



## **Multi-stakeholder Management Plan for Sosua Marine Park Dominican Republic**



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*October 1, 2006 – October 31, 2007*

## **I. Executive Summary**

Sosua Marine Park is located on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic, situated within the Bay of Sosua and the province of Puerto Plata. The marine park was established by Presidential Decree number 634-05 on November 23rd, 2005. The decree itself establishes a management authority to administer the park.

Many diverse ecosystems are found within Sosua Marine Park including sandy beaches, rocky shores, coral reefs, sea grass beds, estuaries and mangroves. These communities house a great deal of marine and terrestrial biodiversity, many of which are of great biological and economic importance. There is a high level of endemism within these habitats and many species are currently threatened.

There are many types of direct and indirect impacts that are threatening the Bay of Sosua, the most prevalent of which include over-fishing, habitat loss due to tourism development, extraction of coastal and marine resources, and marine recreational activities.

Based on the methods established by IUCN's "How is your MPA Doing" manual, a management plan was developed for Sosua Marine Park. The plan was crafted after undergoing a community based participatory process and a series of capacity building and awareness raising workshops involving all major stakeholders in the area. In tandem with the workshops, an exhaustive search for information was carried out for Sosua Bay, and a compilation of documents, research papers and studies was completed and used to supplement the management plan.

The goal of the management plan is to ensure the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources within Sosua Marine Park, through the establishment of zoning as well as other management regulations.

The management plan outlines actions to be taken within a three year framework that address the major issues and concerns impacting the area. These issues were identified throughout the participative process, and validated by community members, as well as institutional, technical and scientific personnel whom participated in the various workshops, meetings and interviews. Local socioeconomic factors were also taken into account when developing the plan of action for Sosua Marine Park.

In order to facilitate the execution of actions outlined in the management plan, several quantifiable goals were established, each with their own respective time-frames. Each goal is accompanied by a list of activities to be carried out and set indicators for evaluation. Each goal is designed to address a major issue and fulfill an important management target, such as the establishment of inspection and vigilance for protection, waste water management and water quality controls, habitat restoration and conservation of endangered species, research and monitoring, environmental education, fishery usage, and zonification.

Together the goals detailed in the management plan provide a roadmap towards the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources for Sosua Marine Park.

## **II. Background**

*Final NFWF Project Report – Counterpart International*

Counterpart International, in partnership with Fundación Global de Democracia and Desarrollo (FUNGLODE), and Reef Check – Dominican Republic, implemented the Multi-stakeholder Management Plan for Sosua Marine Park (SMP), funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, in the northern coast of the Dominican Republic. In the efforts to reverse the declining health of coral reefs, this project aimed to (1) increase the general understanding for the importance of MPAs and the benefits of no-take zones amongst local stakeholder groups, (2) design and implement a multi-stakeholder, co-management plan for the newly established Sosua Marine Park, supported by the fishermen, dive industry, municipal and national government, that entailed a zoning strategy, collection fee, monitoring and evaluation and enforcement procedures, and 3) establish a management NGO and subcommittees responsible for day-to-day operations of SMP.

While several marine parks exist in the Dominican Republic, they are for the most part “paper parks”, with little government support for enforcement, and with user fees going directly to the national budget. In 2004, following an environmental assessment and a series of meetings and workshops in Sosua, in addition to other highly known tourism destinations in the country, it was realized that 8 years prior a management plan had been drafted and proposed to the National Government for Sosua Bay to become a National Park. With FUNGLODE’s support and the invested interest of the private sector representatives to protect their resources for the long term, the idea of Sosua being registered as a marine park was proposed for the second time. In order to bypass the standard rules and regulations of a national park registered through the Ministry of Environment; the SMP was categorized as tourism managed area, thus establishing the Presidential decree No. 634-05 in 2005. SMP logistically and legally being housed under the Ministry of Tourism allowed the government to adopt a completely new model for the country, not only turning the management authority over to a new NGO formed from an existing interest group, but also establishing the right of this NGO to set, collect, and utilize user fees for the park, offering hope for future funding and sustainability of the park.

This revolutionary step by the government made Sosua the national model for financial sustainability and multi-stakeholder governance, and thus the ideal training site for establishing participatory multi-stakeholder and community-based management plan.

### **III. Program Objectives**

The decree establishing the Sosua Marine Park identifies a temporary management authority, or Patronage, consisting of one member from the Undersecretary of Tourism for the North Region, the Director of Ministry of Environment for the North Region, the Mayor of Sosua, Sosua Hotel Association, and declares Massimiliano Scerra, current President of the Diving Association, as the Executive Director of the Patronage and active Manager for Sosua Marine Theme Park. This patronage has the authority to set and collect fees for park usage and therefore be used for management of the park. Counterpart and others in the conservation community realized if successful, the SMP model could be replicated throughout the country, however a general awareness of the importance of an MPA had to be raised and a foundation established, before SMP could be looked at as a model, as identified below;

- 1) Identify concerns, needs, aspirations, and management priorities of each of the four major stakeholder groups while raising awareness and building vision.

- 2) Develop and approve a multi-stakeholder resource management plan for Sosua Marine Park through a participatory and inclusive process.
- 3) Develop an adaptive management system for the Marine Park, with procedures for implementation, enforcement, feedback and monitoring.
- 4) Dissemination of the management plans, enforcement procedures, and governance structures to the wider community.
- 5) Develop and formalize a legally grounded management NGO using the guidelines for best practices and governance found in the IUCN documents.
- 6) Develop and implement a workable socioeconomic and biological monitoring system for the marine park area involving each of the stakeholder groups and taking advantage of Peace Corps and university volunteers

The following report provides details on information gathered, accomplishments achieved, and obstacles encountered.

#### **IV. Program Activities & Outputs**

Implementation activities for the Multi-stakeholder Management Plan for Sosua Marine Park began as planned in October, 2006 with the **First Quarter** focusing on a series of environmental assessments, stakeholder meetings and workshops conducted by Dr. Austin Bowden Kerby, Lead Scientist for CPI Coral Gardens Initiative, and Ms. Christine Hicks, Coral Garden Program Manager. At which time, Kelvin Guerrero was brought onboard to conduct a more in-depth stakeholder analysis and initiate conflict mitigation amongst the various stakeholder groups.

Due to a lack of transparency and mistrust amongst the Dive shops – the Sosua Dive Association had minimal to no communication or collaborative efforts in the conservation and protection of the surrounding coral reefs. Conflict started when Mr. Scerra was appointed Director of the Dive Association, of which each dive shop is required to pay monthly fees, however the sense of the dive community was that the collected fees were not going into the designated projects, with accusations circulating and the industry trying to place blame. With the Mr. Scerra as well being appointed the Director of the SMP, this created a conflict of interest in management of SMP and enforcement of dive industry regulations.

Counterpart began with focusing each dive shop on a particular area of the reef, to maintain and care for, through a pilot Coral Care & Reef First Aid program, and pilot Acropora restoration site. Even though there were increased levels of frustration within the industry, individual dive shops were quick to join the efforts to protect the coral reefs, providing boats, equipment, time and man power, and expertise in monitoring. Once the bay was informally mapped out with highly used dive sites assigned to the various dive shops for basic maintenance, creating a common ground and collaborative effort, this reinforced each dive shop's willingness to support conservation. With a few less formal gatherings the dive industry reunited resulting in a powerful voice in response to Mr. Scerra's lack of transparency.

From the start the Sosua Fishermen's Association was supportive of a co-management model for SMP. They were clearly aware of the challenges faced by a degrading marine ecosystem; the connection between sustainable and unsustainable practices already existed, however with educational materials and Fisher-to-Fisher Exchange, bringing fishermen from Parque Nacional Del Este, an already established MPA in the South-East Coast of the country, to provide testimonials of the benefits to effective MPAs and no-take zones. A collective vision was

established, identifying short term and long term benefits and challenges to the fishermen abiding by proposed no-take zones.

The Sosua Boaters Association, the municipal and national government agencies and the Sosua-Cabarette Hotel and Restaurant Association were actively engaged at this point in the process, providing their perspectives to what would effectively support SMP and how they foresaw themselves contributing.

Counterpart facilitated a series of 3 - two day individual workshops with the (1) local fishermen, (2) dive industry, and (3) beach vendors, local municipal office and tourism industry, with a total of 82 representatives from the stakeholder groups.

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The **Second Quarter** entailed bringing the various stakeholder groups together to define conservation targets, goals and objectives for the SMP.

In order to establish a common ground amongst the fishermen, the dive and tourism industry and municipal government, Counterpart conducted a participatory resource assessment, awareness & problem solving workshop with a balance between the major stakeholder groups. Utilizing the Participatory Learning and Action Manual (PLA), the workshop relayed valuable baseline information about the biological resources and socioeconomic context of Sosua.

In preparation of a series of three – 1 day management planning sessions, the Counterpart team conducted intensive research to gather all available information on the region, including aspects on hydrology, geology, climate, flora and fauna of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, as well as a breakdown of the local economy, including tourism, fishing and agriculture, creating baselines and shared knowledge amongst all stakeholders.

At this time, the IUCN *“How is your MPA doing?” Handbook* was introduced, providing alternative measures and actions to the existing management procedures. Throughout the consultative and decision making process, each stakeholder group agreed to a zoning strategy, identifying the most appropriate and feasible areas for each use, closing off approximately 30 % to public use of reef area for recreational purposes, 25 % of reef area zoned as conservation regions, and 20% patches of reef designated as no-take zones.

In partnership with Reef Check and their network of volunteers, the management plan identifies a long-term monitoring and evaluation strategy that has been agreed upon by all stakeholders, including database collection and completion during Years 1 and 2; monitoring coral reef, algae, fish populations, larvae, water quality, amongst other indicators; an analysis and evaluation is planned for year 3, utilizing the information gathered during Year 1 and Year 2.

In addition to a detailed zoning strategy, the committee established MPA regulations and enforcement procedures. In order to financially sustain management of the park, a user and violation fee system was established that applies to any and all resources users on activities such as fishing in no-take zones, the appropriate use of buoys, and throwing garbage directly into the ocean. Collection of the violation fees will be reinvested back into the park for paying staff, biological and ecological monitoring, equipment and supporting activities of the fishermen. The final Sosua Marine Park Management Plan has been discussed and approved by all major stakeholders and ratified by government and other environmental NGOs, with full support from the fishing & tourism industries

An objective of the **Third Quarter** was to map coordinates, delineate park boundaries and usage zones identified through the consultative process, draft the initial management plan and distribute for feedback and revisions.

An informal “Sosua MPA Committee” was established, in support of the Patronajo, including 13 active individuals, with representation from each stakeholder group; Adalberto Pichardo and Mr. Favoy (Presidente Asociación de Vendedores), Christian Harder (Northern Diving), Luis E. Martínez (Asociación de Pescadores), Eladio Martinez (Ministry Environment and Natural Resources), Jessica Martinez (Sosua-Cabarete Hotel and Restaurant Association), Enmanuel RR (Acuario Banarabo), Jurgen Rumpenhont (Merlin Dive Center), Raul Rodriguez y Alberto Rodriguez (Banana Boat y Pescador), Emma Vanessa Bonilla (Banana Boat), Jose Ruben Paulino (Banana Boat), and Juan Pablo (Glass Bottom Boat).

The “Sosua MPA Committee” served as the voice of the respective stakeholder groups and held approximately 10 meetings, to review the management plan, consult with fellow colleagues and formally submit comments and concerns. Once a community supported Management Plan was emerging, the plan was distributed to Reef Check, the National Aquarium, Maam and Directors of existing MPAs in Parque Del Este, Monte Cristi, and Los Haitises, comments were gathered and integrated. Finally the revised and modified management plan, reviewed by local and national stakeholders, was submitted to the Ministry of Environment, and Ministry of Tourism, for final approval and endorsement.

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The **Final Quarter** entailed approval of management plans following widespread dissemination for feedback. Plans discussed and approved by all major stakeholder groups and ratified by government. Implementation of the reef and coastal management plans. Usage zones marked on maps, public signs, and the deployment of buoys.

Following 3 months of revisions and input from the primary stakeholder groups, on September 19th, 2007, Counterpart International launched the Sosua Multi-stakeholder Management Plan with the key stakeholder groups: Sosua Marine Park Patronage members, Sosua Diving Association, Sosua Vendor and Artisan Association, Sosua Fisherman’s Association, Sosua-Cabarete Hotel and Restaurant Association, Sosua Tourism Cluster, members of municipality dealing with drainage/sewers, and representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources.

One-hundred and fifty hardcopies were printed and distributed locally, accompanied by individual CDs containing valuable background documents in support of the Sosua MPA Management Plan, and the management plan was posted on the various websites and presented to regional and national stakeholders, including Subsecretaria de Areas Protegidas y Biodiversidad, Subsecretaria de Recursos Marino-Costero, Fundacion Ecologia Punta Cana, ECOPARQUE (Parque Nacional. del Este), Grupo Jaragua (Parque Nacional de Jaragua), CEBSE (Parque Nacional de Los Haitises), Bavaro Reef Funds, etc.

A media campaign was used to further inform and educated the local populace and tourism industry, including 2 press releases, 3 newspaper and magazine articles, as well as internet and local news coverage.

Complimentary to the NFWF funded initiative, NOAA and the Lighthouse Foundation had designed and printed a 10-Poster Sustainable Coastal Management Curriculum, distributed to hotels, restaurants, diving schools, schools and the municipal government, proved to be an effective tool in raising the awareness for the value of no-take reserves within MPAs.

During the consultative process, the Ministry of Tourism allocated funds in the efforts to effectively support management of SMP, with funds managed by the Patronajo, providing resources for buoys, reef balls, public signs, a ranger station, and a boat. Thus Counterpart worked with Mr. Scerra in organizing resources within the dive community to support the construction and implementation of each project over the next 6 months.

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### ***One Month Extension and Update, since October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007***

*Boundaries of the Sosua Marine Park and zoning strategy have been posted at 3 main entrance points of the Sosua Bay, at the center, east and west points.*

*In November, 33 mooring buoys were deployed to highly used dive sites, minimizing damage from anchoring directly onto the reef, a common practice in the Bay. The Dive community and fishermen contributed time and resources to ensure successful implementation.*

*In January 18 reef balls were constructed and 6 were positioned to align areas of the coast with eroding beaches, with the assistance of Dr. Austin Bowden Kerby, in March. A plan was established identifying the most strategic location for the remaining 12 reef balls, and potential areas for additional reef balls once completed. Similarly, it was the dive community providing man power and resources.*

*A Fisher-to-Fisher Exchange was conducted in January, as part of the NOAA funded National Network of MPA Practitioners, this time bringing fishermen from Sian Ka'hn Biosphere Reserve, in Mexico. Fishermen from Sian Ka'hn taught 23 Fishermen from Sosua the methodology of constructing, maintaining and harvesting their traditional lobster casitas. Three lobster casitas were constructed in total, however a local dive shop owner from North Coast Diving, Mr. Mark Goldsmith, has committed to matching financial contributions of the Sosua fishermen, with the goal to establish a minimum of 50 lobster casitas in the bay.*

*Construction of the Park Ranger Station is still underway with an anticipated completion date of early June.*

*The Acropora Coral Nursery, that was established prior to the NFWF program, is ongoing with wonderful support from the dive and tourism industry. Boat transportation, equipment, lodging and meals are always provided to Counterpart staff in support of the restoration project. In March, a follow-up visit was conducted by Dr. Austin Bowden-Kerby, on behalf of the NOAA project, with fishermen meetings and a monitoring workshop with the dive industry.*

*In follow-up to the overwhelming response and request from the dive industry, Counterpart is formalizing the Coral Care & Reef First Aid program. Following review and feedback of an initial draft, Counterpart intends to submit an application to PADI for a Coral Care & Reef First Aid Specialty Course to be piloted in Sosua, Dominican Republic. This course will target locally employed and experienced divers only with an advanced certification and increased knowledge of the marine ecosystem. However it will provide the needed protocols and procedures responding to damaged coral reefs following a hurricane or storm, broken corals from inexperienced divers, or a boat accident.*

## **V. Challenges**

Currently, the Patronato serves as the managing entity of the Sosua Marine Park. Instead of allocating resources into creating an entirely separate group or NGO, apart from the actual authority, Counterpart decided it would be more effective to work directly with the Patronajo to

ensure a multi-stakeholder approach in management and decision making for the marine park. When created, the Patronato included: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Tourism, Municipality of Sosua, President of the Hotel Association Cabarrette- Sosua, President of the Dominican Scuba Diving Association, excluding the fishermen and the beach vendors from participation in decision making, creating a top-down approach. At the beginning of the project, the fishermen and beach vendors had no knowledge of and therefore no intention to modify their practices to ensure successful management of the park. Over the past 13 months, the fishermen and beach vendors have become empowered through education, awareness and learning how to communicate and work with other stakeholders. Through this process, the fishermen and beach vendors, with the assistance of Counterpart as a mediator, are requesting from the Patronato; 1) to include the Vendors and Fishermen as member of the Patronato, so they can be part of the governing board; 2) to sign an MOU or Cooperation Agreement among them to work for the conservation of the bay and 3) To support the fishermen with some equipment and material to compensate the for the no take zone area that they will respect. A formal request was submitted in October, and we are currently awaiting feedback and approval. However, as the NOAA program extended through March, and Counterpart's presence will continue in Sosua, we are confident with time and discussed the fishermen will be brought into the Patronajo.

## **VI. Program Results**

Over the 13-month project, starting October, 2006, Counterpart International accomplished:

- 3 - two day participatory resource assessment, awareness & problem solving workshops conducted
- 3 - one day management planning workshop conducted
- 3 monitoring and evaluation field
- 2 – two day MPA Monitoring, Data Collection and Indicator workshops
- Fisher-to-Fisher Exchange
- 212 total workshop participants
- Final Sosua Marine park Mangement Plan completed, with input from each stakeholder group, locally and nationally, 8 rounds of revisions, and endorsed by the government
- Zoning strategy established with areas identified for public use and marine recreation, conservation and restoration, fishing and no-take areas
- MPA Enforcement and Violators Fee Established
- 150 hard copies, 200 CDs distributed with the SMP management plan posted on websites for wider distribution
- 2 national news press releases, 1 radio station program and 4 newspaper /web-based news articles
- 400 (40 sets of 10) Marine Conservation Posters distributed
- 3 public signs strategically located, indicating boundaries and uses of the SMP
- 33 marker buoys deployed
- 6 Reef Balls, with 44 more planned to be deployed
- 3 Lobster Casitas
- 8 active Reef Check volunteers
- 100% entire area of Sosua Marine Park under management
- Strong participation from the fishermen and dive industry, with resources leveraged from government and private sector totaling \$47,259.00.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The NFWF funded program has resulted in an increased understanding of the importance of MPAs and benefits of no-take zones, generating widespread support for the Sosua Marine Park. The multi-stakeholder process has empowered the fishermen and opened lines of communication amongst the stakeholder groups. The community supported process and the financial sustainability of the SMP was fully endorsed by the local and national government, conservation community and private sector.

Even though it is too early to categorize SMP as a success, as time has not allowed for a fully operational plan, with a wide compliance in regulations, lowered conflicts over resource, sustainable and transparent funding system, or continued monitoring of the indicators. However, the Sosua Marine Park Management Plan thus far has proven to be a strong case study for other existing national parks in the Dominican Republic. In parallel to the NFWF program, Counterpart and local partners were managing a NOAA program focused on establishing a National Network of MPA Practitioners. This provided the needed platform to generate awareness of the process underway in Sosua meanwhile the National Network provided a pool of technical expertise and resources in order to provide the necessary support on the national level and scientific expertise and experience in country. The community involved process proved to be such a success, that the Ministry of Environment has invited Counterpart into other National Parks such as La Caletta, Los Haitises, and Monte Cristi, as well as terrestrial park such as Damahaga, to replicate the process.