



GEF International Waters: Learning Exchange and Resource Network  
(IW:LEARN)

and

GEF Large Marine Ecosystem: Learning Exchange and Resource Network  
(LME:LEARN)

---

## TWINNING PROPOSAL AND IDENTIFICATION FORM

### Introduction, Purpose: Why an Exchange

The Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem (GoM-LME) is one of the most productive LMEs in the world. It covers over 1.6 million square km and is bordered by three countries—the U.S., Mexico, and Cuba. Marine protected areas (MPAs) are the references for the strategies used to protect the GoM's ecosystem and manage its resources. However, the interconnections within the Gulf ecosystem mean that its MPAs do not function in ecological isolation. The currents that flow from the Caribbean through the Gulf of Mexico and into the Atlantic physically connect the U.S. with the marine environments that lie upstream in Cuba and Mexico. Fish, sea turtles, whales and sharks migrate between US, Cuba and Mexican waters in the Gulf. International cooperation in ocean conservation issues is therefore an essential part of protecting the ecological integrity of marine protected areas in all three nations. This importance of international cooperation is what drove GoM-LME project staff and partners to create the Gulf of Mexico Marine Protected Area Network (GOMMPAN).

GOMMPAN was first discussed in December 2017 in Cozumel, Mexico at a workshop organized by CubaMar, a project of The Ocean Foundation in collaboration with the GoM-LME Project. Mexican, American and Cuban MPA managers and government officials were in attendance. GOMMPAN's goal is to create a set of key products that provide a fundamental understanding of what marine habitats and biological communities the network sites protect, and an expert assessment of the condition of those habitats and communities by those that best know them. Through these products, MPA managers and other decision-makers will receive a toolkit for the long-term evaluation and improvement of MPA ecosystem and management performance that can be applied throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The first GOMPANN sites are Parque Nacional Sistema Arrecifal Veracruzano and Parque Nacional Arrecife Alacranes in Mexico, Parque Nacional Guanahacabibes in Cuba, Florida Keys and Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuaries in the US. GOMMPAN will continue to expand to include other sites in the three countries as the project advances. GOMMPAN is the first trilateral MPA network in the Gulf of Mexico.

In order to fulfill the goals of GOMMPAN and support the GoM-LME Project, we are organizing an exchange between scientists, managers, government officials, and environmental lawyers from US, Cuba, and Mexico in Merida, Mexico, April 26-27, 2018. At this workshop we expect to have

ministerial level representatives from the three countries officially sign the GOMMPAN agreement and put it into action. An additional of this exchange is for these stakeholders within the GOMMPAN MPAs to gather and exchange and generate knowledge regarding challenges and solutions to MPA management, build capacity, and create partnerships across countries and stakeholder groups. The meeting will take place in conjunction with CubaMar's Trinational Initiative platform ([www.trinationalinitiative.org](http://www.trinationalinitiative.org)). The meeting we propose will convene experts in marine protected area policy as well as benthic and pelagic science to understand 1. How this new MPA network can best be incorporated into existing management schemes in all three countries and 2. how marine connectivity impacts decision making and policy making around the GOMMPAN MPAs.

### **Learning Objectives**

List the specific topics to be addressed by the exchange in bullet form.

- Define common management and technical challenges for the MPAs in the GOM LME and develop solutions to those challenges
- Assess connectivity patterns for sharks, sea turtles, coral reefs and marine mammals to determine how the MPAs are connected and develop tools for addressing threats to these shared species. This will help leverage GOMMPAN as a tool to protect migratory species.
- Create a set of products that provide a fundamental understanding of what marine habitats and biological communities the LME sites protect and assess the condition of those habitats and communities by those that best know them (e.g. MPA managers, local government officials)
- Understand the legal national and transboundary requirements for GOMMPAN to serve its purpose of collectively protecting shared marine resources
- Build partnerships among the various actors (local project staff, government officials, implementing agency staff, and NGOs) who work or conduct research in the GOM LME MPAs and with other LMEs (primarily CLME+)

### **Expected Outputs/Outcomes**

1. A list the general expected outcomes of the exchange. Please describe how the exchange will benefit each partner organization. Who expects to learn what and from whom? There are two meetings taking place in Merida. One is being led by the GOM LME and its main outcome will be a reporting tool designed by exchange participants to standardize condition reporting at each MPA in the network. By standardizing reporting the habitat conditions of the MPAs in the network can be compared, allowing each partner organization to more objectively evaluate their MPAs, better assess their needs, and more efficiently allocate their limited resources. We propose a second meeting to bring together experts from Mexico, the US and Cuba to focus on determining how connectivity is linking the MPAs and how the GOMMPAN network can help protect shared marine species such as sharks, sea turtles and corals. Connectivity experts are existing members of the Trinational Initiative and represent government, policy and academic institutions such as NOAA, CONANP, University of Havana, Mote Marine Laboratory and others.
2. Please mention any actual outputs of the exchange (ex. publications, websites, action plans, reports, communities of practices) Participants will develop a connectivity atlas for GOMMPAN, outlining the network's activities and assigning responsibilities. This atlas will help focus and guide the work of GOMMPAN in terms of protecting shared marine species. We will write a report about the exchange and its outcomes and invite members of the local press to attend as well as document the exchange through photos and videos. Most importantly the GoM-LME community of practice will strengthen and expand through this exchange, allowing for further knowledge exchange and partnership building even after the exchange officially ends. We envision this exchange being the first of many.

3. Please describe any specific outputs from the exchange which could be useful and benefit the wider GEF international waters portfolio. A reporting tool developed at the exchange will be very beneficial to the wider GEF IW portfolio. We hope the connectivity atlas we produce can inform other GOM LME projects and serve as a tool to be used in all LMEs, especially those with an emphasis on MPA networks.

4. Please describe at least one or more IW Experience Notes that will result from this exchange (more information about Experience Notes, case studies on project strategies, activities and innovations is available at <http://www.iwlearn.net/experience>) We will write an Experience Note about the establishment of GOMMPAN, including the steps taken, the stakeholders involved, and the challenges faced. We will also write an Experience Note about the development of the network-wide report card and the process necessary for balancing the needs and capacities of three different countries (in our case, US, Mexico, and Cuba).

### Participants

List all participants of the exchange, along with project/organizational affiliation (note that there must be at least one GEF project included. Please provide the GEF ID No. of the project you would like to exchange with (where possible)).

Name	Organization (Project Affiliation)
Alejandra Navarrete	GoM-LME Project GEF ID No.
Fernando Bretos (sea turtles)	CubaMar, The Ocean Foundation
Maritza Garcia (MPAs)	Direccion de Medio Ambiente, Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnologia y Medio Ambiente (Cuba)
Carlos Diaz	Centro Nacional de Areas Protegidas (Cuba)
Andrew Baker (coral reefs)	University of Miami
Maria de los Angeles Serrano (marine mammals)	Acuario Nacional de Cuba
Rafael Puga (fisheries)	Centro de Investigaciones Pesqueras (Cuba)
Gustavo Arencibia (fisheries)	Centro de Investigaciones Pesqueras (Cuba)
Eduardo Cuevas (sea turtles)	CONACYT-Universidad Autónoma del Carmen (Mexico)
Beatriz Martinez Daranas (corals)	Centro de Investigaciones Marinas, U. Havana
Lazaro Marquez Llauger	Guanahacabibes National Park (Cuba)
Juan Pablo Carricart (corals)	UNAM (Mexico)
Patricia Gonzalez (corals)	Centro de Investigaciones Marinas, U. Havana

**Commented [kt1]:** I put Patrick and Andrea here because I like the idea of having the CLME+ there. Perhaps GoM LME could learn something from them, especially since Cuba is technically in both. Who else should we list here?

### Logistics

Who is/are the guests, who is the host, where do the travelers go and for how long, list any site visits/events which contribute to the learning objectives

The host is CubaMar, GOM LME and Universidad Autonoma de Mexico Campus Sisal, which is based in Merida, Mexico. The connectivity workshop will take place at the Hotel Gamma Mérida El Castellano

### Finances

Provide a basic overview of the actual costs of the exchange, and who will cover which portion (note that GEF IW:LEARN/LME:LEARN can only fund travel costs), it is not necessary (although desirable) to provide dollar amounts for expenses not covered by GEF IW:LEARN/LME:LEARN. Please do indicate who is responsible for which costs however. Please also demonstrate some indicative co-financing from exchange participants and institutions.

Item	Amount	Responsible
Roundtrip flight for Cuban participants (La Habana-Merida)	\$330 X 8=\$2,640	GEF IW:LEARN/LME:LEARN
Round trip flight for Mexican participants	\$350 X 1=\$350	GEF IW LEARN
Per-diem for Cuban and Mexican participants	\$86 X 9 X 3 days=\$2,322	GEF IW:LEARN/LME:LEARN
Bus fare for Mexican participants (Cancun-Merida)	\$35 X 2=\$70	
Hotel rooms for Cuban and Mexican participants	\$51 X 9 X 3 days=\$1,377	GEF IW:LEARN/LME:LEARN
Meeting room	\$750	CubaMar/The Ocean Foundation
Simultaneous translation	\$1,400	CubaMar/The Ocean Foundation
Site visit for participants to Ria Celestun Reserve (GOMMPAN MPA)	\$300	CubaMar/The Ocean Foundation
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,209</b>	

To date CubaMar/The Ocean Foundation has raised a total of **\$20,750** for the Trinational Conference from the following entities. This is going toward accomodations, transportation, field visits and airfare for over 30 other scientists.

\$5,000 from Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies  
 \$5,000 from Environmental Defense Fund  
 \$4,000 from The Nature Conservancy  
 \$750 from Mote Marine Laboratory  
 \$3,000 from Christopher Reynolds Foundation  
 \$3,000 from JetBlue Airlines

### Sustainability

Please describe the potential for continued interchange or cooperation after the GEF IW:LEARN/LME:LEARN-supported exchange has been completed. This exchange will be the first step in long-term interchange and cooperation among MPAs in the GoM. Exchange between MPA sites is vital to the success of GOMMPAN because each country and each MPA brings its own specialties and experiences to the network. The sites have a lot to learn from and teach each other and many times hands-on learning through site visits work best when it comes to MPA monitoring and governance.

### Agenda

If available, please include a (draft) agenda of the exchange.

Day 1

**Morning:**

Opening and introduction

Identify condition report procedures for GOMMPAN

- Presentations of condition reports and management evaluation reports by experts
- Roundtable to discuss GOMMPAN report card
- Consensus about how the GOMMPAN report card will be implemented
- Presentations from scientists about predominant connectivity patterns

**Afternoon:**

Identify habitat mapping procedures

- Presentations of mapping products and procedures by experts
- Consensus on mapping procedures and outputs

Day 2.

Break out sessions and report back to group.

Day 3:

Site visit to Reserva de Biosfera Ría de Celestún, one of the GOMMPAN sites, to see first hand its management strategies and challenges.