



## The Belize Marine Fund—Enhancing Financial Sustainability for Mesoamerican Reef Conservation

*The Oak Foundation has chosen the MAR Fund as the recipient of its \$10 million challenge grant to endow the Belize Marine Fund (BMF). MAR Fund is a regional environmental fund, which has established a \$23 million endowment for the Mesoamerican Reef and has issued \$11 million in grants for conservation over the past 11 years.*

While the \$10M gift is contingent on the MAR Fund raising an additional \$15M, Oak will make \$500K available for marine conservation annually for five years as the MAR Fund raises the matching funds. “We are honored by this gift and thankful for the confidence and trust that Oak has placed in us,” expressed María José González, Executive Director of MAR Fund. She continued, “Valuable partners have already contributed generously to the endowment and we hope the opportunity to leverage these Oak funds will be appealing to other donors who want to be part of the momentum that is building to protect this world class coral reef ecosystem”.



MAR Fund welcomes and will actively be seeking the support of other foundations, individuals, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies as it raises the required match. According to Mr. Lorenzo J. de Rosenzweig (Chair MAR Fund Board of Directors), “We exist in a global environment and it is important that we take collective responsibility in supporting (financially and otherwise) conservation measures in those areas of the world known for their significant environmental value”. Oak’s contribution adds to endowment support already granted to MAR Fund by the German Government through the KfW and the French Global Environment Fund (FFEM). MAR Fund acknowledges also the start-up support provided by WWF, who sparked this regional mechanism, The Summit Foundation -the angel investor who supported the organization’s beginning of operations- and all other donors that have kindly contributed to the conservation of this region. MAR Fund continues to call on all those that can assist in this challenge, to lend their support. It stands ready to lead the charge and remains dedicated to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the Mesoamerican Reef, the well-being of local communities and the people that directly depend on it.

The Mesoamerican Reef is the largest transboundary reef ecosystem in the world – globally significant for its biodiversity and the source of livelihoods for 1.5 million people living along the Caribbean coasts of Mexico, Belize Guatemala and Honduras. Important steps have been taken to conserve this valuable resource – there is a network of marine protected areas, local fishermen are embracing fish replenishment

zones, effective fisheries regulations are in place, farmers are beginning to reduce nutrient runoff, civil society is an active force for conservation. We are on a path toward effective conservation of the reef, but the effort needs to be expanded and strengthened if the reef ecosystem is to endure. There is still too much pollution and sedimentation degrading coral reefs, sewage treatment is insufficient, mangrove loss continues, and we're just starting to understand how these coastal areas can adapt to a changing climate. More resources are clearly needed.

The Oak Foundation has long recognized the importance of the Mesoamerican Reef and has been a stalwart supporter of efforts to protect it. It has issued this challenge grant to MAR Fund to ensure that its conservation efforts will endure. In his address announcing the award, Dr. Kristian Parker, Oak Foundation Trustee, said “*Fifteen years ago, we made a commitment to support marine conservation efforts in Belize and surrounding countries for 20 years*”—this endowment challenge grant represents a culmination of that commitment.

### **About MAR Fund**

*MAR Fund enables innovative, transnational solutions to critical Mesoamerica reef issues through providing meaningful, long-term financial support and trustworthy reef management advice so that future generations can enjoy and benefit from a thriving reef system.* For more information about the Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund) and its body of work, or if you would like to support the Fund in its efforts, please visit [www.marfund.org](http://www.marfund.org) and/or contact María José González ([mjgonzalez@marfund.org](mailto:mjgonzalez@marfund.org)).