I. Background

In June 1998, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) was established by Presidential Executive Order 13089. The USCRTF mission is to lead, coordinate, and strengthen U.S. government actions to better preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment (CCMA) Biogeography Team is supporting the USCRTF mandate. The Biogeography Team conducted the fifth year of an ongoing scientific research mission on board the NOAA ship NANCY FOSTER from February 25 to March 8, 2008. The objective of this project was to collect a multibeam bathymetry dataset with 100% seafloor ensonification, along with multibeam backscatter suitable for seafloor characterization in high priority conservation areas within Puerto Rico. Scientists collected high-resolution multibeam in mid-water depths from approximately 10 to 500 meters. The multibeam data was collected to conform to IHO Order 1 (<100m) and Order 2 (>100m) accuracy standards. The strategies developed for each survey area took into account the minimum depths, general bathymetry, and time allotment. The delineation and identification of seafloor habitats within areas mapped during the mission was assisted by the use of an ROV with video and camera capabilities.

II. Area

The mission explored and mapped moderate depth bathymetry with the NANCY FOSTER’s Simrad EM1002 multibeam system for natural resource management and seafloor characterization. Priority areas for 2008 included the Tourmaline Bank area offshore of western Puerto Rico and the northern portion of Isla De Mona.