

MAR

Mesoamerican Reef Alliance

The ICRAN Mesoamerican Reef Alliance (ICRAN-MAR) engages project partners, local communities and the private sector in coral reef conservation-related activities. With the support from the United Nations Foundation (UNF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), project implementing partners coordinate activities around three interlinked themes that are known for having the potential to strongly impact the reef: Watershed Management, Sustainable Fisheries, and Sustainable Tourism.

The strategy of this collaborative effort is to facilitate the provision of different tools that promote voluntary adoption of better management practices, and build partnerships and other collaboration mechanisms at different levels that strengthen capacities that translate into greater benefits to the reef and the communities who rely on its resources.

To accomplish project goals, over the first two years of implementation partners have facilitated processes by which different stakeholders (ranging from civil society and private sector, to NGOs and government officials) participate in activities that promote shared responsibility for conservation and sustainable use of the reef's resources. The project continues to gain momentum as project activities continue producing significant results, and promises to deliver even more during the third year of this initiative.

Implementing partners in the alliance include the World Resources Institute (WRI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Reef Check, the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL), UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, and UNEP-Division of Technology, Industry and Economics. The UNEP's Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP-CAR), a lead organization within ICRAN, manages project activities with a coordination unit located in Belize City.



Our Challenge

The funds provided by UN Foundation and USAID have enabled this project, and many activities it encompasses to get underway to deliver a set of results and outcomes for the benefit of the Mesoamerican reef system and the people of the region.

In order to ensure that this positive progress continues, we must work together to protect the Mesoamerican reefs. We welcome partnerships with others in our mission to sustain healthy coral reefs and the communities that depend on them for food and livelihoods. Both financial and in-kind contributions to the partnership are welcome.



For more information on how you can join this effort, please contact:

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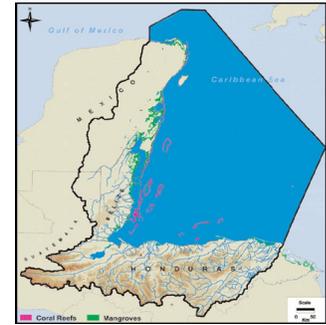


ICRAN

International Coral Reef Action Network

Vibrant and spectacular coral reefs, teeming with colorful fish, coral, lobsters, conch, turtles and other marine life, are considered one of the most biologically diverse habitats on earth. The health and biodiversity of these reefs is critical to the economic livelihood and cultural values of millions of people throughout the world who rely on these coastal environments.

The Mesoamerican Reef, stretching over 1,000 km (625 miles) along the eastern coasts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, is the largest continuous stretch of reef in the western hemisphere; it has been identified as a unique and globally important coral reef ecosystem. People in the adjoining Mesoamerican countries rely on the reef and its associated ecosystems for much of their food and livelihoods. Unfortunately, the Mesoamerican Reef is under severe natural and human induced threat.



In 2004, the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) – a global partnership that responds to coral conservation needs and needs of those who depend on them – launched this ambitious three-year regional initiative to contribute to coral conservation efforts in the Mesoamerican Region.



Watershed Management

Agriculture is deeply interconnected to the economy, the livelihoods, and the biodiversity of the Mesoamerican Region. Appropriate land-use practices are critical for the management of watersheds to ensure that transport of sediment, nutrients, and other pollutants to the Mesoamerican reef is minimized.

In 2004, the ICRAN-MAR initiated an effort to develop better information on the effects of land cover change and agricultural activities on sediment and nutrient delivery on coastal waters in the region. Having assembled a rich geographic database on physical characteristics of the MAR region, a hydrologic analysis of runoff (sediment/nutrient delivery, total suspended solids) to coastal waters has been implemented. This is coupled with a circulation model to estimate sediment transport to the reef. The hydrologic model was implemented on several scenarios of past, current and future land cover change, to evaluate impact of human activities on sediment and nutrient delivery, as well as the implications of future development paths and policy options. The data and tool have been transferred to partners in the region and are available for anyone to apply to analysis of land-based threats to the Mesoamerican region.

These tools and analysis results are being used to encourage key stakeholders to adopt a suite of "Better Practices" to reduce impacts on the coastal and marine resources; likewise, to establish close relationships with key agroindustries to work jointly in identifying and implementing better management practices at field level to reduce the presence of priority pesticides in the MAR marine environment, and to control soil erosion from major commercial agricultural sectors while sustaining productivity.

Banana producing companies, sugarcane and citrus growers associations from Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras have joined these efforts. Cover crops to reduce herbicide use and reduce soil erosion have started in Belize and, soon, in Honduras. The implementation of biological control of two major sugarcane pests, has also started in Chetumal Bay, Mexico and in Belize.



Watersheds of the Mesoamerican Reef Region

Credit: © WWF/Melaine McFadden

Sustainable Fisheries

Fishing is probably the most socially and economically important activity for many coastal communities in the MAR region. In the last decade, however, catches have decreased as the key commercial species such as lobster, conch, snappers and groupers are over exploited. This trend represents a global crisis related to coral reefs, and unsustainable fishing practices are among the leading causes.

Adoption of better fishing practices (BFP) and monitoring of their potential effects contribute to localized management efforts. For the past two years, project partners have engaged community stakeholders in education and awareness activities on the need to adopt better fishing practices, and have trained them in ecological and socioeconomic monitoring of reef health using the Reef Check protocol.



Credit: Reef Check

Credit: WWF/Melaine McFadden

Monitoring results to date reflect the reality and current status of fisheries resources in the MAR region, documenting coral bleaching, and the scarcity of economically important species and reduced population levels of second-order reef fish species like parrot fish and snappers. Besides creating a scientific baseline on the current trends of reef health on the region, this data collection process not only serves to document the status of reefs, but also empowers the communities and raises local awareness and supports localized management efforts

An increasing number of communities have requested to participate in the initiative supporting the adoption of BFP and expressing their interest in engaging in sustainable and profitable alternative economic livelihoods. As the project continues, even more communities become aware of the significance and potential of their contribution to maintaining healthy reef ecosystems.



Credit: © WWF/Melaine McFadden

Sustainable Tourism

While bringing economic benefits to communities throughout the MAR, rapid growth in tourism development has simultaneously led to increases in pollution, over-fishing, improper sewage disposal, and irresponsible marine recreation activities.

Over the last two years, partners of the tourism component have facilitated a stakeholder-led process in the marine tourism industry, resulting in the development of comprehensive conservation and safety standards for marine recreation activities such as scuba diving, snorkeling and boating operations.



Credit: Reef Check

The standards and voluntary code of conduct have received unanimous support throughout the region, and partners are now poised to begin a testing program to measure the effectiveness of these conservation tools.



Credit: Reef Check

Marine recreation providers in each of the four MAR countries will assess their business performance based on the requirements of the standards, identifying both strengths and gaps in environmental performance and sustainable business practices.

In concert with the standards implementation program, stakeholders are developing partnerships and alliances at the local level to implement conservation initiatives which promote adoption of the standards and code of conduct, and increase private sector support for marine protected areas. Project partners are providing technical and financial assistance for stakeholder-led initiatives such as mooring buoy projects, marine protected area infrastructure improvements, and local train the trainers programs in sustainable business practices.



Credit: © WWF/Melaine McFadden

Working Together

The Mesoamerican Reef Alliance brings partners and international expertise to the region to promote economically and environmentally sound management of the reef, and to strategically engage the private sector in the conservation and management of the natural resources. Project partners developed this strategy for the Mesoamerican Reef in conjunction with existing project and initiatives. Extensive consultations with key stakeholders in the region, allowed the design to complement existing work efforts and minimize duplication of activities.

One strategic objective of the project has been to encourage the creation of partnerships, and to exchange knowledge and experience between organizations of the region in order to effectively achieve the goals of the project. Therefore, communication with all communities, groups, sectors and industries is welcomed to develop ways of working together to achieve even greater results.



Credit: © WWF/Melaine McFadden

