

# Regional Highlights

## *Northeast Region*

The Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program is planning a three-year field study in the Northeast region (Maine to Virginia) starting in 2013. To support this effort, the program organized a research priorities workshop in 2011, where representatives from the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, other federal agencies, academia, and conservation groups shared their research ideas and management needs with NOAA. As has been done for other regions, the program is developing computer models to predict the location of potential suitable habitat of deep-sea corals in this region, so the fieldwork can be targeted at locations where corals are likely to be.



The New England Council is considering a suite of alternatives to designate deep-sea coral protection zones using its discretionary authority provided in MSA Section 303(b)(2)(B). This would be the first use by a Council of this authority provided in the 2006 MSA reauthorization. In this process, the New England Council's Habitat Plan Development Team has an ongoing collaboration with the program to refine, audit, and add coral location records for the northeast region. The Mid-Atlantic Council is a strong partner in this effort too as its representatives serve on the New England Council's Habitat Committee and Habitat Plan Development Team. NOAA supports the Councils' efforts to advance the management of known coral ecosystems of the northeast, particularly in submarine canyons, on seamounts, and on select high-relief areas in the Gulf of Maine (see Figure 3).

The program has also supplied information on deep-sea coral locations to regional planning efforts by states that are members of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean.

## *Pacific Islands Region*

In the 2010-2011 period, the program supported a study in the Main Hawaiian Islands to identify suitable habitat of pink coral (*Corallium secundum*) and gold coral (*Gerardia* sp.) – species of deep-sea corals with colored skeletons that can be made into jewelry. They are also the primary species of interest in a currently inactive commercial fishery and, as a result, more data are available than for other species of deep-sea coral in the Pacific Islands region. This study integrates 1,227 observations of the species of interest, from more than 1,100 submersible dives, with data on ocean current velocity, depth, and substrate type, to develop a



predictive map of locations with a high probability of occurrences of these deep-sea coral species. Findings from the study will be submitted to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, which has authority over the precious coral fishery. Findings can also be used to guide activities such as route planning for subsea communications or power cables, dredge disposal sites, and future research on deep-water environments in the Main Hawaiian Islands. Fieldwork to groundtruth the predictive map will, in turn, enhance the prediction technique.