

Spring 2020



Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) status report for the Flower Garden Banks. This document is the product of collaboration between the NOAA Coral program and numerous partners including University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Integration and Application Network, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

This report is meant to inform continued discussion about the Flower Garden Banks coral reefs, and represents a snapshot in time from 2014-2018. Data used for this product primarily came from NOAA's National Coral Reef Monitoring Program (NCRMP), and was supplemented where statistically feasible with data from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary long-term monitoring program (FGB LTM).

The score on this product was derived from comparing data from 2014-2018 to the best available reference data. It is important to note for some indicators the best available data that were statistically comparable to the NCRMP dataset were FGB LTM data post-1992, and for some indicators post-2009s, and therefore may already be reflective of declined ecosystem health compared to pre-industrial times. Additionally, data from the 2019 NCRMP field season were not yet available at the time this report was created. The overall score is "Good (89%)", suggesting most indicators meet reference values, and others have only been slightly impacted/slightly declined. However, it is important to note this score is on the cusp of being considered "Very Good (90%)," meaning almost all indicators meet reference values and are minimally impacted. These reefs received the highest score of any of the Atlantic/Caribbean/Gulf of Mexico reefs.

The report seeks to communicate the Flower Garden Banks are a huge success story, highlighting healthy coral reef ecosystems do still exist in U.S. waters. These results suggest the Flower Garden Banks have not degraded much relative to their historical reference, in part because the Flower Garden Banks are far away from coastal human populations. They are also in deeper waters, which may limit extensive human usage as they are hard to access. These results highlight the importance of engaging in pro-environmental behaviors for communities in much closer proximity to coral reefs. We hope this report will foster continued discussion about Flower Garden Banks coral reefs, and encourage you to contact the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program if you have any questions about anything in the report.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Koss, Director, Coral Reef Conservation Program  
Erica K. Towle, National Coral Reef Monitoring Program Coordinator