



## TRINATIONAL INITIATIVE CUBA - MEXICO - USA

INICIATIVA TRINACIONAL EN CIENCIAS MARINAS Y CONSERVACIÓN DE  
GOLFO DE MÉXICO Y EL CARIBE OCCIDENTAL

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TRINATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR MARINE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION IN THE  
GULF OF MEXICO AND WESTERN CARIBBEAN

**A collaborative workshop to advance marine research in the  
Gulf of Mexico and Western Caribbean**

**April 26-27, 2018  
Merida, Yucatan, Mexico**



**Financial support for this workshop was provided by JetBlue Airlines, The Henry Foundation, The Christopher Reynolds Foundation, and IW Learn (a GEF project).**

8<sup>TH</sup> TRINATIONAL INITIATIVE WORKSHOP  
APRIL 26-27, 2018  
MERIDA, YUCATAN, MEXICO



## INTRODUCTION

On April 26-27, 2018, over 80 marine scientists, resource managers, and government officials from Cuba, Mexico, and the U.S. assembled in Mérida, Yucatan for the 8<sup>th</sup> Trinational Initiative for Marine Science and Conservation in the Gulf of Mexico and Western Caribbean Workshop ([www.trinationalinitiative.org](http://www.trinationalinitiative.org)). The workshop was hosted by the Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México-Campus Sisal and organized by the Cuba Marine Research and Conservation Program (CubaMar) of The Ocean Foundation and the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA). Funding and logistical support was provided by JetBlue, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI), Christopher Reynolds Foundation, The Nature Conservancy and the Global Environmental Fund.

It was the largest workshop to date and significantly had more representatives from Mexican universities, research centers and government agencies than any previous meeting. Hosting the meeting in the historic city of Mérida not only made it easier for Mexican scientists to attend but also provided a chance to open participation to a broader subset of Mexican scientists.

The workshop also featured an associated working group meeting of marine protected area (MPA) directors from around the Gulf of Mexico dedicated to advancing the newly announced Gulf of Mexico Marine Protected Area (RedGolfo). This accomplishment epitomizes the spirit of the Trinational Initiative which is to address threats and commonalities from a regional and wholistic perspective.

## WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The first day of the Trinational Initiative Workshop included presentations on Cuba's actions to combat climate change by Maritza García of CITMA, a summary of trinational programs by HRI, the history of the Trinational Initiative and CubaMar's involvement (including a dedication of this year's meeting to Dr. Pedro Alcolado), and trinational successes and expectations by EDF. There was also an overview of the state of political relations between the US, Mexico and Cuba, a presentation on a joint research cruise by the University of Havana and Florida Atlantic University to study Cuba's mesophotic reefs, a summary of joint projects between The Nature Conservancy and Cuba's National Center for Protected Areas, and information on environmental planning in Mexico.



*Morning plenary session.*

Major takeaway points from the morning session were:

- The Trinational Initiative has for many years served as a bridge to unite efforts between scientists from Cuba, Mexico and the United States. This workshop is becoming more and more comprehensive and year after year more participants are added to the working groups.
- Some collaborative work has emerged from the Trinational Initiative, including the exploration of Cuba's mesophotic reefs and the creation of a Network of Marine Protected Areas in the Gulf of Mexico (RedGolfo).
- Currently, there are a wide variety of institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, that are interested in participating in this event, which gives it a much greater prestige at the regional level.

*"Two important scientific expeditions were carried out in Cuba, which before the Trinational was unimaginable. This demonstrates the political and institutional will to achieve the Gulf ecosystem results that are ultimately the goal."*

*-Director of Cuba's National Center for Protected Areas*

After the plenary session, in the afternoon, participants gathered into six different groups, each focusing on a specific research theme. These themes are:

1. Fisheries
2. Marine Mammals
3. Sharks
4. Marine Protected Areas
5. Sea Turtles
6. Coral Reefs

The breakout group sessions are a significant part of the Trinational Initiative Workshops. Members of these groups are experts in the six research themes. They work together on research projects and use the workshops to report progress and present to the wider Trinational audience. This year, breakout groups discussed and presented on their research activities, past successes, outcomes of this workshop's discussion, plans for future research, and challenges they face. To learn more, visit each [research group's webpage](#) and download the group presentations.



*Sharks and Rays Breakout Group*

At the conclusion of day one, two historic bilateral agreements were signed. Both events featured high level Mexican and Cuban officials. The first agreement, a work plan between Mexico's National Center for Protected Areas (CONANP) and Cuba's National Center for Protected Areas (CNAP) to study and protect shared marine resources, was signed by CONANP Commissioner Mr. Alejandro del Mazo Maza and Mr. Carlos Diaz, Director of CNAP. The second agreement was a letter of support for The Ocean Foundation (TOF) to administer the newly created and GEF funded Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem Project. This agreement was signed by Mexico's Ministry of the Environment (SEMARNAT) Subsecretary for Planning and Policy, Mr. Rodolfo Lacy Tamayo and TOF President Mark J. Spalding. Together these two agreements were an important reminder that the Trinational Agreement is more than a collaborative platform for science but a catalyst for important international agreements.



The second and final day of the workshop consisted of the breakout groups' final presentations and a roundtable discussion regarding the future of the Trinational Initiative.



*Signing between CONANP and CNAP.*



*Signing between TOF and SEMARNAT.*

## WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

Participants completed a survey immediately after the workshop that asked them for their opinions on the Trinational Initiative in general and for specific feedback on this year's workshop.

## WORKSHOP BENEFITS

Overall, participants view the Trinational Initiative as a valuable tool for collaborating on marine research and conservation projects in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. Below are some examples of how participants have benefited from this workshop and previous workshops as stated by respondents:

- Expanded their professional network
- Made and strengthened friendships
- Identified collaborations, made professional connections
- Developed a better understanding of projects happening in the Gulf of Mexico
- Identify common interests and research gaps in the Gulf of Mexico

*"The meeting serves as a gathering place and springboard for ideas for collaborative trinational projects."*

-8<sup>th</sup> Trinational Initiative Workshop Participant

## WORKSHOP IMPROVEMENTS

While most respondents were pleased with the outcomes of the workshop, they also provided some valuable suggestions for improving the workshop. Some of these suggestions include:

- Include Puerto Rico and USVI in the workshops

- Name ambassadors or coordinators for each breakout group and for each country so that person is in charge of sharing information with the group, keeping track of deadline that the group set, etc.
- Send out the agenda at least 15 days beforehand
- Share results, agreements, projects related to trinational before the meeting so everyone is aware where the groups stand in terms of progress. At the beginning of the meeting, group leaders can present what success has been made since last meeting.
- Have more visibility online of the Trinational Initiative
- Create a better balance of breakout groups in terms of number of people and experts
- Promote communication among participants between meetings (Update: the Trinational Initiative has a Slack channel to share news and updates with the group)

We hope to incorporate these and other suggestions when planning the new workshop.

## FUTURE PLANS

We look forward to continue building on the momentum of the workshops and are excited for the recent increase in interest. We are planning on holding the 9<sup>th</sup> Trinational Initiative Workshop in 2019 in Havana, Cuba. Also discussed was to convene a half day Trinational Initiative progress meeting in conjunction with the [Cuban Marine Science Conference](#) which will take place from October 15-19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in Havana, Cuba.

## PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

**Cuba:** Acuario Nacional de Cuba; Agencia de Medio Ambiente; Centro de Investigaciones de Ecosistemas Costeros; Centro de Investigaciones Marinas de la Universidad de la Habana; Centro Nacional de Áreas Protegidas; Centro de Investigaciones Pesqueras; Ministerio de la Industria Alimentaria; Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente; Instituto de Oceanología; Centro de Bioproductos Marinos; Ministerio de Educación Superior; Instituto Superior de Ciencias y Tecnologías Aplicadas

**Mexico:** Comisión de Áreas Naturales Protegidas; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Pronatura; Instituto Nacional de Pesca; Center for International Forestry Research; Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales; COSTASALVAJE; Cinvestav; COBI

**United States:** The Ocean Foundation; Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies; Center for Aquatic Sciences; Environmental Defense Fund; Florida Aquarium; Patricia and Philip Frost Museum of Science; Mote Marine Laboratory; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Nova Southeastern University; The Nature Conservancy; Environmental Law Institute; University of Florida; Florida Atlantic University; Texas State Aquarium; Duke University; Mesoamerican Reef Tourism Initiative

## TRINATIONAL INITIATIVE HISTORY

The Initiative began in 2007 as an international platform for scientists, government officials, and other experts to gather, discuss common regional objectives and disseminate data resulting from joint research on marine resources shared by U.S, Cuba, and Mexico. Workshops have been held in Cancun, Mexico (2007), Veracruz, Mexico (2009), Havana, Cuba (2009), Sarasata, Florida (2010), Havana, Cuba (2012), Corpus Christi, Texas (2013), and Havana, Cuba (2015).

*“The Trinational serves as an inspiration of regional collaboration within the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico that can be extrapolated to other regions.”*

-8<sup>th</sup> Trinational Initiative Workshop Participant