

***Report to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation***  
***Submitted by Karen Chapman, Texas Center for Policy Studies***  
***Project Title: Local Implementation of the Global Program of Action***  
***Project Number: 221.04.02***

Description: Texas Center for Policy Studies and Pronatura Noreste, A.C. hosted a binational workshop in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, from Wednesday, March 7<sup>th</sup> through Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. The workshop was intended to share lessons learned from the Bight of the Californias and the Gulf of Maine Global Program of Action projects administered by the CEC. The fundamental objectives of the workshop were to:

- (1) Present details and status of research and projects in both the US and Mexico that address human impacts to the Gulf of Mexico and Laguna Madre ecosystems
- (2) Identify opportunities to improve binational collaboration within existing projects, or through new coalitions.

It was also intended as an opportunity to explore the potential for initiating a local program that would be guided by GPA principles.

All conference activities took place at the Holiday Inn Express in Ciudad Victoria.

**Opportunities for Addressing Human Impacts on the Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem**  
**Agenda (Actual)**

**Wednesday March 7<sup>th</sup> \*\***

- 8:00 – 9:00      Reception at Hotel**  
Tamaulipas Wetlands Month
- Miguel Cruz, Pronatura Noreste, A.C.  
Forest and Water campaign
  - Javier Gutierrez, Wildlife Delegate, SEMARNAT  
The Tamaulipas Coast
  - Octavio Herrera, Historiador

*\*\* please see page 6 for description of Wednesday evening's reception*

**Thursday March 8<sup>th</sup>**

- 8:00      Registration and Coffee**
- 9:15      Remarks from the U.S. Embassy**
- Willem Brakel – Science Coordinator
- 9:30      Fisheries**
- Rafael Solana, (for Guillermo Compean) Instituto Nacional de Pesca, Mexico City
  - Dr. Rocky Ward, Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., Texas
- 10:15      Binational Estuaries - Lessons Learned from GPA implementation**
- Colleen Mercer Clark, Consultant - Binational Estuaries Lessons Learned Report
  - Joanna Salazar, Bight of the Californias Project
- 11:00      Sea Turtles**
- Dr. Donna Shaver, US Geological Survey: Status of Sea Turtle Ecology in Texas
  - Dr. Rene Marquez, National Sea Turtles Research Coordinator, Centro Regional de Investigacion Pesquera
  - Patricia Luévano, SEDUE, Gobierno de Tamaulipas: Management and Conservation of Marine Turtles in Tamaulipas – a Sustainable Project.

**12:30 Hydrodynamics:**

- Dr. Sergio Cruz, Instituto Politecnico Nacional – Hydrodynamics of the Laguna Madre of Tamaulipas
- Dr. Wes Tunnell, Texas A&M University, Center for Coastal Studies, Texas – The Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas

**1:30 Break for Lunch**

**3:00 Avifauna**

- Ian Hartzler, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Texas: Project Gulf Crossings
- Mario Vazquez, Univ. Autonoma de Tamaulipas, Importance of Tamps. wetlands to migratory birds
- Ignacio González, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León: Monitoring Shorebirds
- Héctor Garza Torres, Instituto de Ecología y Alimentos, Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas: Birds of the Tamaulipas Coast

**5:00 Laguna Madre**

- Dr. Marc Woodin, Research capabilities in the Laguna Madre, US Geological Survey, Texas

**8:00 Dinner at hotel**

**Friday March 9th**

**9:00 Coastal Zone Management**

- Gerardo Sánchez Esqueda, DEPI-Facultad de Ingeniería, UAT C.U. Tampico-Madero: Integrated Management of the Southern Tamaulipas Coastal Zone
- Miguel Angel Cruz, Pronatura Noreste, A.C.: Research and conservation needs for the Laguna Madre of Tamaulipas
- Jorge Brenner, Pronatura Noreste, A.C.: Conservation Plan for Coastal Grasslands and Wetlands

**10:00 Summary, group discussion of needs and priorities**

- Karen Chapman, Texas Center for Policy Studies

**11:00 Conclusion**

**Summary**

There were some **common ecosystem impacts** identified in the presentations. These include:

- Accelerated, unplanned, unorganized growth
- Pollution – point and non-point source
- Tourism
- Fisheries – by-catch & unsustainable harvesting
- Lack of awareness on part of community
- Industrial and agricultural activity (related to growth, and to non-point source pollution)
- Poverty
- Destruction of coastal habitats and wetlands
- Introduction of exotic species

Some **needs identified** that would enhance collaboration and project success:

- Research funds
- Mechanism for applying successful research in other areas
- Establishing information networks
- Integrated management and cross-border collaboration

- Increasing level of communication between colleagues

**Projects** presented and level of binational collaboration:

- Marine turtles – good collaboration experienced, always room for improvement
- Fisheries studies – good but more is needed such as ways of setting up international research teams, mechanism for agreeing on priorities, funding to support genetics studies on shared species
- Laguna Madre binational project and Compendium – good collaboration, need more local outreach and implementation
- Migratory birds – partnerships between landowners to some extent – but have established a gulf-wide network

**Other potential issues** identified:

- Extension of the Gulf Intracoastal Water Way into Tamaulipas
- Hypoxia from Mississippi delta run-off
- Scarce freshwater resources (greatly diminished flows to the estuaries and effects of desalinization on salt water habitats)
- Drought
- Implementation of regressive policies (i.e. “jobs versus environment”)

There is great potential for increased information exchange, research and outreach programs in the Laguna Madre and Gulf of Mexico. The groups represented at the meeting constitute only a fraction of those that could ultimately be involved, but could form the integral components of a larger program. Agencies and organizations that were in attendance:

Government:

USGS –US Geological Survey  
SEMARNAT – Secretaria del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales  
SEDUE – Secretaria de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecologia  
INP – Instituto Nacional de Pesca  
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency  
EMBAJADA AMERICANA –American Embassy  
TPWD – Texas Parks & Wildlife Department  
SAGARPA - Secretaria de Agricultura Ganaderia Pesca y Alimentacion

University:

Univ. Autonoma de Tamps  
Univ. Autonoma de Nuevo Leon  
Instituto Politecnico Nacional  
Texas A&M University

NGO:

Texas Center for Policy Studies  
Pronatura Noreste  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation – GPA representatives  
Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Some **key elements to initiating a local GPA** program include:

Leaders, political support, funds, interest on the part of all sectors, volunteerism, a plan of action with concrete objectives, follow-up, and agreement on priorities.

**Potential Benefits** of a local GPA:

- Information enrichment (from a “big picture” perspective)
- Harmonized/integrated species monitoring
- Collaboration can strengthen individual efforts
- May be able to attack a problem/issue from various fronts
- Establishes a base of support for policy change
- Ultimately, may diminish human impacts to the ecosystem

**Lessons Learned:**

Both Colleen Mercer-Clarke and Joanna Salazar presented some interesting points, summarized here:

- Guidelines from the GPA are useful, but local interpretation is necessary – GPA not seen as a directive
- Individual relationships are very important and take time to foster
- There is a need for the GPA and similar initiatives even where local programs exist
- Financial support for core functions is necessary – must be longer term to address long-term planning and addressing issues
- E-mail played a big role in enabling greater communication among partners
- GPAC time also considered volunteer time to a certain extent
- Need shared international priorities
- Important to include industry and private sector, along with policy and government arena representatives
- Pilot project activities may be differently executed on both sides of the border
- Have sufficient time dedicated to completing tasks
- Short-term objectives with measurable results helps to build momentum in the beginning
- Local control of the GPA is important for efficiency, flexibility and ownership

**Agency Positions:**

Willem Brakel from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City stated that the Embassy was interested in collaborating and assisting with any efforts to coordinate activities in the Gulf of Mexico. Mr. Brakel mentioned he would be participating in a Stennis Space Center, Mississippi meeting (where EPA’s Gulf of Mexico program is located) to be held the following week, and he would report on the event in Ciudad Victoria there.

Oscar Ramirez stated that EPA’s Region VI was interested in establishing an estuary program along the Gulf coast of Mexico.

Rafael Solana stated that the Instituto Nacional de Pesca plans to decentralize their office into Pacific and Atlantic regions. Their primary objective is to try to diminish the impact on the commercial fishery while increasing the value of the fishery to help sustain local communities, most of which exist in extreme poverty. Mr. Solana said the institute wants to increase its response to research needs, improve transparency in the agency, and coordinate research more with universities.

**Informal Discussion**

The group had an informal discussion about potential interest in initiating a Global Program of Action in the Gulf of Mexico. All agreed that they would benefit from additional collaboration, but the concept of a Global Program of Action needs more local elaboration. Most of the participants involved in the discussion

had very specific interests and objectives related to their research, and many were in the academic community. Most also expressed a keen interest in working more closely on Laguna Madre issues, and maintaining a more constant presence in the region. All agreed that education was a very important goal, and that raising awareness about coastal issues crucial.

*Potential support*

Dr. Tunnell indicated that Ed Harte, a Texas philanthropist, had donated \$46 million to Texas A&M in Corpus Christi to work on coastal and Gulf of Mexico issues, with the stipulation that the money be used for local projects.

Dr. Francisco Garcia de Leon of the Instituto Tecnológico de Cd. Victoria stated that his laboratory was open to anyone wanting to do genetic analysis of species in Mexico.

Another participant mentioned that the Global Environment Facility has the ability to marshal large amounts of funding from SEMARNAT and UNEP in Mexico. More information is needed about this agency.

*Next Steps*

The group discussed next steps. Mr. Brakel reiterated the embassy's desire to assist organizationally and through their contacts with the Mexican government. Dr. Gerardo Sanchez with the Univ. Autonoma de Tamaulipas in Tampico offered to apply a model that he has used successfully to create a "hierarchy of ideas" and the group agreed to participate in another forum under Dr. Sanchez' direction, date to be announced in the next few weeks.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Among the participants, there is keen interest in establishing funding and mechanisms for greater collaboration on Laguna Madre and Gulf of Mexico issues. It seems this is an excellent place to start building a larger Gulf of Mexico effort. There does not seem to be a great deal of truly binational activity centered on the Gulf of Mexico, but much interest is expressed in increasing activity in the GOM by federal agencies - the Department of Interior and EPA in particular. The Laguna Madre, being a binational ecosystem that supports many common species, commercial fisheries operations and tourism in both countries, and which engenders a deep interest from both Mexican and U.S. scientists, has laid the foundation for a larger effort. Several participants, recognizing this, recommended that the group focus on creating more momentum initially around collaborative research, prioritizing ideas and fund-raising.

## **Agenda**

### **March 7<sup>th</sup> Reception**

#### **Holiday Inn Hotel Rotunda**

**8:00 pm**

Presentation of key guests:

*Ana Gabriela Robles, Pronatura, NE – Master of Ceremonies*

- Jorge Fernandez, Director of SEDUE (For the Governor of Tamaulipas)
- Willem H. Brakel, American Embassy in Mexico City
- Miguel Cruz-Pronatura Noreste
- Octavio Herrera-Historian

Welcome & Introduction to the conference

*Miguel Angel Cruz*

Tamaulipas Wetlands Month designation announcement and importance of wetlands to the state

*Jorge Fernández*

The role of humans in shaping development of the Tamaulipas coast – from the 1700's to the present.

*Octavio Herrera*

Additional words of welcome; formal inauguration of the binational workshop

*Representative from the office of the Mayor of Ciudad Victoria*