

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

Oculina coral (*Oculina varicosa*), or ivory tree coral, is distributed along the South Atlantic shelf with concentrations occurring off the central East Coast of Florida. The coral provides essential habitat to a complex of fish species including those managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

The Oculina Bank, located approximately 15 nautical miles off the coast of Ft. Pierce, Florida has been designated a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. **Restrictions are in place in order to protect fragile Oculina Coral (*Oculina varicosa*) found in the area. Within the HAPC is an Experimental Closed Area with further restrictions.**

• Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC):

Coordinates

The Oculina Bank 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 have been 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. If aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain.
3. Fish for rock shrimp or possess rock shrimp in or from the area on board a fishing vessel.
4. The possession of *Oculina* coral is prohibited.

• 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

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.