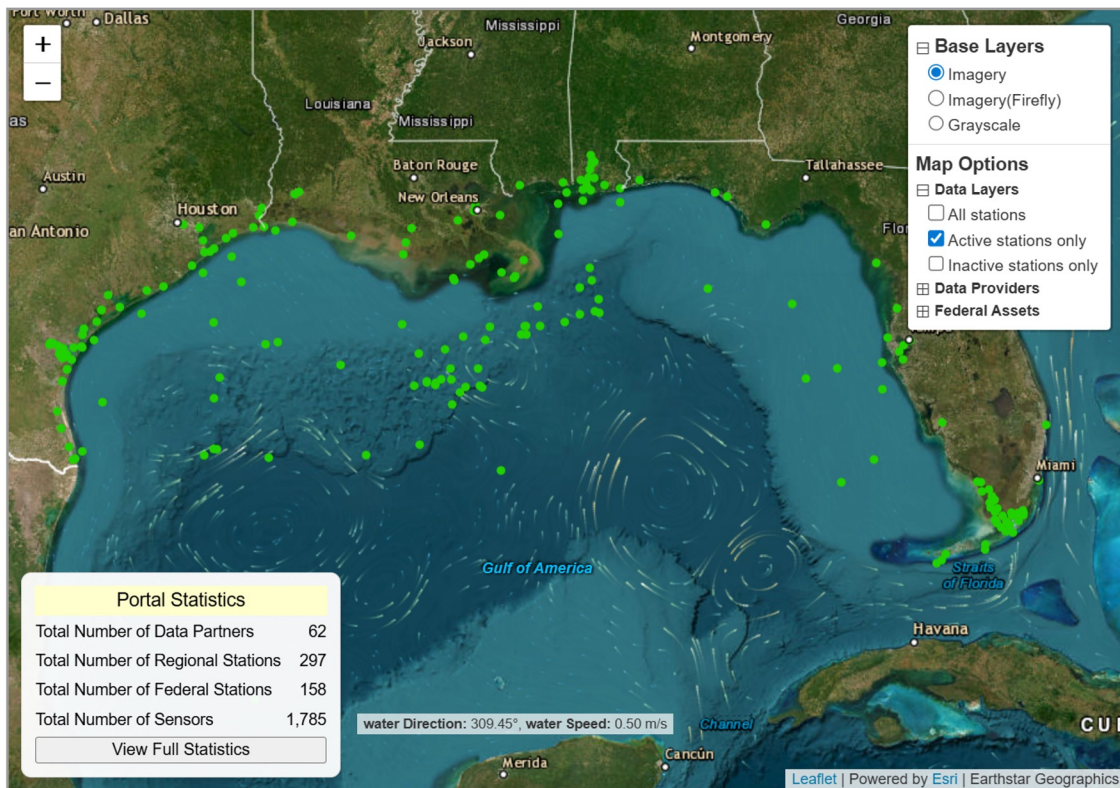


Marine Operations



# GCOOS Regional Assets

This Data Portal provides timely information about the environment of the United States portion of the Gulf of America and its estuaries for use by decs educators, emergency responders, and the general public. Observing stations in the region are monitored constantly.



Meet the **RICE'S WHALE**  
A newly described species and one of the most endangered whales in the world

**Fewer than 100** individuals remain

**KNOWN HABITAT**

**SUSPECTED HABITAT**

Falcate (curved) dorsal fin →

40 feet long

Three prominent ridges

Rice's whales are the only resident baleen whale in the Gulf

Recent research confirmed that Rice's whales are a unique species

**How can you help?**

- See a spout, watch out: slow your vessel to 10 knots or less
- Keep your distance: stay at least 100 yards away
- Report sightings of large whales to (877) WHALE-HELP (877) 942-5343

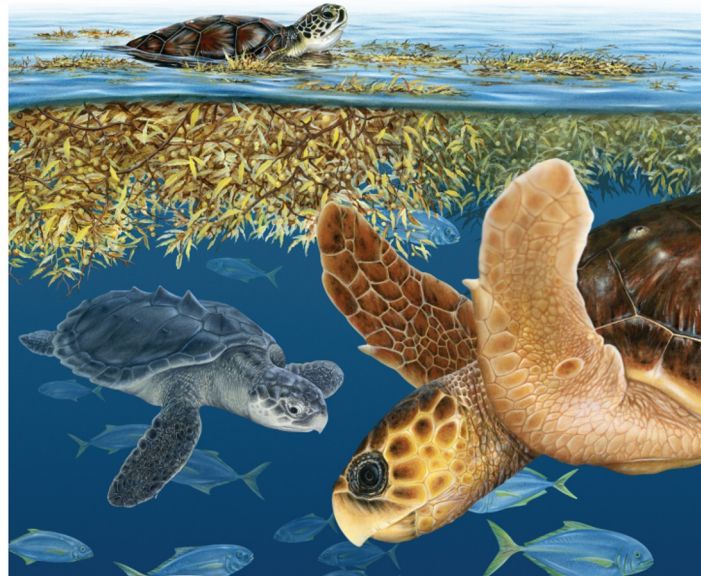
**What are the key threats?**

- Vessel strikes
- Ocean noise
- Oil spills
- Marine debris
- Climate change
- Fishing gear entanglements

Logos: NOAA FISHERIES, NATIONAL MUSEUM of NATURAL HISTORY, NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, NATIONAL MARINE MANGROVE STRATEGY, ESA 50

# Sea Turtles in Texas

The Texas coast provides important nesting beaches, bays, estuaries, and offshore habitats for five sea turtle species. All are threatened with extinction, but thanks to long-term conservation programs, our state's sea turtles are on the rise!




# CETACEAN Data Portal


Compilation of Environmental, Threat, and Animal Data for Cetacean Population Health Analyses Platform (CETACEAN)

The CETACEAN Data Portal was developed by GCOOS with funding provided by NOAA to implement the [CETACEAN Project](#). (CETACEAN stands for the Compilation of Environmental, Threats, and Animal Data for Cetacean Population Health Analysis.) The CETACEAN Project is one of many selected by the [Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group](#) to restore resources injured by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill according to the [Comprehensive Restoration Plan](#). The DWH Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group includes the four federal Trustee agencies: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For more information about the restoration program, visit the [Gulf Spill Restoration website](#) or contact openocean.TIG@noaa.gov for questions about Open Ocean Restoration.


CETACEAN Data Hub is currently under active development, and we welcome your feedback! If you encounter a technical issue, have recommendations for improvements, or would like to **contribute data to the project**, please contact [Megan Howson](#) at [megan.howson@gcoos.org](mailto:megan.howson@gcoos.org). We have successfully completed the compilation of animal datasets and are now in the process of acquiring and processing our next two dataset categories: **threat and environmental data**.




[Population Data](#)



[Threat Data](#)




[Environmental Data](#)




[Ancillary Data](#)


### Find Data by Species




[Beaked Whale](#)




[Tursiops \(Common Bottlenose Dolphin, Short Bottlenose, Oceanic Bottlenose\)](#)




[Rice's Whale](#)



[Bass's Dolphin](#)



[Sperm Whales](#)



[Stenella \(Spinner, Striped, Pastoral or Scottid\)](#)

- **COLLECT** population, anthropogenic, & environmental data for Cetacean & Sea Turtle species in the Gulf
- **CURATE** environmental & anthropogenic variables that impact populations and direct users to those datasets
- **CONSOLIDATE** all data into one platform, allowing for immediate analysis


# Sea Turtle Atlas

Search for sea turtle data...


The Sea Turtle Atlas Portal was developed by GCOOS with funding provided by NOAA to implement the [Sea Turtle Atlas Project](#). This project was selected by the [Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group](#) to restore resources injured by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill according to the [Comprehensive Restoration Plan](#). The DWH Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group includes the four federal Trustee agencies: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For more information about the restoration program, visit the [Gulf Spill Restoration website](#) or contact openocean.TIG@noaa.gov for questions about Open Ocean Restoration.

Sea Turtle Atlas is currently under active development, and we welcome your feedback! If you encounter any technical issues, have recommendations for improvements, or datasets you would like to contribute data to the project, please contact [Megan Howson](#) at [megan.howson@gcoos.org](mailto:megan.howson@gcoos.org).


### Explore Sea Turtle Atlas with Data Categories



[Sea Turtle Data](#)




[Environmental Data](#)




[Anthropogenic Data](#)


### Find Data by Species




[Green Sea Turtle](#)




[Hawksbill Sea Turtle](#)



[Leatherback Sea Turtle](#)





## Model-based Suitability

Historical datasets of georeferenced sightings from across the Gulf of America (GOA) were used to implement the maximum entropy algorithm (MaxEnt) to model the habitat suitability of each species. Five environmental predictors were used, selected for their influence over the occurrence of cetaceans: two oceanographic predictors (sea surface temperature and chlorophyll-a concentration), and three bathymetric predictors (depth, slope, and distance to 200-m isobath). A spatial approach based on the habitat suitability maps was used to identify the suitable regions.

Only 12 species were modeled, which were the ones with the minimum sample size required. The models performed well, showing good discriminatory power and slight overfitting. Overall, depth, minimum sea surface temperature, and bottom slope were the most contributing predictor in the models. High suitability areas of 10 species were located on the continental slope, and four suitable regions were identified: (1) the Mississippi Canyon and the Louisiana-Texas slope in the northern GOA, (2) the west Florida slope in the east-northeastern GOA, (3) the Rio Grande slope in the west-northwestern GOA, and (4) the Tamaulipas-Veracruz slope in the west-southwestern GOA.

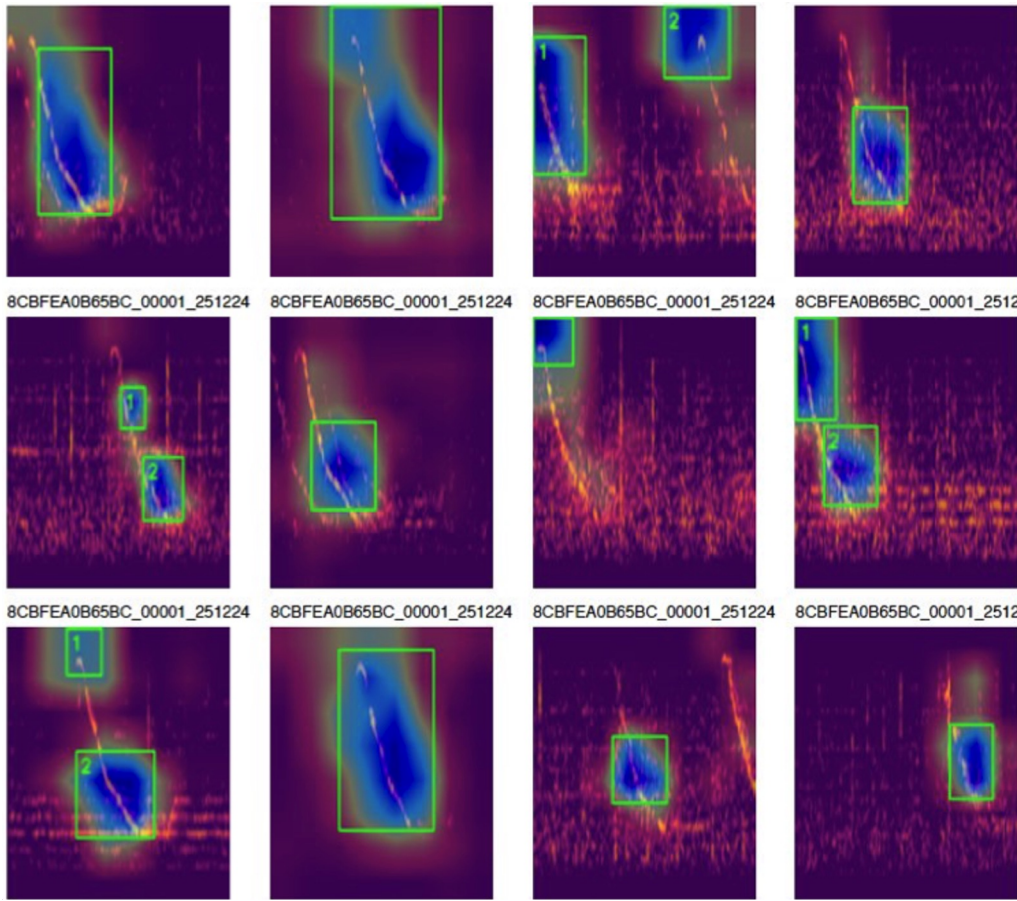
Habitat suitability was obtained for each

Clymene Dolphin Mean Suitability

0.1



- **PROVIDE** access to GCOOS models
- **INCREASE** usability of partner datasets through dashboards and tool development
- **DEVELOP** Education and curriculum materials

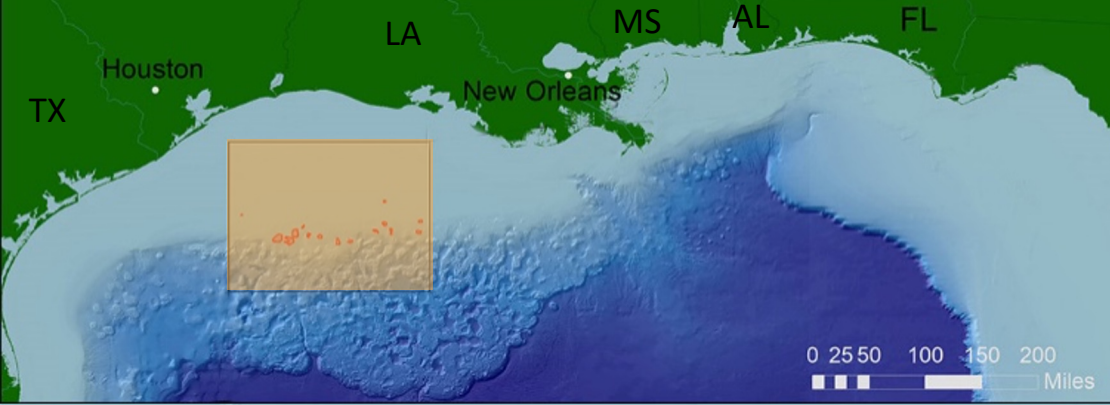


- GUARDIAN allows for acoustic data to be rapidly processed
- Trained on Rice's whale with *\*classifiers for sperm whales and Black grouper under development*
- Utilize glider fleet without requiring acoustic expertise



**NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES**

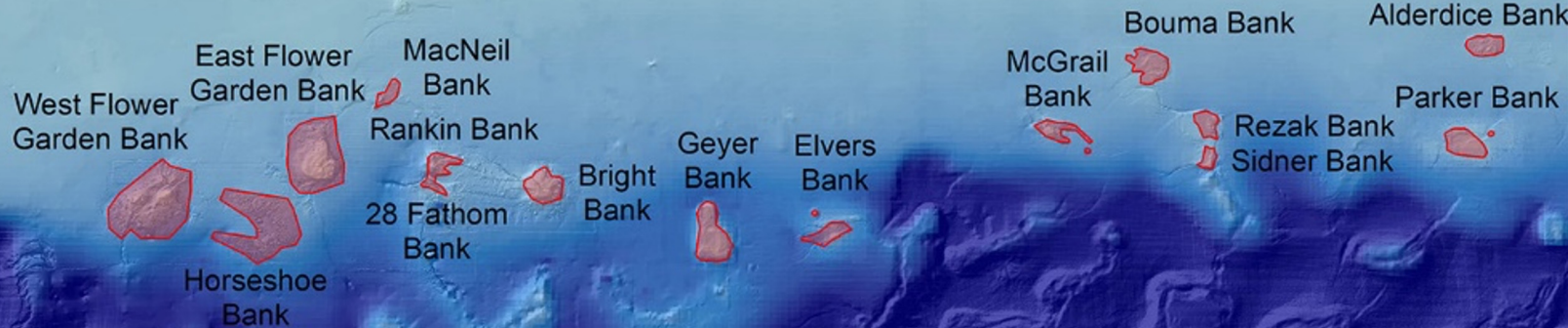
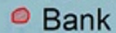




Sonnier Bank

## FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Stetson Bank



# Public Engagement Opportunities



## Management Plan Request for Information

**April 6 - May 21, 2026**

Publication of a request for information in the Federal Register announces the start of the public phase of the management plan review process and invites the public to comment on the scope of the management plan review. NOAA will hold three public meetings to provide information on the review process and to gather oral comments:

- **April 20, 2026, 6 - 8 P.M. CT**

Location: Virtual - <https://meet.goto.com/309423709> (Registration is not required)

- **May 19, 2026, 2 - 4 P.M. CT**

Location: Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, 4700 Avenue U, Building 216, Galveston, Texas 77551

- **May 19, 2026, 6 - 8 P.M. CT**

Location: Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, 4700 Avenue U, Building 216, Galveston, Texas 77551

<https://flowergarden.noaa.gov/management/mpr.html>



# Public Engagement Opportunities - TAKE ACTION



## Sanctuary Advisory Council Recruitment

April 30 - May 31, 2026

NOAA's Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is seeking applicants to serve on its volunteer advisory council. The council provides NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries with advice and recommendations on the management of the sanctuary.

The sanctuary will be accepting applications for the following 7 seats (each for a three-year term):

- Commercial Fishing (2)
- Conservation
- Education (2)
- Recreational Fishing
- Research

<https://flowergarden.noaa.gov/advisorycouncil/recruitment.html>

