Regional Highlights

West Coast Region

The Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program is conducting a three-year field study (from 2010 to 2012) along the west coast, as described on page 11. This study benefits from strong collaborations with many partners. The coastal treaty tribes that co-manage federal fisheries with NOAA participated in the initial research priority-setting workshop, and a fishery biologist from the Makah Tribe was on the research team that surveyed coral sites off Washington with an AUV and ROV in 2010. Moreover, a research cruise off southern California in 2010 was contracted on the private fishing vessel Velero IV. The program also engaged academic scientists and other government agencies in this research. These

academic, agency, tribal, and industry partnerships enhance the program's ability in conducting scientific studies in response to management needs. Along with the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the National Marine Sanctuaries also utilize the newly generated deep-sea coral science to develop their management actions. There are five sanctuaries on the west coast, and they all encompass deep-sea coral communities. The program's research aids all these sanctuaries in the identification of deep-sea coral habitats and subsequent management of coral communities. The findings will also strengthen the sanctuaries' ongoing collaborations with the Pacific Fishery Management Council and the tribes to manage fishing activities in key habitats in sanctuary waters.

Alaska Region

The Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program will begin a three-year field study in the Alaska region in 2012. To that end, the program organized a research priorities workshop in 2010, where participants from the fishing industry, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, other federal and state agencies, academia, and conservation groups shared their research ideas and management needs with NOAA. The program is analyzing archived underwater videos and multibeam maps so the upcoming fieldwork can build on a solid understanding of previous scientific observations. The program also supported the production of a deep-sea sponge identification guide that documents the Aleutian Islands' rich sponge fauna and will help fishery observers better document the types and amounts of incidentally caught sponges. Sponges, like corals, can form complex habitat for commercially valuable fish and crabs, and are a significant component of bycatch in certain Alaskan bottom-trawl fisheries.