



Update July 2015



Ten years protecting the Mesoamerican Reef

We are celebrating ten years of working with all our extraordinary partners like you, the managers and co-managers in the protected areas, stakeholders and NGOs that address their efforts towards the conservation and sustainable use of the natural resources from the Mesoamerican Reef.

This year, we are already celebrating our first ten years of existence by developing small activities to promote and spread the accomplishments we have achieved with your support.

So far, this year we have done the following:

- On May 1st we had a Mayan Ceremony in Punta de Palma, Guatemala, with partners from the four countries of the MAR to give thanks for the reef and the environmental services it provides to the coastal communities.
- We launched a Story Contest on May 4, inviting to participate kids from 8 to 17



years old, that live along the Caribbean Coast of any of the four countries, to share life experiences, observations and stories about conservation in or around the fourteen priority protected areas of the MAR Fund.

- On May 15, under the 24th Board of Directors ordinary meeting, held in Guatemala city, we took the opportunity to celebrate and share with friends and partners in the conservation of the Mesoamerican Reef, the ten years of the joint work between the MAR Fund and committed partners of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. The timing was propitious to recognize, with a commemorative pin and a watercolor of a parrotfish, the work done by the Members of the Board, the staff of the Regional Office and the Member Funds.

We will be preparing some more commemorative activities such as the design of an infographic, the launch of stamps of key species of the reef and a video. Don't worry; we will share them all with you!



German Cooperation Support

Reef Rescue Initiative

We are extremely thankful to the German Government who, through the KfW, donated US\$ 8.5 Million to the MAR Fund. Thanks to this generous support, recovering damaged and degraded reefs in the region is a tangible possibility.

The objective of the initiative is to increase the resilience and ability to recover of the Mesoamerican Reef -and of the environmental and cultural services it provides- through capacity building, regulations, economic incentives and financial sustainability required for effective and timely restoration.

Under this initiative, reef restoration is addressed through two approaches:

- a. Continuous Restoration.** Based on coral nursery techniques, cultivating coral fragments to be transferred to reef areas that have been degraded or damaged.
- b. Emergency Response.** Response to hurricanes or ship groundings to recover and attach live coral fragments with the double objective of preventing secondary damage and restoring the reef.

Four key strategies guide the initiative:

1. To ensure sustainable long-term funding for continuous and emergency restoration through the establishment of an Emergency Fund;
2. To support and develop reef restoration and rehabilitation in the region;
3. To develop alternative sources of income and new employment opportunities for local communities, and
4. To promote the commitment of governments from all four countries in the region.

This initiative will be carried out by the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) and the MAR Fund.



Project Conservation of Marine Resources in Central America

Phase I

We have started the final stretch of Phase I with the approval of the 2015-2016 Biennial Work Plans (BWP) and signing the financial agreements for each protected area.

The BWPs are focused on priority and sustainable activities such as monitoring and control and surveillance efforts, updating of Management Plans and economic alternatives for coastal communities, among others.

From April 12 – 17, a field visit was made to Port Honduras Marine Reserve, Belize, and Yum Balam Flora and Fauna Protected Area, Mexico, with the participation of Dr. Stefan Rischar of KfW, María José González and Claudio González of the MAR Fund, and Enrico Gasparri, the permanent expert hired for the Project. The member funds from each country also participated in the visit in their respective area. Ingrid Hahn, KfW Deputy Director Office for Mexico, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, who is based in Mexico City, also joined the visit to Yum Balam.

The mission had the following objectives:

- To review the procedures for procurement of goods and services;
- To make a physical check of the inventories; and
- To make a field visit to the two protected areas to see advances on project activities.

The office of Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatan (PPY), the NGO administering the funds for Yum Balam, was also visited for the review of administrative documents. Everything was in order and according to the project's operational manual.

During the visit, we were able to verify the quality of the infrastructure works carried out in the two areas. In Belize, the rock wall built in Abalone Caye to protect TIDE's field station, the dry fruit facility for fisher women in Punta Gorda and the cultural kitchen that is run by the women group of Punta Negra. And in Mexico the repairs made to the offices of CONANP in Holbox Island and Kantunilkin town, both are strategic sites inside the protected area.



The equipment purchased with the project and the inventories where these are registered were also checked. Minor recommendations were made to the inventory list of TIDE.

The second meeting for implementers of Phase I of the project was held in Livingston, Guatemala, during April 27 - 30. Twenty four people from the four protected areas that participate in Phase I of the project and our member funds attended the meeting.

The objectives of the meeting were to share and exchange information and experiences between the protected areas, as well as inform them on progress, challenges and opportunities of the Project at regional, national and local level and implementation of coordination platforms, alliances created or other projects and partners in the region.

The implementers also shared the implementation of a good practice in management and operation of each of their protected areas. For example:

- CONANP (Mex), shared the communication as a management tool in the area, and they told how they are working together with strategic partners (NGOs, Universities, other PAs) to manage natural resources of the area.

- TIDE (Bel) exposed their monitoring program and how it has provided them of valuable decision-making information. They also presented their control and surveillance system.
- CONAP (Gua) presented the process of establishment of a Support Committee for the Management of the Area that has promoted spaces of dialogue among and greater participation of the civil society in the co-management of the area, sustainable practices for the use of natural resources, and the compliance of management instruments.
- RMP (Hon) talked about their marine infrastructure program that has successfully decreased anchoring on the reef, supported dive shops reducing their operation costs by using the buoys installed, increased the safety of boats that use the navigation channels demarcated with buoys, among others.
- BICA (Hon) spoke of their Water Quality Monitoring Program and the dissemination of results to local authorities and the Water Boards. They have ratified agreements, promoted meetings with authorities, stakeholders, universities and the IDB, identified priority intervention areas, and discussed the Water regulations, among many other actions.

At the end of the meeting, agreements on improving the communication between all involved in the project was accorded. A Whatsapp group was formed in order to share activities and experiences on real time. Further than sharing productive and interesting activities of the Project, a massive regional effort was made to help locate a missing person using a kayak in Roatan. All areas collaborated!

Phase II

Phase II of the Project will begin field activities in July. The 2015 Annual Work Plans are approved, the financial agreements are signed and the financial planning is ready in all five areas :

1. Manatee Sanctuary State Reserve, in Mexico;
2. Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, in Belize;
3. South Water Caye Marine Reserve, in Belize;
4. Río Sarstún Multiple Use Area, in Guatemala, and
5. Turtle Harbour / Rock Harbour Special Marine Protection Zone, in Honduras

We will share with you all progress and advances these areas achieve during the year.



MAR Fund Small Grants Program

Sixth Request for Proposals Reducing Threats and Improving Management in Key Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the Mesoamerican Reef

Most of the projects of this RfP have finalized and are being revised for their final approval.

Some of their most important results are:



1. Increasing the cost-effectiveness of MPA enforcement in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve, Belize. TIDE

Objective: The overall project objective is that enforcement in PHMR is more cost-effective, as indicated by an increase in the number of infractions that are penalized and a decrease in the amount of money spent per infraction penalized.

- The implementation of the Spatial, Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) has increased cost-effectiveness by providing information that can be compared for making management decisions, such as lower patrol efforts vs. highest illegal encounters, among others.
- A total of five rangers received boarding procedures training by the Belize Coast Guard Officers
- In addition, five rangers and four community personnel received training in powerboat safety level 2 from the Royal Yachting Association



2. Strengthening the network of fish refuges in the Gulf of Honduras. TRIGOH

Objective: To strengthen the fish refuges network of the Gulf of Honduras through political incidence and the management of scientific information.

- The Research Protocol prioritizing the assessment of fish species (reef, commercial and invasive) and ecosystems (coral and mangrove) is complete
- Every TRIGOH member signed a letter of commitment to implement the research protocol for their biological monitoring
- The interactive database for biological information is ready to host the data and analyze it. Field data collection is pending and will be collected by TRIGOH's research team.
- The TRIGOH webpage was updated (www.alianzatrigo.org)
- The Fisheries Authorities from Belize, Guatemala and Honduras signed a letter of understanding to support TRIGOH in fisheries matters



3. Support for the protection and conservation of sharks and rays in the Guatemalan Caribbean. CEMA

Objective: To support the protection and conservation of sharks and rays, evaluating the implementation of Guatemalan Caribbean residents' shark and ray sighting touristic areas.

- The potential sites for sharks and rays sightings have been identified. These are:
- Within Río Sarstún Multiple Use Area:
 - Bajos de Foudara and Languaja
- Within Punta de Manabique Wildlife refuge:
 - Cabo Tres Puntas and Bahía La Graciosa
- Eleven different species of sharks and eight of rays have been identified using surveys and dive sightings
- A photographic identification guide of sharks and rays of the Guatemalan Caribbean was developed
- The guidelines to develop shark sighting activity in Guatemala are being prepared

4. Consolidation of the proposed fish recovery site in the Cuyamel-Omoa National Park. CCO

Objective: to contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of fisheries resources and identifying economic alternatives for communities in the marine area of the Cuyamel Omoa National Park, Honduras.

- CCO and the fishing communities involved in the project have submitted all the required documents to ICF, the Protected Areas Authority, in order to implement the co-management agreement for the proposed fish refuge. They expect to have the signed agreement by August, 2015.
- With the joint patrolling of authorities and community members, illegal fishing activities have been reduced regarding the baseline within Cuyamel Omoa National Park
- The guardhouse built inside the fish refuge continues to provide strategic location for aquatic and terrestrial joint patrols



5. First evaluation of the megafauna in the Mexican Caribbean: a key indicator of the recovery of biodiversity in fishing refuges. COBI

Objective: to determine the abundance of some species of megafauna in Quintana Roo and strengthen the evaluation of the recovery of biodiversity in fish refuges, identifying new priority areas for conservation.

- The project monitored shark, ray, sea turtle and commercial fish species presence inside and outside fish refuges.
- Fish refuges monitored in:
 - Puerto Morelos
 - María Elena (Sian Ka'an)
 - Punta Herrero (Sian Ka'an)
- The techniques to monitor these were:
 - Transects
 - Baited remote underwater video stations (BRUVS)
- The final results of monitoring, that are still being evaluated show little difference between fish species presence inside and outside fish refuges.



6. Banco Chinchorro: elasmobranch conservation through community participation and exchange of experiences. RAZONATURA

Objective: to promote the conservation of elasmobranchs in RBBCH by characterizing the status of populations of sharks and rays and increase the capabilities of researchers, managers and fishermen of the protected area.

- Two workshops developed with fishermen, tourism service providers and protected area staff about knowledge and ecologic conscience regarding sharks and their importance for the reef
- Five fishermen have been trained in sharks and rays monitoring techniques
- The project expects to have the following outcomes:
 - To generate a baseline of diversity and relative abundance of sharks and rays in Banco Chinchorro
 - To build awareness regarding the importance of sharks among children of at least six schools and fishermen from the three Fishing Cooperatives of Banco Chinchorro
 - To build capacity for monitoring sharks and rays in the protected area in fishermen, tourist operators and protected areas staff

The project will be finished at the end of July, 2015.



Seventh Request for Proposals Development of Initiatives for better management of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the Mesoamerican Reef

We would like to thank our two newest donors that joined this request for proposals and strengthened it: Fondation de L'Orangerie and the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation. Five organizations supported this RfP and we are deeply thankful to them.

On January 29, 2015, the Grants Review Committee met in Guatemala City to evaluate the proposals submitted for our 7th RfP. As a result of the evaluation process, nine proposals were approved. Of these, one was submitted directly by community-based organizations and two of them by NGOs that involve active participation of local communities. The approved proposals were:

1. A practical approach to long-term lionfish control: developing Belize's national lionfish exploitation strategy, Fisheries Department, Belize
2. Strengthening the network of fish refuges by involving youth in better fishing practices in the Gulf of Honduras, TRIGOH, Guatemala

3. Pilot project to restore the Guatemalan Caribbean corals: exploring the feasibility and its potential as a tool for management and conservation, FUNDAECO, Guatemala
4. Strengthening self-management of local fishermen for the sustainable management of Sarstún Temash binational area, APROSARSTUN, Guatemala
5. Promoting the integrated management of RVS Laguna Guaymoreto, FUCAGUA, Honduras
6. Managing ecosystems and promoting economic alternatives in the area of fisheries recovery site PAMUCH, CCO, Honduras
7. Strengthening fisheries organizations for better management of marine ecosystems, COBI, Mexico
8. Consolidation of a Reef Restoration Team in Arrecifes de Xcalak National Park, OCEANUS, Mexico
9. Diploma in Participatory Management of Marine Protected Areas of the Mexican Caribbean, Moxviquil, Mexico

The grant agreements were signed between the months of April, May and June, and the disbursements to the Member Funds were made after this.



Additional Projects

Maintaining an Effective Enforcement Presence in the Southern Belize Reef Complex. Southern Environmental Association, Phase VI. Developed by SEA.

The objective of this project was to reduce illegal fishing activity within the Southern Belize Reef Complex (SBRC) by the year 2013 to a level comparable to the Gladden Spit Silk Caye Marine Reserve level of 2008 of only 26 illegal incidents and maintain this level up to 2014. The final results of this project presented in January, 2015 were:

- 152 patrols were carried out.
- Results: 41 warnings, 35 arrests and 28 convictions.
- The total rate of success of prosecution (88%) was higher than 2012 and 2013.
- The number of arrests in 2014 was 15 more than in 2013.
- The number of successful convictions doubled in comparison to 2013
- At the end of 2014 all numbers of activities (warnings, arrests, charges and convictions) have reduced considerably, in more than 50% in most of the cases, since the beginning of the enforcement program in 2009.



Participatory design of fish refuges and fisheries co-management areas in the Río Sarstún Multiple Use Area, Guatemala, Phase II. Developed by FUNDAECO

The objective of the project is to design participatory four fisheries restoration zones and fisheries co-management areas by 2014 in the Río Sarstún Multiple Use Area.

The final results of the project were:

- The co-management agreement for the fisheries recovery site of Barra Sarstún/Laguna Grande were prepared jointly by FUNDAECO, CONAP and the fishing communities.
- The management plans for Barra Sarstún/Laguna Grande and Cocolí fish refuges were designed
- Five fishermen from the communities of Cocolí, Tampico, Barra Sarstún and

Creek Chino were certified in open water scuba diving and the AGRRA methodology. They participated in six biological monitoring exercises in Cocolí, Laguna Grande and Barra Sarstún, two in each site.

- The two baseline indicators fish species, Blackbelt Cichlid and White Mullet, have increased their abundance in 3.5% average within the fishing refuges, although not yet formally established
- The collection Center of San Juan Village was equipped, and its business plan was designed and approved by the community



Improving Resilience through Coral Restoration in No-Take Areas. Developed by OCEANUS. The long term objectives of the project are:

- Recover reef ecosystem health and promote recovery of fish species populations and biomass through a MAR region-wide coral restoration



program (“coral garden nurseries”), with special emphasis on recovering no-take areas as part of the Kanan Kay Alliance and similar initiatives in neighboring countries.

- Strengthen the resilience and adaptation potential of coral reefs by identifying and selecting genetic material from healthy populations that are naturally resistant to climate change and local stressors (such as high water temperatures, disease, bleaching, increased acidity, salinity, excess rainfall and nutrient inputs).
- Secure local community and reef manager engagement for a thriving coral restoration network in the MAR region and eventually the Wider Caribbean basin to rebuild and enhance reef architecture and natural function.

The preliminary results of the project to March, 2015, were:

- 72 coral nurseries installed in four sites of the MAR region:
 - Puerto Morelos National Park (5)
 - Tulum National Park (2)
 - Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve (60)
 - Xcalak National Park (5)
- Nearly 1,000 new colonies have been transplanted in these four sites
- A team integrated by local people has been trained and certified to monitor the colonies in Xcalak National Park.

Feel free to contact us

To learn more about MAR Fund and our activities;
please feel free to visit our website

 www.marfund.org and www.fondosam.org

You can also check us up at our facebook page



If you wish to share or have any comments and/or questions, please do not hesitate to write to us at the following address:

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THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND STAY TUNED FOR OUR NEXT UPDATE!