



MAR FUND NEWS: WHAT WE'RE UP TO

The following MAR Fund activities are a reflection of the support and trust of our donors, which have helped us establish the MAR Fund for the benefit of the reef and its people. We are grateful and honored that you are interested in the MAR region and that you believed in us.

Small Grants Program

In 2006 we began our small grants program to provide much needed funding to local organizations that otherwise would not have access to international funds. The grants are for a maximum of \$20,000.

In our first request for proposals, the projects focused on threats to the integrity and health of coastal and marine protected areas and recommendations to mitigate the threats. The results achieved by these projects have provided valuable management and monitoring tools for key coastal and marine protected areas in the Ecoregion, and have strengthened alliances and improved local stakeholder participation. Examples of the projects we supported include:

- A survey of the endangered Queen conch in Belize was useful in estimating the maximum economic yield and that, in turn, was the basis for the Belizean Ministry of Fisheries to calculate allowable conch quotas for Queen conch.



- In Guatemala, a project to assess environmental impacts from mining and agriculture on a watershed that drains into the Caribbean has provided important databases. There is also formal interest on the part of a nickel mining company and a palm oil company to finance the design of environmental monitoring plans to evaluate and reduce the impact of their operations.
- In Honduras, nine coral nurseries and coral restoration patches were successfully established around the islands of Utila and Guanaja. More importantly, 63 locals were trained in these coral care methodologies, so they can continue to be applied in the future.

- In Mexico, the Public Use Program for Tulum National Park and Tulum-Tankah Archaeological Zone was completed. This important management tool provides valuable information on socioeconomic and biophysical data, as well as guidelines on the use of renewable resources and a complete monitoring plan. The Public Use Program will be used by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), which administrates the National Park.



We are happy to tell you that we have successfully launched our second request for proposals. The objective of this round was to finance projects focused on innovative management practices in the initial network of coastal and marine protected areas in the Mesoamerican Reef, which can be replicated or exported to other areas (protected or not). Public-private alliances, especially with the productive sector, were favored, as well as projects presented by local actors with NGO support. Six projects were approved, most of them involving sustainable fisheries.

Fishing for the future. Pilot Projects

Eleven years ago, over fishing and unregulated fishing activities were identified as two of the main threats to the MAR region. To this day, over fishing continues to be identified as a key threat. However, fishermen have also been identified as key stakeholders that should be involved in managing fisheries resources in protected areas.

We are currently initiating two pilot projects with the support of AVINA Foundation. The main objective will be to involve fishermen in managing the marine resources they utilize. The Puerto Morelos Cooperative in Puerto Morelos National Park, Quintana Roo, México, will develop one of them. The second pilot project will take place with three communities in the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge of Honduras.



The Puerto Morelos Cooperative's fishing territory overlaps with the National Park. The Coop and the Park administration have worked on a new zoning plan that includes the establishment of community marine reserves (no take zones). The MAR Fund will provide support for the development of the Cooperative's monitoring plan and monitoring activities of the new community marine reserves.

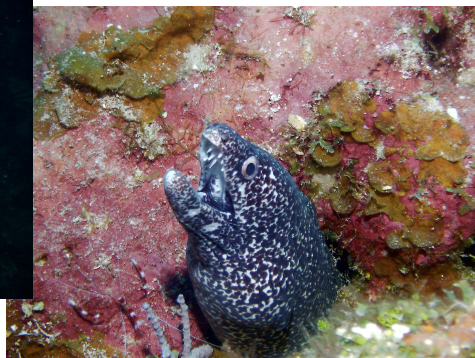
The communities of Cuero y Salado will now begin to discuss how to participate in the management of their fisheries within the reserve. The MAR Fund support will go to strengthening the fishermen's organizations, strengthening the relations among the three groups, and to establishing a co-management agreement between the fishermen and the park administration.

Expedition to Paradise

We are planning a field trip to a small portion of the MAR region, and hope that you can join us. You will have the opportunity to see up close and personal why we are committed to saving this magnificent region.

Our expedition, tentatively planned for the first week of August, will include swimming with whale sharks in Yum Balam, México, and snorkeling or diving in the unique coral channel and colorful reefs of Belize's Hol Chan. The managers of the reserves and experts from each site will join us and provide detailed information on each protected area, its threats and the on-going conservation activities.

You will not want to miss this opportunity. Please find attached the draft itinerary, and send us any questions or requests you may have. We look forward to sharing a few days in paradise with you.



Thank you for your interest. We are convinced that with your participation and support, a long-term strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of the Mesoamerican Reef will become a reality.