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NEW REGULATIONS FOR GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY BECOME EFFECTIVE TODAY

Several new regulations for NOAA Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary become effective today, providing greater protection for the sanctuary's valuable marine resources and reef habitat. The new regulations were released to the public in July 2006 as part of the sanctuary's revised management plan.

The regulatory changes prohibit anchoring in the sanctuary and allow fishing only by rod and reel, handline, and spearfishing gear without powerheads. As of today, these activities become illegal within the boundaries of the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary:

- Injuring, catching, harvesting, or collecting, or attempting to injure, catch, harvest, or collect any marine organism or any part thereof, living or dead, within the sanctuary by any means except by the use of rod and reel, handline, or spearfishing gear without powerheads. There shall be a rebuttable presumption that any marine organism or part thereof referenced above found in the possession of a person within the sanctuary has been collected from the sanctuary.
- Except for possessing fishing gear stowed and not available for immediate use, possessing or using within the sanctuary any fishing gear or means except rod and reel, handline, or spearfishing gear without powerheads.
- Anchoring any vessel in the sanctuary, except when responding to an emergency threatening life, property or the environment. Any person in possession of a valid permit issued by the director in accordance with this section may conduct the specific activity in the sanctuary, including any activity specifically prohibited.

The regulations were developed in collaboration with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries and state of Georgia. Complete details of the new regulations can be found on the Gray's Reef Web site at www.graysreef.noaa.gov.

"These new regulations are an excellent example of the sanctuary program's dedication to providing real protections for marine habitat and resources throughout the National Marine Sanctuary System," said NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program director Daniel J. Basta. "The sanctuary program has developed these management strategies through the sound application of science to marine policy, and working cooperatively with our partners at the regional and local levels to promote sound conservation principles."

"The cooperative working relationship between the NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is a testament to the way regional governance collaborations can occur. This ecosystem approach to management of similar resources across legislative boundaries serves as a model for the ease with which regulatory changes can occur," said Kerry O'Malley of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

In addition to the new regulations, the management plan also includes several non-regulatory actions. Sanctuary managers will make improvements to the sanctuary's research,

monitoring, enforcement and administration programs, and will develop education and outreach efforts to address marine debris and other issues.

The final management plan including the new regulations was developed with extensive input from the public and stakeholders in the management of sanctuary resources. Over the past seven years, sanctuary managers held 15 public meetings and received 2,000 comments from the public. In addition, six specialized public workshops were held to get additional input from anglers, educators, scientists and others. The Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council, which represents a variety of stakeholder groups, played a major role in the development of the plan. During the course of the plan review period, the advisory council was expanded to include more stakeholder representatives.

Designated in 1981, Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary is one of the largest nearshore live-bottom reefs off the southeastern United States, encompassing approximately 23 square miles. The sanctuary consists of a series of sandstone outcroppings and ledges up to 10 feet in height, in a predominantly sandy, flat-bottomed sea floor. The live bottom and ledge habitat support an abundant reef fish and invertebrate community. Loggerhead sea turtles, a threatened species, also use Gray's Reef year-round for foraging and resting, and the reef is near the only known winter calving ground for the highly endangered North Atlantic Right Whale.

NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program, which manages the Gray's Reef sanctuary, seeks to increase the public awareness of America's marine resources and maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, the sanctuary program manages 13 sanctuaries and one national marine monument that together encompass more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA 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 60 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 200th Celebration: <http://www.celebrating200years.noaa.gov>

NOAA National Ocean Service: www.nos.noaa.gov

National Marine Sanctuary Program: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary: <http://www.graysreef.noaa.gov>