

CITATION

COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION AWARD

DEEP GULF HABITATS PROJECT

The Deep Gulf Habitats Project is recognized as an extraordinary collaboration among diverse organizations to conduct research on ultra-deepwater biological communities in the Gulf of Mexico.

This study is a joint partnership between the Minerals Management Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Ocean Exploration with additional participation from the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct ground-breaking exploration and science discovery on deepwater chemosynthetic communities and coral habitats in the Gulf of Mexico in water depths ranging from 4,000 to 9,000 feet. The goal of the project focused on the exploration and study of sensitive biological communities below a depth of 3,300 feet. These included not only remarkable chemosynthetic communities, but also deepwater coral habitats in the deepest parts of the Gulf of Mexico where very little is known. The cooperation among all three Federal Agencies significantly enhances the missions of each and helped to improve the information base necessary to support decision-making pertaining to the energy and mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf. The discoveries and results of this study will be directly utilized to create or modify existing regulatory policies through an adaptive management approach. Project data will be available for comparison with data from similar studies on both a regional and global scale that will further our understanding of deepwater ecosystems worldwide. Educational outreach is also an important component of the project and was integrated into the study objectives. Ocean Explorer Expedition Education Modules were designed with internet uplinks during the field work to reach out in new ways to teachers, students, and the general public to share the excitement of at-sea discoveries and the science behind the project. Classroom lesson plans were created specifically for this mission that will instill wonder, inspiration, and motivation to children in the future.

For their exemplary collaboration and unique investigation, the Deep Gulf Habitats Project is awarded the Cooperative Conservation Award of the Department of the Interior.

Secretary of the Interior