



Promoting Mexico's World Heritage



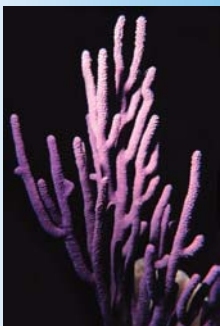
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Why is this project important?

- The Sea of Cortez has been dubbed the "aquarium of the world" by the late Jacques Cousteau. The UNESCO / IUCN / UNF World Heritage Marine Biodiversity Workshop (Hanoi, Vietnam 2002) ranked it among the highest areas for World Heritage (WH) listing by the Latin American working group based on its biodiversity value – the area is famous as a breeding ground for whales, its schools of sharks and diverse fish species, and its endemic island vertebrates. But the Gulf of California is a marine ecosystem under threat due to the pressures of unplanned and unsustainable development along certain coastlines, uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, pollution and poaching.
- Espiritu Santo island is the focus of renewed efforts on behalf of the government of Mexico to strengthen the level of protection for Sea of Cortez islands and marine areas. This project will complement recent governmental and NGO initiatives by providing support in obtaining formal World Heritage status for the islands, providing justification for clearly delineated marine reserves, removing threats from introduced species on the islands, and helping improve eco-tourism infrastructure.



Biodiversity PARTNERSHIPS



Espiritu Santo insular complex, Sea of Cortez, Mexico

Basic Info:

Location: Espiritu Santo insular complex, Sea of Cortez, Mexico

Amount: US\$500,000 (\$250,000 UNF, \$125,000 CI, \$125,000 Int'l Community Foundation)

Partner: FUNDEA (Mexico)

Duration: 2003-2005



---Highlights---

Strong overnment support, and land acquisition marks project start-up

The government of Mexico has been solidly behind the conservation of these islands for years. A presidential decree was signed in 1978 to designate the "Islands of the Gulf of California" as a Natural Protected Area. In 1995 they were declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. On February 25, 2003 President Fox stated that his government was actively working to designate the islands of the Gulf as a World Natural Heritage Site. A unique alliance of national and international NGOs and funding organizations to secure a US\$3.3 million purchase and transfer of Espiritu Santo Island Complex (which includes Isla Partida) to the Mexican Park Service. This initiative was led by FUNDEA with the support of several Mexican donors as well as the backing of The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation among others.

No catch zones

The relatively new concept of no-catch marine protected areas is part of the project. Fisheries management experts are concluding that such zones are critical in ensuring the maintenance of fish stocks. As the fish of the sea of Cortéz provide a livelihood for many Mexicans, means of sustaining that livelihood need to be built into the conservation objectives. The project is supporting baseline studies that will help determine the specifications of the no catch zones (size, location, season). This information will be used by the Mexican authorities who have the full intention to implement the findings.

Protection of endemic species

New species often evolve on islands. Populations isolated from their mainland counterparts, and subject to different environments gradually evolve into new species. There are at least 5 endemic species of mice and one endemic species of snake present in the islands of the sea of Cortez. Introduced cats are aggressive predators, preying on mice and snakes. Whereas introduced rats are known to successfully compete against mice, displacing them. They are also egg predators and threaten snake populations. Aggressive browsing by goats radically modifies habitat, reducing its value for mice. These introduced species are being eradicated as part of the project.

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Project Objectives:

- **Secure** World Heritage listing for Espiritu Santo and the other islands and surrounding marine areas by summer 2005
- **Catalyze** the process to secure Federally protected marine area status with "no take zones" for the waters surrounding Isla Espiritu Santo Complex.
- **Improve** basic conservation management infrastructure and tools on Isla Espiritu Santo.
- **Eradicate** goats, rats and cats on Espiritu Santo island.

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