

FISHING REGULATIONS FOR THE OCULINA BANK

TO REPORT VIOLATIONS:

NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline
1-800-853-1964

**Florida Fish & Wildlife
Conservation Commission**
1-888-404-FWCC or
Cell - *FWC or #FWC

U.S. Coast Guard
Port Canaveral - 321-868-4200
Ft. Pierce - 772-464-6100

- **Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern**
- **Oculina Experimental Closed Area**

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



www.safmc.net

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
843-571-4366; toll free 1-866-SAFMC-10



www.at-sea.org

Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution



www.coris.noaa.gov/about/deep
NOAA's Coral Reef Information System

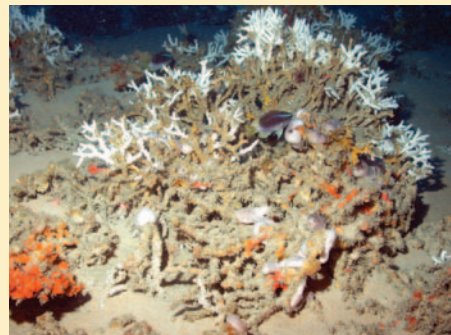
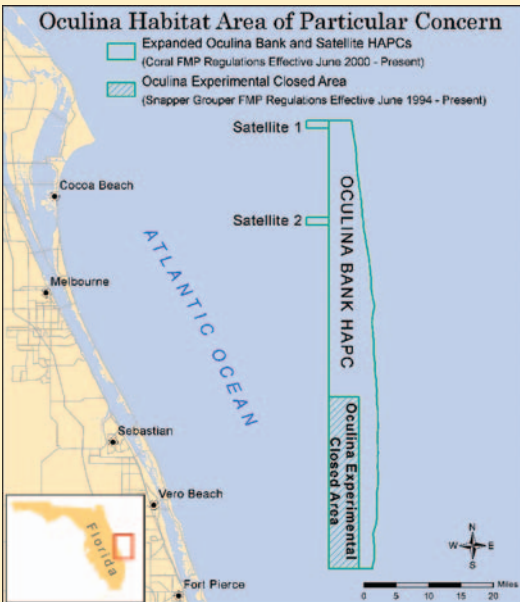


Photo Credits: NURC/UNCW: Cover, fish school and coral, grouper under ledge, coral colony; Tim Fletcher, Cool Beans Charters, Cover, fishermen; John Reed, HBOI: Inside, hand with coral; Tina Udouj, FWRI, map.

Funding for this publication provided by the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program.

This is an unofficial summary of the federal regulations prepared for the information and convenience of interested persons. This summary has no legal force or effect.

Florida is well known for its shallow coral reefs, but is also home to the lesser-known but equally spectacular deepwater coral reefs of the Oculina Bank. Restrictions are in place along Florida's east coast from Cape Canaveral to Ft. Pierce to help protect the coral and associated fish in the area.



THE OCULINA BANK NATURE'S HIDDEN CORAL TREASURE



The *Oculina* Bank, a 90-mile strip of reefs off the central east coast of Florida, is unique among coral reefs and exists nowhere else on earth! The area is named after the slow-growing ivory tree coral, *Oculina varicosa*, which forms massive thickets at depths ranging from 200 to 350 feet, supporting diverse communities of finfish and invertebrates. The coral provides essential habitat for many species of fish, including those managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Restricted Areas

In 1984, the Council established the 92-square mile **Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern** (HAPC) in order to protect the fragile coral from damage by bottom-tending fishing gear, including bottom trawls, bottom longlines, dredges, and fish traps. Subsequent management measures provided further protection by prohibiting anchoring, trawling for rock shrimp, and by requiring vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on rock shrimp vessels.

In 1994, the 92-square mile OHAPC was declared the **Oculina Experimental Closed Area**, and possession of or fishing for snapper/grouper species was prohibited for a period of 10 years to allow for scientific studies. Having an area where deepwater species such as snowy grouper and speckled hind can grow and reproduce without fishing pressure provides a unique opportunity for study. The Council has extended the closure indefinitely with periodic review for further protection and research. The former Oculina Bank HAPC was expanded in 2000 to include an additional 300 square miles.

KNOW THE RULES BEFORE YOU GO

Restrictions are in place in order to protect fragile *Oculina* coral found in the area. The Experimental Closed Area within the Oculina Bank HAPC has further restrictions to protect species in the snapper grouper complex.

Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern

COORDINATES:

The Oculina Bank HAPC encompasses an area bounded on the north by 28°30' N. lat., on the south by 27°30' N. lat., on the east by the 100-fathom (183 meter) contour, as shown on the latest edition of NOAA chart 11460, and on the west by 80°00' W. long.

Two satellite areas are adjacent: the first bounded on the north by 28°30' N. lat., on the south by 28°29' N. lat., on the east by 80°00' W. long, and on the west by 80°03' W. long. The second satellite is bounded on the north by 28°17' N. lat., on the south by 28°16' N. lat., on the east by 80°00' W. long., and on the west by 80°03' W. long. These satellite areas were created to protect concentrated areas of *Oculina* coral.

FISHING RESTRICTIONS:



No anchoring or use of grapples



No trawling, use of fish traps, or bottom-longlines



No fishing for or possession of rock shrimp



No possession of coral or bottom habitat, including *Oculina*

Oculina Experimental Closed Area

COORDINATES:

Located within the Oculina Bank HAPC, the Experimental Closed Area is bounded on the north by 27°53' N. lat., on the south by 27°30' N. lat., on the east by 79°56' W. long., and on the west by 80°00' W. long. This provides researchers with the opportunity to evaluate the effect of prohibiting bottom fishing and fishing-related impacts to habitat in a closed area in the South Atlantic region.

FISHING RESTRICTIONS:

ALL restrictions in the Oculina Bank HAPC apply PLUS



No fishing for or possession of snapper/grouper species;



All snapper/grouper taken incidentally by hook-and-line gear must be released immediately by cutting the line without removing the fish from water.