



Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary 2018 Lionfish Invitational Cruises



Diving for Research

June 24th–28th, 2018



Aug 26th–30th, 2018

Project Description

The invasion of lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico is a situation of rapidly increasing magnitude. This invasive species, known for its voracious appetite, venomous spines and rapid reproduction, is depleting native coral reef fish and invertebrate populations at alarming rates throughout the southeastern United States, Gulf, and Caribbean region. Complete lionfish eradication is not an option with current technology, given the species' broad depth distribution (surface to 1000 feet) and rapidly growing populations. However, control at the local scale has been proven successful. Building on these successes, NOAA's Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) will be partnering with Texas Lionfish Control Unit (TX LCU), with support from Ripley's Aquarium, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF), and Fling Charters, to use trained divers to help conduct research and remove invasive lionfish within FGBNMS. Collection permits will be issued for two separate four-day lionfish research cruises on board the recreational dive charter M/V *Fling*.

The goals and objectives of the project are to:

- I. Conduct research to increase the knowledge of invasive lionfish distribution and predator/prey relationships in coral communities at FGBNMS.
- II. Reduce the impact of lionfish on reef habitats and native fish populations by removing lionfish from the upper 100 feet of FGBNMS.
- III. Assess effectiveness of diver removal efforts on lionfish populations and native fish communities.
- IV. Increase public awareness of invasive lionfish impacts and provide the knowledge and skills for individuals to be part of the solution by training volunteer divers from the local community in safe and effective collection and handling techniques.

About Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Located in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary includes three separate areas known as East Flower Garden Bank, West Flower Garden Bank, and Stetson Bank. The banks are perched atop underwater hills formed by rising domes of ancient salt, and these northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States are a diver's paradise. Since the introduction of lionfish into the Western Atlantic in the late 1980s, they entered the Gulf of Mexico by means of larval transport in 2009. In the fall of 2010, lionfish were observed at Sonnier Bank and nearby oil and gas platforms. Finally, in July of 2011,

lionfish were observed on all three banks of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. For more information, go to <http://flowergarden.noaa.gov>

Eligibility Requirements

To apply, each diver must:

- be at least 18 years of age;
- be able to swim;
- be a certified advanced open water scuba diver, or higher certification level (must present a valid Diver Certification Card);
- be a Nitrox certified diver;
- have conducted a minimum of 25 dives in the past 12 months; or provide the total number of dives logged since becoming a diver
- have DAN or other dive-specific insurance;
- be able to identify reef fish at the Flower Garden Banks and conduct in-water fish surveys; and
- have experience collecting lionfish.

Participant Benefits

Participants will:

- participate in one of the 4-day research cruises at Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary on board the M/V *Fling*;
- learn about invasive lionfish, research, and field techniques through a TX LCU lionfish collecting and handling course;
- build relationships with peers, Flower Garden Banks, TX LCU, partners, and divers from the local community;
- be immersed in classroom, lab, and field activities that raise awareness of invasive lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico and ocean conservation;
- gain hands on experience that can be utilized in future lionfish control efforts throughout the region; and
- assist with marine sanctuary resource protection efforts.

Provided to Divers

All divers will receive:

- four days of diving including Nitrox;
- meals and dorm-style liveaboard accommodations;
- workshop training in lionfish collecting and handling;
- use of lionfish collecting/handling and fish survey equipment and materials; and
- educational resources and materials from TX LCU and FGBNMS.

Requirements of Participation

Divers will be required to:

- travel to and from Freeport, Texas;
- attend the TX LCU lionfish handling course to be held at 5 p.m. in Freeport on Sunday, June 24th for the June cruise or Sunday, Aug. 26th for the August cruise before leaving the dock;
- room with other divers in bunk style accommodations;
- scuba dive at FGBNMS;
- conduct themselves in a responsible manner as volunteers representing TX LCU and FGBNMS;
- practice safe diving techniques;
- remove only lionfish with approved pole spears;
- assist with fish surveys and lionfish processing;
- complete and sign all applications, liability waivers and releases;
- pay the \$625.00 fee via check to cover vessel and fuel costs of the M/V *Fling*.

How to Apply

1. Download the application.
2. Complete all sections of the application, including which cruise (June or August) you are available to participate in.
3. Email a copy of the complete application and copy of C-Card and DAN insurance card to Michelle.A.Johnston@noaa.gov by March 31st, 2018.
4. Applicants will be selected and notified no later than April 6th, 2018

Entry Fee: \$625.00, upon selection. Checks must be post marked by May 31st, 2018

Checks payable to: Fling Charters

Mail Checks to:

Fling Charters
1203 North Ave J
Freeport, TX 77541
Phone: 979.233.4445

Additional Questions? Please contact:

Michelle A. Johnston, Ph.D.
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
4700 Avenue U, Bldg. 216
Galveston, TX 77551
Tel: (409) 356-0392

APPLICATION

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary 2018 Lionfish Invitational

SECTION I — CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

SECTION II — EXPERIENCE

Check the date(s) you would like to participate: June 24-28, 2018 August 26-30, 2018

Dive Certification (Level and Year certified): _____

NITROX Certification (Year certified): _____

DAN Insurance Expiration Date: _____

CPR and First Aid certified? Yes _____ No _____

O2 Certified? Yes _____ No _____

Number of total ocean dives: _____ in the past 12 months: _____

Number of liveboard dive trips: _____

Describe your experience collecting lionfish: _____

Can you identify reef fish at the FGB and perform an in-water survey? If so, include REEF # and # of surveys and experience level _____

SECTION III - PERSONAL INFORMATION

Date of Birth: _____

Gender: Male Female

Dietary Restriction(s): _____

Medical Consideration(s): _____

Have you ever been stung by a lionfish (include reaction, treatment)?

Emergency Contact Name: _____
Relationship: _____
Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____
Email: _____

Hobbies
Tell us about yourself. What are your interests and hobbies? _____

SECTION IV — SIGNATURES

Statement of Intent, Waiver, and Release

I have read the program description and to the best of my understanding I am able to participate. I acknowledge that if I am selected to participate in the Lionfish Invitational, I will be expected to attend the entire 4-day cruise; be willing to dive to achieve project goals; am responsible for using safe diving and lionfish handling techniques; and am responsible for conducting myself in a manner that supports the goals and mission of TX LCU and NOAA’s Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary mission. I recognize that participation in this event may involve certain hazards. I understand that I should not participate unless medically able. I assume the risks associated with involvement but not limited to SCUBA diving, vessel operations, inclement weather, seasickness, and handling venomous lionfish, these risks being unknown and appreciated by me. Having read this release and considering the acceptance of my application, I for myself and anyone entitled to act on my behalf, waive and release NOAA, TX LCU, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and Fling Charters, all partners, sponsors, and hosts and their representatives and successors from any claim of liability arising from my involvement in this project. I do hereby consent to the use of my name and/or photograph in connection with publicity about the project.

Applicant Signature: _____ Date: _____