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FAU Harbor Branch Scientists Explore New Reefs Off the Coast of Florida

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (May 14, 2015) – Scientists at FAU’s Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI) are in the Gulf of Mexico exploring and mapping previously uncharted deepwater coral reefs and essential fish habitats on the southwest Florida Shelf. The exploration is part of a two-week scientific cruise being conducted by the Cooperative Institute for Ocean Exploration, Research and Technology (CIOERT), which is headquartered at HBOI and funded by the NOAA Ocean Exploration and Research program and the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory.

Researchers are also using a new “tool sled” that was designed and built at HBOI, which is attached to a remote operated vehicle (ROV) and allows them to pick up items from the ocean floor. These new deepwater coral reefs coupled with the ability to collect specimens provides HBOI scientists with a unique opportunity to continue their decades-long search for sea sponges that produce chemicals that have the potential to combat an array of diseases including Alzheimer’s and several types of cancers.

“The value of collecting samples of marine life from the seafloor with this ROV can't be overstated,” said Shirley Pomponi, Ph.D., FAU research professor and CIOERT executive director. “From being able to accurately describe the biota in a given region to driving the search for cures to diseases in our labs at Harbor Branch, collecting has always been profoundly important to our mission.”

The sled was designed and built by HBOI and FAU’s College of Engineering and Computer Science, along with the University of North Carolina Wilmington. HBOI has a long history in the discovery and development of marine natural products that could be developed into drugs, having collected more than 30,000 samples from the sea with the *Johnson Sea-Link* submersibles.

For details on the cruise, visit fau.edu/hboi/cioert/cioert_at_sea.php.

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About Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute:

Founded in 1971, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at Florida Atlantic University is a research community of marine scientists, engineers, educators and other professionals focused on Ocean Science for a Better World. The institute drives innovation in ocean engineering, at-sea operations, drug discovery and biotechnology from the oceans, coastal ecology and conservation, marine mammal research and conservation, aquaculture, ocean observing systems and marine education. For more information, visit www.fau.edu/hboi.

About Florida Atlantic University:

Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University, with an annual economic impact of \$6.3 billion, serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students at sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. FAU's world-class teaching and research faculty serves students through 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University is placing special focus on the rapid development of critical areas that form the basis of its strategic plan: Healthy aging, biotech, coastal and marine issues, neuroscience, regenerative medicine, informatics, lifespan and the environment. These areas provide opportunities for faculty and students to build upon FAU's existing strengths in research and scholarship. For more information, visit www.fau.edu.