

# Conservation of Critical Coastal Ecosystems in Mexico:

## Moving Forward in 2001



The Coastal Resources Center (CRC) with its three lead Mexican partners—Amigos de Sian Ka'an, Conservation International and the University of Quintana Roo—works with several extended networks of collaborators to advance participatory management on both of Mexico's coasts. Activities were initiated with Amigos de Sian Ka'an to pioneer a community-based planning approach in Xcalak, Quintana Roo in 1996. Currently, in 2000-2001, the primary focus is to improve governance of critical ecosystems in two sites—the Xcalak Peninsula in Quintana Roo and Bahía Santa María Estuary in the Gulf of California's state of Sinaloa. Activities promote co-management; the establishment of intersectoral mechanisms and partnerships for planning and implementation; the use of best development practices; and building the capacity of a broad spectrum of stakeholders to enhance management and sustainable uses of coastal resources. Concurrently, the project is supporting a foundation for emerging regional management and governance mechanisms in Chetumal Bay, Southern Quintana Roo, and the Gulf of California. All regions employ integrated coastal management (ICM), a key strategy for supporting conservation of critical ecosystems and biological resources in Mexico.

### Tangible Models of Community-Based ICM in Xcalak

The wetlands, barrier beaches, fisheries and reefs along the Meso-American Reef are important for their environmental and economic value. Working with community, government and private sector stakeholders,



the Amigos de Sian Ka'an and CRC are facilitating the development of an ICM action strategy for the Xcalak Peninsula, an undeveloped coastal area 300 km south of Cancun slated for extensive tourism development. The project promotes community co-management, viable economic alternatives, voluntary use of low-impact practices, and implementation of land management regulatory tools. Implementation of governance mechanisms that support stakeholder participation and intersectoral partnerships will be key to long-term success. The project has leveraged support from The World Wildlife Fund, the Summit Foundation and the Japanese Embassy.

### Results to date

- \* The Xcalak National Marine Park was declared by President Ernesto Zedillo, including 14,000 hectares of coastal waters and reef system, and 3,000 hectares of wetlands
- \* The Costa Maya ecological land use ordinance was developed by the state university and decreed by state/federal authorities
- \* A community ecotourism strategy has been initiated; tours with newly trained guides are underway in Xcalak
- \* A Xcalak fisheries management plan implementation was initiated; preliminary observations of the fisheries no-take zone shows increasing fish populations
- \* Replication of Xcalak's community-based management is underway in Mahahual

### Ongoing activities

- \* A Marine Park Management Plan development is underway in collaboration with the Xcalak Community Committee
- \* Development of a comprehensive strategy/implementation mechanism to support participatory management has begun
- \* A user-friendly Internet database of environmental characterization and zoning policies is being developed
- \* Stakeholder workshops to advance governance mechanisms and integrated decisionmaking are being held
- \* Construction has begun on the Mahahual field station/visitor center to advance research, monitoring and outreach of ICM-related issues

## Experience in Integrated Estuary Management in the Gulf of California

A pioneering integrated management initiative in Bahía de Santa María, Sinaloa is developing management strategies for the bay's natural resources. It is being accomplished through a participatory process with community stakeholders and municipal authorities, in coordination with state and federal agencies. This effort is led by the Committee for Conservation and Development, with technical support from Conservation International. The plan will lay out an agenda to support conservation of priority biodiversity habitats, while enhancing economic potential in the region. With agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture as key forces of change, the project aims to develop management tools that are accessible to local communities and authorities for making decisions on use and management of these resources. The overall project is supported by a consortium of funders including USAID, North American Wetlands Council, Ducks Unlimited and The World Wildlife Fund, as well as local private and public sectors.

### Results to date

- \* A draft management plan addresses bay circulation, water quality, mangrove and vegetation management, islands management, and fisheries/aquaculture development within the 285,000 hectare bay and watershed
- \* The "Declaration of Culiacan" catalyzed intergovernmental support and created an intersectoral stakeholder committee
- \* Capacity was enhanced for an NGO/university team and stakeholder Committee for Conservation and Development
- \* An electronic discussion group in Bahía Santa María was established

### Ongoing activities

- \* Workshops are being held to define long-term strategies for development and use of "good mariculture practices" in field operations and governance mechanisms
- \* Formalization of the Committee for Conservation and Development as an parastatal oversight council is being sought
- \* Adoption of a management plan by municipal ordinance and state policy is being promoted by the project
- \* Early implementation efforts are being carried out through seed projects

- \* Review of global experience in regional ICM with application for regional governance in the Gulf of California has begun

## Catalyzing NGOs and University Partners around Chetumal Bay

The project has been forging alliances to enhance the capacity of universities and NGOs to promote ICM activities. The improved capacity of these groups and individuals allows the project to reach a larger population of stakeholders (including government and community groups) and increase the probability of long-term ICM success. Using the "learning-by-doing" approach, partners address relevant issues through extension, research, education and outreach.

### Results to date

- \* The university extension program supports community development and ecotourism programs
- \* The Mexico/Belize Alliance of NGOs and universities was established to contribute to ICM in Chetumal Bay and for the Meso-American Reef region
- \* Monthly seminars continue to promote discussion and outreach on relevant coastal management issues in the region
- \* An annual Bay Fair catalyzes citizen interest in Chetumal Bay
- \* An exchange program between Sarasota, FL and Chetumal promotes democracy through water management

### Ongoing activities

- \* An action strategy will be developed by the Mexico/Belize Alliance
- \* GIS collaboration to develop regional protocols and Quintana Roo digital atlas has begun
- \* Plans for a Bay Summit aimed to help people better understand Chetumal Bay and prioritize actions for management are underway

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