

# Seafloor recovery from fishing gear impacts in Stellwagen Bank Marine Sanctuary slow, unstable

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The University of Connecticut and California State University researchers found that seafloor communities in a restricted fishing area in NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary showed indications of recovery from chronic fishing gear impacts but is not fully stable. The finding is significant because bottom trawlers, dredges and certain gillnets, for example, can alter the ocean floor and benthic ecosystems that provide food and shelter for fish and other marine species.

The Western Gulf of Maine habitat closure area overlaps 22 percent of the sanctuary and was implemented in 1998 by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and the New England Fishery Management Council to aid in the recovery of groundfish. The closure area has also provided an opportunity to assess how restricting an area's use can be a tool for conserving [biological diversity](#). Most [commercial fishing](#) was prohibited in the closure area, but lobster traps, recreational hook-and-line, and mid-water trawls were allowed.

The authors caution that their observations "neither support nor reject" the assumption that cessation or reduction of fishing will allow populations and communities to fully recover. They recommend continued monitoring, over a larger number of sites within the sanctuary, to determine how seafloor communities in the Gulf of Maine respond to various human uses.

**More information:** The Stellwagen Bank study, "Dynamics of Hard Substratum Communities Inside and Outside of a Fisheries Habitat Closed Area in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary," is available online: [sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/c...rvation/tamsett.html](https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/c...rvation/tamsett.html)

Provided by NOAA

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