



# Submarine plunges into an undersea canyon to capture data from Flower Garden Banks

Story   Comments   Image (3)

Print   Font Size:

Recommend 8

Tweet 0

g+1 0

Posted: Saturday, August 15, 2015 1:15 am

By MARISSA BARNETT

GALVESTON — Over the past week, a five-crew submarine has explored the Flower Garden Banks searching deep pockets of the Gulf of Mexico that could eventually become part of the marine sanctuary.

In its deepest dive, the sub plunged 1,500 feet below water surface into a canyon, said Stockton Rush, co-founder of OceanGate, a Seattle-based ocean exploration company. The crew took videos to capture “baseline visual data” for the deep-water sites in the proposed sanctuary expansion region.

“We saw worms, crabs and several different invertebrates,” he said. “It’s such an unusual experience to be in a different world.”

University researchers and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials joined the group on its various dives, he said.

Earlier this year, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration asked for public input about a proposed range expansion of the



Stuart Villanueva/The Daily News

## Submarine

The OceanGate Cyclops 1 submarine rests on a flatbed trailer as OceanGate Chief Operating Officer Neil McCurdy (left) looks into one of its propeller housings at Texas A&M Galveston Thursday, Aug. 13, 2015.



Flower Garden, an idea the administration has floated for several years.

The sanctuary protects three separate areas with coral reefs about 115 miles off the coast. But the sanctuary, home to important marine habitats, could expand to encapsulate nine additional banks. It would enlarge the sanctuary from 56 square miles to about 280 square miles.

The administration has not yet announced whether it will move forward on the expansion.

Representatives from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary were not available Friday.

Rush said it took about 25 minutes for the submarine to reach its deepest depth.

The weeklong trip to the sanctuary was timed up to coincide with the mass coral spawning event that occurs in the reef each year seven to 10 days after the August full moon.

But weather didn’t cooperate and the group, which had a University of Miami coral expert onboard, wasn’t able to do the coral-spawning dive, he said.

Private charter submersibles could become more common in deep regions of the Gulf near Texas because oil operations could become more reliant on subs to transport robots that work underwater on rigs and monitor activity, Rush said.