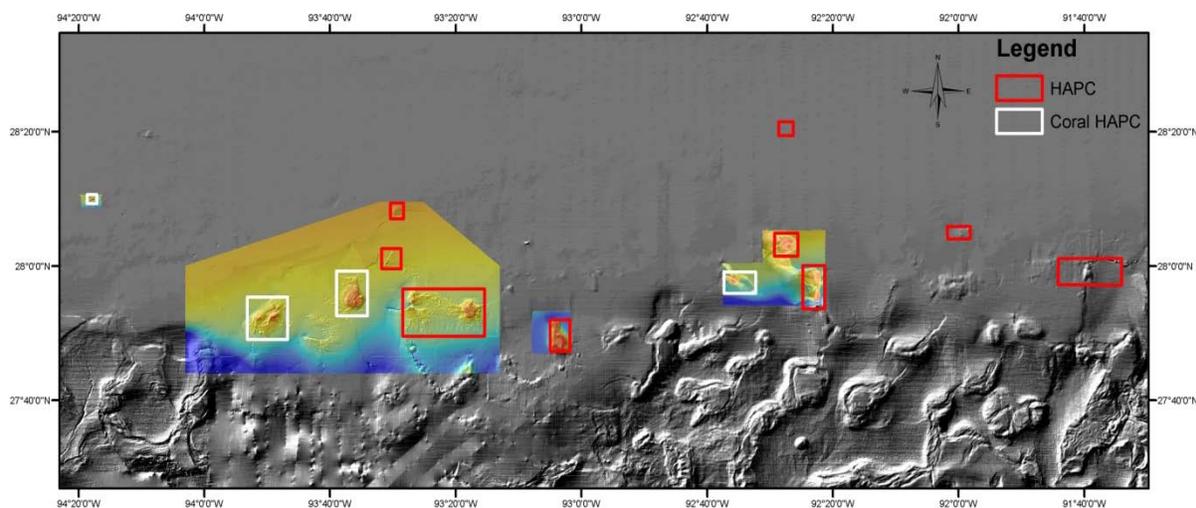


## Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC)



Map of the HAPC designations in the Gulf of Mexico. HAPC banks include, from left to right, Stetson Bank, West Flower Garden Bank, East Flower Garden Bank, MacNeil Bank, 29 Fathom Bank, 28 Fathom Bank, Rankin Bank, Bright Bank, Geyer Bank, McGrail Bank, Sonnier Banks, Bouma Bank, Rezak Bank, Sidner Bank, Alderdice Bank and Jakkula Bank.

Areas that are determined to be of particular importance to the long-term productivity of managed species, or to be particularly vulnerable to degradation, can be identified as "habitat areas of particular concern" (HAPC) by the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council under the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment 3. The intent of the HAPC designation is to identify areas that are known to be important to species which are in need of additional levels of protection from adverse impacts. While no additional regulations are created by a HAPC designation, special attention and consideration is given to these areas during the development of management plans. In addition, activities that may impact the habitat will receive special consideration due to the risks they pose to the habitat.



Yellowmouth grouper often utilize the habitats at both the East and West Flower Garden Banks. Photo: FGBNMS/Schmahl

In determining whether an area requires a HAPC designation, the area in question must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The importance of the ecological function provided by the habitat.
- The extent to which the habitat is sensitive to human-induced environmental degradation.
- Whether, and to what extent, development activities are, or will be, stressing the habitat type.
- The rarity of the habitat type.

The Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council has designated 13 HAPC areas in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, which encompass the West Flower Garden Bank, East Flower Garden Bank, Stetson Bank, 29 Fathom Bank, 28 Fathom Bank, MacNeil Bank, Rezak Bank, Sidner Bank, Rankin Bank, Bright Bank, Geyer Bank, McGrail Bank, Bouma Bank, Sonnier Banks, Alderdice Bank, and Jakkula Bank. The boundaries for these HAPCs were devolved using the latest multibeam bathymetry maps of the area, which were verified for biological communities using Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) surveys.

An additional level of protection is afforded to select HAPCs that harbor coral reefs; a Coral HAPC. While a HAPC does not grant any additional protections to an area, the designation of a Coral HAPC prohibits fishing with a bottom longline, bottom trawling, buoy gear, pot or trap, and bottom anchoring. It should be noted that these regulations only apply to fishing vessels.

The East Flower Garden Bank, West Flower Garden Bank, and Stetson Bank are all protected under the policy of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. In addition to these protections, the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council has identified these areas as Coral HAPC. The Council also recognized the importance of McGrail Bank as a unique coral reef ecosystem, granting the bank the protections provided under the Coral HAPC designation (50 CFR Part 622).



Sand channel at the West Flower Garden Bank.  
Photo: Joyce & Frank Burek