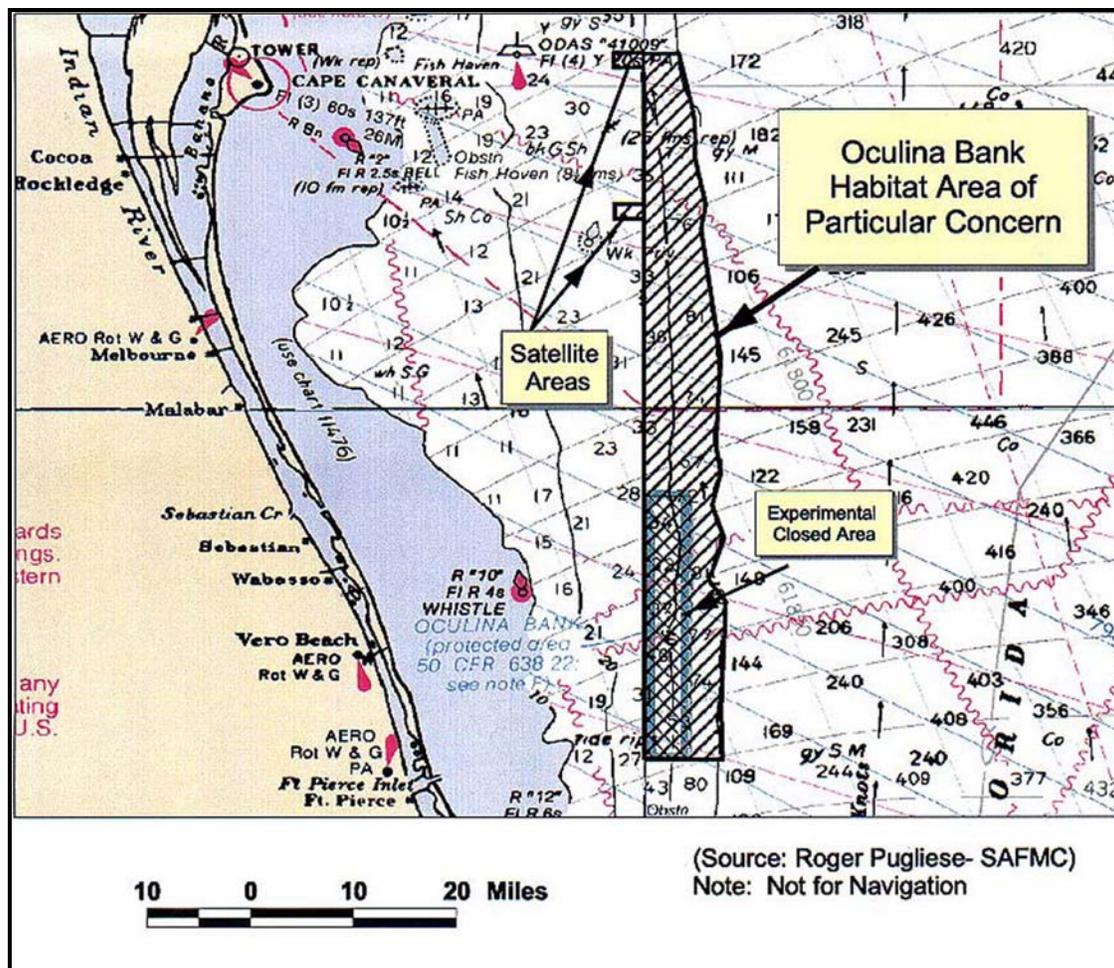


## The Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern and Experimental Closed Area



The shelf-edge *Oculina* coral reef, 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 takes its name after the slow-growing ivory-tree coral, *Oculina varicosa*, which forms massive thickets supporting dense and diverse communities of finfish and invertebrates over a 90-mile strip of reefs off the central East Coast of Florida. The coral provides essential habitat to a complex of fish species including those managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

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

In 1994, the area encompassed by the 92-square-mile Oculina Bank HAPC 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. Designation of an area where deepwater species such as snowy grouper, golden tilefish, speckled hind, and warsaw grouper can grow and reproduce without being subjected to fishing mortality provides a unique opportunity for study. The Council has taken action to extend 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.

(over)



## **KNOW THE RULES BEFORE YOU GO!**

### **Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) And Experimental Closed Area**

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

- **Oculina Bank HAPC:**

#### **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.

#### **Restrictions for the HAPC:**

**In the HAPC, no person may:**

1. Use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot or trap.
2. Anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain if aboard a fishing vessel.
3. Fish for rock shrimp or possess rock shrimp in or from the area on board a fishing vessel.
4. Possess *Oculina* coral.

- **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 area provides researchers with an area in the South Atlantic Region to describe the effects of prohibiting fishing for snapper/grouper species and the characteristics of an unfished resource area that is protected from habitat damage.

#### **Restrictions for the Experimental Closed Area:**

**All restrictions within the larger HAPC apply. In addition, no person may fish for snapper-grouper species in the area or retain snapper-grouper in or from the area. Any snapper-grouper taken incidentally by hook-and-line gear must be released immediately by cutting the line without removing the fish from the water.**

For additional information visit [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) or contact the Council office at: [safmc@safmc.net](mailto:safmc@safmc.net) or 843/571-4366; toll free, 1-866/SAFMC-10