



MESOAMERICAN REEF FUND Update – August 2017

As MAR Fund works on its 12th year of operations, new initiatives are taking off, while initial programs are being strengthened. The driver of our programmatic activities continues to be the establishment and strengthening of a functional network of priority coastal and marine areas. Since 2007, MAR Fund has focused on an initial network of 14 priority sites distributed among the four MAR countries. In 2015-2016, 14 additional areas were prioritized, for a total network of 28 protected areas (Annex 1). We have begun to explore potential sources of funding for the new set of areas.

MAR Fund provides strategic, technical and financial support for planning, managing, and optimizing the hard work of protected area managers, other partners, and communities involved in the region's conservation and sustainable development efforts. As of June 2017, MAR Fund has successfully mobilized financial resources for the region, including \$20.6 million of project funding. In addition, a \$25.1 million endowment has been established, with support from the German Cooperation through the KfW and the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM).

The organization recently secured a \$10 million endowment challenge grant from Oak Foundation to provide long-term financial sustainability for marine resources management and conservation initiatives in Belize and the region. This gift is contingent on the MAR Fund raising an additional \$15 million in a five-year period. During that time, Oak will make \$500K available for marine conservation annually. The Steering Committee for this initiative, the **Belize Marine Fund**, is now operational and the first request for proposals was recently launched.

Another project with Oak Foundation support approved in 2016 is the “**Re-granting in the Mesoamerican Reef**” initiative. This is a \$2 million 4-year program to re-grant to seven longstanding Oak partners working on different strategic aspects of marine resources management in the MAR region.

Within our Protected Areas Program, our Project “**Conservation of Marine Resources in Central America**”, funded by the German Cooperation through KfW, enhances the management of protected areas by funding monitoring activities, update of management plans, enforcement, infrastructure, equipment and participation of local stakeholders in MPA management, among others. The project consists of two concurrent Phases, of €5 million and 5 years each. As of December 2016, \$5,318,411 had been expended in Phase I

and \$1,948,358 in Phase II. Between both phases, nine of the initial 14 priority sites are being specifically strengthened and consolidated (see Annex 2), and all 14 sites are eligible for funding through small grants and participate in regional activities. Examples of some of the activities developed by four of the targeted protected areas include:

- a. Refurbishing and equipping both offices of the Yum Balam Flora and Fauna Protection Area in Kantunilkin and Hol Box, Quintana Roo.
- b. Women's community restaurant established in Punta Negra, Belize, generating local income from visitors to the Port Honduras Marine Reserve.
- c. Improved coordination of conservation activities in Punta de Manabique Wildlife Reserve, Guatemala, among CONAP, the MPA administrator, and local NGOs through the creation of a Support Committee
- d. Refurbishing of a water treatment plant in Sandy Bay, Roatán, and connection of several homes to the plant. Co-funding from CORAL was obtained by the local co-managers to connect additional homes to the plant.

Our **Small Grants Program** is another channel for supporting the conservation, effective management, and sustainable use of marine protected areas; the improvement of fisheries management, and biodiversity conservation. With the kind support of key partners through joint requests for proposals, the program has funded 61 projects developed by over 55 organizations in the region, including local communities, government organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions. Over \$1.75 million have been approved and 1.5 times that amount has been leveraged.

A few examples of projects supported through this program include:

- The Public Use Plan of Laguna de Guaimoreto Wildlife Refuge, Honduras, was designed, submitted to the authorities and approved in 2016. A follow-up grant for further research in the area has been recently awarded.
- The Tobacco Caye Marine Station in Belize was completed, equipped and opened for environmental education for children and tourists.
- Erosion mitigation was carried out on Abalone Caye, where the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) has its ranger station. This was done through the construction of a rock wall (gavions) around the caye. The wall allowed the recovery of the beach, which is now being re-enforced through planting mangroves. This model of protection from erosion is currently being evaluated to determine if it can be replicated on Twin Caye, where South Water Caye's ranger station is also threatened by erosion.
- Five legally established fisheries recovery sites have been supported: 1 in Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve (Mexico); 3 in Punta de Manabique Wildlife Refuge (Guatemala), and 1 in Cuyamel Omoa National Park (Honduras). In Punta de Manabique, fishermen are working with authorities to monitor and manage the fisheries recovery sites, two of which were expanded to include mangroves to bolster the recovery of the fisheries. In Cuyamel Omoa, a strategically located guardhouse was built and equipped to improve control and surveillance by the Navy and CCO – the Honduran NGO that co-administers the protected area.

- Mooring and demarcation buoys were installed in: Santuario del Manatí State Reserve and Arrecifes de Xcalak National Park (Mexico) and South Water Caye Marine Reserve (Belize).
- The first identification guide for sharks and rays of the Guatemalan Caribbean was developed.
- A training course entitled “Diploma in Participatory Management of Marine Protected Areas of the Mexican Caribbean” was developed for park rangers. Nineteen people from 15 marine protected areas attended the workshop. The training modules were later replicated in 10 protected areas. One result of these trainings is that four Social Participation Strategies were designed.

The **Community Fisheries Program** promotes establishment of fish restoration sites (aka fish refuges and community marine reserves). We are contributing to the unofficial goal of fully protecting 20% of the region’s territorial waters, and to date have provided support for the design and creation of 16 no takes in the region. Of these, 10 have been legally approved. We also promote coordinated enforcement among fishermen, local organizations and authorities. For example:

- In Punta de Manabique Wildlife Refuge, Guatemala, we supported the construction of the headquarters for the Interinstitutional Operations Center where the Police Department, Navy and National Council for Protected Areas plan their patrols and from where they depart.
- Through the project *Conservation of Marine Resources in Central America*, fuel and equipment has been provided to support the control and surveillance programs of 9 protected areas (Annex 2). MAR Fund initially provides 40% of the total cost of the fuel needed and gradually, through the life of each phase, the protected areas take on more of the cost.

In 2016 MAR Fund was invited to participate in the **Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action** (GAGGA), which builds the capacity of grassroots groups to advocate with and for women for their rights to water, food security and a clean, healthy and safe environment. MAR Fund is now supporting women in climate change adaptation and environmental justice in the priority MPAs in Guatemala and Honduras. For example, Cuerpos de Conservación de Omoa, in Honduras, will train women on advocacy and microenterprise, and the women will design a pilot project on climate change adaptation. In Guatemala, the organization AMMUDIS will train women on climate change and solid waste management, and the women will develop an action plan for waste management in their communities and family gardens for food security.

The MAR Fund secured a €7 million KfW endowment grant to establish the **Reef Rescue Initiative** to increase the resilience of and restore damaged and degraded reefs. This program is carried out in cooperation with the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD). Among other activities, the program will support the on-line platform to foster exchange of coral restoration experiences and collaboration among practioners, and a regional conference on reef restoration will be organized in 2017.

MAR Fund has spurred and supported the establishment of **strategic regional alliances**, such as the Connectivity Network, the Lionfish Working Group and the Manatee Working Group. Some advances to date are:

Connectivity among MPAs is important for maintaining diversity, fish stocks, and more broadly, ecological resilience. The MAR Fund co-created the **MAR Connectivity Network** to better understand and enhance connectivity among the MPAs in the region. Comprised of El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR) in Chetumal, University of Miami, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, MAR Fund and 10 protected areas, it has developed a standardized methodology and carried out five simultaneous capture exercises of reef fish post-larvae between 2013 and 2016. The five-exercise report is being finalized and will be shared in the region. The network has also developed a catalog of fish post larvae and juveniles. Important additional results from the simultaneous exercises include the identification of sources of larvae for the reef and expansion of the known geographic ranges of a couple of fish species.

The MAR Fund convened a ground-breaking **MAR lionfish workshop** in 2014 – generating the Regional Strategy for the Control of Lionfish in the MAR and spurring national committees and action plans for each country, completed in 2016.

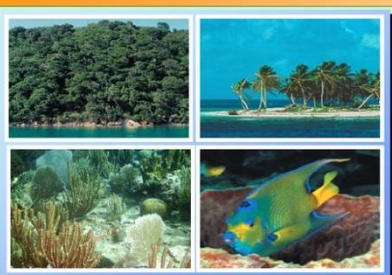
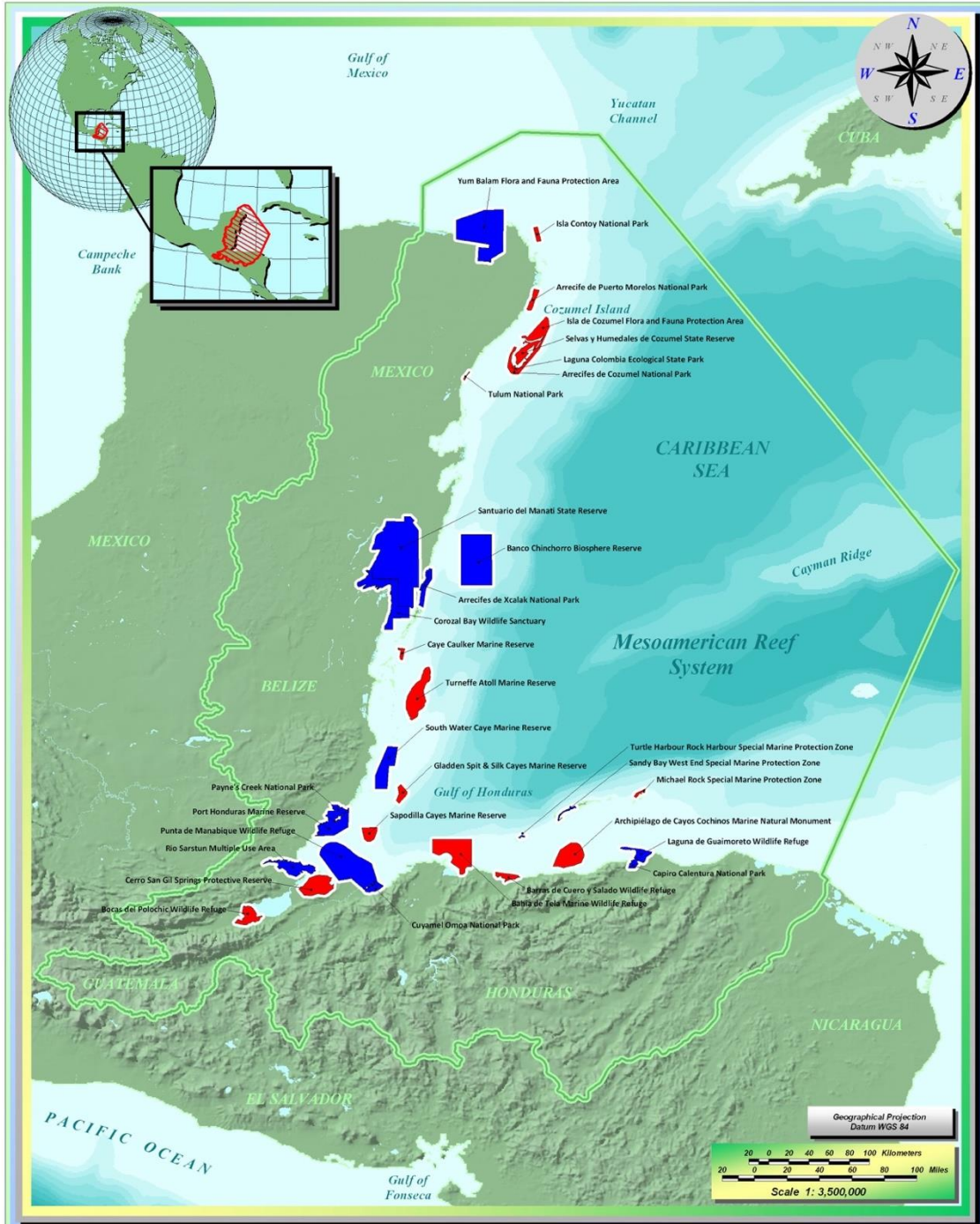
The MAR Fund and the NGO Lighthawk organized a manatee workshop in 2015 to design an aerial monitoring plan. Lighthawk is no longer operating in the MAR, and the MAR Fund is exploring other potential partners for overflights. The protected areas, however, continue to monitor manatees through sightings and satellite tracking.

In 2016, MAR Fund teamed up with the Healthy Reefs Initiative (HRI), the MAR Leadership Program (MAR-L) and the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature (FMCN), to promote a **blue economy approach** for the Mesoamerican Reef, in which effective protection and sustainable use of the region’s “blue” resources can be the pillars for its future development. The three organizations developed a “Vision for the Future” of the MAR and circulated a petition calling on the governments of the four MAR countries to recommit to conserving the MAR, marking the 20th anniversary of the Tulum Declaration.

Annex 1

List of Priority Protected Areas from Both Exercises: 2007 And 2015/2016

No.	Country	Name
FIRST PRIORITY-SETTING EXERCISE		
1	Mexico	Yum Balam Flora and Fauna Protection Area
2	Mexico	Manatee Sanctuary State Reserve
3	Mexico	Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve
4	Mexico	Arrecifes de Xcalak National Park
5	Belize	Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary
6	Belize	South Water Caye Marine Reserve
7	Belize	Payne's Creek National Park
8	Belize	Port Honduras Marine Reserve
9	Guatemala	Río Sarstún Multiple Use Area
10	Guatemala	Punta de Manabique Wildlife Refuge
11	Honduras	Sandy Bay West End Special Marine Protection Zone
12	Honduras	Marina Turtle Harbour Rock Harbour Special Marine Protection Zone
13	Honduras	Cuyamel Omoa National Park
14	Honduras	Capiro y Calentura National Park /Laguna de Guimoreto Wildlife Refuge
SECOND PRIORITY-SETTING EXERCISE		
1	Mexico	Cozumel Island: includes the following areas, Arrecifes de Cozumel National Park / Área Arrecifes de Cozumel Flora and Fauna Protection Area/ Forests and Wetlands of Cozumel State Reserve/ Laguna Colombia State Ecological Park
2	Mexico	Arrecife de Puerto Morelos National Park
3	Mexico	Isla Contoy National Park
4	Mexico	Tulum National Park
5	Belize	Gladden Spit & Silk Cayes Marine Reserve
6	Belize	Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve
7	Belize	Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve
8	Belize	Caye Caulker Marine Reserve
9	Guatemala	Bocas del Polochic Wildlife Refuge
10	Guatemala	Cerro San Gil Reserve for Natural Springs
11	Honduras	Archipiélago de Cayos Cochinos Natural Marine Monument
12	Honduras	Barras de Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge
13	Honduras	Michael Rock Special Marine Protection Zone
14	Honduras	Bahía de Tela Wildlife Marine Refuge



LEGEND	
■	Priority Coastal and Marine Protected Areas 2015
■	Priority Coastal and Marine Protected Areas 2007
	Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion
	Topographic Relief

MESOAMERICAN REEF SYSTEM

10 years protecting the Mesoamerican Reef

Annex 2

Protected areas supported by the KfW-funded “**Conservation of Marine Resources in Central America**”

Phase I (2012 - 2017)

Yum Balam Flora and Fauna Protected Area, Mexico
Port Honduras Marine Reserve, Belize
Punta de Manabique Wildlife Refuge, Guatemala
Sandy Bay West End Special Marine Protection Zone, Honduras

Phase II (2014 – 2018)

Santuario del Manatí State Reserve, Mexico
Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Belize
South Water Caye Marine Reserve, Belize
Río Sarstun Multiple Use Area, Guatemala
Turtle Harbor / Rock Harbor Special Marine Protection Zone, Honduras

